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## It's Complicated: Romantic Breakups and Their Aftermath on Facebook

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

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IT'S COMPLICATED:  
ROMANTIC BREAKUPS AND THEIR AFTERMATH ON FACEBOOK

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by

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Graduate Program in Media Studies

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

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
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## Abstract

Little research examines the ways in which Facebook affects breakups. This exploratory study aimed to determine the prevalence of breakup practices unique to Facebook; to gain an understanding of the relationship between Facebook use and distress following a breakup; and to determine what strategies people use to cope with romantic breakups in the Facebook era. This topic was examined using a mixed methods approach that included a survey and semi-structured interviews. Findings show that content on Facebook can be a source of distress for individuals who have recently experienced a romantic breakup. People who engaged in high levels of interpersonal electronic surveillance experienced more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress than people who did not. Coping mechanisms for dealing with distress caused by content on Facebook following a breakup are complex, as many coping mechanisms can create new distressing situations.

**Keywords:** social network sites, Facebook, romantic breakups, romantic dissolution, breakup distress

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

With more than 901 million users worldwide as of March 2012, Facebook is the most popular social networking site worldwide (Facebook, 2012). Social networking sites are online community services or platforms that facilitate social interactions and the building of social networks among people who share interests, backgrounds or who know each other in real life. Social networking sites typically consist of a representation of each user in the form of a profile, his or her social connections, and means for users to interact with one another online, such as through direct messaging systems akin to email, instant messaging or friend testimonials (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010). Social networking sites are part of a broader trend of user-generated content that has emerged on Web 2.0 environments, and such sites have shifted the ways in which individuals communicate with one another (Brown & Quan-Haase, 2012). Facebook can be used for one-to-one communication among close friends, but it can also be used for one-to-many communication, since Facebook users are able to share photos with and send messages to large groups of acquaintances.

Sixty-five percent of American adult internet users are members of social networking sites; email and search engines are the only two online tools used more frequently (Hampton et al., 2011). The number of Facebook members has doubled since 2008 and, for many people, Facebook has become an important part of daily life (Hampton et al., 2011). While Facebook was initially only available to Harvard University students when it launched in 2004 (individuals required a Harvard email address to sign

up), the website quickly expanded and began to allow students from other universities and finally anyone with an email address to sign up in 2006 (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Gross and Acquisti (2005) claim that Facebook has “moved from niche phenomenon to mass adoption (p. 1).

Although there are many social networking websites, none have acquired the popularity or scale of Facebook. Other popular social networking sites launched prior to Facebook, such as Friendster and MySpace, but these sites have peaked in popularity, whereas Facebook has grown substantially since its launch and continues to grow (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Of Facebook’s 901 million members, 398 million logged in at least six days a week in March 2012 (Facebook, 2012).

Social networking sites are particularly popular among adults aged 18 to 49. Eighty-three percent of internet users aged 18 to 29 use social networking sites, compared with 70 percent of internet users aged 29 to 49 (Hampton et al., 2011). Social networking sites, and Facebook in particular, have become an important aspect of social life for most adults within these age groups. Indeed, Raynes-Goldie (2010) argues that there are significant social costs to not having a Facebook account. Facebook has become a ubiquitous and default mode of communication, and those who are not on the site risk being left out.

Facebook members primarily use the site to maintain existing social ties with friends and family members and to connect with old friends (Ellison et al., 2007; Smith, 2011). Boyd and Heer (2006) describe social networking sites as a “medium for ongoing conversation in multiple modalities” (p.10). Facebook is a space where people can exchange messages with friends, share photographs, and share cultural artifacts. It allows

individuals to converse with many social contacts in one place, and members describe Facebook as “useful,” “convenient,” and “informative” (Madden & Zikhur, 2011). Indeed, Facebook use has been linked to a number of positive outcomes. People use social networking profiles to display their personalities, which assists in identity formation (boyd, 2007). Additionally, Facebook usage is associated with measures of psychological well-being and the formation and maintenance of social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Young & Quan-Haase, 2010).

Another social trend is an increase in the number of young adults who experience romantic breakups from long-term relationships. While in the 1970s, the median age at first marriage was 21 years for brides and 23 years for grooms, in 2001, this increased to 28 and 30, respectively (Beaujot & Kerr, 2004). Common-law unions often delay or replace marriage (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007) and, according to Statistics Canada (2002), 63 percent of first unions among women aged 20 to 29 were common-law. Common-law unions are twice as likely to end in separation as first marriages (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). As such, many individuals are experiencing romantic breakups from relationships that are — except for formal union — indistinguishable from marriage, and thus have similar negative psychological and emotional repercussions.

Romantic breakups have been linked to a number of negative psychosocial outcomes, such as distress (Moller et al., 2002; Field et al., 2009), depression, (Monroe et al., 1999; Zimmer-Gembeck & Vickers, 2007) and lack of self-concept clarity (Lewandowski et al., 2006; Slotter et al., 2009). Breakup withdrawal symptoms, such as irritability, trouble concentrating, and depression are similar to withdrawal symptoms associated with addictive substances (Gilbert, Gilbert & Schultz, 1998; Bartels & Zeki,

2000). Studies have shown that keeping in touch may inhibit one's ability to move on (Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Kross et al., 2007). What, then, are the ramifications when one has unprecedented access to information about an ex-partner's life through social media?

While Facebook may make it easy to maintain contact with one's friends and stay informed about their lives, Facebook may also present challenges in breaking off contact with others. Because Facebook has become so ingrained in daily life and it has many social benefits, there is little incentive for users to delete their Facebook accounts. Additionally, many Facebook users maintain Facebook "friendships" with very casual acquaintances (boyd 2006). As such, unfriending someone on Facebook can be perceived as very insulting, which may make people reluctant to unfriend an ex-partner on Facebook after the relationship has ended, even if it may be in their best interest to do so (Holmes 2010; Gershon 2010). Furthermore, unfriending an ex-partner on Facebook does not guarantee that one will no longer receive updates on Facebook about the ex-partner's life through a mutual friend's Facebook profile.

Numerous studies exist on the ways in which social networking sites mediate and complicate romantic relationships (Andrejevic, 2005; Muise et. al, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010). Andrejevic (2005) argues that social media enable romantic partners to monitor one another and that this constant monitoring, which would have been considered excessive in the past, is now becoming normalized. Tokunaga (2010) found that the amount of time a person spends on Facebook and whether or not it is part of this person's daily routine are associated with greater amounts of surveillance of a romantic partner on Facebook. Additionally, Muise et al. (2009) found evidence that Facebook contributes to the experience of jealousy in romantic relationships. However, little research exists on the

ways in which Facebook affects breakups, except for Ilana Gershon's book *The Breakup 2.0* (2010). Through 72 interviews with research participants, Gershon identifies problematic breakup practices unique to Facebook: changing one's relationship status on Facebook, re-reading and overanalyzing Facebook messages and information posted on an ex-partner's Facebook wall, online stalking practices, and decisions to unfriend an ex-partner. However, Gershon does not determine the prevalence or severity of these practices. Furthermore, she deals primarily with practices occurring immediately after a breakup and thus does not acknowledge long-term issues or coping strategies.

## **1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

While Gershon identifies some of the ways in which Facebook complicates romantic breakups, much about this topic is still unknown. Because Gershon uses a qualitative approach, there are no existing statistics to determine how frequently the practices she identifies occur. Additionally, while Facebook use has been linked to jealousy among partners in romantic relationships (Muise et al., 2009), it is unknown whether or not Facebook use and surveillance of an ex-partner's Facebook page are related to distress, a potential negative outcome of romantic breakups (Moller et al., 2002; Field et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is no research examining why it is that some people participate in surveillance of an ex-partner's Facebook page following a breakup while others do not. There is also no research examining how individuals cope with romantic breakups when they and their ex-partner both have Facebook accounts. This study seeks to fill these gaps in the literature.



### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Facebook's structure enables several breakup practices that are unique to this social networking site. For instance, Facebook gives members the option of publicly listing their relationship status on their profiles. Facebook members can choose their status from a drop-down menu which includes options such as "single," "in a relationship," "married," "engaged," "in an open relationship," and "in a domestic partnership." Additionally, Facebook members may choose not to post a relationship status at all. Facebook members who list their relationship status as "in a relationship," "married," "engaged," "in an open relationship," or "in a domestic partnership" also have the option of listing who they are in a relationship with if their partner also has a Facebook account. The relationship status appears prominently on a Facebook member's profile, directly underneath their name. If either of the people in the relationship decides to remove their relationship status or change their status to "single", news that the couple is no longer together will appear on each ex-partner's Facebook wall as well as in the news feeds of the couple's Facebook friends. Consequently, the breakup becomes considerably more public than if a relationship status had never been posted. One way to circumvent this publicity of the breakup is if both partners delete the news of the breakup from their news feeds. It is unknown how many people have the foresight or desire to prevent this publicity on Facebook following a breakup.

Facebook's structure also enables members to go back and re-read and overanalyze wall posts, chat logs and comments on photographs. Additionally, Gershon (2010) found that people often communicated with their ex-partners on Facebook indirectly, such as by changing their profile picture to something intended to make their

ex-partners feel jealous or by posting a quote or a song lyric about their exes. As Andrejevic (2005) and Tokunaga (2010) point out, Facebook makes it easy to monitor others, but it is unknown how common this behaviour is among ex-partners. In order to prevent an ex-partner from prying into one's life or to prevent oneself from monitoring an ex-partner, Facebook members may choose to unfriend their ex-partners, change their privacy settings or block their exes from appearing in their news feeds, but it is unknown how common these post-breakup behaviours are. Even if an individual does unfriend an ex-partner or if they were unfriended, they may still continue to monitor their ex-partner by logging into a mutual friend's account and looking at the profile that way. Additionally, it is possible for people to monitor an ex-partner's new partner's profile. We know little about how prevalent these behaviours are. The present study expanded research on Facebook and breakups by gathering data about these behaviours.

***Research Question 1: How prevalent are breakup practices unique to Facebook?***

The present study investigated how Facebook use and surveillance of one's ex-partner on Facebook are related to breakup distress, a potential negative outcome of romantic breakups (Moller et al., 2002; Field et al., 2009). The present study also developed the Facebook Breakup Distress Scale, a scale adopted from Field et al.'s (2009) Breakup Distress scale, to measure breakup distress caused by content on Facebook. Facebook use has been linked to jealousy among partners in romantic relationships. Muise et al. (2009) found that there was a significant association between time spent on Facebook and jealousy-related feelings and behaviours on Facebook. Similarly, Tokunaga (2010) found that time spent on Facebook and whether or not Facebook is part of one's daily routine was associated with a greater amount of

surveillance of one's romantic partner on Facebook. The present study expanded the current research on Facebook and surveillance as these pertain to romantic breakups by investigating how time spent on Facebook and surveillance of one's ex-partner on Facebook are related to breakup distress among individuals who experienced a romantic breakup in the past year.

***Research Question 2: How is Facebook use and surveillance of one's ex-partner associated with breakup distress?***

The present study also sought to determine which variables are associated with high levels of surveillance of one's ex-partner, breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress. Breakup initiation status, time since the breakup, and hope for romantic renewal, were all examined. Field et al. (2009) found that non-initiators of the breakup experienced more distress than breakup initiators, and Villella (2007) found that non-initiators of the breakup were more emotionally distraught at the time of the breakup.

Villella also found that increased time since the breakup was related to greater adjustment following the breakup, but this is the first study to examine whether or not time since the breakup is related to high levels of surveillance of one's ex-partner, breakup distress, and Facebook breakup distress. Lanutti and Cameron (2002) developed a scale for examining the variable of hope for romantic renewal in their study on postdissolutional friendships; this scales were included in this study.

***Research Question 3: To what extent are breakup initiation status, time since the breakup and hope for romantic renewal associated with interpersonal electronic surveillance and breakup distress?***

While Gershon (2010) identifies behaviour that can occur on Facebook following a breakup, she does not discuss whether or not these behaviours are related to distress or how individuals cope with distress related to content on Facebook following a breakup. This study expanded the current research on Facebook and breakups by examining individuals' coping mechanisms in detail.

***Research Question 4: How do people cope with breakups when they and their ex-partner both have a Facebook account?***

#### **1.4. RESEARCH APPROACH**

The research questions outlined above were examined using a mixed methods approach comprised of a survey instrument and semi-structured interviews. In order to participate in the study, participants had to have experienced a romantic breakup within the past twelve months and have been Facebook friends with their ex-partner while they were in the relationship. Additionally, all participants had to be at least 18 years old.

The survey instrument was designed to measure the prevalence of the breakup practices unique to Facebook identified by Gershon (2010). Participants were asked to fill out a survey that asked them to keep in mind a person with whom they have recently (within the past year) experienced a breakup. Keeping this person and this specific breakup in mind, they were asked to answer a series of questions about the relationship, the breakup, and their interactions on Facebook with the person following the breakup. Participants were also asked questions about whether or not they feel Facebook makes breakups more challenging.

One-on-one interviews took place with research participants in order to capture their coping mechanisms in depth. The interviews focused primarily on what coping

mechanisms were most effective from the interviewees' personal experience and whether or not they had additional suggestions for people who were experiencing distress related to an ex-partner's content on Facebook.

A mixed methods approach was ideal for this study for several reasons. First, there are no existing statistics on post-breakup behaviour on Facebook, so performing a quantitative study filled this research gap. Second, the interview component allowed for the coping mechanisms that individuals employ to be discussed in greater detail than would have been possible with a survey. Surveys and quantitative analysis allow for greater measurement sophistication than qualitative analysis, but increasing quantification narrows the types of research questions that can be addressed (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). By using both qualitative and quantitative analyses in this study, research depth and breadth were achieved, and the weaknesses that would have been present if only one type of analysis was used were offset (Axinn & Pearce, 2006).

### **1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study examined the ways in which Facebook affects romantic breakups. While a body of literature has started to emerge in the area of Facebook and interpersonal relationships, little is known about how Facebook affects romantic breakups. By gathering statistics on individuals' behaviour on Facebook following romantic breakups and investigating the link between Facebook use, surveillance and distress, this study added concrete quantitative data to the current research on Facebook and breakups. Prior to this study, Facebook and breakups had only been examined qualitatively. Moreover, this study also developed a scale for measuring Facebook breakup distress, which can be used in further scholarly research.

Futhermore, this study also examined the strategies that individuals employ to cope with romantic breakups in the Facebook era. Previous research on Facebook and breakups looked at breakups that occurred on Facebook (i.e., breakups where the breakup message was communicated through Facebook) (Gershon, 2010), rather than breakups which may have occurred face-to-face or through another medium. Consequently, the longer term issues surrounding the way Facebook affects breakups had not been addressed, nor had the mechanisms that individuals use to cope with distress caused by content posted on Facebook following a breakup. This study was the first to address these issues. By discussing coping strategies, my research may serve as a resource for counsellors and educators who are unfamiliar with this relatively new issue.

Breakups can be deeply distressing events, and Facebook has changed the breakup process. This research will contribute to scholarly debates about the cultural change associated with new media tools such as Facebook, and their impact on young people's well-being.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

---

Very little academic literature directly discusses the relationship between social media and romantic breakups. That being said, there is a great deal of literature that discusses the emotional and psychological impact that romantic breakups can have on individuals. There is also a great deal of literature that discusses how social media can give rise to communication breakdowns and increased monitoring of interpersonal behaviour. As such, the first section of this literature review focuses specifically on the impact that romantic breakups have on individuals, and the second section of this literature review discusses aspects of social media that give rise to problematic behaviour following a breakup.

#### **2.1. THE IMPACT OF ROMANTIC BREAKUPS ON INDIVIDUALS' LIVES**

Romantic breakups are often colloquially discussed in a way that suggests that they have little to no bearing on personal well-being. Breakups are commonly viewed as simply a part of growing up, and individuals experiencing romantic breakups are sometimes told by individuals that “there are other fish in the sea” or that he or she will “get over it” (Martin, 2002). For the past several decades, extensive research has been conducted on the personal impact of divorce but, prior to the 2000s, research on non-marital romantic breakups was sparse. The reasons for this trend are unclear. One speculation is that this is related to the fact that premarital sex and cohabitation have become increasingly common (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). In Canada, the median age at first marriage increased from 21 years for brides and 23 years for grooms in the 1970s to 28 and 30 respectively in 2001 (Beaujot & Kerr, 2004), and common-law unions can delay

or replace marriage (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). According to Statistics Canada (2002), 63 percent of first unions among women aged 20 to 29 were common-law, and common-law unions are twice as likely to end in separation than first marriages. As such, many individuals are experiencing romantic breakups from relationships that are — save for the paperwork — indistinguishable from marriage. This may offer some explanation as to why breakups are now being taken seriously in academic literature.

The purpose of this section of the literature review is to determine how adults' breakups affect their well-being. I do this by outlining the breakup outcomes (i.e. the dependent variables) examined in the peer-reviewed literature, including an explanation of the methodologies used in the field. First I outline the negative outcomes associated with breakups. For the sake of organization and because the largest amount of literature exists in this area, the negative outcomes have been split into three separate categories: distress, lack of self-concept clarity, and depression. Second I explore what I have termed neutral breakup outcomes of adjustment and recovery. These outcomes were not considered positive or negative because they do not necessarily better an individual, but rather return them to a healthy emotional state. Finally, I discuss the positive outcomes that can arise from a breakup, including personal development and the redefinition of the relationship into a close friendship. This section concludes with a discussion of the independent variables examined in the studies. I determine which factors have the potential to make a breakup more challenging, what sorts of mechanisms individuals employ to cope with grief following a romantic breakup, and which factors are associated with individual resilience in handling a stressor like a breakup. I also discuss gaps in the literature and the validity of the research in the field.



### **2.1.1. Negative Outcomes**

Romantic breakups have been associated with a number of negative psychosocial outcomes. For the sake of organization, these have been organized into three sub-categories: distress, lack of self-concept clarity and depression.

#### **a. Distress**

One negative outcome which has been associated with breakups is distress. Distress does not have one standard operational definition, so each study measures it in a different way. Moller et al. (2002) seek to determine whether or not current and childhood attachment security are related to distress and coping resources following a breakup. They are interested in determining whether or not there is a difference between what they term continuously secure individuals (those who rate secure on both tests) versus those who have earned secure attachment (they were insecure during childhood but secure in adulthood). The researchers used two scales to measure attachment: the Parental Bonding Instrument and the Attachment Style Questionnaire. These results were used to group their participants into four groups: earned secure, continuously secure, continuously insecure and currently insecure (those with a history of secure). They used four different scales to measure distress in their study: The UCLA Loneliness Scale, Hopelessness Scale, Hopkins Symptom Checklist, and Perceived Stress Scale. Coping resources were measured using the Coping Resources Inventory and the Negative Mood Rating Scale. The study included a sample of 250 college students who experienced a breakup in the past year. At 96 percent, most of the participants were heterosexual, and 62 percent of the participants were female and 38 percent were male. Moller et al. (2002) found that individuals in the earned secure group did not significantly differ from those in

the continuously secure group in terms of coping resources and distress. However, those in the earned secure group and those in the continuously secure group had lower levels of distress and higher levels of coping resources than those in the continuously and currently insecure groups.

Field et al. (2009) developed the Breakup Distress Scale, which was adapted from the Inventory of Complicated Grief (Prigerson et al., 1995). Field et al. (2009) argue that symptoms of grief are distinct from symptoms of depression and thus require a unique measurement. Items on the scale measure factors such as preoccupation with thoughts of the breakup, crying, not accepting the breakup and being stunned by the breakup. Field et al. (2009) examined the relationship between distress measurements to gender, participants answers to questions about the breakup, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, intrusive thoughts, difficulty controlling intrusive thoughts and the participants' ratings of the relationship. These measurements were each assessed using established scales from previous research. The study was composed of 192 psychology students who had experienced a breakup within the past six months. The group was divided into a high and low distress group based on their scores. It was found that females scored higher on the breakup distress scale. High breakup distress was also related to having less time since the breakup occurred, feeling rejected and betrayed, not initiating the breakup, not having yet found a new relationship and the suddenness of the breakup. The high distress group also scored higher on the Intrusive Thoughts, Difficulty Controlling Intrusive Thoughts, Sleep Disturbance, Depression and Anxiety scales. Regression analysis showed that the depression score, feelings of being betrayed, a higher

rating of the relationship prior to the breakup and a shorter time since the breakup occurred were the most important predictors of breakup distress.

In a 2010 study, Field et al. examined the relationship between breakup distress and reasons for the breakup. Using the same scale as in their 2009 study, the 156 participants recruited for this study were divided into high and low distress groups. Congruent with the findings in the previous study, females scored higher on the Breakup Distress Scale than did males. To categorize reasons for the breakup, they created a Breakup Reasons Scale, which was based on qualitative research from a study of high school students (Connelly & McIsaac, 2009). The items in the scale were coded to correspond with four different breakup reasons: affiliation, intimacy, sexuality and autonomy. Participants were also administered a scale designed to test ratings of the relationship before the breakup, how much they missed their partner and what they viewed as the ideal relationship. Field et al. (2010) found that low intimacy, high relationship ratings and high ratings for missing the person were related to high breakup distress. In this study, low intimacy was marked by poor communication, distrust, unreciprocated love, non-caring behaviour, diminishing empathy, arguments, infidelity and hypersensitivity. Affiliation, sexuality and autonomy had no predicting power over breakup distress.

### **b. Depression**

Monroe et al. (1999) found that romantic breakups were a risk factor for the first onset of major depressive disorder. They conducted the study using a large sample of older adolescents who were assessed at two time points. Though the students were in their last year of high school during the first time point in the study, they were university

students or at least old enough to attend university at the second time point. The sample included 1,470 students who were recruited from the senior classes of urban and rural high schools in Oregon. The students were given diagnostic interviews to assess whether or not they were depressed or had experienced depression. They were also administered two scales: The Centre for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale and the Beck Depression Inventory. The students were asked whether or not they had experienced a romantic breakup. Additionally, they were asked if they had experienced any other recent major life events, such as the loss of a family member. The students were given similar interviews and administered the same scales one year later. The event of a recent breakup was a strong predictor of depressive episodes, and 46 percent of the first onsets of major depressive disorder were preceded by a recent breakup, even when other stressful life events were controlled for. However, a recent breakup did not predict recurrence of depression. No significant differences were found between genders.

Similar to Monroe et al.'s (1999) study, Zimmer-Gembeck and Vickers (2007) used the Beck Depression Inventory to test for depressive symptoms among individuals who had recently experienced a breakup. However, their study did not assess clinical depression, so it did not include the many other measurements that were included in the Monroe et al. (1999) study. The main goal of the study was to determine whether or not breakups and relationship satisfaction were correlates of depression over time and whether or not rejection sensitivity and relationship commitment played a role. The first half of the study was administered to 179 first-year students who were in a relationship of at least one month at the start of the study. The second half of the study took place six months following the first assessment. It was found that 37 percent of respondents had

broken up after six months. In addition to the Beck Depression Inventory, the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire was administered. Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the Relationship Assessment Scale, and relationship commitment was rated by asking the respondents to self-rate their level of commitment to their partner and to predict the likelihood that they will be with their partner for the rest of their life. No gender difference was found between those who exhibited signs of depression and those who did not. Zimmer-Gembeck and Vickers (2007) found that when earlier depressive symptoms were accounted for, breakups did not predict depression. They found that students high in rejection-sensitivity were more likely to report depressive symptoms.

### **c. Lack of self-concept clarity**

A number of research studies suggest that breakups have implications for self-concept clarity, or sense of self. This means that following a breakup, individuals may not have a clear idea of who they are. Lewandowski et al. (2006) examine how the self-expansion model affects post breakup self-concept. The self-expansion model states that individuals use romantic relationships as a means to expand their resources, and that they often treat their partner's resources as their own. To test for this, they performed three separate studies with three different samples of psychology undergraduate students who each experienced a breakup within the past six months. Each sample was given a self-expansion questionnaire, and a measure of pre-dissolution closeness scale. Each study used a separate measure of self-concept. Study 1 participants were instructed to answer the open-ended question "How were you affected by the breakup of your relationship?" Responses were coded and scored. Study 2 participants were to answer the open-ended question "Who are you today?" Study 3 participants were given a scale to measure self-

concept. Higher self-expansion during the relationship was strongly correlated with a lack of self-concept clarity following a breakup for all three groups, even when controlling for pre-dissolution closeness.

Slotter et al. (2009) also examined how breakups affect self-concept clarity. They also assessed whether or not lack of self-concept clarity would be related to depression. Research participants were 72 undergraduate students who experienced a breakup in the past six months, and they were each given three separate scales. The first scale measured five domains of change that may have occurred following the breakup: appearance, activities, social circle, future plans and values. The second scale measured self-concept clarity, and the third scale measured depression. The Beck Depression Inventory, the same scale which was used to measure depression in Monroe et al.'s (1999) study and Zimmer-Gembeck and Vickers' (2007) study was also used here. Individuals experienced self-concept change following a breakup, and self-concept change predicted emotional depression.

### ***Summary of Negative Outcomes***

The negative outcomes that have been associated with romantic breakups include distress, depression and lack of self-concept clarity. Moller et al. (2002) found that high levels of breakup distress were related to insecure attachment. Securely attached individuals had lower levels of distress and had more coping resources than insecure individuals. Field et al. (2009) found that women experienced more distress than men and that more time since the breakup and breakup initiation were related to lower levels of distress. Monroe et al. (1999) argued that breakups are a risk factor for depression, but Zimmer-Gembeck and Vickers (2007) found that individuals who were sensitive to

rejection were more depressed. Lewandowski et al. (2006) found that breakups can cause a lack of self-concept clarity, especially if the individuals treated their partner's resources as their own during the relationship. Slotter et al.'s (2009) findings suggest that lack of self-concept clarity and depression following a breakup were correlated.

### **2.1.2. Positive Outcomes**

Some researchers have argued that romantic breakups can lead to positive outcomes, such as growth and personal development or the redefinition of a relationship into a close friendship. Through a study of 92 undergraduate students, Tashiro and Frazier (2003) determine how personality, gender, initiator status and reasons the relationship ended affect personal growth following a romantic relationship breakup. They define growth as "positive changes that may lead to increased competence and satisfaction in subsequent romantic relationships" (p. 113).

In order to measure growth, Tashiro and Frazier (2003) first asked participants to qualitatively describe any positive changes they may have experienced as a result of their breakup that could help them in future relationships. These results were then coded into four categories: (1) *Person*, which refers to personal traits and characteristics; (2) *Other*, which refers to traits of the other person in the relationship; (3) *Relational*, or the interaction between Person and Other; and (4) *Environment*, which refers to factors which are external to the individuals, such as a stressful job or physical distance between partners. For example, if a participant answered "I will choose a better partner," the answer was coded as *Other*, because improved relationships results from a better fit from the other person rather than changing one's own traits. Growth was also assessed using a modified version of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

The original scale included items related to general crises, so these were changed to pertain specifically to breakups. An example of an item is “I discovered that I’m stronger than I thought I was” (p. 119). These were rated on a scale of zero to four, with zero being “I did not experience this change” and 4 being “I experienced this change to a great degree” (p. 119). Reasons the relationship ended were assessed with a 40-item scale. The items were each related to the four categories. Personality was assessed using a 40-item scale intended to measure the Big Five personality traits.

Tashiro and Frazier (2003) found that self-reported growth following a breakup was common. On average, participants reported five positive changes that may assist them with future relationships. Person types of growth, or a focus on how one can improve their own traits, was the most common type. The second most common type of growth was Environment. In terms of reasons why the relationship ended, individuals who reported that the relationship ended due to environmental causes were the most likely to experience growth. The personality trait of Agreeableness was also related to growth, and women were more likely to experience growth than men.

While Tashiro and Frazier’s (2003) study uses a detailed methodology, one of the shortcomings is that there were three times the number of female participants than there were male participants. Tashiro and Frazier (2003) also point out that participants had to retrospectively report on information, so it was difficult to ensure accuracy on some measures. Additionally, it is difficult to assess whether or not growth is long-term.

Another potential positive breakup outcome is the redefinition of the romantic relationship into a platonic friendship. Villella (2010) explores this process through a survey of 200 undergraduate students. She begins with a review of literature discussing



the breakup process. Villella cites a study by Felmlee et al. (1990), which suggests that social exchange theory is at the heart of redefining a romantic relationship into a friendship after a breakup. The concept of social exchange theory is that, in relationships, people seek to maximize benefits and minimize cost. A study by Schneider and Kenney (2000) showed that the costs of friendship are often high among ex-partners, which is why many people choose to break off contact following a breakup.

Villella (2010) examines the relationship between several variables: gender, who initiated the breakup and current relationship status to see if these affect satisfaction, adjustment (both immediately following the breakup as well as at the time of the survey), communication with a former partner following the breakup, and friendship with a former partner. Villella found that breakup initiators experienced greater levels of satisfaction in non-dissolutional relationships than non-initiators. Non-initiators of the breakup were more emotionally distraught at the time of the breakup but, after time had passed, breakup initiators and non-initiators have the same level of difficulty adjusting. Current involvement in a romantic relationship led to greater adjustment, and was also a barrier to friendship. Women experienced a more difficult time adjusting immediately following a breakup, but men took longer to adjust in the long-term.

To measure the dependant variables of satisfaction, adjustment and communication, Villella (2010) used scales from previous studies. To measure satisfaction, she used the Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983), but adapted the items to pertain to non-marital post-dissolutional relationships. To measure adjustment, she used a scale developed by Kellas et al. (2008). This scale had six items: 3 items related to disruption due to the breakup, and 3 items related to current adjustment. To measure

communication, she added two questions to her survey pertaining to how frequently one communicates with their former partner and who initiates the communication.

Villella's (2010) study was distributed throughout various undergraduate classes: communication studies, chemistry, business and Spanish, which helps to keep it free from biases that might exist had it only been distributed to one faculty. However, the study was conducted in a private college, so the students are likely of a higher socio-economic status than most college or university students. There was also a considerably larger amount of female participants than males, with 155 females in the study versus 85 males. Villella's (2010) research shows that gender and breakup initiation did not affect communication following a breakup. However, those who were not currently involved in a new relationship communicated with their ex-partners more frequently than those who were in a new relationship. Those who were not involved in a new relationship were more likely to initiate communication or have communication initiated by their exes. This makes me curious, then, as to what the motivations for communicating with an ex are. If friendship was the motivation, one would think that relationship status should not be a factor.

Like Villella (2010), Lannutti and Cameron (2002) acknowledge the fact that breakups can often be defined into friendships. Through a sample of participants who were involved in same-sex and opposite sex relationships, they examine the degrees to which ex-partners experience interpersonal contact, emotional and sexual intimacy, and satisfaction in their post-dissolutional relationships. In the heterosexual sample, post-dissolutional relationships contained moderate amounts of satisfaction, moderate amounts of emotional intimacy and interpersonal contact, and low amounts of sexual intimacy.

Conversely, same-sex post-dissolutional relationships contained high amounts of satisfaction, moderate amounts of emotional intimacy and interpersonal contact, and low amounts of sexual intimacy. Sexual intimacy was more likely to occur in each group if one hoped to renew the relationship. The more time that passed since the breakup and the more that the participant liked his or her ex-partner predicted satisfaction in post-dissolutional relationships between same-sex partners. The longer the relationship and the higher the extent to which the participant hoped to renew the relationship were associated with less satisfaction in a post-dissolutional relationship. For heterosexual ex-partners, contrary to what was found in same-sex ex-partners, increased time since the breakup was associated with decreased satisfaction with the post-dissolutional relationship.

Lannutti and Cameron (2002) also found that, as time passes, ex-partners contact one another less and that ex-partners who hope to renew the romantic relationship attempt to communicate more frequently. Personal variables, such as the amount of liking for one's ex-partner, uniqueness of the relationship and hope for romantic renewal were the strongest predictors as to whether or not a post-dissolutional relationship would remain. Lannutti and Cameron (2002) also examined structural variables, such as the degree to which the former partners had overlapping social networks. Former partners with overlapping social networks were less likely to redefine the relationship into a friendship.

The two samples were obtained in different ways. While the heterosexual sample contained university students, as do the rest of the samples in this review, the homosexual sample was obtained at a gay pride festival. As such, the two samples may have differences other than simply sexual orientation. That being said, obtaining an equal

number of participants would have been difficult, had the researchers solicited participants solely from the university community.

### ***Summary of Positive Outcomes***

The positive outcomes that have been associated with romantic breakups include personal growth and the redefinition of the relationship into a friendship. According to Tashiro and Frazier (2003) personal growth following a romantic breakup is common; many of their participants reported that they focused on improving their own traits following their romantic breakups. Villella (2010) found that breakup initiators have an easier time redefining a romantic relationship into a friendship than non-initiators. Lannutti and Cameron (2002) found that individuals who hoped to get back together with their ex-partners experienced less satisfaction in their friendships with their ex-partners.

### **2.1.3. Neutral Outcomes**

Recovery and adjustment are two breakup outcomes which cannot be easily classified as either positive or negative. If recovery were to occur quickly and include a growth component as discussed in the first section, it could be positive, but if it occurred slowly, recovery could negatively impede a person's ability to function in daily life. Only one study operationalizes post-breakup recovery; Sbarra (2006) defines emotional recovery as "an event in time based on the level of sadness and anger typically expressed within an intact relationship" (p. 299). This study was also unique because the sample had experienced an extremely recent breakup; each breakup occurred less than two weeks prior to the start of the study. Participants were administered two scales at the start of the study: an Acceptance of Relationship Termination Scale and a Relationship Style Questionnaire, which measured attachment style. Additionally, for each day of the 28-day

study, participants were to answer a 33 question scale called a Daily Diary, which was intended to assess the participants' love, sadness and anger. The participants were instructed to wear a beeper, which would go off at a random time each day, and would instruct them to complete the daily diary exercise. In order to measure anger, Sbarra (2006) had a second sample of students who were in intact relationships complete the daily diary for seven days. These results were averaged, and used as a baseline against which to measure whether or not individuals had recovered from their breakup. Sadness and anger recovery were two types of recovery identified by Sbarra (2006). When the students who had experienced a breakup had three consecutive days where their sadness and anger levels were the same as those of the control group, they were considered recovered. However, students would relapse if this behaviour did not continue, and they would not be considered covered unless they experienced another three consecutive days of recovery prior to the completion of the study. Sbarra (2006) found that 62 percent of participants experienced sadness recovery, and 67 percent experienced anger recovery. Breakup initiator status was not related to recovery rates, but attachment preoccupation, self-reported love for an ex-partner and mean rates of anger decreased sadness recovery. It is interesting that this is the only study examined in this review that found no correlation between initiator status and the outcome being measured.

In Helgeson's (1994) study of adjustment following the breakup of long-distance relationships, she sought to determine whether men or women adjusted better to breakups. Additional variables she assessed included initiation status and interdependence between the partners. Helgeson's (1994) study initially was intended to be about adjustment to long-distance relationships rather than breakups, but she found

that many of her participants broke up during the second half of her study, and thus the direction of the research shifted. To measure adjustment, she administered a distress scale at the start of her study. She then administered the same scale three months later. She found that women adjusted better than men to breakups. Unlike Sbarra's (2006) study on recovery, she found that there was a relationship between initiator status and adjustment; men, but not women, adjusted better to the breakup if they initiated it.

Moller et al. (2003) examine the relationship of attachment and social support to adjustment following a breakup. The main goal of the study was to determine whether or not attachment and social support independently contribute to adjustment or if they offer similar predicting power. Moller et al. (2003) recruited 262 undergraduate students who had experienced a breakup in the past year from educational psychology classes. The participants were given four different scales each intended to measure a different dimension of attachment: general attachment, attachment to peers, attachment to parents, and attachment to romantic partners. They were then given two different scales intended to measure different dimensions of social support: perceived support from friends and family and connectedness to the social environment. Four scales intended to measure different levels of adjustment were also administered: The UCLA Loneliness Scale, Hopelessness Scale, Hopkins Symptom Checklist, and Perceived Stress Scale. It is interesting to note that in their 2002 study, Moller et al. use these same scales to measure distress. Those who scored high on the questionnaires were considered distressed (2002) and those who scored low were considered adjusted (2003). Moller et al. (2003) found that general secure attachment was related to all four measures of adjustment. However, above and beyond general attachment, peer attachment was the only type that was related

to greater levels of adjustment. In particular, secure peer attachment was related to lower levels of loneliness and hopelessness. The researchers suggest that this may be due to the fact that 98 percent of the participants did not live at home, so parental attachment was not as relevant as peer attachment. Additionally, connectedness to the social environment predicted adjustment above and beyond dimensions of attachment.

Lepore and Greenberg (2002) explore how expressive writing affects mood, cognitive processing and social adjustment following a breakup. Undergraduate students who had experienced a breakup in the past year were recruited for the study. In total, there were 145 participants: 72 males and 73 females. Participants were given a scale to assess five dimensions of mood. Cognitive processing was measured using the Impact of Events Scale, which assesses intrusive thoughts and avoidance related to the breakup, which are indicative of unsuccessful cognitive processing. Feelings and attitudes surrounding the ex-partner were also measured in a scale. The participants were separated into two groups. One control group was given three writing assignments pertaining to general relationship topics, such as attitudes toward professors and students dating, whereas the other group was given three writing assignments related to their specific breakup. The participants were then given the scale tests again. Lepore and Greenberg (2002) found that there was no change in intrusive thoughts or mood between the two groups. However, creative writing was related to less resentment, caring, and guilt surrounding an ex-partner. As such, creative writing may have some ability to assist with adjustment following a breakup. This is the only study in this literature review to involve a nearly equal number of male and female participants. The three studies measuring

adjustment as an outcome use very different scales, so there is clearly no standardized operationalization of what exactly adjustment entails.

### ***Summary of Neutral Outcomes***

Recovery and adjustment are two neutral outcomes that have been associated with romantic breakups. Sbarra (2006) found that self-reported love for an ex-partner and anger toward the ex-partner were related to lower levels of recovery from sadness, and Helgeson (1994) found that women adjust better to romantic breakups. Moller et al. (2003) discovered that secure peer attachment was related to higher levels of adjustment.

#### **2.1.4. Conclusion**

While commonly held breakup views suggest that romantic breakups are insignificant, academic literature on the topic shows that romantic breakups can be traumatic life events for some individuals, and that they can lead to a number of negative outcomes. Few studies suggest that breakups provide opportunities for personal growth and development, and although friendship is a potential positive breakup outcome, friendships following a breakup can be unsatisfying if one's motivation for the friendship is to get back together with the person and these feelings are unreciprocated. A wide range of variables have been analyzed to see which are most strongly correlated with negative outcomes, positive outcomes, and adjustment and recovery, but it would take far more studies than have currently been conducted on the topic to definitively argue which are the most influential. Factors related to negative breakup outcomes and poorer adjustment and recovery include greater feelings of liking, anger, rejection or betrayal for the ex-partner (Field et al., 2009; Field et al., 2010); greater self-expansion during the relationship (Lewandowski et al., 2006); insecure attachment (Moller et al., 2003); and



high rejection sensitivity (Zimmer-Gembeck & Vickers, 2007). The following factors were related to higher levels of adjustment, growth and recovery: the personality trait of Agreeableness (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), general secure attachment and secure peer attachment, increased social support (Moller et al., 2003), being in a new relationship, and increased time since the breakup (Villella, 2010). Variables that provided confounding results in the studies were gender and breakup initiation status. Women exhibited more signs of depression and distress in all of the studies, save for one which found that women had a harder time adjusting at the time of the breakup but, over time, men had a more difficult time adjusting (Villella, 2010). Villella (2010) found that breakup initiators were more satisfied in their post-breakup relationships, and Helgeson (1994) found that women, but not men, adjust better if they initiate. Sbarra (2006) found no relationship between initiation status and recovery.

The literature on the effects of romantic breakups is limited in that it tends to use convenient samples that are not representative of most young adults. For instance, many of the studies involved students from psychology classes, and thus the results cannot be generalized. Nearly all of the studies had a far greater number of female participants than males. Researchers do not use the same methods to evaluate distress or adjustment, which demonstrates that these terms are subject to interpretation. Future research should incorporate better sampling methods, and more research needs to include recovery over time, rather than just one measure of adjustment.

## **2.2. THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON ROMANTIC BREAKUPS**

Social networking sites can complicate romantic breakups and make an already distressing experience even more emotionally challenging. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to examine what aspects of social media might present challenges when coping with a breakup. I do this by outlining four topics of study examined in the literature: Etiquette, Surveillance, Self-Presentation and Digital Footprints. Each section includes an explanation and comparison of the methodologies used in the studies. I conclude by discussing gaps in the literature.

### **2.2.1. Etiquette**

One feature of social media that may present challenges in a breakup stems from the newness of the technology. Because social media have not been around for a long time, and they are constantly evolving, there is little established etiquette surrounding appropriate social behaviour. This issue has been addressed by boyd (2006) and Gershon (2010). Boyd (2006) discusses the ways in which the meaning of adding someone as a friend on a social networking site (what she terms Friending) differs from traditional notions of friendship offline. Decisions about whether or not to accept someone's friendship request on a social networking site are varied, and social etiquette regarding Friending is not yet widely established. As such, many people have friends on their Facebook pages with whom they are only casual acquaintances. There are also several reasons for linking strangers, so there is little incentive to be selective about Friendship. Among the reasons she lists for why people choose to accept a friend request even if the person is not a close friend are "it would be socially inappropriate to say no because you know them", "having lots of Friends makes you look popular", "being friends gives you

access to their profile”, “you want them to see your profile” and “it’s easier to say yes than no”. These social rules help to explain why someone may be reluctant to delete their ex on Facebook, even if having access to their profile causes pain.

Gershon (2010) also addresses the issue of etiquette in regards to new media. Using breakups as an ethnographic starting point, she explores how people experience the newness of a medium. Oftentimes there is confusion as to what sorts of communication are socially appropriate for which topics. Gershon argues that the medium is central to a message being communicated, as some media indicate more seriousness than others. She interviewed 72 people, all but five of whom were undergraduate students, who had each experienced a mediated breakup. In addition to the interviews, Gershon surveyed 472 people<sup>1</sup>, asking what the best way to break up with someone was; only four people thought that something other than face-to-face was the ideal way to break up.

Gershon (2010) identifies three key terms to explain how people adopt new communication technologies and how they establish appropriate etiquette for each new medium they use. The first is *media ideologies*, which are “a set of beliefs about communicative technologies with which users and designers explain perceived media structure and meaning” (p. 3). Gershon explains that “...what people think about the media they use will shape the way they use media” (p. 3). She discusses the concept of remediation, coined by Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), to explain how people create their media ideologies. They argue that people define new technologies as they relate to

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<sup>1</sup> Information on the sampling technique used in this survey is not provided.

other available communicative technologies. For example, Gershon explains how many of the university students she interviewed thought email was a formal medium because it resembles a letter. The structural limits of technologies also shape media ideologies. For instance, the 160 character limit of texting and the fact that a text message could be sent anywhere often makes people perceive it as an informal medium. While boyd (2006), discusses that Friending etiquette is not yet widely established, Gershon points out that people have different ideologies in terms of what it means to “delete” someone on Facebook (p. 42). While some people may believe that deleting an ex on Facebook is a good way to get over someone, if their media ideology dictates that even the most casual acquaintances are acceptable online friends, they may be reluctant to delete their ex.

The other key term Gershon identifies is *idioms of practice*, which she describes as the ways in which people figure out together how to use different media and agree upon the appropriate social uses of technology. People ask each other for advice and share stories with one another about communication technologies. Idioms of practice differ from media ideologies in that media ideologies are an individual person’s beliefs about the appropriate use of a medium, and idioms of practice describe a particular group’s rules. Gershon notes that different groups often have different rules surrounding technology use and that, in spite of the fact that most people in her sample were undergraduate students, different groups of friends used communication technologies in different ways.

Finally, Gershon (2010) argues that the medium through an individual communicates has the potential to communicate something indirect to the recipient. For instance, text messages may communicate informality because they are short, can be sent

from anywhere, and do not allow for in-depth discussion. Gershon (2010) uses the term *second order communication* to describe what a medium communicates. The medium has the potential to be at odds with the message, such as the case of a serious breakup conversation that takes place via text message. Gershon argues that new media are not intrinsically formal or informal, but that users determine what is appropriate. Additionally, second order communication can take place when a person uses a song lyric or a famous quotation to describe how they are feeling on a topic as opposed to explaining their feelings in concrete terms. Among university students, these are often posted on one's Facebook status or on an instant messaging system away message.

As research by boyd (2006) and Gershon (2010) illustrates, etiquette on social media is not widely established, and this can create communication challenges during and in the aftermath of a breakup when former partners attempt to understand what exactly their ex-partner's online behaviour means and how they should themselves best communicate with their ex-partner.

### **2.2.2. Surveillance**

Social media has been identified as a surveillance tool, which individuals can use to keep track of each other's behaviour. Andrejevic (2005) examines a societal shift toward lateral surveillance, which he defines as "peer-to-peer monitoring, understood as the use of surveillance tools by individuals, rather than by agents of institutions public or private, to keep track of one another" (p. 488). Peer monitoring that would have once been considered excessive in the past is now trivial, and individuals are adopting technologies once associated with law enforcement and marketing to gain information about friends, family members and prospective love interests. According to Andrejevic,

this typically happens in a climate of perceived risk or skepticism, such as when an individual suspects that a spouse is being unfaithful. Covert investigation is favoured over the belief in others, and new forms of surveillance technologies are becoming available to the public. Andrejevic discusses this behaviour in the context of dating. Increasingly, individuals are using technology to screen potential love interests. He cites the “testimonials” section of Friendster, and the increasingly common act of “Googling” a potential love interest as examples of this phenomenon. He also discusses more severe cases where individuals have installed surveillance software on their spouses’ computers to track their internet use and check on their fidelity.

Tokunaga (2010) builds off Andrejevic’s (2005) observations by testing them in an empirical study. Tokunaga explores the use of *interpersonal electronic surveillance* (IES) in romantic relationships. IES is the use of communication technologies to gain awareness of another’s online and/or offline behaviours. Tokunaga explains that this is a general term related to other surveillance concepts, such as the notion of lateral surveillance discussed by Andrejevic (2005). Social networking sites function as an archive and are also public or semi-public forums, making them an enticing outlet in which to exercise surveillance. To measure IES behaviour, Tokunaga created a 15-item scale and administered it to 126 participants in romantic relationships. The variables he explores in relation to this behaviour are gender, age, geographic proximity of one’s partner, prior infidelities of one’s partner, time spent on social networking sites, whether or not social network site use is part of one’s daily routine and social network site self-efficacy. In the study, no gender difference was observed. Younger participants were more likely to engage in IES than older participants. No difference in IES behaviour was

found between individuals who lived in the same city as their partner versus those in long distance relationships. Prior partner infidelities were not correlated with a greater amount of IES, as Tokunaga hypothesized. However, internet use variables were significantly associated with IES. Time spent on social networking sites, whether or not it is part of one's daily routine and how confident one is with social networking sites were all associated with greater amounts of IES.

Gershon (2010) offers a possible explanation for why partners monitor one another on social networking sites. She argues that Facebook profiles provide “potato chips of information—you get a tantalizing taste that somehow doesn't quite satisfy, and so you keep seeking a sensation of fulfillment, of being satiated” (p. 86). She speculates that this may explain why some people spend countless hours on Facebook. In their study on Facebook and feelings of jealousy, Muise et al. (2009) found that there was a significant association between time spent on Facebook and jealousy-related feelings and behaviours on Facebook. Additionally, women were more likely to experience jealousy than men. However, it is unclear as to whether or not time spent on Facebook increases jealousy or if individuals find information that makes them jealous and then spend more time looking for more information. The qualitative data provided in the study supports the idea that both options are intertwined: “our results suggest that Facebook may expose an individual to potentially jealousy-provoking information about their partner, which creates a feedback loop whereby heightened jealousy leads to increased surveillance of a partner's Facebook page” (p. 443).

Donath and boyd (2004), in their study of privacy on social networking sites, offer another explanation as to why surveillance on these sites may be appealing. Social

networking sites give information about an individual in the context of their connections. A Facebook user's friends are able to write messages and post comments on the user's photographs. As such, individuals are able to learn about one another not only through the information they chose to post, but also through the ways they communicate with their friends.

Social networking sites make it easy for individuals to monitor one another's behaviour, which can provoke feelings of jealousy during a relationship. However, surveillance has not yet been examined in relation to breakups.

### **2.2.3. Self-Presentation**

Because social networking sites enable increased surveillance, self-presentation is particularly important within this realm. Tufekci (2008) argues that the idea of self-presentation is an integral part of social networking sites and that users determine an optimal balance between disclosure and withdrawal. Facebook users want to be seen, but it can be difficult to control one's audience. Disclosure of personal information on social networking sites can have harmful effects on one's future if the wrong person obtains "incriminating" information about an individual. Tufekci surveyed 704 undergraduate students. Students managed privacy concerns by adjusting the settings on the sites, but not by regulating their levels of disclosure. Students were more concerned about living in the present and less concerned about their Facebook content potentially impacting them in the future.

On a scale of 1 to 5, students rated the perceived likelihood of being found by four different categories of future audiences: employer, romantic partner, government, and corporation. The romantic partner category received the greatest score, with a higher



amount of women expecting to be found than men. Students who perceived this as more likely were also marginally more likely to indicate their relationship status. Tufekci suggests that a possible romantic partner looking at the profile may be a goal for many students, rather than a cause for concern. Profile information can be used to weed out potential love interests who do not share one's interests.

Similar to Andrejevic's (2010) findings, Tufekci (2008) suggests that grassroots surveillance and peer monitoring have undergone a profound change because of these sites. She also suggests that instead of being able to experiment with multiple identities, social networking sites may constrain individuals to a unitary identity which they must use to cater to multiple audiences which were previously separate. Gershon (2010) and Raynes-Goldie (2012) also discuss this issue; they argue that it can be difficult for Facebook users to tailor their profile to their friends as well as their romantic partners.

Back et al. (2010) explore the question of whether or not social networking profiles convey accurate impressions of profile owners. If they do, the use of Facebook as a surveillance tool and a tool through which to display one's identity could be justified. Back et al. (2010) discuss two competing hypotheses on this topic: the "idealized virtual-identity hypothesis", which states that the profiles depict idealized versions of their owners, and the "extended real-life hypothesis", which predicts that profiles depict their owners' actual personalities. While the idealized view is supported by content analysis, facial images and social behavior contain valid information about personality. Additionally, much of what appears on one's profile is content generated by other users, such as wall posts and photo comments. To complete this study, Back et al. (2010) recruited 236 Facebook users and university students from the United States and

Germany. Participants were tested on The Big Five personality traits, and they rated themselves on their ideal personality. Their friends also had to rate the users on these traits, and strangers had to guess what the individual is like based on the content of their Facebook page. Observer accuracy was found, but there was no evidence of self-idealization. This suggests that people use their online profiles to depict their real personality. If Facebook profiles provide a fairly accurate representation of their owners, this justifies individuals' using them as both a surveillance tool as well as a tool through which to display their own identities.

Mehdizadeh (2010) also explores self-presentation on Facebook. She examines the relationship between narcissism, self-esteem, time spent on Facebook and self-promotional content on Facebook. She discusses arguments about self-presentation that are similar to the two hypotheses discussed by Back et al. (2010). She notes that online environments differ from face-to-face presentation in that it is a controlled setting where individuals have the ability to construct an ideal self. The fact that Facebook is not an anonymous setting limits this idealization process to some degree, but she argues that individuals still have the ability to customize their page and promote themselves through attractive photographs and status updates outlining their achievements. She recruits 100 students at her campus to participate in the study. Participants were administered two scales: one to measure narcissism and one to measure self-esteem. They also completed a survey outlining the amount of time they spent on Facebook. With their permission, Mehdizadeh then added the participants to Facebook and performed a content analysis of their individual profiles. She looked for self-promotional content in their statuses, "About Me" section, notes, current profile picture and their first 20 profile pictures. Individuals

higher in narcissism and lower in self-esteem were related to greater online activity. Individuals higher in narcissism had a greater amount of self-promotional content, but there was no correlation between self-esteem and self-promotional content.

Mehdizadeh also explains the ways in which narcissists tend to use relationships. Rather than focusing on interpersonal warmth and intimacy, narcissists seek attractive, high status partners, and they tend to engage in a greater number of short-term relationships. Individuals high in narcissism could potentially be more likely to seek attention through their relationship status and the subsequent change from “in a relationship” to “single”.

Many individuals use social networking sites as a way to display their personalities and interests to others. While some aspects of these sites allow for individuals to portray idealized versions of themselves, users may be able to obtain a fairly accurate version of someone’s personality based on their Facebook profile. This information can then be used to weed out potential love interests who do not have much in common with one another. However, another problem with self-presentation is that users must attempt to cater their profiles to several audiences. Something that one wants their friends to see may not be the same as what they want their boyfriend or girlfriend to see. This can cause problems in relationships and give rise to jealousy if one is not careful in monitoring the information that appears on his or her profile.

#### **2.2.4. Digital Footprints**

Another key feature of social networking sites is that they are comprised of words and images that leave behind a trail of one’s interactions. This notion of digital traces online has been discussed by several researchers (van Dijck, 2007; Hogan & Quan-

Haase, 2010; Melander 2010). One aspect of Facebook that presents problems at the end of a relationship is that individuals are able to easily go back and re-read wall posts and messages from a previous time in the relationship. In this sense, Facebook functions as an archive of the relationship. While content can be deleted, the only way to do so is to individually delete each comment and photograph. As such, it is impossible to go back and delete messages without re-reading them, even though one may simply want to forget the relationship ever existed.

Melander (2010) discusses digital traces in the context of online harassment among intimate partners. Partners who are fighting are able to post public slanderous comments online about the person they are dating. Gershon (2010) also conducted interviews with individuals' whose former partners posted negative comments online following a breakup. Unfortunately, the person who is being harassed cannot delete the comment if it is on their ex-partner's page, and the only course of action they can take to remove the comments is to report the incident to Facebook. Unfortunately, it can take weeks before Facebook determines that the message is abusive and takes action to remove it—long after it would have been seen by the ex-partner's social network.

Van Dijck (2007) takes a theoretical look at the complex relationship between material culture, technology and memory. She argues that items mediate memory and raise questions about a person's identity in a specific moment in time. Many people own shoeboxes in which they store personal items, such as photographs, albums, letters and diary clippings. These items are material triggers of personal memories. Rather than functioning as merely prostheses of the mind, van Dijck argues that mediated memories are located both in the brain and within material culture, the latter of which takes on a

new form in the digital age. Van Dijck cites Bergson, who argues that the brain does not merely store memories, but that it re-creates the past. These concepts are discussed in specific relation to breakups, and van Dijck uses the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* as an example of how objects mediate memory. In the film, the two main characters have experienced a breakup, and they undergo a procedure to have each other wiped from their memories. For the procedure to be effective, they must get rid of belongings that remind them of each other. However, van Dijck points out that digital technologies were absent from the film, and neither character was shown deleting emails or images stored on their computer and the like.

Images, wall posts and private messages on Facebook should allow people to re-create memories as material objects do. In the context of a breakup, these memories could be reminders of a happier time in the relationship, or they could be reminders of the painful breakup. Unlike objects in a shoebox, these cannot be put away in a closet. On Facebook, it is easy to stumble across, or actively seek, old pictures that one may be better off not seeing.

### **2.2.5. Conclusion**

Social networking sites make it easy for individuals to interact with a large number of people at once. They offer new ways to stay connected, but this can also create problems when one wishes to break off contact with someone, such as in the case of a romantic breakup. Social networking sites give rise to confusing social interactions when individuals do not agree with how they should be used as a communication medium. The increased surveillance on these sites can lead to feelings of jealousy as well as outright attempts to make people jealous by posting provocative content. Content on Facebook is

difficult to delete, and it has the ability to trigger painful or unpleasant memories every time one encounters it. To make matters worse, unless an individual blocks someone they wish to avoid on Facebook, they will still be able to see content that that individual posts on the profiles of mutual friends. If both individuals have Facebook profiles and mutual friends, it can be difficult to entirely break off contact. This information suggests that Facebook could present difficulties for individuals who are experiencing romantic breakups and who wish to avoid or break off contact with their ex-partners. Most of the literature on Facebook, however, focuses on romantic relationships or friendships rather than romantic breakups, and thus there is a need to expand research in this field.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

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The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methods used in this study. First, it outlines the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study. Second, it explains the research design used to examine the research questions and hypotheses. Third, it explains the recruitment strategies used to collect the data. Fourth, it describes the sample used in the study and the demographics of the research participants. Fifth, it explains how the variables used in the study were measured and how the data were analyzed.

#### **3.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

This study was guided by four research questions: (1) How prevalent are breakup practices unique to Facebook? (2) How is Facebook use and surveillance of one's ex-partner associated with breakup distress? (3) To what extent are breakup initiation status, time since the breakup and hope for romantic renewal associated with interpersonal electronic surveillance and breakup distress? (4) How do people cope with breakups when they and their ex-partner both have a Facebook account? These research questions were described in detail in Chapter 1 (see section 1.3, p. 4). Research questions 1 and 4 were exploratory in nature. Only a marginal amount of research has been conducted in these areas, and the goal was to gather preliminary data. Questions 2 and 3, however, along with the literature review in Chapter 2, were used to formulate six hypotheses.

##### **3.2.1. Facebook use, surveillance, breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress**

The relationship between Facebook use and breakup distress has not been studied. However, Facebook use has been linked to jealousy, another negative emotion. Muise et

al. (2009) found that there was a significant association between time spent on Facebook and jealousy related feelings and behaviours on Facebook, including surveillance of one's romantic partner. However, the reason for this correlation is unclear. Does time spent on Facebook increase jealousy, or do individuals find information that makes them jealous and then spend more time looking at the information? Muise et al.'s study included an optional qualitative component where individuals could provide additional information about their experience of jealousy on Facebook. The qualitative data provided in the study supports the idea that both options are intertwined. Respondents felt that Facebook causes jealousy because information is so accessible on the site and because this information is often removed from its original context. Additionally, many participants reported that they had a difficulty limiting the amount of time they spent on their partners' Facebook pages. Muise et al. state, "our results suggest that Facebook may expose an individual to potentially jealousy-provoking information about their partner, which creates a feedback loop whereby heightened jealousy leads to increased surveillance of a partner's Facebook page" (443). Similarly, Tokunaga (2010) found that time spent on Facebook and whether or not it is part of one's daily routine was associated with a greater amount of interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES) of one's romantic partner. This information formed the basis for hypotheses 1 and 2:

***Hypothesis 1: People who engage in high levels of IES will experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress than people who do not.***

***Hypothesis 2: Heavy Facebook users will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES and experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress.***



People who are no longer friends with their ex-partners on Facebook will not be able to participate in IES of an ex-partner unless the ex-partner has an open Facebook account or they have gained access to the account through some other means, such as by logging into a mutual friend's Facebook account. Because breakup distress, Facebook breakup distress and IES were expected to be linked, hypothesis 3 was as follows:

***Hypothesis 3: People who do not have access to their ex-partners' profiles will experience less breakup distress than those who remain Facebook friends.***

### **3.1.2. Breakup Initiation Status, Time Since the Breakup and Hope for Romantic Renewal**

Research has demonstrated that non-initiators of a breakup are more likely to experience negative breakup outcomes. Field et al. (2009) found that non-initiators experience greater distress following the breakup (Field et al., 2009). Non-initiators also experience slower recovery and adjustment times (Helgeson, 1994; Villella, 2010). Because distress was expected to be linked to Facebook use, surveillance, and Facebook breakup distress, this information formed the basis for hypothesis 4:

***Hypothesis 4: Non-breakup initiators will be more likely than breakup initiators to experience more breakup distress.***

Villella (2010) found that increased time since the breakup was associated with higher levels of adjustment following the breakup. Because adjustment implies a lack of distress, it was expected that the opposite would be true of breakup distress, and this information formed the basis for hypothesis 5:

***Hypothesis 5: Increased time since the breakup will be associated with low levels of IES, less breakup distress and less Facebook breakup distress.***

In their study of post-dissolutional friendships, Lanutti and Cameron (2002) found that individuals who wished to get back together with their exes were more dissatisfied with their friendships with their exes. As such, it was expected that this group would also be more likely to experience breakup distress. Because distress was expected to be linked to Facebook use, surveillance, and Facebook breakup distress, this information formed the basis for hypothesis 5:

***Hypothesis 6: People who hope to get back together with their ex will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES, experience more breakup distress and experience more Facebook breakup distress.***

This section described six hypotheses formulated from the literature. The hypotheses are summarized in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Summary of hypotheses

- H1 People who engage in high levels of IES will experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress than people who do not.
- H2 Heavy Facebook users will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES and experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress.
- H3 People who do not have access to their ex-partner's profile will experience less breakup distress than those who remain Facebook friends.
- H4 Non-breakup initiators will be more likely than breakup initiators to experience more breakup distress.
- H5 Increased time since the breakup will be associated with low levels of IES, less breakup distress and less Facebook breakup distress.
- H6 People who hope to get back together with their ex will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES, experience more breakup distress and experience more Facebook breakup distress.

## **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.2.1. Mixed Methods Approach**

The research questions and hypotheses outlined above were examined using a mixed methods approach comprised of a closed-ended, multiple choice survey instrument and semi-structured interviews. A mixed methods approach was ideal for this study for several reasons. First, there are no existing statistics on post-breakup behaviour on Facebook, so performing a quantitative study filled this research gap. Second, the interview component allowed for the coping mechanisms that individuals employ to be discussed in greater detail than would have been possible with a survey. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) argue that surveys and quantitative analysis allow for greater measurement sophistication than qualitative analysis, but that “Increasing quantification narrows the types of research questions that can be addressed. That is, research depth is sacrificed to gain research depth” (p. 115). By using both qualitative and quantitative analyses in this study, research depth and breadth were achieved, and the weaknesses that would have been present if only one type of analysis was used were offset.

### **3.2.2. Surveys**

The survey is one of the most widely used methods of media research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Survey research involves the researcher selecting a sample of respondents and asking a set of standardized questions. There are two major types of surveys: descriptive and analytical. Descriptive surveys attempt to describe current conditions or attitudes, and analytical surveys attempt to describe and explain why situations exist. In the present study, a survey instrument was designed for descriptive and analytical purposes. The descriptive section of the survey attempted to answer

research question 1—that is, to determine the prevalence of breakup practices unique to Facebook. The analytical section of the survey was designed to answer research questions 2 and 3—that is, to determine the relationship between Facebook use, IES, breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress and to determine which variables are associated with these behaviours and feelings. The sample in this study was adults who experienced a romantic breakup in the past twelve months.

Survey research was used to answer these research questions for several reasons. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of surveys in studies examining the relationship between Facebook use and IES (Tokunaga 2010) and between Facebook use and jealousy-related feelings and behaviours (Muise et al. 2009). Furthermore, surveys have also been effective in studies examining the variables related to various breakup outcomes (Helgeson, 1994; Lanutti & Cameron, 2002; Field et al., 2009; Villella, 2010). The present study continued this line of research as it included scale items developed by other researchers in an attempt to standardize research within the field and to allow for easier comparison between studies.

Survey research was also chosen for this study because it is cost-effective and it is useful for obtaining large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time. Given the time constraints of master's theses, survey research was ideal for this study. Surveys allow researchers to examine many variables and, given that many variables can affect breakup outcomes, a survey allowed the study to be more comprehensive.

Survey research, however, is not without its limitations. One major disadvantage of survey research is that causality is impossible to determine. Similarly, participants cannot express their opinions in detail or explain the motivations behind their behaviours,

making it difficult to explore topics in greater depth. Additionally, if a participant has an additional answer that was not supplied in a closed-ended question, it cannot be included in the analysis. Qualitative analyses in the form of semi-structured interviews were included to address the deficiencies of survey research.

### **3.2.3. Semi-Structured Interviews**

One-on-one semi-structured interviews took place with research participants in order to address research question 4, that is, to determine how people cope with romantic breakups when they and their ex-partner both have a Facebook account. Additionally, the interviews were intended to help determine causality between the variables examined in the survey. Like the sample in the survey, the interview participants were adults who experienced a romantic breakup within the past twelve months. Each of the interview participants had filled out the survey prior to our interview.

Interviews were ideal for addressing coping mechanisms for two reasons. First, interviews provide rich, complex data and allow researchers to explore a topic in depth (Taylor, 2010). The answers were expected to be unique to each individual's personal situation, and interviews are able to capture this complexity. Furthermore, there could be several different motivations for the same behaviour, and these cannot be easily translated into scaled items on a survey.

Second, semi-structured interviews are more flexible than structured methods such as surveys. Because interviews allow for two-way dialogue, participants are able bring up information that did not directly arise from the line of questioning. Interview participants have the potential to bring up new issues that were not preconceived by the interviewer (Axinn & Pearce, 2006). Interviews also allow the interviewer to stray from

the interview guide and ask additional relevant questions when new issues arise (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are able to delve into areas the researcher did not consider prior to the study, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the topic.

### **3.3. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

#### **3.3.1. General Overview**

The data for the study were collected using an online survey powered by Google Docs and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Ethics approval was obtained for the study (see Appendix J for Ethics Approval), and all participants were given a letter of information outlining the purpose of the study, eligibility to participate, incentives and confidentiality (see Appendices A and B for letters of information).

Participants were recruited for the survey component of the study in three ways. First, an invitation was sent out to the researchers' network of acquaintances on Facebook asking them to complete the online survey (See Appendices E and F for Online Survey Interface and Survey Content). Second, acquaintances were asked to send the survey link to others they know on Facebook who may fit the criteria for eligibility. Third, posters were placed in locations around campus (see Appendix D for Call for Participants Poster). Participation in the study was voluntary.

Participants for the interview component of the study were recruited through the survey. The final question of the survey asks participants to email the researcher if they are interested in participating in a follow-up interview. Those who emailed the researcher were invited to take-part in a one-on-one interview on campus.

### **3.3.2. Survey Tool**

The survey was available online between September 2011 and February 2012, and participants were recruited throughout this timeframe. The survey data was stored on a password-protected Excel file on Google Docs.

The survey consisted of four sections. Section 1 contained questions about participants' Facebook use. Section 2 asked respondents to think of a person with whom they had recently (within the past twelve months) experienced a romantic breakup. Respondents were asked to answer a series of questions about their relationship with their ex-partner. Section 3 asked respondents to answer a series of questions about their Facebook use after their romantic breakup. Section 4 contained wrap-up questions about whether or not participants' felt Facebook complicated their breakup as well as demographic questions such as age, gender and whether or not the participant is a university student. Details on the survey items can be found at the conclusion of this chapter (see section 3.6. Measurement and Data Collection).

To ensure a high completion rate of the survey, the following steps were taken:

- (1) To create an incentive to participate in the study, participants were offered the chance to put their names in a draw for a \$10 gift certificate of their choice.
- (2) To reduce reluctance to participate, respondents were given an information letter that provided information about the confidentiality of their answers, incentives and the purpose of the study. The information letter also provided the researchers' contact information and told participants that they may ask questions about the survey at any time (see Appendix A for Letter of Information to Survey Participants).

### **3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview Technique**

Ten people who each experienced a romantic breakup within the past year and who were Facebook friends with their ex-partners on Facebook during the relationship participated in a semi-structured interview where they were each asked to discuss the cause of their breakup, the role that Facebook played in the aftermath of the breakup, how they coped with the situation on Facebook and any other coping mechanisms they would suggest for others who are experiencing a similar situation (See Appendix G for Interview Guide).

The interviews were scheduled in advance and participants were able to choose how they wanted the interviews to take place: face-to-face in a meeting room on campus, via Skype, or through email. The use of different interview modes does have the potential to bias results. For instance, a participant may answer differently through email than they would face-to-face (Dillman et al., 2008). However, the options were provided to make the participants feel comfortable and to enable participants who were not able to meet in person to participate.

The face-to-face interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes in duration and were conducted privately in a room on campus to ensure participant confidentiality. Each participant was asked to read a letter of information before proceeding (see Appendix B for Information Letter to Interview Participants), and participants were asked to sign a form consenting to be interviewed and audio-taped (see Appendix C for Consent to be Interviewed). Participants were compensated \$10 for their time. Audio files were stored on the researchers' computer and destroyed following data analysis. Consent forms and interview transcriptions were stored in a locked cabinet to protect the data.



### **3.4. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE**

#### **3.4.1. Description of Survey Sample**

One hundred seven participants were recruited for the study. The decision to use nonprobability sampling was made for several reasons. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), there are four instances where nonprobability sampling is considered acceptable. This study met these four criteria. First, this research study was not designed to generalize the results to the population, but rather to investigate the relationship between variables and to collect exploratory data to design a measurement instrument for Facebook breakup distress. Second, probability sampling is time-consuming and, given the time-constraints of master's theses, probability sampling was not feasible for this study. Third, probability sampling is costly and, given the exploratory nature of the study, the cost could not be justified. Fourth, error control is not a primary concern in pilot studies such as this one.

That being said, non-probability sampling and, in particular, snowball sampling, has several biases. First, because participation is voluntary, it is possible that certain types of people chose not to respond. For instance, Rosenthal and Rosnow (1969) found that that volunteer subjects tend to have higher educational levels, higher occupational statuses, and higher intelligence levels. In the case of snowball sampling, people who have many friends are more likely to be recruited into the study, as well as people whose primary motivation for completing the study is to personally assist the researchers. There is no way of knowing whether or not the population is representative of the sample. Nevertheless, snowball sampling allows the researchers to target a population that is difficult to locate and, given the numerous criteria for eligibility for this study, snowball

sampling was an effective way to recruit a large enough number of participants to be able to examine correlations between variables. Within the sample, 42.9 percent indicated that they heard about the study directly from one of the researchers, 41.1 percent indicated that they heard about the study through a friend on Facebook, and 16.1 percent indicated that they heard about the study through a poster on campus.

Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 35 years, with a mean age of 23 years. Of these, 74 people were post-secondary students and 31 were not. Two people did not identify whether or not they were a student. Males were underrepresented in the questionnaire sample (n=31 or 29.5 percent) in comparison with female respondents (n=76 or 71.0 percent). While there is a slightly larger number of female Facebook users than males, these numbers were not representative of the actual breakdown by sex on the site. According to Hampton et al. (2011), 43 percent of Facebook users are male and 58 percent are female. However, the same study found that women tend to be more active Facebook users than men; they update their statuses and comment on other peoples' posts much more frequently. As such, it is possible that more women noticed and responded to invitations to participate in this study on Facebook than men. Nevertheless, the sample is not representative of the targeted population, and therefore the results of this study were not generalizable.

#### **3.4.2. Description of Interview Sample**

Ten individuals who filled out the survey notified me via email that they would be interested in being interviewed. Of the ten interviewees, four were male (40 percent) and six were female (60 percent). Four of the participants were university students, and six had completed university/college and were working. The professions and fields of studies

of the participants were diverse. However, all of the participants completed some college and university, so the sample is not representative of all adult Facebook users.

The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 39. The mean age was 25.7, the mode age was 26 and the median age was 26. Table 3-2 summarizes the key characteristics of the interview sample.

Table 3-2 Description of interview sample

| <i>Field of Study/Profession</i>                | <i>Pseudonym</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Year of Enrollment</i>             |
|---|------------------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Hedge Fund Trader</b>                        | Jake             | 27         | N/A                                   |
| <b>Bank Teller</b>                              | Maggie           | 39         | N/A                                   |
| <b>Student – Sociology and Criminology</b>      | Chelsea          | 21         | 4th year                              |
| <b>Student – Justice and Peace Studies</b>      | Cassie           | 21         | 4th year                              |
| <b>Student – Health Sciences and Psychology</b> | Lane             | 19         | 2nd year                              |
| <b>Lawyer</b>                                   | Martin           | 26         | N/A                                   |
| <b>Student – Media Studies</b>                  | Chris            | 26         | 2 <sup>nd</sup> year graduate student |
| <b>Bartender</b>                                | Rebecca          | 26         | N/A                                   |
| <b>Legal Assistant</b>                          | Ann              | 25         | N/A                                   |
| <b>Matte Painter</b>                            | Patrick          | 26         | N/A                                   |

### 3.5. MEASURES

Quantitative data collected through an online survey were used to answer research questions 1, 2 and 3 as well as to test the hypotheses outlined in section 3.2. The qualitative data were used to answer research question 4, as well as to assist in explaining the quantitative findings. This section outlines the measures used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions.

The survey instrument (see Appendix F) included several broad types of measures, which are discussed in more detail below. Information was collected on respondents Facebook engagement, including how much time they spend on the site and how they use the site. Information was also collected on respondents' breakups with their ex-partners, such as who ended it and whether or not the former couple cohabited. The

instrument also asked respondents a series of questions about their behaviour on Facebook following the breakup, and it included measures of breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress as well as interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES). Participants were also asked demographic questions, such as age and gender.

### **3.5.1. Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance (IES)**

Respondents were asked to rate twelve items developed by Tokunaga (2011) about how they survey their ex-partner on Facebook on a 5-point Likert-scale where 1=“strongly disagree”; 2=“disagree”; 3=“neither disagree nor agree”; 4=“agree”; and, 5=“strongly agree” (See question 4.2 of Survey, Appendix F).

### **3.5.2. Breakup Distress**

Breakup distress was measured using sixteen items developed by Field et al. (2010) about their distress following the breakup on a 5-point Likert-scale where 1=“strongly disagree”; 2=“disagree”; 3=“neither disagree nor agree”; 4=“agree”; and, 5=“strongly agree” (see question 2.9 of Survey, Appendix F).

### **3.5.3. Facebook Breakup Distress**

Distress caused by content pertaining to one’s ex-partner on Facebook was measured using an adopted version of Field et al.’s (2010) breakup distress scale. The Facebook breakup distress scale was split into two different categories: action-based Facebook breakup distress and feelings-based Facebook breakup distress. Items which were considered to be action-based included “I spend so much time looking at my ex’s profile that it’s hard for me to do things I normally do” and “I overanalyze old messages, wall posts or photographs of me and my ex together.” Items which were considered to be feelings-based included “I feel paranoid that people posting on my ex’s wall are potential

romantic interests” and “I am envious of others who do not have an ex on Facebook.” The Facebook breakup distress scale was question 4.10a of the survey (see Appendix F). Items 1 through 4 were action-based and items 5 through 10 were feelings-based. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-scale where 1=“strongly disagree”; 2=“disagree”; 3=“neither disagree nor agree”; 4=“agree”; and, 5=“strongly agree.”

### **3.5.4 Facebook Use**

Facebook use was measured using a question developed by Ellison et al. (2007), which asks how much time respondents spent on Facebook in the past week (see question 1.2 of Survey, Appendix F). Respondents reported their Facebook use on a six-point scale: (1=“less than 10”; 2=“10 – 30”; 3=“31-60”; 4=“1-2 hours”; 5=“2-3 hours”; 6=“more than 3 hours”. They were also given the option to respond 7=“don’t know/refused.”)

### **3.5.5. Access to Ex-Partner’s Facebook Account**

Access to the ex-partner’s Facebook account was measured using question 4.1a, which asks “Are you and your ex-partner friends on Facebook?” Respondents had the option of answering “yes” or “no.”

### **3.5.6. Breakup Initiation Status**

Breakup initiation was measured using question 2.4 of the survey, which asks: “Who ended the relationship?” with the options of answering “me”, “my ex-partner” or “the breakup was mutual”. People who answered “me” were coded as breakup initiators and people who answered “my ex-partner” were coded as non-initiators.

### **3.5.7. Time Since the Breakup**

Time since the breakup was measured using question 2.7 of the survey which asks “Approximately when did the breakup take place?” Respondents were able give an answer between one and twelve months and they had to answer to the nearest month.

### **3.5.8. Hope for Romantic Renewal**

To measure hope for romantic renewal, respondents were asked to rate three items developed by Lannutti and Cameron (2002) about their hope for romantic renewal with their ex-partner on a 5-point Likert-scale where 1=“strongly disagree”; 2=“disagree”; 3=“neither disagree nor agree”; 4=“agree”; and, 5=“strongly agree”. These were the first three items of question 2.8 of the survey.

### **3.5.9 Behaviour on Facebook following the breakup**

To determine the prevalence of breakup practices unique to Facebook, respondents were asked a series of yes and no questions about specific behaviour on Facebook following their breakup. These were questions 3.1 to 4.1 and questions 4.3 to 4.6.

### **3.5.10. Demographics**

Respondents were asked for their age, gender and whether or not they are a post-secondary student (see section 5 of Survey, Appendix F).

## **3.6. DATA ANALYSIS**

### **3.6.1. Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlations. Descriptive statistics were used to determine which behaviours on Facebook are the most common following a breakup. Correlations were used to analyze the relationships

between variables and to test the hypotheses.

### **3.6.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Ten people who each experienced a romantic breakup within the past year and who were Facebook friends with their ex-partners on Facebook during the relationship participated in a semi-structured interview where they were each asked to discuss the cause of their breakup, the role that Facebook played in the aftermath of the breakup, how they coped with the situation on Facebook and any other coping mechanisms they would suggest for others who are experiencing a similar situation (See Appendix G for Interview Guide).

The interviews were transcribed and then reconstructed as narrative accounts of the way each individual's breakup unfolded, including the role Facebook played in the aftermath of each breakup (see appendices K to T for the Participants' Narrative Accounts). The data were visualized using a thematic framework matrix created in Excel (see Appendices H and I for Thematic Framework Matrix), and emerging patterns and themes in the narratives were recognized, compared and clustered into experiences and ideas that were similar and those that were singular. (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Polkinghorn, 1988; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Schram, 2003).

## **3.7. SUMMARY**

Data for this study was quantitative and qualitative in nature and it was collected through a questionnaire and interviews. The quantitative data described behaviour on Facebook among adults who experienced a romantic breakup within the past twelve months, and analyzed the relationship between Facebook use, interpersonal electronic

surveillance, breakup distress and Facebook distress as well as other variables. The qualitative data were used to learn about the mechanisms that individuals employ to cope with distress caused by content on Facebook following a breakup as well as to explain and describe the quantitative findings.

The measures employed in this study were discussed in this chapter, as well as the data analysis procedure for the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study. The following chapter discusses the results of the study.



## CHAPTER 4

### STUDY RESULTS

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#### 4.1 FACEBOOK USAGE

In line with previous research (Hampton et al., 2011), the survey data show that adults between the ages of 18 and 35 are heavy users of Facebook. When responding to the statement “Facebook has become part of my daily routine,” 86.2 percent of participants answered “agree” or “strongly agree” (see figure 4-1). When asked how much time they spent on Facebook per day last week, 81.3 percent of participants answered that they spent one hour or more each day (see figure 4-2).

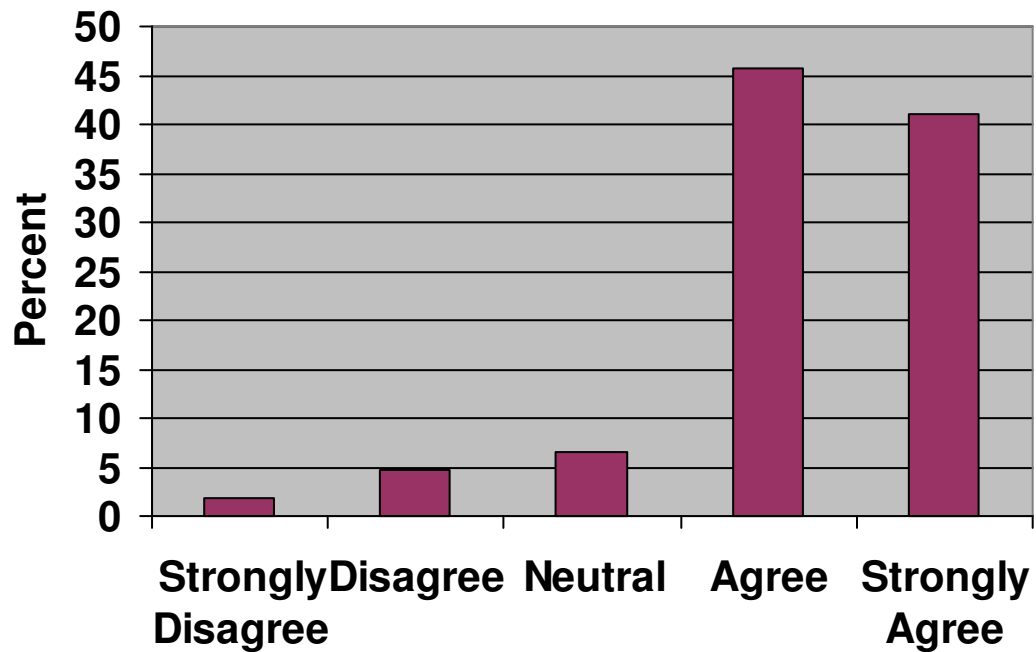


Figure 4-1. “Facebook has become part of my daily routine”

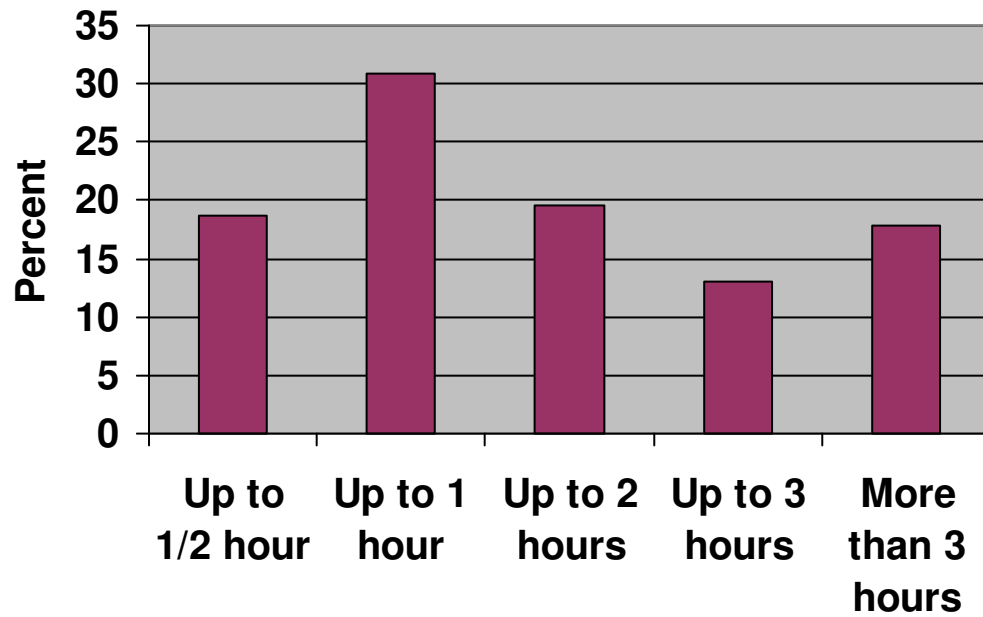


Figure 4-2. Facebook use per day last week

The participants had a large number of friends on Facebook. The number of friends participants had on Facebook ranged from 69 to 1800, and the mean number was 484 (*S.D.* = 315). 65.5 percent of participants reported that they update their Facebook profile once a month or more, and 34.5 percent said they updated their profiles “rarely” or “a few times a year” (see figure 4-3).

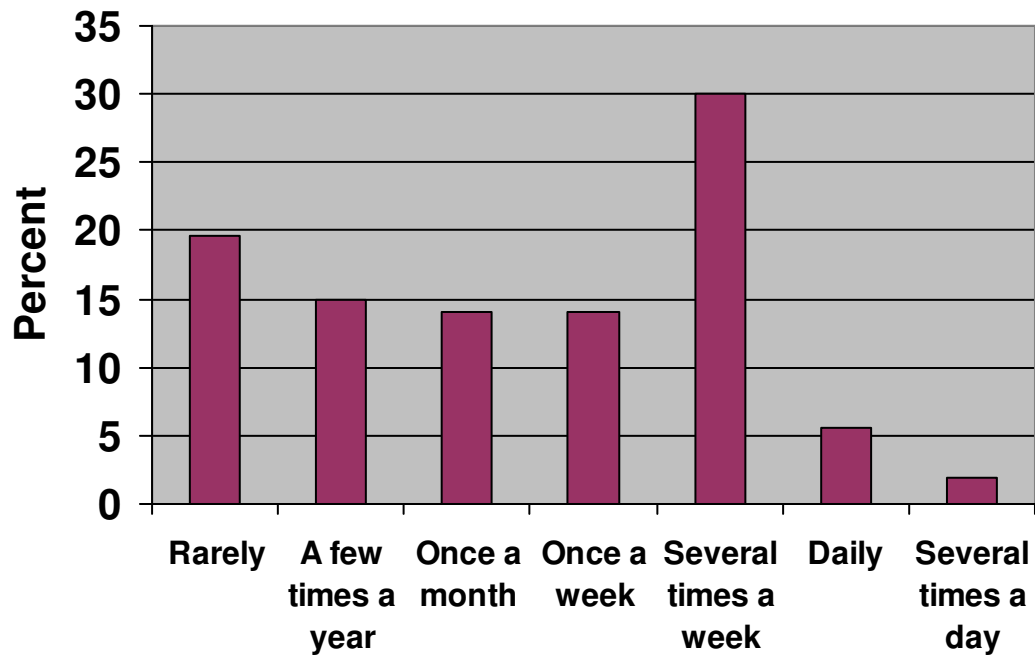


Figure 4-3. Facebook profile updating

The participants in the sample took advantage of many of Facebook’s features to communicate with their Facebook friends. Among the specific ways individuals communicated with their friends on Facebook, “liking” friends’ photos, status updates and wall posts were the most popular, and sending group messages to a number of friends was the least popular (see Table 4-1)

Table 4-1 Communication on Facebook

| Communication Technique                                   | Percent |
|---|---------|
| Post messages to a friend’s wall                          | 88.8%   |
| Create events and invite your friends                     | 51.4%   |
| Send private messages to a friend within Facebook         | 92.5%   |
| Send group messages to your friends                       | 37.5%   |
| Comment on friends’ photos, status updates and wall posts | 94.5%   |
| “Like” friends’ photos, status updates and wall posts     | 96.3%   |
| Browse friends’ pages without posting anything            | 85.0%   |
| Use Facebook chat   | 65.4%   |

## 4.2 ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND BREAKUPS

The length of the participants' romantic relationships ranged from one month to seven years and three months. The mean relationship length of the participants was 27.5 months (2 years and 3 months). The median relationship length was 18 months (1 year and 6 months). Additionally, 26.2 percent of participants said they lived with their ex-partner at some point during the relationship and 73.8 percent did not. Participants had a high number of mutual Facebook friends with their ex-partners. The mean number of mutual friends was 75 and the median was 40.

To be eligible to participate in the study, survey respondents had to have experienced a romantic breakup within the past twelve months. Within the sample, 63.6 percent of respondents reported that their breakup had occurred six months prior to the time they filled out the survey, and 36.6 percent stated that the breakup had occurred between six months and twelve months prior to the date they completed the survey. About half (48.1 percent) of the survey participants stated that they remained Facebook friends with their ex-partners following the breakup. In terms of who ended the relationship, 22.4 percent of participants stated that they were the breakup initiator, 43.9 percent were non-initiators, and 33.6 percent of the breakups were initiated mutually (see Table 4-2)

Table 4-2 Breakup Initiation Status

| <b>Breakup Initiation Status</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Initiator                        | 22.4%          |
| Non-initiator                    | 43.9%          |
| Mutual initiation                | 33.6%          |

## 4.3. PREVALENCE OF FACEBOOK BREAKUP PRACTICES

This section reveals which breakup practices on Facebook were the most and least common among the individuals who filled out the survey.

The most common breakup practices on Facebook were all related to surveillance (see Table 4-3). “Creeping,” or surveillance of the ex-partner was the most common practice in this study; 88.2 percent of survey participants who remained Facebook friends with their ex-partners following the breakup said that they creeped their ex-partner following the breakup. Among the participants who no longer had access to their ex-partners’ Facebook accounts following the breakup, 70.2 percent said that they tried to creep their ex-partners’ accounts through other means, such as by logging into a mutual friend’s account. Additionally, 74.4 percent of survey participants said they looked at or tried to look at an ex-partner’s new or suspected new partner’s profile. When asked whether or not they thought their ex-partner spends time looking at their profiles, 47.4 percent of people answered “maybe,” 46.2 percent answered “yes,” and 6.4 percent answered “no.”

Table 4-3 Facebook Surveillance Following a Breakup

| <b>Question</b>   | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------------|
| Have you ever spent time looking at, analyzing or “creeping” your ex’s profile?   | 88.2%          |
| If you and your ex are not friends on Facebook, have you ever looked for ways to access his/her profile (ie. looking at photos mutual friends have, logging into a friend’s account, etc.)? | 70.2%          |
| Have you looked at (or tried to look at) an ex’s new partner’s (or suspected new partner’s) profile?  | 74.4%          |

Other common behaviours on Facebook following a breakup included re-reading or overanalyzing old messages or wall posts (64.2 percent), being asked about the breakup on Facebook upon removal of the relationship status (62.1 percent) and deleting pictures off Facebook with the ex-partner (50.5 percent). Less common behaviours included changing privacy settings on Facebook following the breakup (38.3 percent), posting a picture intended to make the ex-partner jealous (31.4 percent), changing the Facebook status to a quote or song lyrics about the ex-partner (33.6 percent), and deleting

the conversation history with the ex-partner on Facebook (32.7 percent). Interestingly, while only 31.4 percent of participants stated that they changed their profile pictures to something intended to make their ex-partner jealous, 52.3 percent of participants stated that their ex-partner's profile picture made them feel jealous. The least common behaviour was the posting of slanderous comments about an ex-partner on Facebook following the breakup; 5.6 percent of participants stated that they had posted a slanderous comment about their ex, and 5.7 percent said their ex had posted a slanderous comment about them (see Table 4-4).

**Table 4-4 Behaviour on Facebook Following a Breakup**

| <b>Question</b>   | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------------|
| Did people ask you about the breakup on Facebook when you removed the status?   | 62.1%          |
| Have you ever re-read or overanalyzed old messages or wall posts an ex sent you in the past?  | 62.4%          |
| Have you ever deleted pictures off Facebook of you and your ex together?  | 50.5%          |
| If you answered yes to the previous question, did you save the pictures before deleting them?   | 39.6%          |
| Have you ever deleted private messages your ex sent you on Facebook (And/or your conversation history with your ex on Facebook)?                        | 32.7%          |
| If you answered yes to the previous question, did you save the messages before deleting them?   | 2.9%           |
| Have you ever changed your Facebook status to a quote or song lyric about your ex?  | 33.6%          |
| Did you change your privacy settings so your ex has less access to your information?  | 38.3%          |
| Has your ex ever posted slanderous or negative public comments about you on Facebook?   | 5.7%           |
| Have you ever posted slanderous public comments about your ex on Facebook?  | 5.6%           |
| Has your ex ever (intentionally or unintentionally) posted a picture or changed his/her profile picture to something that made you feel bad or jealous? | 52.3%          |
| Have you ever posted a picture or changed your profile picture to something intended to make your ex feel bad or jealous?                               | 31.4%          |

#### **4.4. SOURCES OF DISTRESS ON FACEBOOK FOLLOWING A BREAKUP**

Three aspects of Facebook were a source of distress<sup>2</sup> for the interviewed participants: the ex-partner's Facebook profile, the relationship status change and shared content on Facebook. The most commonly distressing aspect of Facebook among the interviewed group was their ex-partner's Facebook profile. All but one of the interviewed participants monitored their ex-partner following the breakup, and the one who did not was unable to participate in this behaviour because his ex-partner deleted him from Facebook almost immediately following the breakup. The ex-partner's Facebook profile was a source of distress for seven of the nine interviewees who monitored their ex-partner's profiles. Relationship statuses were another source of distress, and four of the participants discussed how decisions to change their relationship status from "in a relationship" to "single" or to remove it altogether presented problems for them. Another source of distress included content shared on Facebook with an ex-partner prior to the breakup, such as old chat logs exchanged with an ex, and tagged photographs with an ex. These digital archives caused two of the participants to remember the good parts of their former relationships, which made them feel confused about the breakup.

##### **a. The ex-partner's Facebook profile**

The ex-partner's Facebook profile was the most common source of distress among the interviewed participants. Of the ten interviewees, six said that they actively checked in on their ex-partners' Facebook profiles. An additional three interviewees

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<sup>2</sup> The term "distress" was defined more loosely for the qualitative portion of this study than the quantitative portion. Distress was measured using the Breakup Distress Scale developed by Lanutti and Cameron (2002) for the quantitative portion of this study. For the qualitative portion of this study, anything that participants said made them "feel bad", "sad," "distressed", "harassed", etc. was coded as a cause of distress.

stated that although they did not actively attempt to view their ex-partner's Facebook profiles, they found themselves doing so inadvertently when content their ex-partners posted appeared in their news feeds. The one interviewee who did not check in on his ex was unable to do so because his ex-partner deleted him from Facebook almost immediately following the breakup. The two interviewees who were not distressed by their ex-partners' Facebook profiles explained that their ex-partners were posting information related to their hobbies as opposed to pictures of themselves with people of the opposite sex. Of the nine interviewees who checked in on their partners (either actively or inadvertently), seven felt that their ex-partner's Facebook profile was a source of distress following the breakup. Examples of these experiences are provided below:

*"A breakup without Facebook you can't really see what your ex is doing, but with Facebook you just have to click and you know exactly what they've been up to. That's a little frustrating." – Chelsea*

*"I felt like I was making an effort to sort of keep a low profile and she wasn't reciprocating. I felt like she was bouncing back unduly fast and had this kind of demeanor or online persona that didn't really reflect how I was feeling or how I thought she ought to be feeling which was morbidly depressed." – Martin*

*"Afterward it's the worst though because you start to overanalyze the new friends they make, and then the pictures they post have people you don't recognize in them, and pictures of him in the house change and things you had up are gone... At first, I was checking in on him every day for sure, without question. It was upsetting for me. I would rather go back to the old days when none of this stuff existed." – Maggie*

*"I couldn't handle watching his stuff... I think it consumed me because I was working 8-5 at a desk and every once and a while I would check my Facebook and after our breakup he kind of became more active on Facebook and I felt like I was drawn to his page" – Ann*

*"We had a trip planned for just the two of us and when we broke up, I had to call and cancel everything. He ended up still going with a few of his friends, and a few albums of photos from a trip that was supposed to be mine started to pop up. I felt like every time I logged onto Facebook there*



*were new photos or new comments. I obviously couldn't help but look at them over and over and beat myself up and dwell on my seemingly horrible, horrible life. It was poisonous.” – Rebecca*

*“I still have some access to his page, so I definitely creep him all the time and I would get my girlfriends to creep him to by logging into their accounts. The thing is, you’re creeping him because you want to find something. You want to find something to be angry about. You want to see if any new girls have written on his wall or if there’s pictures tagged of him partying or doing whatever. You’re kind of looking for something to be mad about so it’s definitely self-destructive. It’s not healthy.” – Cassie*

*“Because I had so little idea about what was going on in regards to the breakup, for a very long time I felt a lack of resolution towards everything. So things like seeing posts she was tagged in or seeing her profile picture pop up somewhere and the anxiety of what could be in the profile picture can be very stressful things.” – Chris*

#### **b. The relationship status change**

Of the ten interviewees, six experienced distress in relation to the experience of changing their relationship status from “in a relationship” to “single”, or removing their relationship status altogether. Of the ten interviewees, two did not post their relationship statuses on Facebook in the first place. Jake stated that he finds relationship statuses “cheesy,” so he and his ex-girlfriend did not post it to Facebook. Patrick explained that he did not post his relationship status on Facebook due to an experience he had a few years prior:

*“I had gone through a breakup previous to this, and a lot of the stuff had been published on Facebook, like who I was in a relationship with. When the other person basically caused it to end they went in and updated their Facebook status while I wasn’t around to update or delete anything to do with my news feed. Suddenly, all this stuff ended up being recorded in my Facebook news feeds saying I was no longer in a relationship. I was kind of embarrassed by that. I figured I may as well keep those details private this time”. – Patrick*

In order to prevent a situation like Patrick’s, three of the interviewees removed their relationship statuses on Facebook and deleted the information off their Facebook

walls so that news of the breakup would not appear in their friends' news feeds. Of these three, one interviewee, Rebecca, stated that although the experience of her ex-partner removing the relationship status on Facebook was less distressing than it could have been, given that she removed the public evidence, the experience was still difficult for her:

*“In some weird way, it kind of feels like you're breaking up all over again when the status comes down. It angered me at the time that something as trivial as a Facebook status could make me feel so shitty.” – Rebecca*

Five of the ten interviewees did not delete their relationship statuses from Facebook following the breakup, and they experienced a situation similar to Patrick's, where the breakup was made unnecessarily public. Examples of these experiences are provided below:

*“There were some girls and friends of his who started “liking” that the relationship had ended, things like that. It was more cyberbullying than anything; they were trying to make things worse.” – Chelsea*

*“We went through different phases where we would [post our relationship status]... However, when we would start to fight he would kind of be like “I'm going to spite you and remove it”, so that you could no longer see that I was in a relationship. It made me feel pissed off. Definitely angry. I just felt like it was announcing to the world that we were in a fight or that we were about to break up and it was more public than I would like to deal with issues like that.” – Cassie*

*“She went in and changed the relationship status. I had to deal with everyone seeing it. [Sarcastic] It was awesome.” – Chris*

*“He was upset that I changed it, but it happened, so why would it still say we were in a relationship? It doesn't make any sense that he got upset. I deleted it off my wall shortly after I deleted my [relationship] status, but in the interim period it showed up in my friends' news feeds because I got a million phone calls asking what happened. I think it made me more upset. I was already upset and then when people started asking about it and when you re-tell the story so many times you just get even more upset.” – Lane*

*“For a person who doesn’t like Facebook he got very angry [when I removed the relationship status]. He’s not an active Facebook or social media person, and that really angered him because he went above and beyond his own comfort zone by putting ‘in a relationship’ in the first place. He left his and I took it down and we fought and then it was left alone. Eventually when we did break up I didn’t want to put it as single so I put Katie, since Katie and I are best buddies and we both have similar dating histories we put it as ‘in a domestic partnership’ and he waited a good couple of weeks to change his down.” – Ann*

### **c. Shared Content on Facebook**

All of the interviewees had shared digital histories with their ex-partners on Facebook. These digital histories included things such as messages that were exchanged back and forth with the ex-partner or tagged photographs from events such as trips they went on together. Deciding whether or not to delete this content after a relationship ends can be difficult. Many of the interviewees felt that looking at this content was distressing, but did not want to delete it for fear of forgetting the good times in the relationship. These experiences are provided below:

*“Definitely because it’s a constant reminder of hey I gave this up, or hey remember the good times, because that’s the only thing Facebook documents. You don’t have pictures of you guys fighting. So it’s kind of hard to be like ‘no, you deserve better’ when all you’re doing is looking at ‘oh, remember this time we did this’ or ‘remember how cute this picture is’. No, you don’t want those reminders when you want to get over someone so it makes it a lot easier to get over someone when you don’t have those kinds of things going on.” - Cassie*

*“I haven’t had the heart to un-tag myself in them, even though I’ve definitely thought about it.” - Rebecca*

*“I would never post ‘I love you’ on my girlfriend’s wall, because that’s lame and gross and would have embarrassed us both -- but I might post ‘Please stop belittling me’ or she was like, ‘I hate my job, I’m gonna burn this mother down’ and I said ‘You better not, you better not!’ because those are lines from movies we both liked and they’re basically completely inscrutable to others outside of their proper context. I miss that.” – Martin*

*“I guess [content on Facebook] just added salt to the wounds. With everything being recorded and everything being written in public it’s hard to get over it on your own because it’s always there and it’s always a constant reminder and it’s kind of hard to get rid of. Old messages [were particularly distressing], which can be deleted easily, but it’s kind of a tough thing to do – Chelsea*

#### **4.5. FACEBOOK USE, SURVEILLANCE, BREAKUP DISTRESS AND FACEBOOK BREAKUP DISTRESS**

***Hypothesis 1: People who engage in high levels of IES will experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress than people who do not.***

To examine the relationships between IES (interpersonal electronic surveillance), breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress, correlations were conducted. IES was positively correlated with both breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress. The relationship between IES and breakup distress was statistically significant,  $r=.34$  ( $p<.01$ ).

The relationship between IES and the action and feeling-based Facebook breakup distress scales was also statistically significant,  $r=.33$  ( $p<.05$ ) and  $r=.57$  ( $p<.001$ ), respectively. Thus the data supported Hypothesis 1.

***Hypothesis 2: Heavy Facebook users will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES and experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress.***

The data did not support Hypothesis 2. Facebook use was not correlated with IES, breakup distress or either of the Facebook breakup distress scales.

***Hypothesis 3: People who do not have access to their ex-partner’s profile will experience less breakup distress than those who remain Facebook friends.***

The data did not support hypothesis 3. In fact, the results were in the opposite direction. A one-way ANOVA was run comparing the breakup distress levels of people who remained friends with their ex-partners following the breakup and those who did not

and was statistically significant,  $F(1,105)=4.33, p<.05$ . It was found that people who did not have access to their ex-partner's profiles experienced more breakup distress than those who remained Facebook friends with their ex-partners. The average breakup distress level of those who did not have access to their ex-partner's profiles was 2.54 whereas the average breakup distress level of those who remained Facebook friends with their ex-partners was 2.19.

#### **4.6. BREAKUP INITIATION STATUS, TIME SINCE THE BREAKUP AND HOPE FOR ROMANTIC RENEWAL**

*Hypothesis 4: Non-breakup initiators will be more likely than breakup initiators to experience more breakup distress.*

Hypothesis 4 was supported. There was a statistically significant difference in the level of breakup distress experienced by breakup initiators and non-initiators. Breakup initiators scored an average of 2.1 on the breakup distress scale, whereas non-initiators scored an average of 2.7. The average breakup distress scale score of people whose breakups were initiated mutually was slightly higher than breakup initiators at 2.3. A one-way ANOVA was run comparing the breakup distress levels of initiators, non-initiators and people whose breakups were mutual and was found to be statistically significant,  $F(2,104)=5.09, p<.01$ . Post hoc tests (with Bonferroni correction) show a significant difference between initiators and non-initiators. No other comparison was significant.

*Hypothesis 5: Increased time since the breakup will be associated with low levels of IES, less breakup distress and less Facebook breakup distress.*

Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Increased time since the breakup was not associated with low levels of IES, breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress.

***Hypothesis 6: People who hope to get back together with their ex will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES, experience more breakup distress and experience more Facebook breakup distress.***

Hypothesis 6 was supported. The relationship between hope for romantic renewal and IES was statistically significant,  $r=.51$  ( $p<.001$ ). The relationship between hope for romantic renewal and breakup distress was statistically significant,  $r=.61$  ( $p<.001$ ). The relationship between hope for romantic renewal and the activity-based Facebook distress scale was also statistically significant,  $r=.38$  ( $p<.01$ ), as was the relationship between hope for romantic renewal and the feelings-based Facebook distress scale,  $r=.50$  ( $p<.001$ ).

#### **4.7. COPING STRATEGIES**

Interview participants discussed the strategies they used to cope with distress caused by content on Facebook following their breakups.

##### **a. Deleting and/or blocking the ex-partner from Facebook**

Six of the interviewees deleted and/or blocked their ex-partners on Facebook to cope with distress caused by content on Facebook. All six who deleted and/or blocked their ex-partners felt this was an effective strategy. Their experiences are provided below:

*“I deleted her about three months after the breakup. It was in response to her behaviour after the breakup. Without getting too deep into details, I just felt like she wasn’t... she did a couple of things that I felt didn’t demonstrate reasonable respect to me as a person.” – Chris*

*“I ended the Facebook connection between us... I think if there’s a lot of drama there or if one or both are distressed about the breakup I think it’s a lot healthier because it’s hard enough if you have to see the person but then to be able to see their personal life the way Facebook glorifies it all I think it makes it really hard to put the person out of your mind and move on if there are constant reminders always there.” – Chelsea*

*“I would say pull off the Band-Aid as quickly as possible and block the person if you’re finding it as painful as I did to see their continuing existence in your sphere. You’ll feel immediately better, or at least I did.”*  
– Martin

*“I erased him from my Facebook for a little bit because I couldn’t handle watching his stuff and I needed some space and privacy. For me it helped because I’m a visual person. Out of sight out of mind.”* – Ann

*“I think that [deleting] can be a good strategy, and I most definitely feel that it was for me this time around. I honestly felt like he had no right to know what was happening in my life and I was sick of being bombarded with him every time I logged on. For me, it helped and I don’t necessarily regret doing it. I think it all depends on how badly the relationship ended and how desperately a person needs to move on.”* – Rebecca

*“The initial reason I blocked him was because he was bugging me through private messages, but in the end I also find it a lot easier now that I can’t see him on Facebook. It’s like he no longer exists and that does make it a lot easier.”* – Cassie

Of the four interviewees who remained Facebook friends with their ex-partners, three felt that deleting could be a good strategy, though two felt it was only a good strategy in certain situations:

*“I would say [deleting] would be a definite effective strategy at coping with a breakup to remove a person from Facebook and remove any way that you would have of running into the person or hearing about them.”* – Patrick

*“Deleting is a good strategy only if you really want to remove someone from your life.”* - Jake

*“There’s no black and white answer. If someone treated me really badly I would delete them from Facebook and my life, but since that wasn’t the case I didn’t feel like it was necessary.”* – Maggie

One interviewee felt that deleting one’s ex-partner was not an effective coping strategy:

*“A lot of my friends have been telling me to delete my ex but I think that’s going a little too far. You obviously spent a lot of time with them and on some level they’re one of your best friends and so even though you’re*

*going through a hard time with them now I think if you delete them in the future you might regret it. I think it's taking it overboard. I don't think it's necessary."* – Lane

Additionally, although deleting an ex-partner was overwhelmingly the most popular coping strategy, seven interviewees explained that this strategy has some problems:

*"It's almost more energy to not be friends with him because of all our mutual friends. It was more dramatic to not be friends than to be friends."* – Ann

*"There's always the chance that others won't understand why you deleted the person, and it could be awkward in the case of a lot of mutual friends. Even if you delete a person, it doesn't mean they disappear forever. They will still show up via mutual friends... Another issue is that, every now and again, I would be faced with a weird anxiety that I couldn't go back and un-delete him. And I knew that I couldn't just add him back either. It's very final. I guess that was one problem that it did present. But, it's a feeling that I was quickly able to shake."* – Rebecca

*"I was deleted and it was hard feelings because initially when we broke up it was more like 'okay, we've been best friends for six years so we'll have somewhat of a friendship now ' because when you're breaking up with someone you're breaking up with your best friend. So when he deleted me I was offended because I was like 'okay, first of all how are we supposed to be friends when I can't even see what's going on in your life?' and second of all, I think it's so public because now people can be like 'oh, why aren't they friends anymore?'"* – Cassie

*"I felt concerned when we were un-friended that we would no longer have any means of communication. The worry was absurd, obviously, but I really did feel that way for some reason. It's pretty crazy how important Facebook has become for keeping track of people, much more important than phone numbers or email addresses."* – Jake

*"I think some people perceive being unfriended on Facebook as an additional insult. So it might just, if the guy broke up with the girl and the guy then decided in a couple of hours to also unfriend the person it might feel a little mean-spirited."* – Patrick

*"If you become friends with them again then you have to re-add them."* – Maggie



*“I certainly think that deleting people on Facebook should not be as socially awkward as it seems to be. I think if your Facebook has a purpose and someone’s Facebook friendship does not coincide with that purpose it should be a value-neutral thing to cut them, but on the other hand I can recognize it’s not.” – Chris*

### **b. Unsubscribing to posts by the ex-partner in the news feed**

Two of the interviewees hid their ex-partner’s content from their news feeds so they would not be confronted with distressing updates:

*“I eventually ended up (before deleting her from Facebook) using one of the options to not show updates from this friend. Not because I felt I was going to go track it down or whatever but you can’t control what shows up on your Facebook feed without that, so it was just a means of sort of regulating it.” – Chris*

*“So I eventually blocked/hid him from my thing. He had so many updates all the time that I put him on hide so I wouldn’t be reminded of him all the time.” – Maggie*

Additionally, one interviewee who did not feel the need to hide his ex-partner’s content from his news feed suggested it as an additional strategy that individuals could employ:

*“They have the option now on Facebook where you can be friends with someone but not be subscribed to the person or not have details about them appearing in your news feed so I guess just unsubscribe to them and any part of their social circle that you could cut out to avoid hearing about them.” - Patrick*

### **c. Deleting mutual friends of the ex-partner from Facebook**

Two interviewees deleted mutual friends they had with their ex-partners in order to avoid receiving updates about the ex-partner through a third party:

*“I ended up deleting a couple other people, the people I felt were sufficiently complicit, that their willingness to be a part of what I regarded as unreasonable treatment of me made them not the sorts of people I want to be friends with. That’s obviously a value judgment but yeah, I sort of went through and did that. I didn’t do a particularly extreme sweep; I’m still friends with some people who were, for instance, in her cohort in grad*

*school and not mine. I didn't just cut everybody out of my Facebook circle, but I did sort of trim it a bit.*" – Chris

*"I deleted a lot of people that I then associated with Adam."* – Rebecca

#### **d. Using self-restraint**

One interviewee did not participate in IES and used self-restraint to stop herself from looking at her ex-partner's Facebook profile:

*"I think was so upset about the breakup that I'm trying everything with all my power to stay away from it because if I found pictures or conversations I know I'd be upset so I just don't want to put myself through that. One of my friends recently broke up with her boyfriend and I know she looks at it almost every day. It just upsets her. Maybe seeing that—because they broke up before me and my boyfriend—really helps me because I just do not want to go through that."* – Lane

#### **e. Facebook purge of old photographs**

One interviewee deleted photographs of her ex-partner because they made her feel sad:

*"Yeah, I did go in and delete photos. It was hard because it was memories coming up and we didn't have the past three years in one area to always go to, but doing it was the best decision; it was the healthiest thing to do to move on. I didn't keep photos of him in my bedroom so why would I keep them on Facebook?"* – Chelsea

#### **f. Deleting the status altogether**

Of the eight interviewees who posted their relationship statuses with their ex-partners on Facebook, three deleted news of the breakup from their Facebook walls immediately to prevent this information from showing up in their friends' news feeds and to prevent distress caused by people bombarding them with questions about the breakup:

*"Yeah. I removed my status and it's remained blank ever since. I removed it from the feed too so no one would notice. I don't think anyone noticed. I didn't get any messages from people asking what happened until they heard from other sources."* – Martin

*“We mutually decided [to remove our relationship statuses]. Because it comes up with the broken heart thing we both agreed to take it off and delete it completely so it wouldn’t show a relationship status at all. We both removed it from showing up on our profiles. We didn’t have anyone bugging us on Facebook.” – Maggie*

*“Nobody asked me anything because I was very quick to delete the evidence.” – Rebecca*

### **g. Not posting a relationship status in the first place**

Three of the interviewees explained that they would be more reluctant to post a relationship status on Facebook in the future (not including Patrick, who had already learned not to do this from an experience that happened a few years prior to our interview). They recommended keeping one’s relationship status off Facebook to prevent distress that may result from having to remove it if the relationship ends:

*“Never again. I don’t care what the circumstances are. I don’t care if I’m married. My relationship status will never again appear on Facebook or any other social networking site.” – Rebecca*

*“In the future I don’t think I would post a relationship status again, unless I’m in a really serious relationship... I still have it as nothing. I don’t have it as ‘single’. I think I would keep it like that unless it was extremely serious so I wouldn’t have to go through that again.” – Maggie*

*“I would just say don’t make your relationship status public because then people will know stuff they shouldn’t know through Facebook, like if you guys break up or if you’re in a new relationship. I don’t want people to know that and it’s just such gossip because I find myself being like “Oh my god, did you see she’s in a relationship with him?” and it’s just so unnecessary gossip and I just say to everyone, why does this exist? We don’t need to post our relationship status because it’s only going to hurt you a lot more when you have to remove it in a breakup and it’s also going to cause a lot of gossip if you post a new one.” – Cassie*

### **h. Stay busy and stay off the computer**

One interviewee said she recommends spending less time on the computer and on Facebook:

*“Try to keep yourself busy. Go out with your friends and stay off your computer and off of their page.” – Lane*

### **i. Changing your password**

One interviewee suggested that people should change their Facebook passwords immediately following a breakup. This advice especially applies to breakup initiators:

*“I would advise anyone who is in the midst of dumping someone to change his or her password immediately. Getting dumped from a serious relationship can be traumatic and can cause you to behave in ways you might not foresee. Certainly it did for me. Prior to getting dumped I wouldn't have dreamed of logging into my girlfriend's Facebook account; I wasn't the kind of person who would commit such a breach of trust. These things change. Play it safe, no matter how well you know your soon-to-be-ex.” - Martin*

### **j. Delete Facebook**

One interviewee suggested that if someone is having a particularly tough time dealing with content on Facebook following a breakup, that they delete they take a hiatus from Facebook:

*“I recommend cutting out Facebook for a long time all together, if that's possible.” - Patrick*

## **4.8. SUMMARY**

This chapter provided answers to the research questions discussed in section 1.3 (p. 5) and presented the results of hypotheses 1 through 6 (see also table 4-5 for a summary of findings).

The results showed that surveillance of an ex-partner on Facebook is extremely common following a romantic breakup. Other common behaviours on Facebook following a breakup included re-reading or overanalyzing old messages or wall posts, being asked about the breakup on Facebook upon the removal of the relationship status and deleting pictures off Facebook with the ex-partner. Almost of half of participants

experienced jealousy in relation to content on their ex-partner's Facebook profile. The qualitative results of this study showed that there were three main sources of distress on Facebook among individuals who recently experienced a romantic breakup: the ex-partner's profile, the relationship status change and shared content with the ex-partner on Facebook.

Interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES), breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress are positively correlated. However, Facebook use was not correlated with IES or any type of distress. People who were no longer friends with their ex-partners on Facebook experienced more distress than people who remained friends with their ex-partners following the breakup.

Non-initiators of the breakup engaged in higher levels of IES and experienced more breakup distress than and Facebook breakup distress than breakup initiators. Increased time since the breakup was not correlated with IES, breakup distress or Facebook breakup distress. People who hoped to get back together with their ex-partners were more likely to engage in high levels of IES and experience higher levels of breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress.

The individuals who participated in this study used a myriad of strategies to deal with distress caused by content on Facebook following their romantic breakups. These included the following: deleting and/or blocking the ex-partner from Facebook, unsubscribing to posts by the ex-partner on Facebook, deleting mutual friends of the ex-partner from Facebook, deleting photographs with the ex-partner from Facebook, deleting the relationship status off Facebook, using self-restraint to refrain from surveying the ex-

partner's Facebook profile, not posting a relationship status, staying busy and off the computer, changing your password, and deleting Facebook.

**Table 4-5 Summary of Findings**

| <i>Hypotheses</i>  | <b>Supported</b> | <b>Not supported</b> |
|--|------------------|----------------------|
| <i>H1: People who engage in high levels of IES will experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress than people who do not.</i>   | x                |                      |
| <i>H2: Heavy Facebook users will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES and experience more breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress.</i>  |                  | x                    |
| <i>H3: People who do not have access to their ex-partner's profile will experience less breakup distress than those who remain Facebook friends.</i>   |                  | x                    |
| <i>H4: Non-breakup initiators will be more likely than breakup initiators to engage in high levels of IES, experience more breakup distress and experience more Facebook breakup distress.</i>     | x                |                      |
| <i>H5: Increased time since the breakup will be associated with low levels of IES, less breakup distress and less Facebook breakup distress.</i>   |                  | x                    |
| <i>H6: People who hope to get back together with their ex will be more likely to engage in high levels of IES, experience more breakup distress and experience more Facebook breakup distress.</i> | x                |                      |

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

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This chapter begins with a summary of the results of this study and a discussion of the implications of the results. It concludes by explaining the limitations of the study and recommending avenues for further research on this topic.

#### **5.1. DISCUSSION**

Although there was little existing literature on the topic of Facebook and breakups prior to this study, many of the results were unsurprising based on previous research on social media and previous research on romantic breakups. The three sources of distress on Facebook following a breakup that were reported by the interviewees were as follows: the ex-partner's profile, the relationship status change, and shared content on Facebook. These three sources of distress were concordant with the literature. The results of the hypotheses, however, were somewhat surprising. While hypotheses 1, 4 and 6 were supported, hypotheses 2, 3 and 5 had unexpected results. The coping mechanisms for dealing with distress caused by content on Facebook following a breakup employed by the interviewees were varied. In terms of which coping strategies were the most effective, it depended on the individual and what aspects of Facebook were causing them the most distress. There was no one-size-fits-all solution for dealing with distress caused by content on Facebook.

The ex-partner's profile as a source of distress on Facebook was an unsurprising finding, given that it has also been a source of jealousy (Muisse et. al, 2009). The relationship status change as a source of distress was also expected, as Gershon (2010) mentions that the publicity of the status was a source of distress for some of the individuals she interviewed. The fact that shared content was a source of distress among

the interviewees was also predictable, as it relates back to research on digital footprints and memory (van Dijck, 2007; Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010; Melander, 2010).

As per hypothesis 1, IES, breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress were linked. However, it is unclear whether or not distress leads to IES or vice-versa. The qualitative findings suggest that both may be true. Participating in surveillance of an ex-partner was distressing for the interviewees, but those who were distressed may also have been more curious to know what their ex-partners were doing. However, all of the interviewees who were distressed and participating in heavy amounts of surveillance identified that this behaviour was detrimental to their well-being and eventually deleted and/or blocked their ex-partners to curb their behaviour.

Unexpectedly, heavy Facebook use was not related to high levels of IES, breakup distress and Facebook breakup distress. These were expected to be linked because high Facebook use was linked to IES in Tokunaga's (2010) study, and it was also linked to jealousy in Muise et al.'s (2009) study. However, Tokunaga (2010) and Muise et al.'s (2009) studies both sampled individuals who were in romantic relationships, rather than people who experienced breakups. It may be the case that IES of a current partner is related to heavy Facebook use but that IES of an ex-partner happens regardless of whether or not an individual is a heavy Facebook user. More studies would have to be conducted to determine how IES behaviour between these two groups differs.

It was also surprising that individuals who were not Facebook friends with their ex-partners were less distressed than individuals who remained friends with their ex-partners. The opposite was expected to be true based on the fact that in order to participate in IES (an assumed distressing behaviour), one would also have to be friends



with their ex-partner. The qualitative findings suggest, however, that individuals who participated in IES and experienced the greatest amount of distress were also the most likely to delete their ex-partners as a coping mechanism to stop their distressing IES behaviour.

As was expected based on Vilella's (2010) findings, non-initiators experienced more distress and scored higher on the IES scale. Additionally, individuals who hoped to get back together with their ex-partners experienced more distress and scored higher on the IES scale. Increased time since the breakup, however, was not associated with lower levels of IES and distress, as per hypothesis 5. This may be the case because the participants' breakups occurred no longer than a year prior to their completion of the survey. Had individuals whose breakups occurred less recently been allowed to participate, this result may have been different.

In terms of which coping strategies were the most effective, it depended on the individual and what aspects of Facebook were causing them the most distress. For instance, blocking the ex-partner's posts from the news feed may work for someone who was not actively participating in surveillance of their ex-partner, but it would be unhelpful to someone who was actively creeping their ex-partner several times a day. In such an instance, deleting the ex-partner may be a more effective strategy. Similarly, some people may have albums of photographs with an ex-partner while others may have none and thus not have to make decisions about what to do with shared photographs on Facebook following the breakup. Although there is no one solution that may work for everyone, some strategies were employed more frequently than others.

Among the interviewees for this study, deleting/blocking the ex-partner was overwhelmingly the most popular coping mechanism for dealing with distress caused by content on the ex-partner's profile. Deleting is not without its problems, however, and interviewees stated that when deleting an ex-partner one also runs the risk of the following: creating socially awkward situations with mutual friends, offending the ex-partner, and experiencing feelings of anxiety due to the ended connection. Additionally, when deleting an ex-partner, access to their information may not disappear entirely. Information can appear on the Facebook profiles of mutual friends, and one can still look at their ex-partner's profile if the ex-partner does not have high privacy settings. Given that previous literature on Friending suggests that many people on Facebook are not selective about friendship (boyd, 2006), and given the public nature of Facebook, it was suspected that many people would remain Facebook friends with their ex-partners, even if looking at the ex-partner's profile was distressing, in order to not upset the ex-partner and to not strain relationships among mutual friends. However, it appears that most individuals who are extremely distressed by their ex-partners' Facebook profiles do in fact opt to delete their ex-partners.

Another interesting finding was that individuals are changing the way they use Facebook to communicate their relationships in response to previous experiences. Patrick, one of the interviewees, stated that during the relationship that was the primary focus of our interview, he did not post his relationship status with his partner. He had learned from a previous breakup that posting a relationship status can lead to distress when the status needs to come down. Similarly, three of the other interviewees stated that they would be very reluctant to post a relationship status in the future, given the distress

they felt upon removing their relationship statuses following their breakups. This harkens back to Gershon's (2010) observation that because Facebook is new, people are still learning how to use it and are continually establishing new social conventions and etiquette.

While three of the eight interviewees who had their relationship status with their ex-partner posted on Facebook chose to delete this information from their news feeds right away (so people would not bombard them with questions on their Facebook walls), the other five left the news of the breakup public and had people ask them about the breakup. While having people ask about the breakup was often distressing, a few of the interviewees mentioned that they also received messages of affirmation that they were better off with the ex-partner and that they were receiving social support online. As such, sharing news of the breakup publicly online could actually be beneficial for some individuals.

Romantic breakups are emotionally challenging events, and Facebook users may have a more difficult time following a romantic breakup than people who do not have Facebook accounts. Facebook can present unique challenges following a romantic breakup because the site has the ability to create a digital, public archive of the relationship, and it provides unprecedented access to information about an ex-partner's life. Facebook users must make decisions about how to cope with distress caused by content on Facebook following a breakup—an experience that adds a new layer of complexity to an already emotional experience. Facebook users are confronted with difficult decisions about what to do with tagged photographs on Facebook, whether or not to unfriend their ex-partner and, if the relationship status was posted on Facebook, they

may be questioned about the breakup when the status comes down. It can be difficult to determine which actions will lead to the least amount of distress overall, as many of the coping mechanisms identified could create new distressing situations while alleviating others. Ultimately, it is up to the individual to determine the course of action that is most appropriate to their situation, though these decisions are anything but simple. It can be hard to make rational decisions during an emotional upheaval such as a breakup and, because there are so many pros and cons to each coping mechanism, it is easy for someone who has experienced a breakup to make excuses to justify behaviour that is causing them harm. For instance, one could use the excuse of not wanting to complicate relationships with mutual friends to justify staying Facebook friends with an ex-partner, even though this individual may be following their ex-partner's updates obsessively—behaviour that is perhaps more distressing than any potential awkwardness with mutual friends. The fact that 88% of individuals surveyed admitted to participating in surveillance of their ex-partners demonstrates that this behaviour is extremely compelling, yet deleting the ex-partner, the most obvious and seemingly most effective coping mechanism, can present more challenges.

This research has implications for how people who are experiencing distress caused by content on Facebook following a breakup can be helped. I list seven recommendations for counsellors to help individuals cope with their breakups:

**1. Listen carefully to the person's concerns and avoid oversimplifying their situation.**

Facebook is an extremely central part of most young adult's social lives. Telling someone to delete Facebook or to simply avoid looking at their ex-partner's Facebook

profile is much easier said than done. Determine what aspects of Facebook are causing the person distress to help choose coping mechanisms appropriate to their unique situation on Facebook.

**2. Tell them to change their password.**

The only piece of advice given by the interviewees that could be applied universally is to change your Facebook password following a breakup. Although only one interviewee stated that he had logged into his ex-partner's account, the only drawback to changing your password is to memorize a new one—a small price to pay when privacy is potentially at stake.

**3. Suggest the person remove their relationship status change from their Facebook wall.**

Some people receive comfort from the public relationship status change because friends can offer social support online. Other people may find the experience embarrassing or distressing if they have to keep telling people the breakup story over and over again. If the person does not want to advertise their breakup, suggest they remove news of the breakup on their Facebook wall. This will prevent the information from showing up in their friends' news feeds, and people will be unlikely to notice that the breakup took place. Even if the person did not remove news of the breakup from their Facebook wall right away, deleting this information will likely discourage others from writing comments about the breakup.

**4. Suggest removing tagged photographs with the ex-partner, especially those that were profile pictures.**

Looking at photographs of oneself with an ex-partner can elicit painful memories (or happy, confusing memories). If one has several recent tagged photographs with their ex-partner on their profile and they log into Facebook frequently, chances are they will encounter the photographs every day.

Suggest to the person that they consider deleting pictures with their ex-partner from their Facebook profile if it is painful to look at them. However, they may want to save the pictures in a special folder on their computer or on a USB stick so they can look at them at a later date. There is nothing wrong with keeping reminders of an ex-partner, but having these reminders readily available soon after the breakup can be distressing.

**5. Suggest deleting message histories if the person is re-reading and over-analyzing old messages and wall posts.**

Old messages may illicit painful memories and lead to dwelling on the past or trying to figure out what went wrong in the relationship. Tell the person to delete message histories from Facebook if they are making them upset. As with photographs, they may want to copy and paste old messages and save them in a file somewhere else, but they should not look at them every day on Facebook.

**6. Determine how the person is monitoring their ex-partner on Facebook following the breakup and recommend either unsubscribing from the ex-partner's news feed, unfriending the ex-partner or blocking the ex-partner.**

Nearly everyone monitors their ex-partner's profile to some degree after a romantic breakup. While some people actively seek information about their ex-partners by typing in the ex-partner's name and reading their profile several times a day, others

may only be provoked to seek out information about their ex-partners when information appears in their news feed.

Determine which of these two categories the person falls into. If they actively seek out their ex-partner's information, they may want to unfriend their ex-partner. However, if they only seek out the ex-partner when the ex-partner's information appears in their news feed, they may simply want to unsubscribe from the ex-partner's posts. There are pros and cons to each method.

Unsubscribing is good because the ex-partner and mutual friends will not know they did it and they can still contact their ex-partner on Facebook if need be. However, they will still have access to their ex-partner's profile, should they chose to seek it out. Also, their ex-partner could still contact them through Facebook chat, if they use that feature of the site. Unfortunately, there is currently no way to block someone exclusively from the chat feature.

Unfriending is a good coping mechanism because they will no longer be able to receive updates from their ex-partner in their news feed, nor will they be able to access their profile (unless the ex-partner does not have any privacy settings – in that case the person may want to go a step further and block their ex-partner). Unfriending has been an extremely effective coping strategy for individuals who were experiencing distress caused by continued interactions on Facebook with their ex-partner. However, unfriending can be seen as mean-spirited and could strain relationships with mutual friends.

Whether the person decides to unsubscribe to their ex-partner's posts, unfriend their ex-partner or block their ex-partner altogether, they must weigh the pros and cons

carefully, but tell them to **be honest with themselves**. It can be hard to make rational decisions during an emotional upheaval such as a breakup, and it can be easy to use the excuse of mutual friends to justify staying friends with an ex-partner, even when it means torturing oneself by following the ex-partner's updates. Unfriending does not demonstrate weakness. There is nothing wrong with distancing oneself from an ex-partner following a breakup. At the end of the day, the person needs to do what is best for them to help them heal.

**7. Suggest the person think about whether or not they would advertise a new relationship differently in the future.**

If one has experienced a breakup on Facebook, they may want to reflect on whether or not they would do anything differently the next time they are in a romantic relationship. Tell them to consider whether or not you would post a relationship status with a partner in the future on Facebook and whether or not it is important to make future relationships (and potential breakups) public.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study had methodological limitations related to the selection of the sample. First, because a non-probability sampling method was chosen, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all adult Facebook users. Second, the sample size was relatively small. This study relied on quantitative data from 107 participants and qualitative data from 10 participants. This limits the interpretability of the results because many diverse opinions and behaviours may not have been represented in such a small sample. To address these methodological limitations, future research could employ probability sampling techniques and seek to include a larger number of participants. This would



ensure that the variation that exists within the sample is represented. Additionally, future research could focus on sampling other populations, such as high school students, and could include individuals whose breakups occurred less recently to see how breakup distress and surveillance of an ex-partner changes over time.

Aside from the limitations resulting from the size, composition and selection of the sample, there are also limitations that arise from the study of Facebook. Because Facebook is constantly changing and evolving, newer features could have an impact on the ways in which individuals conduct themselves on Facebook following a romantic breakup. New behaviours may be afforded by new features that Facebook adds. For instance, in September of 2011, Facebook created a new type of profile called timeline, which allows individuals to post a large cover photo on their profile. According to Facebook (2012), it is intended to allow individuals to “share and highlight [their] most memorable posts, photos and life events.... This is where you can tell your story from beginning, to middle, to now.” The feature has not been available for long, and Facebook users have the option of keeping their traditional profiles or changing to the new timeline layout. As such, it is not yet clear whether or not individuals are using timeline the way Facebook intends for it to be used. At the time of my interviews, only one individual had switched over to timeline. It would be interesting to see if timeline changes the ways in which individuals participate in IES in the future or whether or not it enables individuals to view more information from the past than was possible with the traditional profile.

In order to move this research forward, it would be worthwhile to examine a greater number of variables to see if they are related to IES and breakup distress. The survey collected data on the following additional variables: gender, length of the

relationship, cohabitation, amount of liking for one's ex-partner, and perceived uniqueness of the relationship with one's ex-partner. Due to the time constraints of a master's thesis, however, these variables have not yet been examined. Additionally, while the results showed that most individuals who were experiencing distress caused by content on their ex-partners profiles deleted the ex-partner, it would be interesting to examine the survey results of the outliers who scored high on the distress scale yet did not delete their ex-partners. It would be worthwhile to learn more about their motivations for remaining Facebook friends with their ex-partners in spite of distress.

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## Appendix A: Information Letter to Survey Participants

### **Romantic Breakups in the Age of Social Media**

**Veronika Lukacs (MA Candidate)**

**Faculty Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (PhD)**

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The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information you require to make an informed decision on participating in this research. I am a Master's student in Media Studies in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario.

#### **Purpose of this Study**

You are being invited to participate in a research study looking at Facebook and romantic breakups. This study investigates how people deal with breakups while using Facebook.

#### **Who is eligible to Participate?**

You are eligible to participate if you are a Facebook user and if you have experienced a romantic breakup in the past 12 months. You must have been friends with your ex on Facebook when you were in the relationship.

#### **Research Procedures for this Study**

You will be asked to complete a web-based survey. It should take about 30 minutes to complete. Approximately 100 people will complete the survey. You will also be given the opportunity to participate in a second phase of the study which consists of an interview.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future academic status.

#### **Inquiries and Risks**

You are free to ask questions about the study or survey at any time. Due to the emotional nature of the topic of breakups, questions could cause discomfort. The survey may ask you to discuss painful memories of past events. If you are a UWO student, please keep in mind that there are counselling services available at Health Services on campus.

Information about counselling services may be found online at the following URL: <http://www.shs.uwo.ca/counselling/counseling.html>. Another excellent place to access information and resources during tough times is <http://www.mindyourmind.ca>.

**Benefits from the Study**

The study may give you the opportunity to reflect on your past relationships and the ways in which Facebook can impact your personal-well being. Your participation will also help gain insight into how Facebook affects romantic breakups and well-being more broadly.

**Confidentiality of Information**

Information that is collected during the study will be stored in a secure database on a secure server accessible only by the researchers (Veronika Lukacs and Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase) and used solely for research and teaching purposes. Results of the study will be available from the researchers when the study is completed. You will not be asked to give us information that discloses your identity.

**Compensation**

In recognition of your contribution to this project you will be entered into a draw to win one of four gift certificates (you may choose where from) valued at \$40. To enter the draw, please send an email to Veronika Lukacs at vlukacs@uwo.ca stating that you have completed the survey. Any additional costs you may incur as a result of your participation will not be reimbursed.

**Consent to Participate**

You consent to participate in the present study by completing the survey.

I have read the Information Letter, and I agree to participate in the study. \*

Yes

No

\*Required

## Appendix B: Information Letter to Interview Participants

### **Romantic Breakups in the Age of Social Media**

**Veronika Lukacs (MA Candidate)**

**Faculty Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase (PhD)**

---

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information you require to make an informed decision on participating in this research. I am a Master's student in Media Studies in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario and the information I am collecting will be used in my thesis. If you decide not to participate in the study, this will not have negative consequences for the progression of my degree.

#### **Purpose of this Study**

You are being invited to participate in a research study looking at Facebook and romantic breakups. This study investigates how undergraduate university students deal with breakups while using Facebook.

#### **Who is eligible to Participate?**

You are eligible to participate if you are a Facebook user and if you have experienced a romantic breakup in the past 12 months. You must have been friends with your ex on Facebook when you were in the relationship.

#### **Research Procedure of this Study**

You will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. We are planning to interview approximately 15 to 20 undergraduate students at the University of Western Ontario. The study will take place in one of the meeting rooms in the North Campus Building. The interviews will be audio taped, with the consent of the participants, and transcribed and analyzed in NVivo.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future academic status.

#### **Inquiries and Risks**

You are free to ask questions about the study or survey at any time. There are no known risks involved from participating in this study. Participating in the present study does not hinder your ability to participate in concurrent studies or in future studies.

**Benefits from the Study**

There are no known benefits to you from participating in this study. However, your participation will help gain insight into how Facebook affects romantic breakups and personal well-being. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

**Confidentiality of Information**

Information that is collected during the study will be stored either in a locked cabinet or in a secure database on a secure server accessible only by the researchers (Veronika Lukacs and Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase). The interviews will be audio taped, with your consent, and will be labeled with pseudonyms to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published. Quotes from the interviews may be used in publications and reports; however, your name will not be associated with any of these quotes and no quotes will be disclosed that identify you or anybody else. All records will be kept by Dr. Anabel Quan-Haase for educational purposes.

**Compensation**

In recognition of your contribution to this project you will be given \$10. Any additional costs you may incur as a result of your participation will not be reimbursed.

## Appendix C: Consent to be Interviewed

### Romantic Breakups in the Age of Social Media

#### Consent Form

I have read the Information Letter, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

---

Do you consent to be interviewed? Yes  No

Do you consent to be audio taped? Yes  No

---

**Name (please print)**

---

**Participant's Signature**

---

**Date**

---

**Name of person obtaining informed consent  
(please print)**

---

**Signature of person obtaining informed consent**

---

**Date**





## Appendix E: Online Survey Interface

### Romantic Breakups on Facebook

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**Section 1: Facebook Use Questions**

**1.1 About how many friends do you have on Facebook?**  
If you are unsure, you can write a range, such as 400-500.

**1.2 On average about how much time did you spend PER DAY on Facebook last week?**

None  
 Up to 1/2 hour  
 Up to 1 hour  
 Up to 2 hours  
 Up to 3 hours  
 More than 3 hours

**1.3 On average how often do you update your Facebook profile?**

Never  
 Rarely  
 A few times a year  
 One a month  
 Once a week  
 Several times a week  
 Daily  
 Several times a day

**1.4 General Facebook Attitude**  
Please rate the following statements.

|  | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Neutral               | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook is part of my everyday activity                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Facebook has become part of my daily routine                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook in a while | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel I am part of the Facebook community                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would be sorry if Facebook shut down                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**1.5 What are the specific ways you communicate with your friends using Facebook?**  
Check only those that apply.

Post messages to a friend's wall  
 Create events and invite your friends  
 Send private messages to a friend within Facebook  
 Send group messages to your friends  
 Comment on friends' photos, status updates and wall posts  
 "Like" friends' photos, status updates and wall posts  
 Browse friends' pages without posting anything  
 Use Facebook chat  
 Other:

Powered by [Google Docs](#)  
[Report Abuse](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Additional Terms](#)

## Appendix F: Survey Content

### Section 1: Facebook Use Questions

1.1 About how many friends do you have on Facebook?  
(If you are unsure, you can write a range, such as 400-500.)

---

1.2 On average about how much time did you spend PER DAY on Facebook last week?

- None
- Up to ½ hour
- Up to 1 hour
- Up to 2 hours
- Up to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

1.3 On average how often do you update your Facebook profile?

- Never
- Rarely
- A few times a year
- Once a month
- Once a week
- Several times a week
- Daily
- Several times a day

#### 1.4 General Facebook Attitude

Please rate the following statements.

| Statement   | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Facebook is part of my everyday activity                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Facebook has become part of my daily routine                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel I am part of the Facebook community                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I would be sorry if Facebook shut down                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### 1.5 What are the specific ways you communicate with your friends using Facebook?

Check all that apply.

- Post messages to a friend's wall
- Create events and invite your friends
- Send private messages to a friend within Facebook
- Send group messages to your friends
- Comment on friends' photos, status updates and wall posts
- "Like" friends' photos, status updates and wall posts
- Browse friends' pages without posting anything
- Use Facebook chat
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2: Relationship Questions

**Instructions:** Think of a person with whom you have recently (within the last 12 months) experienced a romantic breakup. Keeping this person and the specific breakup in mind, please answer the following questions.

2.1 During the relationship about how much on average did you use Facebook PER DAY?

- None
- Up to ½ hour
- Up to 1 hour
- Up to 2 hours
- Up to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

2.2 During the time of the relationship, about how much on average did YOUR EX use Facebook PER DAY?

- None
- Up to ½ hour
- Up to 1 hour
- Up to 2 hours
- Up to 3 hours
- More than 3 hours
- I don't know

2.3 Approximately how many mutual friends do you have with your ex on Facebook? (If you are unsure, you can write a range, such as 10-20).

---

2.4 Who ended the relationship?

- Me
- My ex
- The breakup was mutual

2.5 Approximately how long did the romantic relationship last before the breakup took place?

(Please indicate days, months or years. Be as specific as possible.)

\_\_\_\_\_

2.6 At any point in time in your relationship, did you and your ex live together?

- Yes
- No

2.7 Approximately when did the breakup take place?

- Within the past month
- Within the past two months
- Within the past three months
- Within the past four months
- Within the past five months
- Within the past six months
- Within the past seven months
- Within the past eight months
- Within the past nine months
- Within the past ten months
- Within the past eleven months
- Within the past twelve months

## 2.8 Please rate the following statements.

| Statement   | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I hope that my ex and I will have a romantic relationship again | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am still in love with my ex                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If I could never be around my ex, I would feel miserable        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I generally speak about my ex in positive ways                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I think my ex is a good person                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My ex is unlike most people in my life                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My ex's space in my life is hard to fill                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My ex and I have many friends in common                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My ex and I do not have many friends in common                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## 2.9 Please rate the following statements

| Statement  | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I think about this person so much that it's hard for me to do things I normally do | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Memories of the person upset me  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel I cannot accept the breakup I've experienced                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel drawn to places and things associated with the person                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I can't help feeling angry about the breakup                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I feel distressed over what happened  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel stunned or dazed over what happened  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ever since the breakup it is hard for me to trust people  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ever since the breakup I feel like I have lost the ability to care about other people or I feel distance from people I care about | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have been experiencing pain since the breakup   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I go out of my way to avoid reminders of the person   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel my life is empty without the person  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel bitter over this breakup   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am envious of others who have not experienced a breakup like this   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel lonely a great deal of the time since the breakup  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel like crying when I think about the person  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Section 3: Facebook use after the breakup

**Instructions:** Keeping in mind the person and breakup from Section 2, please answer the following questions about your behaviour on Facebook following the breakup.

3.1a Did you change your relationship status on Facebook after the breakup and/or did you remove your relationship status?

(For instance, from “in a relationship” or “married” to “single” or “it’s complicated.”)

- Yes
- No – My ex changed the status
- N/A – relationship status was never posted
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3.1b Did people ask you about the breakup on Facebook?

- Yes
- No
- N/A – it wasn’t obvious through our Facebook profiles that we had broken up

3.1c if you answered “yes” to question 3.1b, was this supportive or distressing?  
Please tell us in a short paragraph what happened.

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3.2 Did you change your privacy settings so your ex had less access to your information?

Yes

No

3.3 Did you block your ex from appearing in your news feed?

Yes

No

3.4a Has your ex ever (intentionally or unintentionally) posted a picture or changed his/her profile picture to something that made you feel bad or jealous?

Yes

No

3.4b Have you ever posted a picture or changed your profile picture to something intended to make your ex feel bad or jealous?

Yes

No

3.5a Have you ever changed your Facebook status to a quote or song lyrics about your ex?

Yes

No

3.5b Do you think your ex has ever changed his/her Facebook status to a quote or song lyric about you?

Yes

No

Maybe/Don't Know

3.6a Have you ever spent time looking at, analyzing or “creeping” your ex’s profile?

- Yes
- No
- I cannot access my ex’s profile

3.6b If you answered “yes” to the previous question, how often did you visit his/her profile in the month following the breakup?

- Several times a day
- About once a day
- 3-5 days a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- A couple times a month
- N/A – answered “no” to the previous question
- Don’t know

3.6c If you have ever spent time analyzing your ex’s profile, please tell us more about this behaviour.

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3.7 Do you think your ex spends time looking at your profile?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- He/She cannot access my profile

3.8a Have you ever deleted pictures off Facebook of you and your ex together?

- Yes
- No
- N/A – There are no pictures of us together on Facebook

3.8b If you answered “yes” to the previous question, did you save the pictures before deleting them?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

3.9a have you ever deleted comments your ex posted on your wall or on your photos?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

3.9b If you answered “yes” to the previous question, did you save the comments before deleting them?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

3.10a Have you ever deleted private messages your ex sent you on Facebook (and/or your conversation history with your ex on Facebook)?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

3.10b If you answered “yes” to the previous question, did you save the messages before deleting them?

- Yes
- No
- N/A – There are no pictures of us together on Facebook

3.11a Have you ever posted slanderous comments about your ex on Facebook? (ie. Did you post something negative about your ex on your Facebook wall?)

- Yes
- No

3.11b has your ex ever posted slanderous public comments about you on Facebook? (ie. Did your ex post something negative about you on Facebook?)

- Yes
- No
- Maybe/Don't Know

3.12 Have you ever re-read or analyzed old messages or wall posts your ex sent you in the past?

- Yes
- No
- N/A – I deleted old messages and wall posts

3.13 have you ever looked at (or tried to look at) an ex's new partner's (or suspected new partner's) profile?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

#### **Section 4: Facebook use after the breakup continued**

**Instructions: Keeping in mind the person and breakup from sections 2 and 3, please answer the following questions about your behaviour on Facebook following the breakup.**

4.1a Are you and your ex friends on Facebook?

- Yes
- No

4.1b If you and your ex are no longer friends on Facebook, how soon after the breakup did the deleting happen? (ie. Did you deleting him or her/get deleted soon after the breakup conversation or did the deleting occur months later) Please explain what happened.

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4.2 If you and your ex are still friends on Facebook, please rate the following statements.

| Statement   | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I visit my ex's Facebook profile often  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When visiting my ex's Facebook profile, I read the new posts of his/her friends                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I often spend time looking through my ex's Facebook pictures  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I pay particularly close attention to news feeds that concern my ex   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I notice when my ex updates his/her social networking site page   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am generally aware of the relationships between my ex and his/her Facebook friends                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If there are messages on my ex's wall I don't understand, I try to investigate it through others' Facebook profiles | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I peruse my ex's Facebook profile to see what s/he's up to  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I know when my ex hasn't updated his/her Facebook profile in a while  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I try to monitor my ex's behaviors through his/her Facebook profile   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I explore my ex's Facebook profile to see if there is anything new or exciting                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4.3 If you and your ex are not friends on Facebook, have you ever looked for ways to access his/her profile? (ie. Looking at photos mutual friends have, logging onto a friend's account, etc.)

- Yes
- No
- N/A – We are still Facebook friends

4.4 Have you ever asked your friends to delete your ex?

- Yes
- No

4.5 Have any of your ex's friends ever deleted you?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe/Don't Know

4.6 Have you ever deleted any of your ex's friends?

- Yes
- No

4.7 If you did not delete your ex on Facebook, why didn't you delete him/her?  
Check all that apply.

- N/A – I did delete my ex
- He/She deleted me first
- There was no animosity following the breakup
- We are trying to remain friends
- Deleting him/her would have made it look like I cared too much
- I was/am hoping to get back together with my ex
- I want to know what he/she is up to
- I want to see if he/she is miserable or bored
- I want to make myself feel better if I can see I am doing better than him/her
- I was afraid of what our mutual friends would think
- I was afraid that it would make things awkward if I ran into him/her again
- I don't usually delete people on Facebook
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



4.8 If you deleted your ex, why did you delete him/her? Check all that apply.

- N/A
- I was tempted to spend too much time looking at his/her profile
- The relationship ended poorly and I wanted nothing to do with him/her
- Looking at his/her profile was painful
- I felt like deleting him/her would help me move on
- I thought he/she would delete me first
- I only keep a small group of close friends on Facebook
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4.9 Have you ever considered deleting your Facebook account as a result of breakup-related problems online?

- Yes
- No
- I temporarily deleted or deactivated my account due to breakup-related problems online

4.10a If you and your ex are still friends on Facebook, please rate the following statements. If you and your ex are no longer friends on Facebook, please skip to question 4.10b.

| Statement  | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I spend so much time looking at my ex's profile that it's hard for me to do things I normally do | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Looking at my ex's profile or "See Friendship" page upsets me                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Re-reading old messages my ex sent me upsets me  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I overanalyze old messages, wall posts or photographs of me and my ex together                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|  |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I feel drawn to my ex's Facebook profile   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I can't help feeling angry about content my ex posts on Facebook                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel distressed when I talk my ex on Facebook chat                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel paranoid that people posting on my ex's wall are potential romantic interests | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I feel jealous when other people post on my ex's wall                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Looking at my ex's Facebook page is self-destructive                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am envious of others who do not have an ex on Facebook                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4.10b If you and your ex are not friends on Facebook, please rate the following statements. If you and your ex are Facebook friends, please skip to the following page.

| Statement  | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I deleted my ex because being reminded of them was too painful                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Looking at photographs that mutual friends have tagged of my ex upset me       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Re-reading old messages my ex sent me upsets me                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I overanalyze old messages, wall posts or photographs of me and my ex together | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I would feel upset if I saw my ex was with a new romantic partner              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Section 5: Wrap up and demographics

5.1. Please rate the following statements.

| Statement   | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Facebook makes breakups more challenging  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Having an ex on Facebook makes it harder to get over him/her  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not having access to an ex's profile is the <b><i>best</i></b> way to move on   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not having access to an ex's profile is the <b><i>only</i></b> way to move on   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being on Facebook makes it more difficult to get over someone, regardless of whether or not you have full access to each other's profiles | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5.2 Please rate the following statements.

| Statement  | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neutral                  | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Most people I know stay friends with their ex-partners on Facebook           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It is common for my friends to be friends with their ex-partners on Facebook | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It is common for me to be friends with my ex-partners on Facebook            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I think it is important to be friends with ex-partners on Facebook           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5.3 How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

5.4 What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

5.5 Are you a college or university student?

Yes

No

5.6 If you are a student, what institution do you attend? \_\_\_\_\_

5.7 How did you hear about this study?

Facebook invite or word-of-mouth directly from the researcher (Veronika Lukacs or Anabel Quan-Haase)

Facebook invite from a friend

Found an ad for the study on a poster on campus

Received an email in my UWO account from the researcher inviting me to participate

Other \_\_\_\_\_

5.8 Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please contact Veronika Lukacs via email at [vlukacs@uwo.ca](mailto:vlukacs@uwo.ca)

5.9 Is there anything you would like to add that might be of interest to the researchers? (Optional)

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## Appendix G: Interview Guide

### Demographic Information

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Program/Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

### Interview Questions

1. How serious would you consider your previous relationship?
2. Tell me about the breakup—who ended it/why did you break up, etc.
3. How often did you communicate with your ex on Facebook when you were in the relationship?
4. Was your relationship status posted on the site? Why or why not?
5. What role did Facebook play in your breakup? (Were there any status changes, jealousy, etc)
6. How did content on Facebook make you feel after the breakup? How did you react to content posted on Facebook (both emotionally and in terms of behaviour) Did you/do you ever try to find out what your ex is doing via Facebook? Do you think your ex tries to find out what you're doing via Facebook?
7. Why did you participate in this behaviour? (Or, why do you think your ex participated in the behaviour she/he participated in?
8. How did you cope with the situation on Facebook? How are you currently coping with it?
9. Do you feel deleting is a good strategy? What problems might this present?
10. What are some other suggestions you may have for other people who are going through similar situations?

## Appendix H: Thematic Framework

1. Seriousness of Relationship
2. Initiation Status
3. Relationship Status Posted on Facebook
4. Breakup Aftermath on Facebook
  - 4.1. Creeping of Ex-Partner
5. Distress Aspects of Facebook
6. Reasons for Participating in Behaviour on Facebook
7. Coping Strategies Used
8. Perceptions on Deleting as a Strategy
9. Other Potential Strategies

## Appendix I: Thematic Framework (Example)

| <b>Pseudonym, Age, Field of Study</b>                                   | <b>1. Seriousness of Relationship</b>  | <b>2. Initiation Status</b> | <b>3. Relationship Status Posted on Facebook</b>              | <b>4. Breakup Aftermath on Facebook</b>  | <b>5. Distressing aspects of Facebook</b>  |
|---|--|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| Jake,<br>27,<br>Hedge Fund Trader                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “the second most serious I ever had”</li> <li>• Together for six months</li> <li>• Didn’t live together officially but she stayed over six nights a week</li> </ul> | Initiator                   | No  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• posted malicious status updates about his ex</li> <li>• his ex-partner deleted him in response and deleted all tagged photographs of the couple</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None, but upset ex-partner by posting malicious comments about her</li> </ul>   |
| Maggie,<br>39,<br>Bank Teller   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “very serious”</li> <li>• Together for two years</li> <li>• Lived together for the last six months of the relationship</li> </ul>                                   | Non-initiator               | Yes   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creeped ex-partner</li> <li>• Came to mutual decision with ex-partner to remove Facebook status at the same time</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ex-partner’s Facebook profile</li> </ul>  |
| Chelsea,<br>21,<br>University Student – Sociology and Criminology       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “very serious”</li> <li>• Together for three years</li> <li>• Relationship was long-distance – her ex-partner went to university in another city</li> </ul>         | Initiator                   | Yes   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removed relationship status</li> <li>• People asked her about the breakup</li> <li>• People “liked” that the relationship ended, which made her feel bad</li> <li>• Deleted ex-partner right after the breakup</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her ex-partner’s profile</li> <li>• Tagged photographs of the couple together</li> <li>• The relationship status change</li> </ul>  |
| Cassie,<br>21,<br>University Student – Social Justice and Peace Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “very serious”</li> <li>• Together for six and a half years</li> <li>• Never lived together</li> </ul>  | Initiator                   | Posted on and off throughout the course of their relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He deleted her</li> <li>• She deleted tagged photographs of them together</li> <li>• Creeped ex-partner</li> <li>• Logged onto friend’s account to creep ex-partner after her deleted her</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationship status change</li> <li>• Her ex-partner deleting her</li> <li>• Tagged photographs of the couple together</li> <li>• Her ex-partner’s profile</li> </ul> |

## Appendix J: Ethics Approval



*Office of the Dean*

### Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

All non-medical research involving human subjects at the University of Western Ontario is carried out in compliance with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Guidelines (2010). The Faculty of Information Media Studies (FIMS) Research Committee has the mandate to review minimal-risk FIMS research proposals for adherence to these guidelines.

#### 2011 – 2012 FIMS Research Committee Membership

- |    |                      |     |                |
|----|----------------------|-----|----------------|
| 1. | R. Babe              | 7.  | A. Pyati       |
| 2. | A. Benoit            | 8.  | A. Quan-Haase  |
| 3. | J. Burkell (alt)     | 9.  | D. Robinson    |
| 4. | E. Comor             | 10. | K. Sedig (alt) |
| 5. | C. Hoffman           | 11. | L. Xiao        |
| 6. | P. McKenzie (Chair)* |     |                |

Research Committee member(s) marked with \* have examined the research project **FIMS-2011-12-002R** entitled:

#### Romantic Dissolution in the Age of Social Media

as submitted by: Anabel Quan-Haase (Principal Investigator)  
Veronika Lukacs

and consider it to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects under the conditions of the University's Policy on Research Involving Human Subjects. Approval is given for the period 01 August 2011 to 30 June 12.

Approval Date: 1 December 2011



## Appendix K: Cassie's Story

Cassie is a 21-year old university student, in her fourth-year of a social justice and peace studies program.

She describes her previous relationship as “very serious” and she dated her ex-boyfriend Jason for six and a half years. The couple never lived together.

Cassie ended the relationship with Jason six months ago because she felt it was unhealthy. The couple fought a lot, and she felt Jason had anger issues and was constantly blaming her for things.

During the relationship, Cassie and Jason communicated on Facebook everyday through a combination of wall posts, private messages and Facebook chat.

The couple had their relationship status posted on Facebook during different phases of their relationship, but not the entire time they were together. When they first joined Facebook, they had their relationship status posted on the site, but Jason would occasionally delete the status if he and Cassie were in a fight. When this would happen, Cassie's friends would quickly prompt her for details via text messages. When asked how Jason's behavior made her feel, she answered, “Definitely angry. I just felt like it was announcing to the world that we were in a fight or that we were about to break up and it was more public than I would like to deal with issues like that.” Eventually she removed her relationship status altogether to prevent this from happening. For the last two years of the relationship, neither Cassie or Jason had a relationship status posted on Facebook.

After Cassie broke up with Jason officially, he deleted her off Facebook a few hours later.

Cassie went through her Facebook page and deleted tagged photographs of her and Jason. Her profile picture had been of the two of them, and she felt it was an unnecessary reminder of the relationship. When asked why she decided to delete the photographs, she said it was done out of spite. She was angry that he had deleted her, so she felt that if he did not want to be her Facebook friend that he had no right to appear on her profile.

Cassie also found herself checking in on Jason's Facebook page all the time after the relationship ended because his account was semi-public. Additionally, she would view his profile by logging into their mutual friend's accounts. Cassie felt this behavior was self-destructive, and she believes she did it because she wanted to find something. "You want to find something to be angry about. You want to see if any new girls have written on his wall or if there's pictures tagged of him partying or doing whatever. You're kind of looking for something to be mad about. It's not healthy."

Cassie was also hoping to find a status update or a sign that displayed remorse on Jason's behalf for deleting her from Facebook. However, when looking at Jason's page, Cassie found pictures of him with other girls that made her feel upset. She felt they were low tactics to use after being with someone for six and a half years.

Eventually, Cassie decided to block Jason from Facebook because he kept trying to contact her by sending her private messages. Although it was not her reason for deleting him, she felt it also helped curb her desire to look at his page because it is as if he no longer exists on Facebook.

Overall, Cassie felt blocking Jason was an effective coping strategy but that, in some ways, this has actually made her more curious about what he is doing. Jason still sends her text messages from time to time, and when she reads them, it makes her want to

find out if they are congruent with what is on his Facebook profile. Two weeks prior to our interview, Cassie's roommate (who is still friends with Jason on Facebook) allowed Cassie to look at Jason's profile through her account. He had been sending Cassie text messages telling her he missed her, but when she looked at his profile, she saw that there was a picture of him kissing another girl. Finding the picture made her feel better because it confirmed her belief that he was lying.

Cassie believes that breaking off the means of Facebook contact with an ex is an effective way to get over a breakup, even though being deleted can result in hard feelings, as was the case when Jason deleted her. Additionally, she was concerned that their lack of friendship on Facebook was a source of gossip among their 200 or so mutual friends but, ultimately, she felt that breaking off contact is "the best strategy if you want to move on because you're going to find yourself criticizing his page, and if you're constantly keeping tabs on someone you're not going to be able to go and find someone new."

In the future, Cassie would not post her relationship status if she was dating someone new, and she recommends that people refrain from posting relationship statuses.

## Appendix L: Chelsea's Story

Chelsea is a 21 year-old fourth-year undergraduate student double-majoring in criminology and sociology. She considers her previous relationship “very serious.” Chelsea was with her ex-boyfriend John for three years. John went to a university in a different city, so the relationship was long-distance.

During the relationship, Chelsea and John communicated via Facebook daily, through Facebook chat and private messages. Their relationship status was posted on Facebook for the duration of the relationship. When asked why they decided to publicly post their relationship status, Chelsea explained “we were 18 when we put it up there, so it was just the norm to post it for all to see.”

Chelsea initiated the breakup eight months prior to our interview. John was unfaithful and “not the nicest guy”, so she decided to end the relationship.

In terms of the role Facebook played in their breakup, Chelsea says that removing her Facebook status indicated “the serious end of the relationship.” She also felt that having the breakup publicly announced on Facebook caused awkward social interactions. Upon removing her Facebook status, people she was not close friends with would ask her about the relationship. Most of these confrontations occurred face-to-face rather than online. “I actually found it a little creepy and a little frustrating because no one confronted me on Facebook but the second I ran into someone they would say 'oh, I heard about your breakup'.”

Additionally, Chelsea explained that removing her status caused drama: “There were some girls and friends of his who started 'liking' that the relationship had ended. It was more cyberbullying than anything; they were trying to make things worse.”

Chelsea said that content on Facebook “added salt to the wounds” following the breakup. “With everything being recorded and everything being written in public it’s hard to get over it on your own because it’s always there and it’s always a constant reminder and it’s kind of hard to get rid of.” Chelsea explained that she found herself re-reading old messages her and John had exchanged when they were together and reminiscing about the good times in the relationship. She also did not like how easy it was to find out what John was doing. “A breakup without Facebook you can’t really see what your ex is doing, but with Facebook you just have to click and you know exactly what they’ve been up to. That’s a little frustrating.”

Three weeks after the breakup, Chelsea decided to delete John after she realized that being friends with him on Facebook “was not healthy.” When asked why she was monitoring his behaviour online, she explained that it is just too tempting not to look. Even though it is not healthy or beneficial to monitor one's ex's behaviour, it is too tempting not to look.

Chelsea felt that deleting John was a good strategy to help her get over the relationship, and she recommended people going through similar situations also delete their ex: “I think if there’s a lot of drama there or if one or both are distressed about the breakup I think it’s a lot healthier. It’s hard enough if you have to see the person but then to be able to see their personal life the way Facebook glorifies it all I think it makes it really hard to put the person out of your mind and move on if there are constant reminders always there.”

After deleting John as a friend, Chelsea also deleted photographs of the two of them together on Facebook. She explained “When I was going through them it was hard

because memories were coming up, but doing it was the best decision; it was the healthiest thing to do to move on. I didn't keep photos of him in my bedroom so why would I keep them on Facebook?"

## Appendix M: Chris' Story

Chris is a 26-year old master's student. He describes his previous relationship as "basically a marriage". Chris and Isabel were together for eight years and they lived together for six and a half of those years. Additionally, the couple had shared finances and two cats.

Isabel ended the relationship with Chris, but he does not know why. One day (about six months prior to our interview) Isabel told him the relationship was over, and she asked him to leave the house while she collected her things and left.

During the relationship, Chris and Isabel communicated on Facebook about once or twice a day by commenting on or liking each other's posts. However, because they lived together, Facebook was not their primary means of communication. The couple posted their relationship status on the site as soon as they signed up. Chris believes that they did not reflect on potential consequences of this action.

Following the breakup, Isabel changed her relationship status, which caused an update to appear on Chris' wall stating "Chris is no longer in a relationship with Isabel". Chris only keeps a small, select group of friends on Facebook and, because of this, he said that anyone who received the notification that him and Isabel were no longer together knew it was a big deal. Most of his friends did not ask him about the breakup via Facebook, but rather discussed it with him in person.

Chris said that content Isabel posted on Facebook after the breakup made him feel stressed. He believes the lack of resolution he felt following the breakup contributed to this feeling, and he said "seeing posts she was tagged in or seeing her profile picture pop up somewhere and the anxiety of what could be in the profile picture can be very

stressful. To sort of not have that person in your life but to have their messages appearing as though they should be is weird and probably distressing.”

In order to prevent this distress, Chris blocked Isabel’s posts from appearing in his news feed. Then, three months following the breakup, he decided to delete Isabel from Facebook entirely. When asked why he did not do this immediately, he explained that at first he believed he and Isabel might be able to remain friends. As he came to the realization that this was unlikely, Chris deleted Isabel from Facebook, as she no longer fit his criteria of having to be a close friend in real life to be his friend on Facebook.

When asked whether or not he feels deleting an ex is a good strategy to cope with a breakup, Chris felt that, though it was useful for him, it may not be a magic solution for everyone. He wishes that deleting people on Facebook was less socially awkward but that, unfortunately, it is a complicated process. He explained, “I think if your Facebook has a purpose and someone’s Facebook friendship does not coincide with that purpose it should be a value-neutral thing to cut them, but on the other hand I can recognize it’s not and that it’s a fraught process.” Chris went on to discuss how when he deleted Isabel, he then had to ask himself whether or not he should delete her family or mutual friends that were more her friends than his. Ultimately, he decided to delete some of her friends as well, as he did not want to receive information about her life through their Facebook walls. “It’s a really extreme metaphor, but in a sense it’s almost like surgery to remove a tumor because you have to make sure you get everything in order to leave the rest of the structure intact and healthy and it’s a very difficult process.”

Chris feels there is no blanket solution for people who are having a difficult time coping with information pertaining to an ex on Facebook. “I have the utmost respect and



admiration for people who are able to navigate a breakup and still be friends with their ex, but you also need to be able to recognize when some part of that chain is damaging or poisonous and be willing to break through the expectation of Facebook, of society and just cut parts of that out.”

## Appendix N: Jake's Story

Jake is a 27-year old male who works as a hedge fund trader.

He considers his relationship with Amy to be the second most serious he has ever had. The couple was together for six months, and they practically lived together; she stayed over at his house six nights a week.

Jake ended the relationship with Amy a month prior to our conversation after he discovered that she cheated on him and that she was pregnant with the other man's baby.

During the relationship, Jake and Amy seldom communicated via Facebook, but they did use it to share photographs extensively. The couple did not have their relationship status posted on the site, as Jake believes they are "cheesy". However, he believes it also made it easier for Amy to maintain her multiple relationships.

Following the breakup, Jake changed his Facebook status. "I posted a status update celebrating my newfound freedom, some work accomplishments, and a simple mention that I was not a daddy. This resulted in a huge fight. It was certainly intended to hurt her, and while sitting in the office in front of a computer it was one of the only things I could do. I took it down later that day and apologized, as I knew it was pointless and mean-spirited."

Soon after, Amy deleted all the photographs she had of Jake in her Facebook albums. A few days later, Jake changed his Facebook status to a quotation that Amy interpreted as an attack, and she blocked him from Facebook. She also told Jake she wanted to delete him to avoid seeing pictures of him having fun with other women.

Jake feels he posted a malicious Facebook status about Amy because he was hurt and angry, and he knew he could do little about the situation. “I turned to Facebook status updates to express myself. In hindsight there was no need to make it public.”

When asked whether or not he feels deleting an ex is a good strategy to cope with distress caused by content on Facebook, Jake answered, “Only if you really want to remove someone from your life. I felt concerned when Amy and I were un-friended that we would no longer have any means of communication. The worry was absurd, obviously. However, I really did feel that way for some reason. It’s pretty crazy how important Facebook has become for keeping track of people, much more important than phone numbers or email addresses.”

When asked if he had any strategies for people going through a similar situation, Jake answered, “Avoid posting hurtful stuff in a public place. It makes you look and feel like an ass.”

## Appendix O: Maggie's Story

Maggie is a 39 year old woman who works at a bank. She says her previous relationship with Matthew was very serious.

Maggie and Matthew were together for two years in total, and they lived together during the last six months of their relationship.

Maggie and Matthew broke up one year prior to our interview after coming to the realization, while living together, that they wanted different things out of life. Maggie said that Matthew constantly wanted to have people over, whereas she liked quiet and privacy. While Matthew was the one who initiated the breakup conversation, Maggie says the breakup decision was mutual and that the breakup itself was amicable.

Prior to living together, Maggie and Matthew communicated on Facebook about once a day, and less frequently after they moved in with each other.

The couple had a conversation about posting their relationship status on Facebook before deciding to do so. Maggie says they were together for three months before deciding to post their status. "It was a weird thing. It was the first time [posting a relationship status on Facebook] had happened for either of us. We were both listed as single three months into our relationship and then finally we went 'Are we boyfriend and girlfriend? Are we continuing?' It started as a joke. We asked each other 'is this worthy of being on Facebook? That's how it came up and that's when we changed it.'" After this point, the couple had their relationship status posted on Facebook for the rest of their relationship.

Maggie says changing their Facebook status after the breakup was challenging, but that her and Matthew handled it well. They discussed the status change together and

agreed to remove their status entirely as opposed to changing it to “single”. The former couple logged on and removed their status at the same time and deleted it from showing up on their profiles. Because of this, none of Maggie’s Facebook friends noticed the status change, and no one asked her about the breakup.

Following the breakup, Maggie decided to remain friends with Matthew on Facebook because they were really good friends in real life. However, she says this was difficult for her at first because she found herself checking his profile every day and overanalyzing the new friends he was making and the pictures he posted of himself with other women. “I’d like to say I’m above it, but I did it. It was upsetting for me for sure. I would rather go back to the old days when none of this stuff existed.” Pictures of the house they had shared were posted, and Maggie noticed that decorations she had up had been taken down, which made her feel weird.

When asked why she participated in this behaviour, Maggie said there were several reasons. “I wanted to see if there were other girls he was meeting or if there were pictures or things he was saying that might have been construed as vague or about me so I just started to drive myself crazy.”

A few months after the breakup, Maggie decided to delete Matthew from appearing in her news feed. Following the breakup, there had been a lingering period where the former couple wondered if they were going to get back together and whether or not they had made the right decision. However, once it became apparent to Maggie that the relationship was for sure over, she felt it was appropriate to block Matthew’s posts. “It was part of the healing process to move on. After a while when I was better I unblocked him and we moved on. We were friends afterward except for a period right

after when we were giving each other space.”

When asked whether or not she feels deleting an ex is a good strategy for getting over a breakup, Maggie said it depends on the situation, and she felt that, for her, blocking Matthew’s posts from her news feeds worked well. Because they were still friends, she said deleting him would have been complicated, as they would likely eventually re-add each other as friends a few months later anyway. She feels that cutting off an ex is a healthy strategy and that, if someone treated her badly, she would delete them without question in order to move on.

Maggie’s advice for other people experiencing a similar situation is to do what she did with the status update. “Remove it from Facebook first and then delete it so it’s undetectable and leave it off there for a while. Block your ex as much as you can, and if they did something bad I would block them completely. If you think you can be friends I would keep them on there.”

## Appendix P: Ann's Story

Ann is a 25-year old woman working as a legal assistant. She has an undergraduate degree in communication studies.

She considers her previous relationship with Brian to be “pretty serious”, and says it was one of the two most serious relationships she has had in her life. Ann says she wanted to marry Brian. The couple dated on and off for three or four years. They met each other in university and dated for three months in person. After that, the relationship was mostly long distance and the couple saw each other every other month.

Ann says her relationship with Brian ended three months prior to our interview over a disagreement about whether or not the relationship should be made public on Facebook. Although she typically would not post a relationship status on Facebook, Ann wanted to have hers posted with Brian because he did not tell his friends that they were back together, which made her feel she could not fully trust him. Brian did not agree to post his status, so Ann ended the relationship. She explains, “It wasn't specifically about Facebook, it's what is meant behind that—saying something about committing to me openly and publicly and doing something he didn't want to do for someone he loved.”

During the relationship, the couple communicated via Facebook infrequently. Their primary mode of communication was the phone.

After the breakup, Ann said she was constantly checking Brian's Facebook page. She explains “I consider myself super rational and logical but get me on Facebook and I will go crazy.” She deleted him as a friend so she would no longer be forced to look at his posts when they appeared in her news feed. However, she re-added him two months later after catching up with him over the phone and after she began to date someone else. Ann

said it was almost more dramatic to not be friends with Brian than it was to remain his friend because they have many mutual friends.

Since re-adding Brian as a friend, Ann sometimes wonders if pictures he posts of himself with other women are intended to manipulate her or make her feel bad.

Ann feels deleting an ex is an effective strategy to cope with any negative feelings created by Facebook. “For me it helps because I’m a visual person. Out of sight, out of mind.”

When asked if she has any other suggestions for people going through similar situations, Ann said people should limit the amount of time they spend on Facebook altogether.



## Appendix Q: Lane's Story

Lane is a 19-year old second-year university student completing a double major in psychology and health sciences.

She considers her previous relationship very serious. Lane and her ex-boyfriend, Jared, were together for four years; they started dating in grade 11. The former couple was from the same hometown but, following high school, they moved to different cities for university. During university, Lane and Jared saw each other about once every three weeks but, during the holidays, they saw each other nearly every day, as they live down the street from one another in their hometown.

During the relationship, Lane and Jared communicated on Facebook very seldomly. The couple's primary mode of communication was the telephone.

Though Jared initiated the breakup conversation, he and Lane agreed it was for the best. They decided to break up because it was very difficult for them to see each other throughout the year, and seeing other couples together was very difficult for them. Jared and Lane broke up two months prior to our interview.

Lane says the couple had hundreds of tagged photos together on Facebook and hundreds of mutual friends from high school.

Following the breakup, Lane removed her relationship status from Facebook. Jared was upset at this decision, but Lane does not understand why. "The breakup happened, so why would it say we are 'in a relationship on Facebook?'" Lane removed news of the breakup from her own Facebook wall but, because it still appeared on Jared's wall, her friends still knew about the breakup. Lane received several phone calls from her

friends who heard the news on Facebook, and she said re-telling the story to them over and over again made her more upset than she already was.

Lane says she did not look at Jared's Facebook wall following the breakup, even though the former couple remained Facebook friends. He told her, however, that he looks at her wall on a daily basis, and he has interrogated her through text messages about photographs with her male friends he has never met, asking if she is dating them.

Although Jared's posts appear in Lane's news feed every so often, she said there are two reasons she did not feel compelled to look at them. First, he was mostly posting about sports she did not find interesting. Second, she felt that looking at his wall and seeing who he is talking to would not do her any good.

Lane mentioned that she looked at Jared's profile more when they were dating than after the breakup. "Some of his friends would post pictures with random girls in them and I would wonder who they were, but I would never really ask him because I trusted him enough to know he wasn't doing anything. Still, in the back of your mind you're questioning who it is."

When asked how she was able to exercise self-restraint and ignore Jared's Facebook wall, Lane said she learned from the experience of a friend in a similar situation. "One of my friends recently broke up with her boyfriend and I know she looks at his profile almost every day. It just upsets her. Maybe seeing that—because they broke up before me and my boyfriend—really helps me; I just do not want to go through that."

Lane feels that deleting an ex is not an effective strategy to get over an ex. "A lot of my friends have been telling me to delete my ex, but I think that's going a little too far. You obviously spent a lot of time with them and on some level they're one of your best

friends and so even though you're going through a hard time with them now I think if you delete them in the future you might regret it. I think it's taking it overboard. I don't think it's necessary."

Lane's advice for people who have experienced a breakup and cannot stop looking at their ex's Facebook posts is "Keep yourself busy. Go out with your friends and stay off your computer."

## Appendix R: Martin's Story

Martin is male, and a 26 year-old lawyer. He described his previous relationship as “very serious.” He dated his ex-girlfriend Amelia for four years, and they lived together for two of those years.

Because they lived together, most of their communication took place face-to-face; Martin and Amelia communicated with each other via Facebook relatively infrequently. They both worked at desk jobs, so they would use the chat function to communicate with each other periodically throughout the day, and they posted items of interest on each others' walls about once or twice a week, such as articles or favourite movie quotations.

The couple had their Facebook status listed as “in a relationship” with each other for the entirety of the relationship. According to Martin, the status was posted because “It was a public relationship. We were both happy with it and proud of it and we wanted our mutual friends to know.”

Martin did not see the breakup coming. Amelia broke up with him out of nowhere, on an otherwise regular evening. She announced that she was ending things with him and packed up and left. Shortly after the breakup, Martin removed his Facebook status, but he removed it from his wall immediately so news of the breakup did not show up on his friends' news feeds.

According to Martin, Facebook made his breakup a great deal more complicated. He and Amelia had many mutual friends, and her activity on Facebook following the breakup made him feel horrible: “I felt like I was making an effort to keep a low profile and she wasn't reciprocating. I felt like she was bouncing back unduly fast and had this kind of demeanour or online persona that didn't really reflect how I was feeling or how I

thought she ought to be feeling, which was morbidly depressed.”

In the month following the breakup, Martin indulged in behaviour he said he was embarrassed to admit: he started logging on to Amelia's Facebook account and reading her private messages. “I was trying to keep tabs on her and was going crazy... Once I started doing that it was addictive and it didn't do me any favours. I just became privy to things I didn't want to know, but I kept doing it for a while until she changed her password and got wise.”

When asked why he participated in this behaviour, Martin had several reasons: “I was really shocked at the breakup and thought that my life was over. I was hurt and shocked by the abruptness and the way this very, very significant part of my life had just been severed. I wasn't ready for that and I tried to maintain whatever tenuous connection we still had.” Martin explained that he had also suspected the breakup had something to do with a male coworker that Amelia had developed a crush on during the last several months of their relationship. He wanted to confront her about the issue, but he was afraid to do so in person. His suspicions were confirmed upon logging into her account, but Martin insists this does not justify his behaviour.

Martin felt the month following the breakup was particularly debilitating for him: “I was logging into her account repeatedly throughout the course of a day. I accomplished very little in that month except for feeling sorry for myself.”

When Amelia finally changed her password, Martin was relieved. Shortly after, he deleted her from his friends list and blocked her, an action he says made him feel immediately better.

When asked if he had any advice for other people who were experiencing

breakups and were Facebook friends with their exes, Martin said he felt deleting and blocking one's ex is an effective coping strategy: "Pull off the bandaid as quickly as possible and block the person if you're finding it as painful as I did to see their continuing existence in your sphere." Martin believes that some people may have no issues remaining Facebook friends with their exes, but his situation was complicated by the fact that the relationship was so serious. Martin's final advice was for people who are experiencing a breakup to change their passwords immediately. "Getting dumped from a serious relationship can be traumatic and can cause you to behave in ways you might not foresee. Certainly it did for me. Prior to getting dumped I wouldn't have dreamed of logging into my girlfriend's Facebook account; I wasn't the kind of person who would commit such a breach of trust. These things change. Play it safe, no matter how well you know your soon-to-be-ex."

## Appendix S: Patrick's Story

Patrick is a 27-year old male working as a matte painter in the movie industry.

He described his previous relationship as “pretty serious.” Patrick and his previous girlfriend, Karen, dated for about a year and saw each other one to three times a week. Patrick had met her family, and the two were exclusive.

During the relationship, the couple did not communicate on Facebook very often. They messaged each other once or twice a week to organize get-togethers. Patrick did not have his relationship status posted on the site. He explained that he does not keep many details of his life public on Facebook, which is a decision he made while seeking employment after college. Additionally, he experienced a previous breakup a few years prior where his relationship status had been posted, and he was embarrassed by how public that breakup had been. Karen had her relationship status listed as “in a relationship” when her and Patrick were together.

Patrick said he initiated the breakup with Karen because they were not spending as much time together toward the end of the relationship. Facebook did not play a large role in their breakup. Although Karen did not like that Patrick never posted their relationship status on Facebook, this was not the cause of the breakup.

Patrick said that after the breakup, he paid more attention to posts made by Karen than a more neutral friend, but that her posts did not make him feel emotional. She was not the kind of person to post photographs of herself with other men, and most of the content she posted on Facebook after the breakup was related to her hobbies.

Patrick and Karen remained Facebook friends following the breakup. Patrick says he was not angry with Karen so there was no reason to delete her. However, he believes

that Facebook could create problems for other people who are experiencing breakups. “It definitely removes the whole 'out of sight, out of mind' aspect of getting over someone. It basically is a website that tells you what other people are up to—even people you might not see on a regular basis in real life. If you cut ties with someone in real life it’s almost like you still sort of know them, you’re still exposed to their life, and you know what information they and their friends publish about them. So I think it lengthens how long it would have taken prior to Facebook existing, how long it would take to get over someone.”

Patrick believes that deleting one's ex is a good strategy to remove challenges caused by Facebook, though he believes that unfriending one's ex could be seen as mean-spirited. He believes unsubscribing to an ex's Facebook posts, or the Facebook posts of an ex's close friends are other potential coping strategies to avoid hearing about them. Additionally, he recommends deleting Facebook all together if possible.



## Appendix T: Rebecca's Story

Rebecca is a 26 year-old bartender.

She described her fourteen-month relationship with Adam as the most serious she had ever been involved in. Although she never wanted to get married, she wanted to marry him. She could picture him as the father of her children, and he told her several times that, although he did not picture himself having children, he could see himself having kids with her. Rebecca and Adam never lived together, but they spent nearly every possible moment together, travelled together for a month and worked together.

Rebecca and Adam broke up six months prior to our interview. According to Rebecca, the relationship ended because they did not see eye to eye on a number of things, and they had very different conflict resolution styles. Their fights were never constructive. Although Rebecca and Adam talked about how they would never survive as a couple if they continued to fight, Rebecca was surprised when Adam decided to officially end things.

During the relationship, Adam and Rebecca seldom communicated on Facebook, save for a month when she was travelling in Europe and it was their only means of communication. They would occasionally send each other videos and messages, but most of their communication occurred face-to-face or via the telephone.

Rebecca and Adam had their relationship status posted on Facebook, but only during the last year of their relationship. Rebecca said that, prior to dating Adam, she had been in a previous relationship where her Facebook status was posted on the site, and taking it down had been a distressing experience. Because of her previous experience, she decided that she would not post the status when she began her relationship with Adam.

However, one year before their final breakup, Adam abruptly broke up with her in the middle of the night and deleted her from Facebook. However, the next day, he went to her house begging for forgiveness. The couple got back together and, to prove he was serious, Adam asked Rebecca if they could post their relationship status on Facebook. Rebecca agreed because she was afraid of losing Adam, and this was a way of making the relationship seem real.

Rebecca said that she would never post a relationship status on Facebook ever again, even if she was married. She feels that Facebook statuses make breakups—an already emotionally challenging experience—even more difficult. In her words, “[relationship statuses] make the break-up more public than it needs to be... Also, in some weird way, it kind of feels like you're breaking up all over again when the status comes down.” Rebecca said that when Adam removed their relationship status, it made the breakup seem final. “It angered me at the time that something as trivial as a Facebook status could make me feel so shitty. And really, it is trivial. But, Facebook, and social media in general, has become a weird extension of our realities and what we put out there becomes a reflection of us.” Rebecca quickly removed the update about their breakup so no one would ask her about it via Facebook.

Rebecca remained Facebook friends with Adam immediately following the breakup. She was more concerned about the fact that she still had to work with him than she was about being his Facebook friend. However, a month after the breakup, she decided to delete him due to the presence of photographs and comments on his page that made her upset. Rebecca and Adam had planned a weekend trip to a nearby city prior to their breakup. Adam decided to go on the trip with three of his friends instead of with

her. “A few albums of photos from a trip that was supposed to be mine started to pop up. I felt like every time I logged onto Facebook there were new photos or new comments. I obviously couldn't help but look at them over and over and beat myself up and dwell on my seemingly horrible, horrible life. It was poisonous. I deleted him as a result of that.”

Although she had deleted Adam from Facebook, he has a completely open profile, so she still had access to information about his life. The fact that she did not have to deal with information about him showing up in her news feed helped her cope with the situation, but she still found herself checking his profile from time to time. When asked why she participated in this act of surveillance she said “It was just so easy. And, also, because I hadn't let go of him yet. I constantly wanted to know what he was up to, who he was talking to, anything. I couldn't accept that he was moving on and living life without me. Facebook makes it easy to ‘keep tabs.’”

Rebecca coped with her breakup with Adam by deleting him from Facebook and then forcing herself to stop checking his open profile. She felt this was an effective strategy, and she felt liberated after deleting Adam. She believes, however, that decisions to delete an ex are subjective and that the presence of mutual friends could make deleting an ex awkward. One's ex could still show up in one's news feed, if the former couple has a number of mutual friends. Additionally, although she felt liberated after deleting Adam, occasionally Rebecca would feel anxious about the finality of her decision to delete him: she could not go back and undelete him or easily add him back.

When asked if she had other suggestions for people going through similar situations, Rebecca said “The big one is to not torture yourself by checking the other person's page. It can only lead to over analyzing everything, and it just makes it harder.

You start to question who any unknown girl that he becomes friends with or interacts with is. You analyze posts. It's really unhealthy.

“Delete if you want, or don't delete if you want. Don't let others make that decision for you. It really just comes down to what makes you feel better in the healing process.”

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