

2014

Romantic Relationship Stages and Social Networking Sites: Uncertainty Reduction Strategies and Perceived Relational Norms on Facebook

Jesse Fox

Courtney Anderegg
George Fox University, canderegg@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm_fac

 Part of the [Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons](#), and the [Social Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fox, Jesse and Anderegg, Courtney, "Romantic Relationship Stages and Social Networking Sites: Uncertainty Reduction Strategies and Perceived Relational Norms on Facebook" (2014). *Faculty Publications - Department of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts*. 26.

https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm_fac/26

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication Arts at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Department of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Romantic Relationship Stages and Social Networking Sites: Uncertainty Reduction Strategies and Perceived Relational Norms on Facebook

Jesse Fox, PhD, and Courtney Anderegg, MA

Abstract

Due to their pervasiveness and unique affordances, social media play a distinct role in the development of modern romantic relationships. This study examines how a social networking site is used for information seeking about a potential or current romantic partner. In a survey, Facebook users ($N=517$) were presented with Facebook behaviors categorized as passive (e.g., reading a partner's profile), active (e.g., "friending" a common third party), or interactive (e.g., commenting on the partner's wall) uncertainty reduction strategies. Participants reported how normative they perceived these behaviors to be during four possible stages of relationship development (before meeting face-to-face, after meeting face-to-face, casual dating, and exclusive dating). Results indicated that as relationships progress, perceived norms for these behaviors change. Sex differences were also observed, as women perceived passive and interactive strategies as more normative than men during certain relationship stages.

Introduction

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNSs) have become an integral medium for communicating within and about interpersonal relationships.¹ The SNS Facebook is ubiquitous, with more than 1.2 billion active monthly users worldwide, and more than 800 million users accessing the site daily.² Thus, it is unsurprising that recent research indicates that SNSs play a crucial role in the enactment of relationships.³⁻⁷ Further, a growing number of long-term relationships are initiated on SNSs.⁸

Through posts, pictures, and relationship status changes, SNSs give users the ability to broadcast every detail of their lives to a vast audience. This flow of information allows users to accomplish significant information seeking and uncertainty reduction about potential or current partners, often without their knowledge.⁹⁻¹² The terms for these behaviors—"Facebook stalking" and "creeping"—still indicate a negative social stigma, however.^{9,13} At this time, it is unclear how normative users perceive uncertainty reduction behaviors via SNSs to be.

Identifying individuals' relational norms is an important step in ascertaining how SNSs exert social influence on romantic relationship processes. Individuals develop norms and expectations for romantic behaviors based on observation, social experiences, and media consumption. These norms then shape subsequent relational behaviors.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Although

some research has begun to probe how romantic relationships escalate via SNSs,^{3,7,9} little is known about what users perceive as normative relational information-seeking behaviors on SNSs, and whether these change depending on the stage of the relationship.^{3,7,9} These relational norms, in turn, drive users' expectations about how the relationship should progress and what expectations they hold for their partners' behaviors in the semi-public domain of Facebook. Thus, this study was designed as a first step to identify the uncertainty reduction strategies implemented on Facebook, and how normative these strategies are perceived at different stages in romantic relationships.

Information Seeking and Uncertainty Reduction

Relational uncertainty stems from ambiguity regarding the nature of the relationship, such as not knowing if the partner is serious about the relationship or if the relationship has a future.^{17,18} Individuals may question whether their partners wish to maintain, escalate, or de-escalate the relationship. If an individual is unsure about the partner's feelings or intentions, the individual may be more likely to engage in uncertainty reduction behaviors.^{17,18} Because of the emotional investment we make in developing and maintaining a romantic relationship, uncertainty may emerge at any point during the relationship.

Berger and Calabrese elaborated three types of strategies for addressing uncertainty: passive, active, and interactive.¹⁹

Passive strategies involve unobtrusively observing a target to garner information. On SNSs, this may include reading the target's posts or sifting through his or her pictures. Active strategies include seeking information about a target without directly addressing the target. On SNSs, this could be identifying who the target is linked to on the site and using those "friends" for information. Interactive strategies involve seeking information directly from the target. This could be accomplished on SNSs by commenting on the target's page or sending the target a private message.

Some studies have examined the use of uncertainty reduction strategies in different online contexts. On a popular SNS in the Netherlands, all three strategies were used to reduce uncertainty about an online friend. Passive strategies were used most often, followed by interactive and active strategies.²⁰ A separate study found that online daters use interactive strategies most frequently, but passive strategies are also common.²¹ Emerging adults report relying on Facebook to research potential romantic partners, employing passive strategies (e.g., reading the target's profile), active strategies (e.g., identifying common friends through Facebook's visible connections and asking them about the target), and interactive strategies (e.g., sending a friend request to the target).⁹ Facebook also affords the execution of secret tests in which an individual strategically enacts a behavior to assess the partner's feelings and reduce uncertainty about the status of the relationship.²²

These studies indicate that in modern relationships, online information seeking is a relatively common behavior, although some aspects are stigmatized. Persistent online monitoring through SNSs, also known as interpersonal electronic surveillance,¹² is often perceived negatively. The common parlance for these behaviors—"Facebook stalking" and "creeping"—indicates that users consider these behaviors as socially inappropriate, or at least inappropriate to admit.^{9,11–13} Indeed, reported engagement in these behaviors seems to vary widely based on the sample and the method used.^{3,10–12} Although people may be loath to admit their own behavior, another important way to assess the influence of these behaviors is to determine how common people perceive them to be.

Romantic Relationships and Norms

Many theories suggest that romantic relationships develop in stages. Typically, these models suggest a progression wherein individuals meet, become acquainted, establish romantic interest, date, and then enter into an exclusive relationship that escalates in commitment over time.^{23–26} Over this course of development, intimacy increases²⁷; as such, perceptions of normative behavior change and differentiate from other types of relationships.²⁸ Moreover, men's and women's relational expectations do not always align.^{29–31} For instance, sexual intimacy is not seen as normative behavior between two people who just met, but becomes more normative at later stages in a romantic relationship.

One significant change in modern relationships is that online communication enables partners to get acquainted without having met in person. Traditional models have typically conceptualized and described relational initiation as a face-to-face meeting,^{26,27} but in current environments, individuals may meet or get acquainted online before they ever meet face-to-face. Because this phase is understudied in

terms of relationship progression and expectations, we chose to examine the norms that exist before individuals meet face-to-face, after they meet face-to-face, once they are casually dating, and once they are exclusively dating.

Another reason to focus on these early stages is that individuals often experience uncertainty about appropriate behavior within the relationship during this time.^{17,18} Perceived norms and expectations about romantic relationships thus become an important influence in how people behave.³² For example, adolescents rely on the experiences of others in their group or social network to form their expectations of romantic relationships and whether they seek them.^{15,33,34} Perceived relational norms also provide indications as to when it is acceptable to engage in relational behaviors such as disclosing intimate personal information,^{35,36} expressing feelings about the relationship,³⁷ and initiating sexual activity.^{29,38}

Perceptions of normative behavior can transfer to online settings as well,^{39,40} although limited research has parsed apart what norms and expectations have emerged regarding romantic relationships and SNSs. In this study, we decided to investigate the SNS Facebook to understand what people believe is "normal" online behavior regarding potential or realized romantic partners. Specifically, we were interested in identifying the behaviors that individuals perceive as normative per relationship stage and relating those online behaviors to uncertainty reduction strategy types. Based on these interests, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: How do relational uncertainty reduction strategies manifest on Facebook?

RQ2: Do perceptions of normative SNS relationship behaviors vary according to relationship stage?

RQ3: Do perceptions of normative online relationship behaviors vary by sex?

Method

Sample

Participants were recruited from a large Midwestern university and offered course credit for completing the survey. The final sample ($N=517$) included 251 male and 265 female Facebook users (one did not report sex) ranging in age from 18 to 47 years ($M=20.99$, $SD=3.54$) who identified as white ($n=383$; 74.1%); black/African/African American ($n=27$; 5.2%); Eastern Asian/Asian-American ($n=25$; 4.8%); Central Asian/Asian-American ($n=20$; 3.8%); Latino/a/Hispanic ($n=14$; 2.7%); multiracial ($n=34$; 6.6%); and other ($n=10$; 1.9%). Four chose not to identify race/ethnicity. Participants identified themselves as heterosexual ($n=496$; 95.9%), bisexual ($n=3$; 0.6%), gay/lesbian ($n=13$; 2.5%), and asexual ($n=2$; 0.4%); three did not report. Approximately half of the participants were currently in a relationship ($n=257$; 49.7%).

Procedure and measurement

Based on previous research,^{9,20–22,41} a list of potential information-seeking behaviors on Facebook was compiled. To assess the validity of these items further, they were pilot tested by different participants ($N=35$) from those who participated in the main study.

In the main study, participants were presented with a list of behaviors to consider how likely (1 = “very unlikely” to 7 = “very likely”) they thought it was that individuals would engage in that behavior during four possible stages of a developing romantic relationship. Participants reported on expected uncertainty reduction behaviors during four stages: before they had met the target face-to-face; after they had met face-to-face; when they were dating nonexclusively; and when they were in an exclusive relationship.

Results

Using the definitions of passive, active, and interactive strategies elaborated by Berger and Calabrese,¹⁹ two coders (one male, one female) independently coded the behaviors for strategy type. Perfect agreement was achieved ($\kappa = 1.00$). The list of information-seeking behaviors by strategy type is shown in Table 1. Correlations can be found in Table 2. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities for each strategy type by stage can be found in Table 3.

For all hypotheses, repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run with sex as a between-subjects factor and relationship stage as a within-subjects factor. Age and relationship status (0 = “not in a relationship”; 1 = “in a relationship”) were examined as covariates. Means and standard deviations for all uncertainty strategies can be found in Table 1.

For passive uncertainty reduction strategies, age was not a significant covariate. Relationship status was a significant covariate for relationship phase, $F(2.63, 1,341.55) = 3.73$, $p = 0.015$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$. Mauchly’s test revealed a violation of sphericity, $\chi^2(5) = 141.22$, $p < 0.0005$, so the Huynh–Feldt correction was examined ($\epsilon = 0.88$). Relationship phase predicted the perception of passive strategies, $F(2.63, 1,341.55) = 10.34$, $p < 0.0005$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$. Pairwise comparisons demonstrated that there were no differences between passive strategies before or after face-to-face interaction, but

passive strategies were perceived as significantly more common during those phases than during dating and exclusive dating phases (which were not significantly different from each other.) Sex also predicted the perception of passive strategies, $F(1, 511) = 11.22$, $p = 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$. Pairwise comparisons indicated that women found passive strategies more acceptable than men at every stage. Means, standard deviations, and comparisons by sex can be found in Table 3. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(2.63, 1,341.55) = 1.80$, $p = 0.15$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.00$.

For active uncertainty reduction strategies, neither age nor relationship status were significant covariates. Mauchly’s test revealed a violation of sphericity, $\chi^2(5) = 98.45$, $p < 0.0005$, so the Huynh–Feldt correction was examined ($\epsilon = 0.89$). Relationship phase predicted the perception of active strategies, $F(2.66, 1,364.63) = 292.49$, $p < 0.0005$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.36$. Pairwise contrasts revealed that active strategies were significantly different across each stage. They were lowest before the individual had interacted face-to-face and highest in exclusive dating relationships. Active strategies also dipped from the post-face-to-face meeting to the dating stage. Sex did not predict the perception of active strategies, $F(1, 511) = 0.52$, $p = 0.47$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.00$. The interaction effect was significant, $F(2.66, 1,364.63) = 3.99$, $p = 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$. None of the pairwise contrasts emerged as significant, however.

For interactive uncertainty reduction strategies, neither age nor relationship status were a significant covariate. Mauchly’s test revealed a violation of sphericity, $\chi^2(5) = 112.08$, $p < 0.0005$, so the Huynh–Feldt correction was examined ($\epsilon = 0.90$). Relationship phase predicted the perception of interactive strategies, $F(2.69, 1,363.95) = 8.93$, $p < 0.0005$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$. They were lowest before the individual had interacted face-to-face and highest in exclusive dating relationships. Interactive strategies also dipped from the post-face-to-face meeting to the dating stage. Sex also predicted the perception of interactive strategies, $F(1,$

TABLE 1. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES ACROSS RELATIONSHIP PHASES

	<i>Before face-to-face</i>		<i>After face-to-face</i>		<i>Dating</i>		<i>Exclusively dating</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Passive</i>	5.65	1.35	5.72	1.21	5.23	1.38	5.51	1.32
Look through pictures	5.82	1.45	5.89	1.31	5.48	1.44	5.89	1.37
Scroll through timeline posts	5.66	1.52	5.79	1.30	5.36	1.45	5.75	1.46
Repeatedly check their page	5.54	1.49	5.58	1.37	5.10	1.60	5.50	1.53
Determine their relationship status	5.60	1.61	5.64	1.42	4.96	1.69	4.89	1.99
<i>Active</i>	3.08	1.54	3.99	1.46	3.70	1.49	5.28	1.54
Friend their friends	3.51	1.70	4.54	1.57	4.13	1.64	5.40	1.59
Friend their family	2.62	1.70	3.43	1.74	3.27	1.75	5.17	1.72
<i>Interactive</i>	4.44	1.29	5.31	1.16	4.82	1.32	5.72	1.33
Like profile picture	5.14	1.56	5.67	1.34	5.08	1.53	5.90	1.41
Like any picture	4.80	1.63	5.41	1.38	4.94	1.56	5.81	1.46
Comment on picture	4.46	1.68	5.36	1.35	4.84	1.50	5.77	1.45
Like a status	5.09	1.55	5.70	1.25	5.05	1.47	5.84	1.43
Comment on status	4.44	1.66	5.34	1.36	4.75	1.58	5.73	1.46
Post on their wall	4.07	1.76	5.14	1.44	4.55	1.63	5.71	1.48
Tag them in a status	3.40	1.73	4.82	1.55	4.28	1.62	5.63	1.56
Tag them in a picture	3.48	1.70	5.02	1.48	4.61	1.64	5.84	1.48
Send a private message	4.70	1.65	5.27	1.45	5.02	1.55	5.51	1.64
Chat online	4.85	1.57	5.43	1.37	5.10	1.50	5.51	1.63

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Sex	—														
2. Age	-0.16***	—													
3. Relationship status	0.05	-0.11*	—												
4. Pre-FTF passive	0.12**	0.03	-0.03	—											
5. Pre-FTF active	-0.07	0.03	-0.03	0.00	—										
6. Pre-FTF interactive	0.01	0.03	-0.01	0.49***	0.52***	—									
7. Post-FTF passive	0.12**	0.02	0.04	0.77***	-0.08	0.37***	—								
8. Post-FTF active	-0.08	0.01	0.07	0.10*	0.51***	0.36***	0.20***	—							
9. Post-FTF interactive	0.01	0.00	0.06	0.61***	0.11*	0.54***	0.77***	0.50***	—						
10. Dating passive	0.17***	0.07	0.07	0.60***	-0.03	0.26***	0.61***	0.12**	0.48***	—					
11. Dating active	-0.01	0.08	0.03	0.14***	0.38***	0.18***	0.19***	0.45***	0.25***	0.43***	—				
12. Dating interactive	0.12**	0.10*	0.03	0.51***	0.04	0.33***	0.53***	0.17***	0.53***	0.78***	0.58***	—			
13. Exclusive passive	0.09*	0.01	0.10*	0.54***	0.01	0.32***	0.62***	0.20***	0.54***	0.44***	0.17***	0.40***	—		
14. Exclusive active	0.08	0.00	0.05	0.47***	0.06	0.23***	0.49***	0.33***	0.48***	0.37***	0.28***	0.36***	0.61***	—	
15. Exclusive interactive	0.10*	0.03	0.05	0.65***	-0.08	0.33***	0.69***	0.14**	0.62***	0.51***	0.16***	0.50***	0.79***	0.76***	—

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

508)=4.20, $p=0.04$, partial $\eta^2=0.01$, with women using more interactive strategies overall. The interaction effect was significant, $F(2.69, 1,363.95)=4.34$, $p=0.007$, partial $\eta^2=0.01$. There were no differences between men and women before or after face-to-face interaction, but women found interactive strategies significantly more appropriate than men while dating and in exclusive relationships.

Discussion

The behaviors enacted on Facebook when seeking information about a possible or realized romantic partner can be categorized into the three uncertainty reduction strategy types as defined by Berger and Calabrese: passive, active, and interactive.¹⁹ These findings indicate that perceptions of normative Facebook behavior vary across stages of relationships. Additionally, although men and women did not differ in their perceptions of active strategies, women believed passive strategies to be more common across all relationship stages. Women also believed interactive strategies were more common during the dating and exclusively dating stages than men did.

The results of this study show that normative and acceptable behaviors online change as the stage of a relationship changes. Passive information seeking strategies, such as looking through a target's pictures and scrolling through his or her timeline posts, were found to be more normative before a couple begins dating than after a romantic relationship has been established. This pattern may occur as potential partners do not know each other very well at first, and it may seem inappropriate to employ other strategies, such as directly asking the target, given the lack of familiarity between parties. Given passive strategies can be accomplished privately and relatively easily through SNSs, they may be optimal at early stages of the relationship wherein investment and intimacy are typically low.

Active strategies, including friend requesting an interest's friends or family members, were found to be least normative before face-to-face interaction and most acceptable once individuals were exclusively dating. This finding is not surprising considering that meeting the parents and other network members is often perceived as an indicator of commitment to the relationship and potential for longevity. Therefore, engaging in this behavior before deemed appropriate may be seen as intrusive or as a sign that the partner is too obsessed with the relationship^{30,42} and may lead to negative outcomes.

One unexpected finding concerning active strategies was the dip in normativity from face-to-face interaction to non-exclusive dating. One reason why these types of behaviors may be less acceptable during this phase may be because of the implications of casual dating, wherein neither partner is expected to invest too heavily in the relationship. If one partner starts reaching out to a romantic interest's friends or family while nonexclusively dating, he or she may be seen as clingy or too attached. By the time the relationship is exclusive, this may seem like a natural act of network integration as the relationship becomes more committed and serious.

Interactive strategies on Facebook include behaviors such as chatting, posting a message on the timeline, and tagging an individual in a status or picture. Similar to active strategies, interactive strategies were found to be least acceptable before

TABLE 3. MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RELIABILITIES FOR UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES BY SEX AND ACROSS RELATIONSHIP STAGE

	<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
<i>Before face-to-face</i>							
Passive ($\alpha=0.91$)	5.48	1.40	5.81	1.28	502.58	-2.80†	0.005
Active ($\alpha=0.78$)	3.18	1.53	2.96	1.54	513	1.62	0.11
Interactive ($\alpha=0.93$)	4.43	1.26	4.45	1.31	513	-0.22	0.83
<i>After face-to-face</i>							
Passive ($\alpha=0.93$)	5.58	1.28	5.86	1.13	498.92	-2.65†	0.008
Active ($\alpha=0.71$)	4.11	1.42	3.87	1.50	514	1.82	0.07
Interactive ($\alpha=0.95$)	5.30	1.19	5.33	1.14	514	-0.31	0.76
<i>Nonexclusive dating</i>							
Passive ($\alpha=0.92$)	4.99	1.39	5.45	1.32	513	-3.84	<0.0005
Active ($\alpha=0.71$)	3.71	1.54	3.69	1.44	512	0.22	0.83
Interactive ($\alpha=0.96$)	4.66	1.37	4.97	1.25	513	-2.73	0.007
<i>Exclusive dating</i>							
Passive ($\alpha=0.85$)	5.39	1.40	5.62	1.23	496.59	-1.98†	0.05
Active ($\alpha=0.85$)	5.16	1.64	5.40	1.43	496.59	-1.76†	0.08
Interactive ($\alpha=0.97$)	5.59	1.43	5.85	1.22	491.75	-2.15†	0.03

†For these values, the Levene's test was significant, and adjusted values are reported.

face-to-face interaction and most acceptable once individuals were exclusively dating. Because exclusive relationships typically aim to foster intimacy and togetherness, these types of behaviors can help to reach goals and can serve as a supplement to the intimacy experienced face-to-face. Additionally, these interactive strategies are often accomplishing multiple goals at once: not only do they reassure the individual of the partner's investment or interest, but they may also serve as public displays of affection and communicate the state of the relationship to other individuals on Facebook.^{3,9}

Participants perceived strategies differently across the relationship stages. Passive strategies were considered most normative in early stages, perhaps because SNSs are cited as a good method for screening potential partners and determining whether they are a viable match before individuals invest effort in dating.⁹ Once the couple started to date casually, participants felt that uncertainty reduction strategies in general were less common. Although this may seem counterintuitive, this period represents the transition between casual interaction and romantic potential to actually testing the viability of the romance. Thus, this may represent a time when uncertainty has temporarily decreased, as the romantic intent of both partners is now apparent. Additionally, the dating context may make partners feel more comfortable enacting offline strategies rather than relying on Facebook. Another explanation is that while dating casually, partners may want to avoid giving the partner or the partner's network the impression that they are overly interested or invested in the relationship, so they may avoid active or interactive strategies. During exclusive dating, strategies again become more common, supporting previous research that has demonstrated that dating couples often use Facebook to deal with uncertainty.^{10,22} Although exclusive dating represents a form of commitment, among young adults, these relationships are often turbulent and uncertain.²⁴ Thus, Facebook may serve as a way to address relational uncertainty about the seriousness of the relationship, the presence of mate competi-

tion, or the existence of other relational threats such as disapproving friends.

Interestingly, sex predicted the perception of passive strategies and interactive strategies at certain relationship stages. This finding reflects previous research that found that women use more passive strategies than men in romantic initiation,⁴³ perhaps because although women are expected to seek and value romantic relationships, they are not expected to be aggressive in pursuing them. Sex role stereotypes may also explain why men use fewer interactive strategies than women once they have started dating. Previous research has noted that social networks often pressure men and women into adhering to gendered norms in their romantic relationship,⁴⁴ and on Facebook, users are aware that their actions are visible to others. Because men are expected to remain stoic and inexpressive about romantic relationships and to appear not too invested in any one romantic partner, they may avoid interactive strategies. Women, on the other hand, may feel pressured to interact because they are expected to nurture and actively maintain relationships.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷ Future research may investigate the role of gender or sex role stereotype endorsement on relationship behaviors on Facebook.

Several limitations need to be addressed in relation to this study. First, only two of the items that were validated in the pilot testing met the criteria for active strategies. Other behaviors should be identified in future research. For example, one study found that some romantic partners manipulate elements of the environment to test relationships (e.g., setting up a fake Facebook profile to flirt with the partner), but such behaviors were rare.²² Future investigation should further probe the scope of active uncertainty reduction strategies on SNSs. Another limitation was that this study was restricted solely to Facebook. With the growing popularity of SNSs such as Twitter and Instagram,⁴⁸ those sites should also be investigated. Finally, these norms were observed among emerging adult college students. It is likely that other young adults or other age groups have different information seeking

and uncertainty reduction practices on SNSs. For example, adolescents' behaviors may be contingent on whether they can use an SNS without parental oversight.

This study demonstrated that the normativity of SNS information seeking behavior varies by relationship stage, and that men and women maintain different perceptions. There are several important implications for these findings. First, perceived relational norms guide behaviors. Regardless of whether or not a behavior is psychologically or relationally healthy or productive, if users perceive it as the norm, they may be more likely to engage in it. For instance, although it is a common behavior,¹⁰ studies have shown clear downsides to the passive strategy of "Facebook stalking" in many situations.^{11,41} Future research should test existing models of relational norm development to investigate how social norms develop on specific SNSs, how they integrate with offline norms, as well as how they influence actual online and offline relational behaviors across relationship stages.

Second, our findings support existing research on differences in men's and women's expectations and behaviors in romantic relationships, both offline^{29,43,46} and on SNSs.^{3,49-51} These differences may cause tension or strain in heterosexual relationships. For example, a woman may perceive friending her partner's family members as normative, but the man may find it abnormal and feel upset at the perceived intrusion. Future research should examine perceived norms dyadically to see whether both heterosexual and nonheterosexual partners' norms align, or whether this technological incompatibility is a source of conflict in relationships.⁵²

Third, these findings have demonstrated that one corporation's Web site has succeeded in becoming a normative part of romantic relational processes in college students' relationships. Thus, any research examining romantic relationships among this group needs to consider the role and influence of SNSs, as they have been shown to have considerable offline effects as well.^{11,41} Given that emerging adulthood is a crucial time for testing and establishing models for romantic relationships that will influence individuals for the remainder of their lives, it is important to assess how the use of SNSs may shape users' romantic relationship behaviors in the long term. For example, if users are accustomed to being able to reduce uncertainty and screen dating partners online, what happens when they do not have this information available? Are users similarly capable of flirting to gauge a potential partner's interest, asking a partner important or intimate questions, or having deep conversations face-to-face, or have they developed a reliance on SNSs and other computer-mediated technologies for uncertainty reduction? Going forward, it is crucial that as communication technologies develop and evolve, we continue to examine how our relationships are developing and evolving within and around them.

Note

Researchers may contact the first author at fox.775@osu.edu for a copy of the measures used in this study.

Author Disclosure Statement

No competing financial interests exist.

References

1. Stafford L, Hillyer JD. Information and communication technologies in personal relationships. *Review of Communication* 2012; 12:290-312.
2. Facebook. Statistics. <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/> (accessed Apr. 1, 2014).
3. Fox J, Warber KM. Romantic relationship development in the age of Facebook: An exploratory study of emerging adults' perceptions, motives, and behaviors. *CyberPsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2013; 16:3-7.
4. Carpenter CJ, Spottswood EL. Exploring romantic relationships on social networking sites using the self-expansion model. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2013; 29:1531-1537.
5. Hand MM, Thomas D, Buboltz WC, et al. Facebook and romantic relationships: intimacy and couple satisfaction associated with online social network use. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2013; 16:8-13.
6. McEwan B. Sharing, caring, and surveilling: an actor-partner interdependence model examination of Facebook relational maintenance strategies. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2013; 16:863-869.
7. Papp LM, Danielewicz JD, Cayemberg, C. "Are we Facebook official?" Implications of dating partners' Facebook use and profiles for intimate relationship satisfaction. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2012; 15:85-90.
8. Hall JA. First comes social networking, then comes marriage? Characteristics of Americans married 2005-2012 who met through social networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2014; 17:322-326.
9. Fox J, Warber KM, Makstaller DC. The role of Facebook in romantic relationship development: An exploration of Knapp's relational stage model. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships* 2013; 30:772-795
10. Fox J, Warber KM. Social networking sites in romantic relationships: Attachment, uncertainty, and partner surveillance on Facebook. *CyberPsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2014; 17:3-7.
11. Marshall TC. Facebook surveillance of former romantic partners: associations with postbreakup recovery and personal growth. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2012; 15:521-526.
12. Tokunaga RS. Social networking site or social surveillance site? Understanding the use of interpersonal electronic surveillance in romantic relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2011; 27:705-713.
13. Lyndon A, Bonds-Raacke J, Cratty AD. College students' Facebook stalking of ex-partners. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking* 2011; 14:711-716.
14. Eggermont S. Television viewing, perceived similarity, and adolescents' expectations of a romantic partner. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 2004; 48:244-265.
15. Furman W, Winkles JK. Predicting romantic involvement, relationship cognitions, and relationship qualities from physical appearances, perceived norms, and relational styles regarding friends and parents. *Journal of Adolescence* 2010; 33:827-836.
16. Weisskirch RS, Delevi R. "Sexting" and adult romantic attachment. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2011; 27:1697-1701.
17. Knobloch LK, Solomon DH. Measuring the sources and content of relational uncertainty. *Communication Studies* 1999; 50:261-278.
18. Knobloch LK, Solomon DH. Information seeking beyond initial interaction: Negotiating relational uncertainty within close relationships. *Human Communication Research* 2002; 28:243-257.

19. Berger CR, Calabrese RJ. Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research* 1975; 1:99–112.
20. Antheunis ML, Valkenburg PM, Peter J. Getting acquainted through social network sites: testing a model of online uncertainty reduction and social attraction. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2010; 26:100–109.
21. Gibbs JL, Ellison NB, Lai CH. First comes love, then comes Google: an investigation of uncertainty reduction strategies and self-disclosure in online dating. *Communication Research* 2011; 38:70–100.
22. Fox J, Peterson A, Warber KM. Attachment style, sex, and the use of secret tests via social networking sites in romantic relationships. Paper presented at the 2013 Multi-Level Motivations in Close Relationship Dynamics Conference of the International Association for Relationship Research, Louisville, Kentucky, USA.
23. Duck SW. (1977) *The study of acquaintance*. Farnborough, United Kingdom: Saxon House.
24. Furman W, Wehner EA. (1994) Romantic views: toward a theory of adolescent romantic relationships. In Montemayor R, ed. *Advances in adolescent development, Vol. 3: Relationships in adolescence*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, pp. 168–195.
25. Furman W, Wehner EA. (1997) Adolescent romantic relationships: a developmental perspective. In Shulman S, Collins WA, eds. *Romantic relationships in adolescence: developmental perspectives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 21–36.
26. Knapp ML. (1978) *Social intercourse: from greeting to goodbye*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
27. Altman I, Taylor DA. (1973) *Social penetration: the development of interpersonal relationships*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
28. Fuhrman RW, Flannagan D, Matamoros M. Behavior expectations in cross-sex friendships, same-sex friendships, and romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships* 2009; 16:575–596.
29. Aubrey JS, Harrison K, Kramer L, Yellin J. Variety versus timing: gender differences in college students' sexual expectations as predicted by exposure to sexually oriented television. *Communication Research* 2003; 30:432–460.
30. Bartoli AM, Clark MD. The dating game: similarities and differences in dating scripts among college students. *Sexuality & Culture* 2006; 10:54–80.
31. Waller MR, McLanahan SS. "His" and "her" marriage expectations: determinants and consequences. *Journal of Marriage & Family* 2005; 67:53–67.
32. Cialdini RB, Reno RR, Kallgren CA. A focus theory of normative conduct: recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 1990; 58:1015–1026.
33. Brown BB. (1999) "You're going out with who?" Peer group influences on adolescent romantic relationships. In Furman W, Brown BB, Fiering C, eds. *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 291–329.
34. Friedlander L, Connolly J, Pepler D, et al. Biological, familial, and peer influences on dating in early adolescence. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 2007; 36:821–830.
35. Bochner AP. (1982) On the efficacy of openness in close relationships. In Burgoon M, ed. *Communication yearbook 5*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, pp. 109–124.
36. Knobloch LK, Carpenter-Theune KE. Topic avoidance in developing romantic relationships: associations with intimacy and relational uncertainty. *Communication Research* 2004; 31:173–205.
37. Simon RW, Eder D, Evans C. The development of feeling norms underlying romantic love among adolescent females. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 1992; 56:29–46.
38. DeLamater J. (1987) Gender differences in sexual scenarios. In Kelley K, ed. *Females, males, and sexuality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 127–139.
39. Mathwick C. Understanding the online consumer: a typology of online relational norms and behavior. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 2002; 16:40–55.
40. Mesch GS, Beker G. Are norms of disclosure of online and offline personal information associated with the disclosure of personal information online? *Human Communication Research* 2002; 36:570–592.
41. Fox J, Osborn JL, Warber KM. Relational dialectics and social networking sites: The role of Facebook in romantic relationship escalation, maintenance, conflict, and dissolution. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2014; 35:527–534.
42. Spitzberg BG, Cupach WR. What mad pursuit? Obsessive relational intrusion and stalking related phenomena. *Aggression & Violent Behavior* 2003; 8:345–375.
43. Clark CL, Shaver PR, Abrahams MF. Strategic behaviors in romantic relationship initiation. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 1999; 25:709–722.
44. Baxter LA, Dun T, Sahlstein E. Rules for relating communicated among social network members. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships* 2001; 18:173–199.
45. Balswick JP. (1988) *The inexpressive male*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
46. Burnett R. (1987) Reflection in personal relationships. In Burnett R, McGhee P, Clarke D, eds. *Accounting for relationships: explanation, representation and knowledge*. New York: Methuen, pp. 74–93.
47. Canary DJ, Emmers-Sommer TM. (1997) *Sex and gender differences in personal relationships*. New York: Guilford Press.
48. Pew Research Internet Project. Social media update 2013. www.pewinternet.org/2013/12/30/social-media-update-2013/ (accessed Apr. 1, 2014).
49. Mansson DH, Myers SA. An initial examination of college students' expressions of affection through Facebook. *Southern Communication Journal* 2011; 76:155–168.
50. McAndrew FT, Shah SS. Sex differences in jealousy over Facebook activity. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2013; 29:2603–2606.
51. Muise A, Christofides E, Desmarais S. "Creeping" or just information seeking? Gender differences in partner monitoring in response to jealousy on Facebook. *Personal Relationships* 2014; 21:35–50.
52. Fox J. (in press) The dark side of social networking sites in romantic relationships. In Wiederhold BK, Riva G, Cipresso P, eds. *The psychology of social networking: Communication, presence, identity, and relationships in online communities*. Berlin, Germany: Versita.

Address correspondence to:

Dr. Jesse Fox
3084 Derby Hall, 154 North Oval Mall
School of Communication
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH 43210-1339

E-mail: fox.775@osu.edu