

# *Psychology*

## **The Effects of Facebook on Jealousy in Relationships**

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What makes Facebook Facebook? And why are people are so infatuated with it? The word "Facebooking" is a popular expression coined by my generation. Who hasn't heard the phrase "I didn't finish my assignment because I was 'Facebooking' all day?" Facebooking – verb: the act of wasting time for extended hours a day on the Facebook website for no good reason. Why do we believe its okay, or normal, to become completely engulfed in other peoples' social life? It's fun, for one, and its something that has never been done before. Facebook is a remarkable online community that allows people to rekindle old and forgotten relationships, chat with friends, meet new friends, keep tabs on boyfriends, stalk ex-girlfriends, play online games and use as an excuse to get out of doing actual work. Facebook has been a huge hit for social networking since it first launched in 2004. It has grown from a meager 20 million users to 600 million in only six years. A big question, and one we cannot ignore, is how has Facebook impacted relationships? Facebook is invasive and it seems to be structured around the fact that we do not believe in privacy anymore. Where do we draw the line between private and public spheres? Your life is open for everyone to see at anytime. Socializing will never be the same.

I focused my study on how facebook could affect intimate or sexual relationships because of the jealousy it initiates. Numerous articles have been written about the effect of Facebook on relationships, with jealousy being the specific emotion. For example, a newspaper article by Valdes (2009) focused on how time spent on Facebook has and could be ruining marriages. The article focuses on a few couples whose relationships are being torn apart because of Facebook. One newlywed couple is considering a divorce because of Facebook. The husband believes that his wife spends too much time on Facebook, and she isn't sure whether she could give it up for him. Another couple turned to violence because of Facebook. Atlanta Falcons offensive tackle, Quinn Ojinnaka, was arrested because of a fight with his wife, that got out of hand, over a woman he added as a friend on his Facebook account. Another article by Cribb (2010) pointed out how "social network sites such as Facebook have changed the nature of public and private in the sense that much more information is available to individuals about their partners relationships and interactions than they would have with other online or offline methods of communication". Further examples

include an article that called attention to the ambiguous nature of Facebook. Hill (2009) wrote about a woman who was surprised by her boyfriend's new Facebook profile picture: He was kissing a girl on the cheek. The girl stated that "we trust each other. Deep down, I know nothing is going on. But when you first see it, it's like Oh my goodness! Whats going on here?" What is trust then? Cribb believes that Facebook has a "unique ability to stir jealousy and suspicion".

A study done by Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009) looked at the topic of Facebook and jealousy. These researchers were interested exclusively on young relationships and how potential negative outcomes could arise because of Facebook. Their argument was that facebook causes jealousy and negatively impacts romantic and sexual relationships. They also asked if facebook reinforced jealousy in relationships, and examined aspects such as personality and relationship factors that contribute to the experience of jealousy. Additionally, they looked at specific situations, such as self-esteem levels, the level of commitment in relationships and the trait of jealousy. The result found that the trait of jealousy was a significant predictor of Facebook jealousy. When they added personality and relational factors, only trust significantly added to their prediction of Facebook jealousy. Another significant finding was the time spent on Facebook. They found that time spent on Facebook was also a significant predictor of Facebook related jealousy. The purpose of this research is to determine if Facebook does indeed reinforce jealousy in relationships. I predicted that the more trust someone had in their partner/relationship, the less likely they were to experience Facebook related jealousy.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Fifty-two Facebook users filled out the survey (20 male, 32 female). Twenty one percent of the participants were 18-20 years old, 65.4% were 21-23 years old and 13.5% were 24-26 years old. The large majority of the participants were white/Caucasian (80.8%). About half of the participants were single (46.2%), other participants were in a serious relationship (40.4%); some were casually dating another person (7.7%), and the remaining were married (5.8%). All participants were treated ethically (American Psychological Association, 2002).

### **Procedure**

The study was done anonymously through an online survey. The participants were systematically selected from a list of my facebook friends. Every 12th friend on the list was chosen to participate in the study. The participants were informed before they began the study that completion of the survey implied they have given permission to use the data they

contributed. I asked a series of demographic questions and asked a few questions specifically about their relationships status and Facebook use. I used the Facebook Jealousy Scale (see Appendix A), which was developed by the previously mentioned Muise, Christofides and Desmarais (2009) to measure jealousy. The scale consisted of 27 items, measured on a 7-point likert scale, which I altered to be an 8-point likert scale (0, not at all to 7, very likely), that assessed Facebook related jealousy. Sample items include “How likely are you to monitor your partner’s activities on Facebook?” and “How likely are you too check your partner’s Facebook page on a regular basis?”

## **Results**

Responses to the questionnaire were coded as indicated in Appendix A. There was a significant positive correlation between scores on the facebook log measure and the monitor partner on Facebook item ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ). There was also a significant positive correlation between scores on the self report-deep trust measure and the experience jealousy measure ( $r = .32, p < .05$ ). The correlation between the trust in your partner measure and the evoking jealousy through Facebook measure was also significant ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ).

## **Discussion**

The results showed that the more trust you have in your partner the more likely you are to experience Facebook jealousy, and evoke jealousy through Facebook. I interpreted these findings in light of the social desirability principle. I believe that the participants responded in a way that seemed favorable to others. My initial hypothesis was that the deeper the trust you had in your partner the less likely you were to experience Facebook related jealousy, but that was not supported by the results. The results also showed that the more times a day you log onto facebook the more likely you are checking or monitoring your partner’s Facebook. I also wondered if the more times an individual logged onto Facebook the more likely they were to be checking on their partner’s activities. I cannot be sure if they were logging on more to check on their partner or if it is just convenient to do that. Past research, by Muise, showed that certain individuals were more prone to becoming jealous because of Facebook if they had been known to have trait of jealousy. Their findings also showed that time spent on facebook was a significant predictor of Facebook related jealousy. I did not go into as great detail with my research. I had a typo on the online survey for the first few days. I fixed the problem but it may have skewed my results. Further research with the project would be necessary if you would want to know more about the subject. I could ask more comprehensive questions about the trust with your partner because

I was only basing it off of one measure. If I were to do more research I would make sure to be more specific about my questions and collect a larger sample size. I did not get as much data as I wanted. I believe my results could have been more consistent if I had a larger sample.

#### References

- Cribb, Rob. "Facebook Reinvents Jealousy: Social Networking Plants Naggins Seeds of Doubt in Our Relationships." Toronto Star (2010). Print.
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- Valdes, R. (2009). If enough is not enough addicts must learn when to pull the plug. Spending too much time on social media site can destroy a marriage. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, E11.
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## Appendix A

The numbers next to each item indicate how responses to that item were coded for the purpose of data analysis.  
Effects of Facebook on Jealousy

I am conducting a survey on how Facebook may reinforce jealousy in relationships. Your completion of this survey implies your consent to use your data submitted for the purposes of research. The data will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Nothing you say will jeopardize your standing with me, so I ask that you answer the questions with complete honesty, please. Subject numbers will be assigned for each participant to assure your anonymity. The survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Thank you for helping me better understand this issue.

1. What is your gender? (Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Male
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. Female

2. What is your age? (Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Under 18years
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. 18-20 years
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. 21-23 years
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. 24-26 years
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. 27 years and older

3. Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic background?  
(Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Asian
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. Black/African American
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. White/Caucasian
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. Hispanic/Latino
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. Native America
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ F. Multiracial
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_ G. Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ H. Prefer not to answer

4. What is your current relationship status? (Not Facebook status) (Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Seriously dating another person
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. Casually dating one or more partners
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. In an open relationship

- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. Married
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. Divorce/separated
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ F. Single

5. What is current relationship status on Facebook? (Circle on)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Single
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. In a relationship
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. Engaged
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. Married
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. It's complicated
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ F. In an open relationship
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_ G. Widowed
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ H. Separated
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_ I. Divorced

6. On average, how many times a day do you log onto Facebook? (Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. One time
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. 1-3 times
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. 3-6 times
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. 6-9 times
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. 9-12 times
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_ F. 12 times or more

7. On average, how many hours a day do you spend "face-booking"

Example: Checking out others peoples pages, writing on walls, Facebook chatting, using applications etc. (Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Under 1 hour
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. 1-2 hours
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. 2-3 hours
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. 3-4 hours
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. 5 hours or more

8. You have a deep trust in your partner. (Circle one)

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ A. Strongly disagree
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ B. Disagree
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ C. Agree
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ D. Strongly agree
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ E. I don't have a partner

Please be completely honest when answering these next few questions. You will answer how you feel on a 7-point Likert scale. Below are the instructions

for what every point means. Read carefully and type your number (0,1,2 ect.) in the space provided located to the bottom left of the question.

Response scale 0 = Very unlikely, 1 = Unlikely, 2 = Somewhat unlikely, 3 = Neither likely nor unlikely, 4 = Somewhat likely, 5 = Likely, 6 = Very likely.

1. Become jealous after seeing that your partner has added an unknown member of the opposite sex to Facebook. \*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6

Very unlikely

Very likely

2. Be upset if your partner does not post an accurate relationship status on Facebook. \*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6

Very unlikely

Very likely

3. Feel threatened if your partner added a previous romantic or sexual partner to his or her Facebook friends. \*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6

Very unlikely

Very likely

4. Monitor your partner's activities on Facebook. \*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6

Very unlikely

Very likely

5. Become jealous after seeing that your partner has posted a message on the wall of someone of the opposite sex. \*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6

Very unlikely

Very likely

6. Question your partner about his or her Facebook friends. \*

0      1      2      3      4      5      6

Very unlikely

Very likely

7. Feel uneasy with your partner receiving a personal gift from someone of the opposite sex. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

8. Experience jealousy if your partner posts pictures on Facebook of him or herself with an arm around a member of the opposite sex. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

9. Be upset if your partner limited your access to his or her profile. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

10. Be jealous if your partner posts pictures of him or herself with a previous romantic or sexual partner. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

11. Be suspicious about the private messages that your partner sends over Facebook. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

12. Worry that your partner will become romantically involved with someone on Facebook. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

13. Become jealous after seeing that your partner has received a wall message from someone of the opposite sex. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

14. Become jealous if your partner posts pictures of him or herself with unknown members of the opposite sex. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

15. Suspect that your partner is secretly developing an intimate relationship with someone on Facebook. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

16. Worry that your partner is using Facebook to initiate relationships with members of the opposite sex. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

17. Feel jealous if your partner posts pictures of him or herself that are sexually provocative. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

18. Be concerned that someone else on Facebook is attracted to your partner. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

19. Look at your partner's Facebook page if you are suspicious of their activities. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

20. Have a fight with your partner about Facebook. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

21. Check your partner's Facebook on a regular basis. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

22. Worry that your partner is using Facebook to reconnect with past romantic or sexual partners. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

23. Question your partner about his or her Facebook activities. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

24. Add your partner's friends to your Facebook to keep tabs on your partner. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

25. Attempt to use Facebook to evoke jealousy in your partner. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

26. Attempt to gain access to your partner's Facebook account. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely

27. Experience jealousy related to Facebook. \*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Very unlikely

Very likely