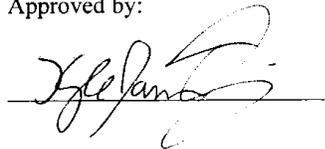SURVIVAL OF THE DIGITAL:

NETWORKING ROMANCE

BY

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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Survival of the Digital: Networking Romance

A Content Analysis of Computer- Mediated Communication and Uncertainty Reduction Theory

in Regards to the Maintenance of Romantic Relationships and Social Media

This thesis seeks to understand how social media, through computer-mediated communication (CMC), impacts modern day potential or romantic relationships. The general premise is that people experience greater uncertainty about their relationships and partners after seeking information from social media due to two key unintended consequences: lack of privacy and nonverbal communication. The author used this reasoning to conclude that modern day romantic relationships are significantly harder to maintain compared to relationships prior to the pervasiveness of social media. Through an analysis of related articles and extensive interviews, there is evidence that social media has negative consequences on romantic relationships. However, some evidence shows that it can have a neutral or even slight positive effect depending on how one uses social media within their relationship. Furthermore, most people use social media as a means to connect with friendships not romance, which has been positive. The results of this study show an individual's intimate relationships are clearly affected when the individual is highly involved with social media. The following discussion highlights the use and impact of other computer-mediated communication devices and implications for future studies.

Introduction

Technology has impacted our everyday lives in many beneficial ways, like the speed of communicating, the accessibility of information, and the proximity of distance seeming closer.

There is no doubt that technology has made significant contributions to modern day communication. Technology is great for the big picture, but with interpersonal communication, is it really productive? Being a college student, the author frequently witnessed the impact of social media and it's effect on romantic or potential relationships. The subject thesis evolved from the author's observation of a study group she was in along with three other young women. During the group, two of them were on Facebook, while the other was texting on her cell phone. These girls all had romantic interests. One of the girls on Facebook was interested in a guy that had no idea that she even existed, but managed to find him online, and to put it appropriately, "lurked" through his profile. The other girl on Facebook, was in a committed relationship, but spied on her partner and found that he was still in contact with his ex-girlfriend. She was dealing with some negative feelings. Lastly, the girl on her cell phone was anxiously waiting for a response back from her romantic interest, and when he finally did respond, his vague answer made her more anxious than she was before he did so. The author saw this scenario as an issue that needs to be addressed.

People have become dependent on computer-mediated communication as a means of managing their uncertainty. Relationships are put in jeopardy by using social media as a means to uncover unknown information about their romantic interests. This paper will detail the popularity and issues of CMC, Berger's Uncertainty Reduction Theory (1975) and the effects of information seeking, and lastly compare the impact that technology has had on modern romantic relationships in the Digital Age. The author suggests that romantic relationships are harder to maintain in the Digital Age because social media has increased uncertainty through the availability of information thereby introducing an abundance of negative consequences that were nonexistent in prior dating society.

CMC Theories and Evidence:

It is well known that the way people communicate has been rapidly changing as technology becomes more advanced. Along with face-to-face communication (FtF), computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been a common means of communicating since e-mail became prevalent in the 1990s. (Tidwell & Walther, 2002) According to Spitzberg, CMC is defined as any text-based interaction facilitated through digitally-based technologies. This includes the Internet; cellular phone text, instant messaging (IM), and email and listserv interactions. The process of exchanging messages is at some point computerized. (Spitzberg, 2006).

Today, people rely heavily on the Internet to communicate. It is convenient, fast, and easily accessible. "Between 2000 and 2005 Internet usage grew an average of 160% worldwide—North America alone now has 68% of its population using the Internet, representing almost a quarter of worldwide usage (Internet World Stats, 2005). According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2000, hereafter ''Pew''), every day close to 50 million Americans log onto the Internet, send or read email, and perform some activity on the World Wide Web. According to studies of U.S. youth, about half go online daily, about 85% live in homes with a computer, and one third have used their cellular phones to send text messages (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Rideout et al., 2005)." (Spitzberg, 2006) "In recent years, the use of online dating or online personals services has evolved from a marginal to a mainstream social practice. In 2003, at least 29 million Americans (two out of five singles) used an online dating service (Gershberg, 2004); in 2004, on average there were 40 million unique visitors to online dating

sites each month in the U.S. (CBS News, 2004)" (Ellison, et al, 2006) "Individuals who use online matchmaking systems examine each other's profiles, where they are exposed to one another's interests and attitudes about a variety of topics prior to discussion (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). They start electronic dialogues to explore and convey their mutual interests, using in-house chat or e-mail systems, and encourage or discourage affinity in response (Fiore & Donath, 2004)." (Walther et al., 2010) The Internet has also been a tool for unacquainted individuals to meet and create friendships and romance. "Unacquainted individuals negotiate friendships (Parks & Floyd, 1996) and romantic attachments on the basis of their topical discussions in online forums (Baker, 1998) or online role-playing games (Parks & Roberts, 1998; Williams, Caplan, & Xiong, 2007), where interpersonal interaction is notably common (Klimmt & Hartmann, 2008). Even unacquainted gamers whose avatars battle one another exchange a considerable proportion of socio-emotional communication together (Pe˜na & Hancock, 2006)." (Walther et al., 2010) The Internet is clearly a vital tool towards communicating with others.

Evidently, CMC has become a popular topic in recent years, but it is important to understand how CMC functions and it's impact on messages, especially in romance. Since CMC is a broad concept, this thesis will briefly highlight how people formulate impressions, draw on nonverbal factors, and the way it is all processed. CMC is divided into three theories, social identification/de-individuation (SIDE Model), Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT), and Hypersonal perspective. The first theory is Lea & Spears's Social Identification/ De-individualization Model (SIDE Model).   SIDE explains how receivers interpret different messages. This part of CMC allows individuals to make assumptions and impressions when accessing online information about a romantic partner. SIDE specifies when impressions will be positive or negative. When people feel as if they are a part of something, they have positive

relations with others; and when a person is independent from a group, they have negative relations with others. People want to feel a sense of belonging, which is why people have an unruly addiction to the Internet and social media.(Walther & Tidwell, 1995) This reasoning evolves from Internet use being positively related to loneliness and depression because of the lack of "real" contact. (Spitzberg, 2006) Some people have shown slight increases in loneliness and depression over time, and decreases in social and family involvement with increasing Internet usage. (Kraut et al., 1998)

After understanding how CMC shapes impressions, it is paramount to discuss the next theory of CMC, Walther's Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT). SIPT explains how people form opinions and get to know each other based on online textual interactions without nonverbal cues, and how they manage relationships in CMC. (Walthers, 2002) SIPT predicts that CMC users adapt to the medium and find ways to overcome the cue systems by personalizing online communication, through emoticons (or "smileys"), and time stamps (Ramirez et al., 2002). In a content analysis of approximately 3,000 messages, they found that 13.2% contained emoticons, intentional misspellings, punctuation, and other CMC-based textual graphics. Walther & D'addario, 2001) With that in mind, SIPT assumes that if communicators interact over time, they will actively develop social relationships regardless the purpose of their interaction. (Walther & D'addario, 2001) SIPT claims that the exchanges between users is just as effective as FtF. "The lack of nonverbal cues in CMC limits the scope of exchanges, which then require more messages and more time to bring relational effects in CMC to the same level as in comparable FtF relationships." (Walther & D'addario, 2001) Time will create a deeper relationship, but time can also be a distraction. One concern is that time spent on the Internet is time away from more ''real'' activities. ''Almost two thirds of online teens (62%) think that the Internet does keep

young people from doing more important things'' (Pew, 2001, p. 31). Discontented youths appear to ''spend more time using media than their most highly contented peers'' (Rideout et al., 2005, p. 24). A study of chat room users found almost 32% ''considered that use of the Internet interferes with other activities'' (Peris et al., 2002, p. 47).'' (Spitzberg, 2006) This idea that CMC over time can be just as effective as FtF expands into the last CMC theory, Hypersonal Perspective.

Hypersonal perspective is an extension SIPT, but focuses more on the processing of information sought and given online. It proposes that individuals that engage in processes to reduce uncertainty are prone to making exaggerated characteristics based on limited information. (Ramirez et al., 2002). This suggests that CMC can become hyperpersonal because a sender has communicative advantages over FtF interaction by strategically presenting one self to others. Online environments require purposeful and strategic disclosure of personal information to reduce uncertainty so that the individual can overcome the lack of information. (Mesch & Beker, 2010). The ability to control what information one reveals online creates uncertainty on how much to disclose, to whom am I disclosing this information, how do I want to present myself? The more freedom and responsibility one has, the more risk involved. With the Internet, there is a plethora of online exposure to display ones life story, especially with Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

To fully understand the thesis discussion, "uncertainty" must be defined. Uncertainty derives from the inability to anticipate and explain behaviors and attitudes. This means that a

person with uncertainty has insecurities about how their relational interactions will proceed (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005). More specifically, *relational uncertainty* is the amount of confidence one has in their perceptions of involvement within thier relationships. (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) According to URT, uncertainty derives from three different attributes within interpersonal relationships: the self, the partner, and the relationship. Self uncertainty involves an individual's doubt about their own involvement in the relationship. (e.g., how certain am I about how I feel about this relationship?)." (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002) This occurs when people are not able to describe, predict, or explain their own attitudes or behavior (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In these situations, the questions of 'Why did I do that?' or 'Why did I say that?' might cross our minds. This type of uncertainty demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the self because of the uncertainty an individual experiences in adopting attitudes and behaviors when achieving their own goals. (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Partner uncertainty is the second focus of URT. This involves doubts about a partner's involvement in the relationship evidenced by an inability to predict one another's attitudes and behaviors, an overall lack of knowledge about the partner's values, and preferences. (e.g.,''How certain am I about how much my partner wants to pursue this relationship?'') (Knobloch, 2006).

Finally, the last aspect of relationship uncertainty involves doubts about the nature of the relationship itself separate from either self or partner uncertainty (''How certain am I about the definition of this relationship?''). The initial characteristics of relational uncertainty center around the pervasiveness of a partner's attitudes and personality characteristics (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), but the status of the relationship itself may be clear (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). This is because people draw "on normative role expectations for impersonal relationships (Miller & Steinberg, 1975) and schemas for the beginning stages of relationship development

(Honeycutt, Cantrill, Kelly, & Lambkin, 1998) to guide their behavior" (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). On the contrary, when partners are progressing towards an interpersonal relationship, relational uncertainty increases because they can no longer depend on acquaintanceship norms to determine appropriate behavior (e.g., Baxter, 1987; Solomon, 1997) and because doubts about mutual commitment to the relationship become important. (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002) Relationship uncertainty is different than other uncertainties because it focuses on the dyad as a unit. (Berger, 1988) Berger argued that relationships exchange information to reduce uncertainty in order for survival. (Berger, 1975) For further explanation, Knobloch & Solomon understand relational uncertainty as "an umbrella construct that stems from self-focused, partner-focused, and relationship-focused doubts within intimate associations (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005)." Their research suggests that self and partner uncertainty concentrates on three content areas: (a) people's desire for the relationship, (b) their evaluation of its worth, and (c) their goals for its development. While, relationship uncertainty includes four content areas: (a) norms for appropriate behavior within the relationship, (b) mutuality of feelings between partners, (c) the definition of the relationship, and (d) the future of the association (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). In sum, they claim that relational uncertainty is rather a particular form of doubtfulness because it "entails the questions that are specifically tied to dyadic involvement (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005)." The premise in relationship uncertainty, is that communication has to be equal. URT claims, "in order for a relationship to continue, it is important that the persons involved in the relationship consistently update their fund of knowledge about themselves, their relational partner, and their relationship." (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999)

URT (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) proposes to predict and explain how people develop relationships and form impressions of each other during initial interactions, based on self-

disclosure. The main assumption of URT is that an individual's chief concern when encountering with a stranger is to reduce uncertainty between both participants in order to increase predictability about each other's behaviors. (Westerman, 2008) When an individual is experiencing uncertainty, that individual reduces doubt by seeking information relating to that particular situation. (Westerman, 2008) "Uncertainty leads to information seeking behavior, as individuals are motivated to monitor other people's behavior in social situations and engage in a variety of strategies to find out more about others, such as covert observation, asking questions, or communication to encourage others to reveal more about themselves (Berger,1979)." (Gibbs et al., 2011) Communication, whether it is FtF or CMC, plays a key role in this process, because it allows strangers to reduce their uncertainty by gaining greater knowledge and mutual understanding (Gibbs et al., 2011). Networking sites like Facebook, Myspace or any online profile account have made seeking information about people significantly easier.

Uncertainty and Information Seeking

As we know people seek-information about others to manage their uncertainty, particularly through CMC. Information seeking is a goal-driven, multifaceted activity. It is the notion of striving to obtain desired information about a target (Ramirez, et al., 2002). CMC has and will continue to create new and efficient ways to seek information about their uncertain target. According to Ramirez, there are four types of information strategies to reduce uncertainty, specifically in CMC: interactive, active, extractive, and passive. Interactive strategies are direct interactions between the communicator and target. People that employ interactive strategies may interrogate a target, disclose information to receive reciprocal disclosure, or attempt to relax the

target to acquire information. (Ramirez et al., 2002) Another strategy is active. Active strategies acquire gathering information from other individuals and the environment, but without direct interaction with the target. This may involve obtaining knowledge from a third party information source, through email exchanges, chats, or search engines with individuals that know your target (Ramirez et al., 2002). The third strategy type is extractive, and is characterized by electronic postings, messages and archives, that draw upon comments written by targets. (Ramirez et al., 2002) Extractive strategies are primarily executed through social media, which can provide insight and information on a target without the target's knowledge (Ramirez et al., 2002). Last are passive strategies. Passive strategies are characterized by acquisition of information about a target through inconspicuous observation. (Ramirez et al., 2002) Social media also provides a means for passive strategy communicators. People can view online forums, by reading messages posted to a central area, and reviewing "buddy profiles"(Ramirez et al., 2002). This strategy has made it acceptable for people to "lurk" through others' information.

Along with the four strategies, Ramirez also describes five factors influencing strategy selection, they include: communicator-related, situation, goal-related, information-related, and technology-related. (Ramirez et al., 2002) The communicator-related factors reflect the communicator's pattern of information seeking based on his or her background or history. (Ramirez et al., 2002) Situation/context-related factors are caused by external influences, such as amount of time to acquire information (Ramirez et al., 2002). The third factor is goal-related. These are influenced by the differences in the types of goals being pursued that may "constrain or expand the strategies that may be employed to fulfill them (Ramirez et al., 2002)." Next are information-related factors. These include the characteristics of the preferred information that influences on how an individual seeks that information. This will influence the amount of

information obtained and its importance to the individual. (Ramirez et al., 2002) Last are technology-related factors. This is an information-seeking process that is used through the use of an information and communication technologies. (Ramirez et al., 2002) These five factors may come in different intervals. There are two types of intervals, initial, which determine the initial selection; and emergent or continued, which determine any alterations to fulfill the goal (Ramirez et al., 2002). Uncertainty comes from these initial factors, which drive our need to seek information. The second we are curious; we find an approach to achieve our goals. When the approach fails, an individual will either change that approach and substitute it with additional ones or disregard the approach completely in favor of another (Ramirez et al., 2002). This continuation and persistence are the emergent intervals that evolve from initial efforts and develop during the information gathering process (Ramirez et al., 2002). There are a variety of strategies and influences that fluctuate uncertainty among relationships.

Uncertainty, Information Seeking and Social Media

Information-seeking strategies are an important influence to the impression formation processes and relationship development. (Ramirez et al., 2002) Individuals inevitably consider the risks that pertain to getting involved into a relationship, which can be directly related to self-disclosure. (Gibbs et al., 2011) In today's society, we seek information about other people primarily through CMC. With resources like Facebook and Myspace, when we are feeling uncertain about our relationship, our first reaction is to look online the individual's profile page. "The number of American adults who use social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn exploded from 8% in 2005 to 46% in 2009 (Lenhart, 2009). Systems such as

Facebook create value for users by closely tracking individual behavior, and subsequently advertising this information to others. In exchange for free services, users share large amounts of potentially sensitive information. Amazingly, individuals offer this information willingly, even when privacy and rules of ownership are in constant flux (see Sullivan, 2009; Walters, 2009a, 2009b). Although some online systems allow users to determine which information about them is tracked or shared, others do not. Furthermore, simply navigating to various Web sites leaves trails of information behind (Gross, 2009), sometimes despite protective measures available in popular Web browsers (Gomez, Pinnick, & Soltani, 2009)." (Cheshire al et. 2010) In the past few years, social media has been integrated into our everyday communication. As beneficial as it has been to effectively communicate with friends and families, it has been detrimental to romance.

Romantic relationships are not easy to maintain. After the "honeymoon phase," relationships take work; especially when trust issues are involved. Researchers implicated that relational uncertainty increases people's use of testing their partner to gain information when they are managing changing levels of intimacy. (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002) Social media provides an easy access of information when a relationship becomes a struggle. Relationships are always changing, which is why social media increases uncertainty. Planalp and Honeycutt (1985) state that there are certain events that increase uncertainty within an established relationship. Therefore, the need to continue reducing uncertainty about another person does not vanish once you "get to know" that person. It is a process that is always changing, both increasing and decreasing levels of uncertainty. (Planapl & Honeycutt, 1985) Social media may be used as a substitute to FtF communication, which can misconstrue what may have been clear in a FtF conversation. Akin proposes a concept of communicatory utility that supports this idea.

"The concept of *communicatory utility* (Atkin, 1972) presents additional insights into the resources from which online conversants may draw for the purpose of relational management. Atkin (1973) proposed that when people anticipate talking with others interpersonally about some topic, they seek information from the mass media in order to be more knowledgeable about the topic (Walther et al., 2010)."

Since people anticipate information to direct conversation, it is important to understand the depth people read into messages. An important concept of communication is that individuals rely on knowledge about their environment to enhance comprehension of messages. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) People depend on different categories of information such as: role-based expectations, familiarity with the partner, awareness of emotion, procedural knowledge, and an understanding of the context (Berger, 2002). When they lack knowledge in one of those categories they experience uncertainty (Knobloch, 2006). When they experience this uncertainty they may find understanding conversation (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005), and producing messages more challenging because of the lack of information. The lack of information can complicate message production in two ways it may interfere with a person's planning of the messages, and it may threaten how the message will be produced. (Knobloch, 2006) Therefore a lack of information inhibits individuals from adequately expressing themselves. However had the individuals had a more thorough understanding of the context of a communication, either received or sent, the chance of misunderstanding would have been reduced.   A lack of information might also create difficulties when individuals decide upon appropriate or attempt to anticipate their partners' response. (Knobloch, 2006). "When people produce messages under conditions of relational uncertainty, they risk embarrassing themselves (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), losing privacy (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000), calling attention to issues of

incompatibility (Baxter, 1987; Solomon, 1997), disrupting the status quo (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune), and damaging the relationship (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985)." (Knobloch, 2006) This ties into the idea of relationship talk. Relationship talk is the content of messages that reflexes the condition of the romantic relationship between partners (Acitelli, 1988; Baxter, 1987; Baxter & Bullis, 1986). This provides individuals in relationships to negotiate their relationship development and address significant events. In regards to social media, if a couple discusses their issues online, relationship talk can threaten the face of interactants, and jeopardize the status of the relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005).

Contact through social media is passive and therefore an indirect means of communication. As stated previously, passive strategies occur when information seekers gather information without the knowledge by their target (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). In an article by Tidwell & Walther's, the authors expand on Berger's three passive strategies. The first passive strategy is the low-key observation of a targeted individual in a situation in which the target interacts with, and reacts to others (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). This is when a person goes on Facebook, and "lurks" through their targets profile. The second type is social comparison, where a target is observed as it interacts with online acquaintances. The "lurker" draws comparisons based off of the similarities of the targets to the others (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). This takes place when one views someone's Facebook wall for clues as to how that person interacts with others. The last passive strategy seeks to identify the target's normal behaviors by looking at them in less hindering situations (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). This involves candid photos and comments on the targets walls; the target cannot control these situations. When a couple is struggling, they may employ passive strategies because they cannot communicate their uncertainties to one another. "Empirical research also suggests that people experiencing

relational uncertainty tend to avoid communicating about sensitive issues. Individuals are less willing to talk about the status of their relationship when they are unsure about the mutuality of feelings between partners (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Similarly, people tend to avoid expressing jealousy (Afifi & Reichert, 1996), to avoid communicating about unexpected events (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b), and to avoid talking about private topics (Afifi & Burgoon, 1998; Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004) when they are experiencing relational uncertainty." (Knobloch, 2006)

The volatile nature of romantic relationships combined with complex message exchanges and the confusion created by passive and indirect social media communication make modern day relationships hard to maintain. Each of these factors results in uncertainty increase. First, uncertainty increase can affect the beliefs about the relationship itself. This is because social changes in one belief derive from the changes in others. Second, uncertainty increase could produce strong emotional effects,produced by events that interrupt goal-oriented behavior. If an event interrupts normal behavior but achieves goals it will produce positive emotions; if it intrudes goals it will produce negative emotions. (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985) A primary tenet of this thesis is that social media deprives its users of privacy and nonverbal communication and consequently has had a negative influence on romantic relationships.

Social Media and Romantic Relationships

Communication is key to a healthy relationship, because it provides us with knowledge about the relationship. According to Spitzberg, knowledge is represented by cognitive attributes that enhance our planning, uncertainty reduction, familiarity, expertise, and other indicators of

comprehension (Spitzberg, 2006). Knowledge can be ranked by measurements of recognized capabilities. Spitzberg states that a person may know a lot about computer, but have little knowledge in how to compose a message where there is full understanding between the sender and receiver. (Spitzberg, 2006) The more knowledge we have, the more we are skilled in that category. If an individual wants the relationship to be more successful, they have to communicate with their partner. This means communicating FtF, with occasional use of CMC. Social media is an indirect form of communicating, which can only lead to harm for potential and current romantic relationships.

Potential Relationships

People are attracted to one another for varied reasons. Usually, the initial attraction is physical, and subsequently the attraction grows as we discover more about our potential prospect. If you see someone that 'catches your eye,' the first instinct is to ask the question, 'who is this person?' You are curious, interested and intrigued by this individual. At one time, the next step would have been to either find a common acquaintance to introduce the two of you or to boldly introduce yourself. However, in the modern age, rather than getting to know the individual personally, it is customary to use social media to see if they are worth pursuing.

Social media presents two main concerns to a potential relationship involving privacy: self-presentation and self-disclosure. Although it may be voluntary, social media denies privacy to its users. A third party can look at someone's pictures and find out information about a potential romantic interest making it possible to prepare what to say and how to respond to their interests. Without asking, it is possible to assess a user's relationship status. Needless to say, this

does not take in account that the information may be inaccurate or outdated. An individual's online presentation has a major influence as to the type of person who might find them interesting. On the other hand it may make them unattractive to those they want to attract. Self-presentation strategies are important during relationship initiation, because individuals use as others will use this information to decide whether to pursue a relationship. (Cheshire al et, 2010) In person, a potential interest may seem wild, carefree, and rebellious, but they may have nothing on their profile page to reflect what one believes as their reputation. This may be a turn off to the communicator towards their target. An individual's perception has control over his or her own personal information on the Internet. Control over one's own information is synonymous with information privacy control: "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others." (Westin, 1967, p. 7) Because the target has the ability to control the amount they disclose online, this can lead to misrepresentation. Online environments give individuals more control over their self-presentation, and therefore greater opportunities to engage in misrepresentation. (Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001) This control allows a potential partner to disclose as little or as much information as they please. The amount that you are learning about your potential partner may not be sufficient.

Self-disclosure is the amount of unknown information that an individual reveals about themselves to others. By discovering the information that their target discloses online, they feel closer to their target (Ellison, N., et al, 2006). The problem with self-disclosure and the lack of privacy with social media is that when people are seeking out information about their potential partner; they are going to end up memorizing interests and confirming relationship statuses.

People do this early on so that they know whether this person is worth pursuing, but the misrepresentation can put forth false information.

Self presentation and self disclosure in social media can mislead and may harm a communicator when seeking information about their target because of the amount of information can fluctuate whether or not to pursue their target. Since social media is a type of CMC, there are not any non-verbal cues to understand how the "real" person. The communicator creates an impression of the target based solely on assumptions, the basis of which is a profile page. This may set unrealistic expectations for the potential prospect. Online systems can fall below users' expectations causing false, misleading, or incomplete information. They can also fail to protect information and services from potentially malicious others causing viruses and hackers to access information. (Cheshire al et. 2010) Information on a profile page is likely to present an unrealistic illusion.   Whether or not the information on a profile page is deceptive, the limited scope of the information will not create an accurate portrayal of the individual.   It is natural that users of CMC make inferences from the information they gather about online profiles and observations. Relationship implications come from social knowledge and nonverbal cues gathered from conversation. This information obtained creates expectation, which humans naturally extract meaning from the messages conveyed by other individuals. (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005) Knobloch and Solomon expand on these expectations develop in their article. "To clarify how cognitive structures and interaction cues work in tandem to support relational inferences, consider the process by which people comprehend letters, words, and sentences in written form (e.g., van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Certainly the marks on a page are essential inputs into discourse processing. At the same time, however, the top-down application of syntactic and semantic rules facilitates people's ability to recognize letters and words. As readers progress

through a text, they formulate a mental model of the discourse, which not only directs their attention to relevant interpretations of a passage but also suppresses alternative meanings. Thus, people rely on both existing knowledge and developing expectations to decode written discourse (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005)." Basically people have to take what they already know about their potential interest, and dissect the information that they find out about online to develop these expectations. The expectations implanted in the communicators head, then will take the information they find online to try to communicate with their potential interest. If the information is false, then an increase of uncertainty will occur causing a disrupting in their expectation and have a difficult time continuing conversations. Relational uncertainty can impede individuals' attempts to make sense of conversation, and disrupt their expectations about appropriate behaviors within interactions. (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005)

Besides the fact that expectations created by CMC increase uncertainty, there are many other ways that social media increases uncertainty in potential relationships. First, it is hard to get to know someone when communication is limited to interactions online. The way a person feels when they communicate FtF compared to CMC is completely different. CMC may give a communicator a feigned sense of control over encounters making them feel able to change themselves in some way. Research suggests that when individuals expect to meet a potential dating partner for the first time, they will alter their self-presentational behavior in accordance with the values desired by the prospective date (Rowarrm Cunningham, & Druen, 1998). Even when interacting with strangers, individuals tend to engage in self-enhancement. (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000) In doing so the communicator is not being true to his or herself. Ultimately, this practice of changing to please others or to make a positive impression increases the communicator's self doubt or self-certainty. "Previous research has found that online dating

participants engage in a process of rewriting their profiles so they can be more desirable to potential partners. This also questions the credibility of others' identity claims while recursively applying these rules to their own self-presentation. (Gibbs et al., 2011) The concept of changing your interests to impress someone else is giving a superficial start to the relationship. The relationship is also superficial if the communicator notes that the target's profile picture is more attractive, because they will want to pursue them more, even if the picture is altered. The fact that they are basing whether to pursue them off of a picture means that the relationship has no meaning. When assessing personal information in Facebook profiles, individuals trusted the claims of attractiveness more when others told them, than they did to self-proclamations of attractiveness. (Walther et al., 2009)

Current Relationships

Social media does not just harm potential relationships; it truly puts a burden on current relationships. As we have discussed, we seek information because we are uncertain. When a person in a relationship or just ended a relationship, and experiences the feelings of jealousy and distrust, the person is likely to utilize social media to its fullest. Jealousy is a combination of thoughts, emotions, and actions triggered by perceptions of threat, specifically, to the romantic nature of the relationship (Guerrero, 1998). In Afifi & Reichert's article, they demonstrate jealousy through Pfeiffer and Wong's three-dimensional conceptualization of jealousy using cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Cognitive jealousy includes paranoid thoughts about the behavior of one's partner. (Afifi & Reichert, 1996) When one speculates a partner is cheating, one becomes full of emotional jealousy and feelings of uncertainty. White and Mullen

(1989) proposed six jealousy-related emotions: (1) *anger,* which includes emotions such as hate, disgust, annoyance, and rage; (2) *fear,* which includes anxiety, worry, and distress; *(3) sadness,* which includes depression and hopelessness; (4) *envy,* which includes resentment and begrudging; *(5) sexual arousal,* which includes lust and desire; and (6) *guilt,* which includes regret and embarrassment (Guerrero, 1998). These emotions cause trouble with the last type of jealousy; behavioral jealousy (Afifi & Reichert, 1996). Social media only enhances behavioral jealousy because it allows one partner to spy on the other According to Guerrero, there are eleven ways to handle jealousy, the first six are ways by directly communication or avoid communicating with the partner. *Expression* of *negative affect* is made up of nonverbal expressions of jealous-related emotions. *Integrative communication* includes trying to problem-solve. *Distributive communication* is when you yell or act rude towards your partner. *Avoidance/ denial* is when you close off all communications and deny your feelings. *Active distancing* includes giving your partner dirty looks, and finally, *violent communication threats* involves engaging in physical violence. The next five do not always involve direct communication. First, *surveillance behavior,* this is when you spy on the partner, and looking through their possessions and social media. *Compensatory restoration* strategies are when you try to make yourself more appealing to the partner, like sending flowers. *Manipulation attempts* involve manipulating the partner's emotions. *Rival contacts* involve communicating with the rival and possibly warning the person to stay away from the partner. Last, *violent behavior* includes throwing a chair, or physically hurting them. (Guerrero, 1998) Studies show the more uncertainty in a relationship, the greater the probability one or both of the partners will experience jealousy (Afifi & Reichert, 1996). Therefore, it is likely that one or both of the partners will practice one or more of the

aforementioned surveillance behaviors, especially with social media allowing such easy access to check up on the partner.

A jealous person or one who has the tendency to clandestinely seek information about a partner through social media may also misread the social media information. Walther and Parks (2002) present a concept of "warranting" as a tool to understand how users verify others' online identity cues (Ellison, N., et al, 2006). Gibbs et al. continue on this idea, and claim that the more important the uncertainty, the more motivated they will be to validate the information about others before opening up to them in order to reduce uncertainty about others' identity claims (Gibbs et al., 2011). Online social media does not reduce uncertainty, as a person would think. There are three reasons. First, the information that is disclosed online can result in threats (Gibbs et al., 2011). This is if you see your partner in pictures with people you do not approve. Second, online profiles can result in the exposure of information to unintended audiences from third parties posting information on your profile. If you make an excuse or lie to your partner, and then the truth is discovered on the social media pages of mutual friends (Gibbs et al., 2011). Last, individuals face risk from the misrepresentation. The more one reveals, the easier it is for others to agree; a recent study found that the revelation of private information in one's Facebook profile enabled others to obtain knowledge about the target person and use it to create a sense of homophily in subsequent interaction (Hancock et al., 2008). Self-disclosure may be dangerous because others may use this information to lie about their own disclosures (Gibbs et al., 2011). The lack of privacy makes it extremely accessible to draw conclusions based off of being misrepresented. Since CMC is the popular means of communicating, people use social media to communicate with their partners. CMC means there is an absence of nonverbal cues to enhance comprehension of messages.

Knobloch & Solomon discuss two different types of messages, relational and content. *Relational messages* allude to the implied meanings that define the relationship status. Meanwhile, *content messages* are defined as the actual meanding of the words that encompass explicit information about the relationship. (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005) This means that there are two ways to process the information. In the article, studies revealed that verbal and nonverbal involvement cues influences a person's perceptions of the intensity of relational messages, but those cues do not help distinguish the type of exchanges. (Knobloch & Solomon, 2005) Messages have different connotation depending on the relational context, history, and situations. Therefore, if it is difficult to process information when in person, with verbal and nonverbal cues, then it follow that it is only be that much more difficult when they those cues are absent. Numerous studies on the nature of CMC conclude that computer-mediated communication differs from face-to-face (FtF) communication because the nonverbal cues are absent in CMC. When these cues are not available, the messages that the individual is trying to convey are misinterpreted. Without nonverbal tools, an individual cannot understan the mood of a message, communicate effectively, or demonstrate dominance. (Walther & Tidwell, 1995) Nonverbal behavior usually reflects general intentions, so observers believe that they are less controlled (Walther & D'addario, 2001). This is why people rely so heavily on nonverbal behaviors, because it helps them understand and interpret messages when they are unclear. Visual cues have a greater impact than verbal messages alone, on the interpretation of emotions in FtF communication and especially in the case of mixed messages. (Walther & D'addario, 2001) Nonverbal cues make communication easier. Emoticons, (or "computerized smileys"), only help messages to a certain extent (Walther & D'addario, 2001). When the message is mixed, positive verbal messages with a negative emoticon may be misinterpreted. (Walther & D'addario, 2001)

According to Leathers (1986), inconsistencies between nonverbal cues and verbal meanings are said to be ambiguous and problematic for successful communication. If so, the affective meaning of mixed messages should be unclear or prompt an interpretation of sarcasm. Since the absence of nonverbal cues in social media can lead to misinterpretations of messages, an individual would experience an increase of uncertainty in their relationship (Mesch, G. S. & Beker, G., 2010).

With lack of privacy and nonverbal cues, the individual will make assumptions, misinterpret messages, and be misrepresented. If doubts about a relationship exist, social media is not the advised way to reduce the uncertainty. This is because users in online environments feel that they need and are more willing to disclose personal information to reduce uncertainty and create trust (Mesch, G. S. & Beker, G., 2010). Studies have shown that individuals disclose significantly larger amounts of personal information in CMC than in FtF communication with the use of self-disclosure relying on URT (Walther, 2002). "Studies on teens with a profile in social networking sites (such as Facebook and Myspace) found that 56% posted their photo, 38% their first name, and 81% their city of residence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Among college students, the percentage of disclosure of real names was much higher (Tufecki, 2008)." (Mesch, G. S. & Beker, G., 2010) Since people are more willing to expose themselves online, there is going to be more information to increase their uncertainty. As we have discussed, relational uncertainty predicts the way people express jealousy (Afifi & Reichert, 1996), and the way they communicate about unexpected events (Knobloch, 2006). If an individual is experiencing jealousy, they will look at their online profile to check up on their partner. Although they presume that the more information they access the more certainty they will feel, the information ends up increasing their uncertainty level leaving themselves at risk for future consequences. An

individual can fear that their partner is withholding information or question whether they are revealing honest information. If one person discloses information, it is normal for their partner to also share information. Individuals put themselves at risk if they reveal detailed information in response to an ambiguous conversation to their partner. (Gibbs et al., 2011) Checking up on your partner through social media is way of hiding behind your insecurities. For example a partner is still communicating to an "ex", an individual will make assumptions based on their insecurities (e.g. 'do they still have feelings for them?' 'Are they cheating?'). It can get to a point where the individual will question their partner and over-analyze situations. Most commonly, people will misinterpret information because they are misrepresented online. On the other hand, a person may closely control what they disclose online, and this can hurt a relationship, more than help. "Online dating participants report that deception is the "main perceived disadvantage of online dating" (Brym & Lenton, 2001, p. 3) and see it as a commonplace: A survey of one online dating site's participants found that 86% felt others misrepresented their physical appearance (Gibbs et al., 2006). A 2001 research study found that over a quart of online dating participants reported misrepresenting some aspect of their identity, most commonly age (14%), marital status (10%), and appearance (10%) (Brym & Lenton, 2001). Perceptions that others are lying may encourage reciprocal deception, because users will exaggerate to the extent that they feel others are exaggerating or deceiving (Fiore & Donath, 2004)." (Ellison, N., et al, 2006)

Method

Participants

To examine the logic behind relational maintenance through social media, the author personally conducted 50 interviews over a two-week period of three different demographics: college students, older adults, and therapists. This included 35 college students, 7 Adults with professional experience, and 9 therapists that work with college students.

Apparatus

The equipment and tools for collecting data consisted of my iPhone's voice memo recording application, phone conversations with self, hand recording. Also, the questionnaires and interview recording I sent and communicated through e-mail.

Recruitment Procedures

Approximately half of the students interviewed were well-acquainted friends. The other students interviewed were chosen at random. These university students consented to answer some questions about social media and romantic relationships when asked. The reason for the college student demographic was because they are part of the generation which social media affects most. Also, being a college student, the accessibility and ease for conducting the most interviews would obtain the primary focus of the thesis. Interest in comparing dating in the Digital Age to the baby boomers is the reason professional adults were my second demographic. This group needed to be specific, preferably dated before the impact of technology, and has kids that utilize CMC. I was recommended by an advisor to interview one of the adults. The other adults were family members and friends of author's family. Therapists were my last demographic.

Therapists gave more insight and an outside perspective on modern day romantic relationships. The therapists targeted were those who personally work with college student. Campus resources were utilized, and the author personally asked if she could interview some therapist through our counseling and psychology services. They set me up in a room for a three-hour time slot, where nine therapists volunteered their time to answer my questions. (See Appendix)

Data Collection Procedures

The author created specific open-ended questions for each group to get general opinions on how each class felt about social media and its' impact on romantic relationships. Each group was asked around six or seven questions. The author recorded all of the interviews on my cell phone through the voice memo, or had them fill out a questionnaire. Each group was asked specific questions (See Appendix). Students were asked general questions about how they utilize social media, how their partner utilized social media, and do they find it effective towards their relationship. The author went around campus and asked students, both strangers and acquaintances, to answer these questions. Every student voluntarily answered. Thirty-four of the thirty-five interviews were recorded on the iPhone's voice memo application, then immediately emailed to myself. One of the interviews was on the phone and hand-recorded. The Adults were spread out. One adult, the author interviewed personally. Four adults returned my questionnaire. The remaining two were asked the questions over the phone, and hand recorded their answers. The author asked them questions about their dating experiences as a college student, their kids, and the impact of social media. (See Appendix) The author asked these questions to understand in a broader sense how much social media has influenced romance. The last demographic were

the therapists. All the therapists interviewed volunteered their time. The author asked them about the problems they encounter with their students. She wanted to know from a medical standpoint whether the impact of social media was truly negative.

Findings

As we have seen, social media has a strong influence in modern romantic relationships. Information seeking and uncertainty management go hand in hand, but social media has affected every stage of the relationship. Dating prior to social media, one never knew who was going to call and, without caller ID, if the phone rang, who was on the other end, there was no anticipation of a text message, and no one could "lurk" online for you to see what you might be doing. In today's world, after a break up, it is easy to see what your "ex" is doing. That it makes it difficult to heal from the relationship.

For the most part my hypothesis was supported by the data. All three demographics agreed that social media has a negative impact to modern day romantic relationships.

Students

It is important to understand how much social media is utilized in our communicating world, particularly among college students. Out of the 34 students interviewed, my research indicated that all of them use their cell phones and social media on a daily basis to communicate with their partners. They use social media for many reasons, the most common is "checking up on people" through Facebook. This includes seeing what their partner is doing, updating

themselves on others lives, looking through pictures, and seeking information about a person they didn't know personally. Most students feel disconnected if they do not utilize social media, and believe it is the "natural yet unnatural" way to find out information about a potential or current partner.

Students reported looking through old photos to see what the subject they were viewing used to look like and speculate what the person might be like based on their candid shots. Many believe that there are no lies on Facebook, and 'lurking' through profiles is a way to protect themselves and avoid embarrassment, when determining whether to actually pursue a potential partner. Some students, in relationships, had their partner's passwords, which seemed to reinforce the relationship bond and create a stronger trust between the partners despite a possible loss of privacy.

Social media allows discrete observation, and as discussed earlier, a passive approach to obtaining third party information. For this reason many students enjoy using social media to seek information. It is easy to use and accessible. Social media is the social norm, and since the majority of people use social media, it is a convenient way of communicating with others. It has the potential to reach multiple people in a way that other technologies cannot; it allows people to respond quickly. Students feel that it is easier to just post on someone's wall than to actually ask in person. This ease of communicating also causes information to spread quickly. Students enjoy the ease of keeping up with current events, entertainment, and sports. Social media is a great marketing tool. Students use it to promote radio shows, news articles, and other events going on in the community. They can control the amount of information that is being released; it is their form of self-expression. The control obtained through social media allows students to participate

as much or as little as they wish. For students who are shy listing a status provides a means of self-expression as well as a way for people to get to know them better.

The last question I asked the students was 'Does social media have a positive or negative affect on romantic relationships? Why or why not?' Almost all of them said it had a negative effect for the following reasons: lack of privacy, inspires jealousy, can be misleading, and increases your insecurities. Most of the students did not like how everything about their relationship is open to the public. People find it annoying and immature when they see their friends publicize their affection through social media. The lack of privacy strains a current relationship or past relationships. Whatever is out on social media, it is out for the public to see. Students admitted to the fact that the information they see can be bothersome. One student claimed that it "drives them crazy" seeing posts from an ex. Another student claimed viewing her partner's activities blurs privacy boundaries because of the information disclosed. Occasionally the converse is true. One student said she went into her partner's email, using his password, and saw an email from their ex. She read it because she was curious. At first, she was upset and furious; but then relieved because no secrets were hidden anymore.

Being able to view a partner's actions online can spark jealousy and end up having a paranoid effect on the viewer. Students get very jealous and uncertain about their current or past relationships, and obsess over the postings on their social media sites. Viewing information about an ex is painful for a partner who leaves a relationship with feelings for the ex. Having knowledge of his or her comings and goings can be emotionally detrimental when one is trying to forget about an ex. The less that one knows about this, the easier it is for an ex to get over a relationship. Most students claim that they become more jealous as they 'lurk' through their ex's profile.

Social media allows one to gather information without the person even knowing. Students agree that the information you find online is not always accurate and can be very misleading. If communication is not clear between the couple, and they find out information about them online, this can interfere with the relationship. Last, students say that social media increases insecurities and judgments. The insecurities would not be as severe if people were not "checking up" on there ex's so often. The content in photos and postings will increase insecurities, because they are being judged by whoever is reading them. When their partner does not post on their wall or "like" their status, they feel as if no one cares what they are saying or doing. Social media causes double standards because one person might get jealous and insecure about their partner's ex being in a photo, and make their partner delete those pictures. Meanwhile, the other partner, does not say anything about their ex being in their photo. The students interviewed felt that people lose their communication skills because they rely so heavily on social media. Gathering information and communicating through CMC eventually results in a loss of intimacy. When students do have to communicate in person, their uncertainty increases.

Adults

The second demographic were professional adults, preferably with children. The author interviewed seven adults. She wanted to understand how they dated when they were in college, how social media has impacted them and how they feel about the influence of social media on the younger generations. All of the people interviewed claimed that they dated in college by either being fixed-up through friends, went on blind dates, or dated someone they met at school, functions, parties, and bars. The types of dating are important to know for later discussion.   Not

all of the adults use social media, the ones that do, primarily use it for business, reconnecting and staying in contact with old, long distance friends. It has made reunions easier because everyone knows what you look like and what has been happening in their life. Also, some adults use social media for the online dating resources. Online dating is set up so you can look at potential partner's biographies, and then send them an email if you are interested. The ones that use social media for online dating had nothing positive to say. They said that social media, in terms of online dating, is negative because it can disguise the person's weaknesses because it is easy to lie. People are not always honest in their profiles and their pictures are misleading. The result is that the match is incompatible because the couples have little in common or they are disappointed because the individual did not look like their picture. People pretend they have attributes that, in their mind, the opposite sex will find attractive. The lies can go beyond online dating profiles. One adult claimed that she had acquaintances that used social media to communication with distant friends and that theses acquaintences posted pictures of a happy home-life/relationship that did not reflect the actual state of the relationship itself. In the pictures, the couples look happy and in love, but in reality the relationship is in jeopardy. Social media allows people to create a persona that will make a positive impression on others. That is why all of the adult sampling believes that FtF communication is necessary for a healthy relationship. It is the basis of a truthful relationship because interpersonal interaction is the only way for a relationship to mature and grow. All of the adults understand the negative impact social media has on the younger generations. They all believe that the younger generations use social media more than they should and feel that the give away too much. Social media takes the mystery out of romance. It leaves an individual with no privacy, enigma, or conjecture.

An adult also reported that when their child read one of their posts, a post where they exposed a very personal thought, the child was emotionally crushed, a response the adult did not expect.

Therapists

Last, the author interviewed nine therapists to get a neutral and objective point of view of how social media has impacted modern day relationships. The patients they see typically have relationships type concerns, and they all supported the contention that social media has played a big role in the maintenance of relationships. In general, college students are at an age where they do not know how to maintain a relationship. They have unrealistic demands and expectations for the relationship, which sets it up for failure. They also get into relationships where they are trying to figure out how they feel, or whether the relationship has long-term potential.

Social media makes relationships harder to maintain because of the way it allows us to communicate. Conversations that were once FtF are now talked about through social media. This electronic version of communication, because of its lack of feedback from facial expressions, can be easily misconstrued. Without the FtF, this indirect means of communication, forces people to make assumptions and try to read each others minds. Many problems in relationships come from a lack of direct communication. Many of the relationships therapists see share the same characteristics; the couple lack an identifying common goal, the individual interests of the couple are different, the couple cannot fine common ground, one or both of the partners are unwilling to accommodate demanding schedules or prioritize the relationship. The assumptions that are

present when one first gets involved in a relationship are not expected to change. When they do, there is anxiety, stress, mistrust, and jealousy. This leads to the "stalking" behaviors.

"Stalking" behaviors are what students call "checking up on people". If one person is trying to individuate by hanging out with their friends, their partner either does not trust them or gets jealous, and looks on their profile to "keep track of" them. Students typically look to see what their partner is doing, whom they are talking to, and how much time they are spending online to confirm their partner's honesty. Many therapists have students who have their partner's password. This is problematic to the relationship especially when there is a conflict, because they will look into their partners account, and see whether the person is telling the truth. The uncertainty causes impulsive behaviors, because they feel that they need to know the information right away. Social media is an outlet for students to spy on and envisage their partner's spare time activities outside of the relationship. If they do find out information, the nonverbal aspect created by social media causes misinterpretation of messages and resulting false conclusions. Specifically, when someone is holding onto an issue from the past, and it gets brought up when they get mad or find out about something. The assumptions that are made from the information that is gathered on Facebook can be destructive to the relationship. It not only jeopardizes the current relationship, but if the relationship has ended, it makes it harder to move forward.

People forget that they are in a relationship with a person and not a device. All of the therapists surveyed discussed students who check their cell phones and get anxious when they do not receive a text right away. The therapists also noted a more dominant trend among the generation of college students in the last 10 years; they do not want to make a "clean" break up and move on from a relationship; they want to maintain a friendship. Facebook adds to the difficulty. It makes break-ups hard to resolve because it advances lack of privacy and the false

feeling of being well connected. The couple is constantly connected through the common sites they visit. Issues arise when an ex posts something that makes the former partner upset. So even though the two people have broken up, there is still a connection.

Lingering problems of a serious nature may come about after there is disclosure on social media. For example, when a couple sends one another provocative photos during a relationship, the photos may be leaked onto the Internet after the break up. An act such as this may cause permanent harm to a person's life.

In modern day dating, there is no closure for the couple. Prior to social media, it was easier to move on. Overall, social media is a distraction from connecting in a real way with people. All of the therapists agreed that it is detrimental to romantic relationships, but it can be a fun diversion when used responsibly. One doctor compared social media to alcohol. They claimed that getting drinks with your friends on the weekends can be really fun, but if one consumes too much, there are consequences. If one overuses social media, there can be unhealthy side effects because it can be just as distracting to their relationship.

My findings did support my thesis of social media having negative consequences to modern day romantic relationships, but some of the interviewers saw it positive not for romance but for other reasons. There was positive feedback when people receive 'postings' on their wall; this is a way that a person knows that they are receiving attention from their partner. However, many argued that when one of the partners in the relationship is not satisfied, they exploit themselves through provocative pictures on social media sites to seek out the attention they desire. Many people like social media because it creates a type of support system. Others argue that there are "strange rules" implied when having online friends (i.e. who you can and cannot be friends with during a relationship), and this can add more stress. Especially social media sites

that allow one to rank their friends. This increases insecurities. One shy student made an interesting argument saying that through social media you see another side to a person, and the faceless aspect of social media allows you to get to know a person better. Many students disagreed and said that the "faceless aspect" was the problem. So much is lost with translation in social media, because we are not interacting FtF or with our voices. It has the potential to create a lot of conflict based off of miscommunication, because we cannot hear inflection or gather tone. Social media fosters miscommunication. The one common idea was that social media is a great way to maintain relationships with friends, especially long distance, not romantic relationships. For those that do not use social media, it does not impact their relationship.

Discussion

My hypothesis claimed that uncertainty increases when seeking out information through social media, because of the lack of privacy and nonverbal communication. The common reasons that people were uncertain in the first place were reasons that I discussed in my research: jealousy, curiosity, and lack of trust. When people have these forms of uncertainty they use social media to seek out information about their partner. Because of the lack of privacy and how publicized everything is on the Internet, it is an easy and convenient way for people to "keep track of" their partners. This does increase uncertainty because the information that you find can increase insecurities, increase jealousy, and information can be misinterpreted and misrepresented from the nonverbal communication. This impact that social media has had on modern day relationships has made it more difficult to maintain a healthy relationship. The more information one sees online, the more a partner will make assumptions. The likelihood of the

relationship ending because of something a person sees through social media is extremely high. Students and therapists mentioned that in their interviews. It really makes moving on from a relationship significantly harder. Prior to social media as a form of networking, people dated through FtF interactions and connections. If the relationship did not work out, it was easier to move on from the other person because they were not in similar social circles, and not nearly as easily connected. Individuals disclose a great deal of personal information online, which affects those that access the information.

What is interesting is how everyone who was interviewed addressed the negative impacts social media has on romantic relationships, but particularly the students, who continue to use it most frequently. What could be the reasons that people let social media impact them as much as they do? One reason is that the world is a lonely place. Everyone experiences loneliness. So when people do find someone they will do whatever it takes to hold on to that feeling of connection, which may cause obsessive tendencies and usage of social media because they do not want to let go of the relationship. Some research suggests that when lonely and socially anxious persons reach out through CMC, people are less likely to be lonely. Another study found that lonely, socially anxious teenagers were more likely to communicate with a stranger online than with a friend or close friend after school (Spitzberg, 2006). Loneliness could be an explanation, but other reasons could opt for further research.

Social media is here to stay, whether we like it or not. It impacts our daily lives and the only way to cope with its impact is by gaining understanding of different solutions and learning how to use social media responsibly. Limit the amount of information you put online because nothing is as private as it seems. Be cautious of what people post on your sites, pictures, and what you say to others. Jobs and schools look at online profiles, and it can profoundly effect ones

future. If you are experiencing a break-up, separate yourself completely. By limiting your usage, use the time to interact FtF and rekindle some friendships. Understand the value of the friendship or the relationship in the first place. The most important tool is to use direct and forward communication. Communicate your expectation about the relationship to limit surprises, thereby when conflict arises, you can handle it effectively. For relationships to be successful, it comes down to trust. I truly believe that if it were not social media triggering these insecurities, it would be another tool.

Romantic relationships are complicated, and they trigger our deepest emotions. Western culture and society has created an ideal image that people fall in love and it is going to be easy. In order to maintain a relationship, it is a complicated process. It is hoped that people get better with it over time. This thesis does not claim that modern day relationships are all going to be unsuccessful. In many ways, CMC has made it difficult to maintain modern day relationships. However, there are always ways to make modern day relationships successful that involve more than FtF communication. There are ways to seek information and reduce uncertainty in your relationship without having to use online resources. Parks and Adelman state that when you meet your partner's friends and family in person, you obtain third-party information, you observe your partner's out of role behavior, and how they interact with others. This is a network that acts as a "barrier force" by making it harder to end a relationship. (Parks, M. R. & Adelman, M.B, 1983) When you gain approval from friends and family, it will reduce uncertainty and maintain the relationship. People forget sometimes that true authentic communication is key to a successful relationship.

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Appendix:
The questions were as follows:

Questions for College Students:
1. Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
2. If so, what do you use to communicate with your partner? If not, how would or do you communicate with a potential partner?
3. How do you think your romantic or potential partner utilizes social media, such as Facebook or Twitter?
4. How do you utilize social media, such as Facebook or Twitter?
5. Why do you utilize social media in the way you just described?
6. Does social media such as Facebook or Twitter have a positive or negative impact to your relationships? Why or why not?

Questions for Adults:
1. How did you date you when you were younger? Please include the process that you went through?
2. Do you currently use social media, like Facebook, Twitter now? If so, how has that affected you?
3. Have you used social media for romantic purposes? If so, how would you compare that experience to your youth?
4. Do you have children?
5. How much time do you think they spend on social media?
6. How do you think social media affects them?

Questions for Therapists:
1. On Average, How many patients do you see that have relationship-type issues?
2. How often do you see your patients?
3. What are the common problems you witness when dealing with these relationships?
4. What is the cause or the source of these problems?
5. Do your patients use social media? How do they utilize it?
6. Does social media such as Facebook or Twitter have a positive or negative impact to relationships you've dealt with? Why or why not?
7. Does social media have had a positive or negative impact on interpersonal relationships? Why or why not?