The purpose of this study is to identify how romantic partners use Facebook to monitor each other’s communication and if it affects the level of jealousy in the relationship. Researchers have found that low self esteem can increase one’s sense of jealousy in a romantic relationship (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011), and that the amount of time spent on Facebook can also increase jealousy by possibly viewing unwanted information (Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais, 2009). This study will expand on previous research through surveying college-aged, heterosexual men and women regarding why jealousy arises in a relationship due to Facebook. This research will further explore how often and in what ways relationship partners use Facebook to monitor the other and if this usage is correlated to levels of jealousy. This thesis prospectus will be updated to include results by April.
Introduction

Social network sites (SNS), specifically Facebook, allows anyone to create an account and see what their friends are up to by viewing their photos, status updates, comments, basically anything that is on their personal page. Having the constant availability of this information is not always a positive thing. Individuals who are in romantic relationships have their partners every move available to them, such as what they are doing; exactly who they are friends with on Facebook, and pictures they may be tagged in. This constant amount of information can lead to jealousy and trust issues in the relationship. An online newspaper interviewed a researcher, Amy Muise, whose study targeted the issues of Facebook and jealousy. Muise stated, “Part of the problem lies in the fact that content posted on the social site can be interpreted in a variety of ways given its lack of context” (Eadicicco, 2012). This lack of context that Muise mentions I believe may be one of the underline issues that create jealousy among couples who use Facebook.

I am very interested in Facebook as a whole, but Facebook causing jealousy in a romantic relationship really caught my interest. Considering the rise in popularity of Facebook I wanted to know how big of a role these Facebook rituals (wall posts, tagged pictures, status updates, etc.) may impact the amount of jealousy in a heterosexual romantic relationship.

The current and past history of Facebook

Facebook first got its start in 2004 at Harvard University. Mark Zuckerberg was the student to create this now very well-known SNS. When Facebook first got it start, it “allowed users to create their own page, upload pictures, and communicate with other people” (Mark Zuckerberg Biography). This SNS allows people to maintain relationships that may be long
distant, reconnect with past relationships, or it is just another way to communicate with an individual one may interact with on a daily basis. From wall posts to video and instant chat, Facebook has evolved so much since it got its start nearly eight years ago. When Mark Zuckerberg first created this site it was only available for college students, but as the site quickly became popular it is now available for anyone with a valid email address.

As of October 2012, “Facebook has reached 1 billion users, 166 million of those users are located in the United States” (Smith, Segall, and Cow, 2012). This SNS plays an active role in many individual’s social lives in our country. For being such a well known and popular SNS around the world, this site is still relatively new. Facebook has only been around for less than a decade. Until a few years ago, there were not many studies performed on this SNS. According to Marshall, Bejanyan, Di Castro, and Lee (2012), whose study targeted men and women who were currently in some form of a relationship. These researchers discovered that individuals with attachment anxiety (an individual who has a fear of being rejected, low self worth, and worries that they cannot count on their partner when they are needed) experienced jealousy and surveillance in a positive way, whereas individuals with attachment avoidance (an individual who does not trust their partner, has a history of abandonment, and tries to maintain a certain amount of emotional distance in the relationship) experienced jealousy and surveillance negatively. Marshall, et al. (2012) had stated “Social networking websites have exploded in popularity over the last few years” (p. 1). Facebook is still growing, and fast, “It took Facebook six years to hit the 500 million user mark and barely two to double it. Facebook’s total membership grew nearly 30% over the past year” (Smith, Segall, and Cow, 2012). As of now, this site has no signs of slowing down and will remain a part of many peoples’ lives.
Facebook has become a huge communication phenomenon. According to an article on CNN.com by Smith, Segall, and Cow (2012) states “Facebook now reaches one out of every 7 people on the planet,” that is a huge user base. “The United States and Canada only account for 20% of Facebook users, however, those users account for 48% of the $992 million in advertising revenue that the site took in last quarter” (Smith, Segall, & Cow, 2012). For a SNS to gain so much revenue for roughly 20% of its users are outrageous, but it shows that people in the United States and Canada are being affected by the ads that are being put on this site. Overall, the amount of people using this SNS, and the revenue the site is receiving due to its users; it is hard not to notice Facebook becoming such a large communication phenomenon.

The purpose of this study is to identify how heterosexual college age men and women that are currently in a romantic relationship, how often they view their partners Facebook rituals and if it affects the level of jealousy in the relationship.

**Theoretical Grounding**

**Axiomatic Theory**

Overall, my study will focus on how an individual may interpret their romantic partners Facebook rituals. The theory that will ground my research is the Axiomatic Theory.

An axiom is a known reliance that does not require further evidence (Griffin, 2008). The eight axioms are: “verbal communication, nonverbal warmth, information seeking, self-disclosure, reciprocity, similarity, liking and shared networks” (Griffin, 2008, p. 126). This research will only target one out of the eight axioms, which is information seeking. The information seeking axiom is “high levels of uncertainty cause increases in information-seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information-seeking behavior decreases” (Griffin, 2008,
Information seeking is simply about observing information, interpreting it, and when the uncertainty of the situation decreases so will the need to observe the information.

When an individual is on Facebook and they come across information about their romantic partner that they find possibly threatening, one becomes interested in discovering the truth. This can cause that certain individual to look further into the situation then what is really necessary. Anything that someone may post on Facebook can be interpreted in many different ways leaving the true meaning to be vague. One can easily misinterpret a wall post, an instant chat conversation, or a message. These misinterpretations can easily create jealousy in the relationship. However, if one does not believe there is no need to worry about the information that they had seen, then the need to constantly view romantic partners’ webpage decreases.

**Relational Framing Theory**

A second theory that can be used to ground my research is Relational Framing Theory (RFT). This theory also focuses on how an individual may interpret messages.

Relational Framing Theory is how one interprets the messages in order to further understand the relationship one has with another individual (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). RFT has two indicators, dominance-submissive and affiliation-disaffiliation. These two indicators are used when one is interpreting the message. Dominance-submissive is how an individual has a certain amount of power or persuasiveness over another. An example that is given by Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) is “when a parent directs a child to clean his room, the parent is relying on status and authority to influence the child” (p. 105). Affiliation-disaffiliation is the respect and admiration one individual has towards another. An example that is given by Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) is “consider how a love letter conveys affection and positive regard to the
recipient” (p. 105). Depending on which indicator is more relevant to the other individual they are communicating with will determine the way the message was interpreted and how the relationship will be understood. This research will focus on affiliation-disaffiliation indicator. This indicator “captures the appreciation, esteem, or solidarity one person has for the other” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 105). Simply defined this indicator is how an individual may interpret a message from someone they respect and admire.

If an individual views their partners web page and sees a comment from a member of the opposite sex. The individual may view this wall post as potential threatening to the relationship. After seeing this on their partners’ page, whom they respect and admire, this may cause a problem. The possible negative reactions one may experience is jealousy, create possible self-esteem issues, and lack of trust. By viewing the information negatively, this may cause a negative reaction towards the significant other.

**Potential causes to the problems of Facebook relationships**

While gathering information for this study, I have discovered that the amount of time one spends on Facebook can create jealousy. I would like to further analyze exactly what the individual is viewing when they are on this SNS that creates the jealousy in the relationship. The following literature review will provide evidence from researchers past studies supporting the reason why jealousy may occur on Facebook and where that jealousy may stem from.

**Jealousy**

**Self-esteem**

Utz and Beukeboom (2011) had conducted a study that focuses on how SNS can affect romantic relationships by possibly creating jealousy. These researchers believe that self-esteem
plays a role when jealousy occurs in a romantic relationship due to a SNS. They discovered that individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to have jealousy issues in the relationship as opposed to an individual with high self-esteem. According to Utz and Beukeboom (2011) “Low self-esteem individuals experienced higher levels of SNS jealousy than high self-esteem individuals” (p. 23). However, high self-esteem individuals may also experience SNS jealousy when they are less satisfied in their present romantic relationship (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011).

Utz and Beukeboom (2011) have also gathered evidence to support that an individual with high self-esteem has more confidence in themselves as opposed to an individual with a lower self-esteem. Individuals with lower self-esteem strive for acceptance and tend to not manage stressful situations as successfully.

Trust issues

According to Marshall, et al., (2012) study, as previously stated focused on attachment styles that may cause jealousy in a romantic relationship due to surveillance on Facebook, “Lack of trust and heightened jealousy may lead highly anxious individuals to attentively check their partner’s Facebook page, and ambiguous cues that are perceived as threatening may intensify anxiety, jealousy, and mistrust in a vicious circle” (p. 25). These researchers also discovered that the only relationship factor that creates jealousy on Facebook is trust. (Marshall, et al., 2012, p. 25).

Couch and Jones (1997) whose study focused on measuring levels of trust discovered that one’s self-esteem and trust level have been linked to jealousy. Individuals with a low level of self-esteem and trust are more likely to have more extreme and common cases of jealousy.

Facebook usage
Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) created a study that focuses on Facebook and jealousy and if the two connect. Their findings discovered that the amount of time spent on this specific SNS will increase jealousy in an individual (Muise, et al., 2009). Spending a significant time on Facebook may cause a feedback loop to occur after viewing unwanted information. A feedback loop is the viewing of unwanted information on a SNS. This unwanted information causes one to view a specific individual’s page more often. This can then possibly lead to viewing more unwanted information and in return creates more jealousy. It is a constant cycle. “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” (Muise, et al., 2009, p. 443).

**Creeping**

Creeping is a term that simply means Facebook surveillance. An individual that “creeps” is gathering up all the information that is available on Facebook. Muise, et al. (2009) stated, “Persistent surveillance results in further exposure to jealousy-provoking information” (p. 443). However Marshall, et al. (2012) study believes otherwise. They thought that an individual that was viewing their partners Facebook page was a way to reinforce and express their feelings they have of their partner. These researchers discovered that “Facebook surveillance was not only the domain of anxious, jealous individuals or those whose partners were lacking commitment, it was also more prevalent among passionate and love partners” (Marshall, et al., 2012, p. 27). Their results showed that it was not negatively impacting the romantic relationship. It was simply occurring often because of the desire and attraction the one partner has for the other. However, according to a survey conducted by Stern and Taylor their results showed that people tend to spy on their significant other in order to know if they are truly faithful and what they are up to. This
would involve viewing their partners Facebook page to possibly catch them doing something wrong. Stern and Taylor’s study targeted college age students who have a Facebook account. Their research discovered that the majority of the participants did not have a negative experience (being stalked, fake profiles of people, discovering ones partner being unfaithful, etc.) with the SNS and found that these negative experiences were very rare.

Facebook is allowing one to have instant access to ex romantic partners. Before Facebook, people would not typically know what their ex was doing on a daily basis, but now if one has their ex as a friend on Facebook that information may sometimes be broadcasted to them. Greg Bowe (2010) targets specific Facebook rituals such as ones form of PDA (public displays of affection) towards their partner, their relationships status on Facebook, and pictures of the couple in his study. He discovered that relationship status and PDA were a form of possession in order to alert others that those individuals are taken by someone else. According to Bowe (2010) “The ex was also identified as someone being stalked (the one being creeped on), particularly for those who would no longer have reason to contact their previous partner” (p. 66-67). Having an ex partner as a friend on Facebook may create jealousy towards the other partner.

**Research Gap**

The information gathered from these researchers’ studies showed a trend when discussing certain topics. A trend was found among multiple studies that self-esteem is related to jealousy. Multiple studies discovered that individuals who have a low level of self-esteem prove to have an increased level of SNS jealousy. There was also a trend among the amount of time one may spend on Facebook within these researchers’ studies. The amount of time one may spend on Facebook proved to have an effect of jealousy on a romantic relationship.
Bowe (2010) stated that “A gender comparison of how people approach these rituals is something that could yield some interesting results in exploring the feeling rules evident with a modern relationship” (p. 74-75). After searching I have yet to discover a study that focuses on that specific issue. To play off of Bowe’s potential study, I have decided to conduct further research on men and women, who are in a heterosexual romantic relationship, and how often they view their partners Facebook rituals and if it effects the level of jealousy in the relationship. An example would be if ones significant other accepts a friend request from the opposite sex that the other does not personally know. Would the accepting of that friend request make the one partner uneasy and wonder why that particular person is added and if so will it cause jealousy in the relationship? I believe this information is an important gap in research because it will further analyze why jealousy arises in a relationship due to Facebook.

**Methodology**

The quantitative method will be used for my study in order to gather additional data. This method will best suit my study because a survey will reach more of my target audience as opposed to an interview or a focus group. I also believe that the participants will likely be more open and honest about their jealousy issues in their romantic relationship in an online survey than in person. All of my sources, except for one, used the quantitative method in their personal research. This method was successful in the outcome of their research. This approach will allow me to get a large amount of participants. It will also allow these participants to be anonymous when expressing their personal information about Facebook. With the participants being anonymous in the survey will hopefully allow me to gather accurate data.
H1: Viewing a high amount of a romantic partner’s Facebook rituals may cause an increase of jealousy in the relationship.

While gathering research from previous studies, the amount of time one spends on Facebook increase ones jealousy kept occurring in many results. The amount of time one spends on Facebook gives the user the chance to view unwanted information and increases the possibility for jealousy to occur. I am basing this hypothesis off of that discovery and altering it. If one is constantly monitoring their significant others every move on Facebook, from the data gathered from researchers past studies, I believe that this will increase the amount of jealousy in a relationship.

Participants

The target audience for this study will be heterosexual college age men and women who are currently in a romantic relationship. I specially would like to target individuals who are current students at Longwood University. I chose these participants because SNS are a large part of many college students’ lives and the influences it may have on their romantic relationships.

Procedure

The survey questions for my study will center on the SNS of Facebook and their current relationship (see appendix A).

The dependent variable (DV) for my hypothesis is men and women. The independent variable (IV) is the amount of times the individual views their partners Facebook page. Currently, I only have the amount of times the individual views their partners Facebook page,
previous relationships, and the amount of time in the relationship as my IV. As my research progresses I hope to add more IV to my study.

The statistical test I will be using to conduct my data will be correlation. According to Keyton (2011) “correlation allows you to determine if scores on both variables increase or decrease, or if one score increase while the other score decreases” (p. 223). I believe that the DV, the amount of times an individual views their partners Facebook page, will influence whether or not men or women are more jealous in the relationship due to the viewing of these rituals.

These research procedures will help me find data to close my research gap. It will do so by allowing me to further investigate if the jealousy that occurs from this SNS stems from viewing their significant others personal page too often and possibly misinterpreting the message being seen. By the participants I will be surveying and the specific statistical test I will be using, this will assist me in finding the information that is lacking in my research gap.

**Conclusion**

Facebook plays an active role in many peoples’ lives and by conducting this study will allow me, and many others, to further understand how large of a role it plays; specifically on romantic relationships. The correlation will be used to discover whether the increasing viewing has an effect of the amount of jealousy in the relationship. Bringing this issue to light may be beneficial for those college age individuals who do find themselves misinterpreting messages on Facebook which causes jealousy and problems within the relationship.
Bibliography


Appendix A

1. On an average day, how many hours are spent on Facebook?
   a. This research question will allow me to start gathering my information by the amount of time the participant spends on Facebook.

2. On an average day, how many times do you view your romantic partners Facebook page?
   a. This question also relates to the first. Will the amount of time spent on this SNS increase the amount of times one views their partners’ page?

3. How long have you been in your current relationship?
   a. This research question will allow me to determine whether or not the amount of time in the relationship affects the increase or decrease in jealousy due to viewing their partners’ page.

4. Has your partner previously cheated on you?
   a. This question may be a possible motive to why that individual feels the need to constantly view their partners’ page.