**The Role of Facebook in Romantic Relationship Development: An Exploration of Knapp's**

**Relational Stage Model**

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Abstract

This study examines the implications of social networking websites (SNSs) within romantic relationships. Specifically, Knapp's (1978) stage model of relationships is examined through a new lens wherein the role of SNSs, specifically Facebook, is explored in the escalation stages of romantic relationships (i.e., initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding). Further, this study sought to discern the interpersonal and social implications of publicly declaring oneself as "In a Relationship" with another person on Facebook (i.e., going "Facebook official" or "FBO"). Ten mixed-sex focus groups were conducted. Analysis revealed Facebook is one of the primary means of uncertainty reduction in the initial stages of relationship formation. College students consider FBO to be indicative of an increased level of commitment in relationships. Typically, relationship exclusivity precedes a discussion about becoming Facebook official, which occurs when the relationship is considered stable. Going FBO has implications for the public proclamation of one's relationship status as described in Knapp's model, and these results differ for men and women. Theoretical implications for the role of SNSs in romantic relationships are discussed.

*Keywords*: romantic relationships, relationship development, social networking sites, Facebook, stage models of relationships, uncertainty reduction

The Role of Facebook in Romantic Relationship Development:

An Exploration of Knapp's Relational Stage Model

Social networking websites (SNSs) have become an integral medium for communicating within and about interpersonal relationships (Baym, 2010; Boyd, 2008; Turkle, 2011). The social networking site Facebook has become ubiquitous with over 900 million active monthly users worldwide (Facebook, 2012), including 74% of U.S. adolescents and young adults aged 12 to 24 (Edison Research, 2010). Recently, SNSs have experienced a dramatic spike in use (Edison Research, 2010). Nearly half of Facebook users visit the site at least 6 days a week (Facebook, 2012), and U.S. residents spend more time on Facebook than on any other website (Nielsen, 2011). College students are particularly heavy users of the site, averaging 1 to 2 hours on the site each day (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011).

Despite this growing dominance of online social interaction, research has yet to catch up with the potential implications for how our romantic relationships simultaneously unfold both on- and offline. Though we have always had ways to communicate our romantic relationship status to others, such as wearing a varsity jacket or wedding ring, the public nature of SNSs makes it easier to cast information about the status of our romantic relationships to a wider network of people and to do so much more quickly than via traditional face-to-face communication. Before SNSs, some members of one's extended social network (such as friends from a school one no longer attends) may never hear the news unless they encounter the person face-to-face. Now, in a matter of seconds, Facebook can trumpet the news broadly across the user's online network, which according to recent studies of college students averages between 200 and 250 friends (Kalpidou et al., 2011). Previous research indicates that social networks often have a significant impact on our romantic relationships (Blair & Holmberg, 2008;

Sprecher, 2011; Sprecher & Femlee, 2000), and the nature of Facebook gives network members unprecedented access to information about a romantic involvement, including declared relationship status, photographs, social commentary, and even communication between partners.

Given its unique social context, it is important to assess the role of Facebook in the escalation of romantic relationships. Additionally, asynchronous media technologies are supplementing or replacing face-to-face interaction in relationship development for a growing number of individuals (Pierce, 2009). Because considerable interpersonal research and theorizing were developed on the basis of face-to-face interaction, the applicability of these frameworks in the modern era needs to be examined. Understanding how traditional models of relationship formation play out in online environments is essential in understanding the role of computer mediation in modern interpersonal communication. In this study, we consider how this technology may be related to the way users experience and progress through the stages of relational development as originally conceptualized by Knapp (1978).

**Knapp's Relational Stage Model**

Knapp's (1978) relational stage model is a foundational theory in interpersonal communication. Stage models have been widely tested and applied over the past forty years to explicate the steps of romantic relationship development and decline (e.g., Afifi & Lucas, 2008; Altman & Taylor, 1973; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008; Duck, 1977; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009; McKenna, 2008; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Wilmot & Baxter, 1983). Stage models assume a social exchange framework wherein individuals involved in romantic relationships seek to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), choosing to engage in or disengage from relationships based on the equity of costs and rewards in that relationship (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978).

Knapp's (1978) dual staircase model elaborated how relationships escalate, stabilize, and descend over time through communicative processes. The model assumes relationships escalate in five distinct stages: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. Each stage in the development process is characterized by unique phenomena that allow researchers to differentiate between stages (Avtgis, West, & Anderson, 1998; Ayres, 1982; Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009; Shea & Pearson, 1986; Welch & Rubin, 2002; Wheeless, Wheeless, & Baus, 1984; Wilmot & Baxter, 1983). *Initiating* is defined as the first interaction between two individuals. It occurs immediately upon meeting someone and involves making a first impression. Initiating is often dictated by social norms and standards for greeting another person; handshakes, introductions, and superficial topics dominate initial conversation (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). *Experimenting* is the next stage, wherein couples seek more in-depth information as a means of determining whether or not a potential romantic partner would be a good fit. Typically, this stage immediately follows the initiating stage, particularly if romantic sparks fly (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Experimenting may involve posing direct or indirect questions to the target or asking a common acquaintance about the potential partner to reduce uncertainty (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Experimenting might also involve the use of *secret tests* (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984) within the relationship to evaluate the interest or commitment level of the target. Information is gathered and weighed, as the initial stages of relationships require that individuals filter information about a potential romantic partner. The next stage in escalation, *intensifying*, occurs when the relationship becomes less scripted. Relational partners' self-disclosure increases and relational commitment begins to manifest (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009; Shea & Pearson, 1986). During the *integrating* stage, couples form a sense of shared, public relational identity. Couples are less likely to rely on social norms to

dictate their relationship and instead focus on connectedness within the dyad. In this stage, couples typically refer to themselves as "we" and "us" as a way to assume an interdependent relational identity (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009; Shea & Pearson, 1986). Finally, couples publicly announce their relationship which is often solidified in the formal, typically legal (e.g., marriage or civil union) *bonding* stage of Knapp's model (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).

Despite the popularity of Knapp's (1978) model in the area of interpersonal communication, empirical examinations of the model are less common (exceptions include Avtgis et al., 1998; Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009; Shea & Pearson, 1986; Welch & Rubin, 2002). In light of the ever-increasing role that communication technologies play in our romantic relationships, it is necessary to see if the assumptions of the model still hold. Though Knapp's model has stood the test of time, limited research has examined the role of communication technologies in the escalation of romantic relationships through this framework. Technologies have fundamentally changed the way we communicate on many levels (McKenna, 2008; Turkle, 2011). Given the prevalence of SNSs in modern interpersonal communication (Baym, 2010; Boyd, 2008), it is important to examine how they are used in the course of romantic relationship formation.

**Social Networking Sites**

Boyd and Ellison (2008) distinguished SNSs as Internet services with the ability for a user to: 1) create a public or semi-public profile; 2) identify and connect with other users; and 3) trace these first-degree connections to identify members farther out in the collective network. One key aspect of SNSs is that, in contrast to previous forms of online interaction, these sites are nonymous and predominantly used to connect with and organize one's existing offline networks.

Currently, the most popular SNS is Facebook (Edison Research, 2010; Nielsen, 2011). Facebook recently changed their user interface to a *Timeline* wherein users can display their page according to their life as it unfolds chronologically. Facebook's chief features are an *About* section, wherein users can list the schools they attended, religious and political affiliations, and their romantic relationship status (e.g., single, in a relationship); *Likes*, which include interests, activities, music, or movies a user enjoys; *Friends*, where all one's connections and links to their profiles are listed; a *Status Update* box for the user to post his or her current thoughts, feelings, or experiences; the *News Feed*, in which friends' status updates and other Facebook activity appear; and *Photos*, which one can upload or be *tagged* (i.e., identified) within.  In the interface update, the *Wall*, a public board on the profile where friends can type comments or leave media clips and links directed to the individual, was incorporated into the Timeline. Facebook also mimics other electronic media by providing a messaging service for communication sent within the system. These affordances may shape how a couple communicates with each other as well as how the couple communicates about the relationship to their social networks.

**Social Networking Sites & Relational Development**

Existing research has explored how individuals express themselves or construct identities (Boyd, 2008; Livingstone, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) or experience friendships (Baker & Oswald, 2010; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008) on social networking sites. Limited research, however, has focused on the implications of SNSs on our offline lives, particularly on our romantic relationships. Given the pervasiveness of SNS use, particularly for emerging adults (Edison Research, 2010), it is increasingly imperative that researchers examine what this means for romantic relationships. Users may be developing new norms, expectations, and behaviors based on what they observe and experience on these sites.

This study specifically addresses how SNSs may play a role in how people enact, elaborate, and interpret their romantic relationships, as well as how those relationships transpire.

Previous frameworks have examined relational development using traditional forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as text-based chat and email (e.g., Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon, & Sunnafrank, 2002). Walther's (1996) social information processing theory suggests that information is "sipped" and that interactants in CMC learn information more slowly than face-to-face interactants. Social networking sites may have changed this flow, however, as information has the potential to be "chugged" rather than sipped. Once a person has access to a target's Facebook page, he or she has access to a breadth of information about that individual: education, religious and political affiliations, interests, activities, group memberships, friends, and usually a considerable quantity of photographs. A Facebook profile essentially maps aspects of a person's identity and social history for the network's consumption. It is important, then, to examine this "chugging" of information in contrast with assumptions of traditional theories of relational development such as social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), which suggests that trust and intimacy unfold slowly through the process of self-disclosure. With the breadth and occasional depth of information available on SNSs, it is possible to learn a lot about another person without actually interacting with him or her, thus violating the norms of appropriate rate of disclosure early in a relationship.

One affordance of many SNSs is the ability to list one's categorical romantic relationship status (e.g., single, dating, or married). Facebook made a significant change in how relationship status is conveyed in an SNS profile: rather than just having a category listed, it capitalizes on the social network structure by allowing users to identify and link to their romantic partner on their profile. For instance, rather than merely listing Ann's status as "In a Relationship,"

Facebook enables Ann to connect with her significant other in her relationship status as "In a Relationship with Jamie Smith." On Ann's profile will be an active link to Jamie's profile, which in turn would read "In a Relationship with Ann Jones" and provide a link to Ann's profile. An interesting aspect of this affordance is that one partner must initiate a relational request and the other must confirm that he or she is indeed in a relationship for it to appear on both partners' pages. Thus, one cannot be listed as "In a Relationship" with someone without that person's consent. It is unclear, however, how users within and outside of the relationship interpret this type of declaration, how this profile change is negotiated within a relationship, and if there is a consistent interpretation of the meaning of the relationship status in terms of the characteristics and commitment of the offline relationship.

Given this lack of research despite the growing dominance of SNSs as communication channels, we decided to investigate what role this emergent technology is playing as romantic interactions escalate. This study was designed to explore the role of Facebook in developing romantic relationships up to the stage where an individual declares that he or she is "In a Relationship" on Facebook. Specifically, we were interested in what it means to make this statement on one's profile and how that fits within a theoretical understanding of relational stages. For the purpose of exploring the role of social networking websites in the stages of romantic relationships, the following research questions were advanced:

RQ1: What role does Facebook play in the beginning stages of relational

development?

RQ2: How are Facebook's affordances and social context reflected in users' perceptions

of romantic relationships?

RQ3: What are the implications of being "In a Relationship" on Facebook, and how does

this status fit within Knapp's stages of relational escalation?

RQ4: How do users feel about Facebook's overall role in romantic relationships?

**Method**

The study employed focus group methodology because sparse literature exists regarding

the intersection of SNSs and romantic relationship escalation. Though extant research addresses

many aspects of Knapp's (1978) relational stage model (e.g., Avtgis et al., 1998; Ayres, 1982;

Dunleavy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009; Shea & Pearson, 1986; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Welch &

Rubin, 2002; Wilmot & Baxter, 1983), research has yet to address whether the use of SNSs

informs the practical application of the model. Given that SNSs are in themselves social

contexts, focus groups seemed more appropriate than alternative methods as we wanted to

observe the interplay, agreement, and disagreement of participants. Further, focus groups provide

rich, in-depth information that cannot be obtained from closed methodologies (Morgan, 1997).

The focus groups were conducted in two sessions, one in the spring and one in the fall of 2011.

The inclusion of a second wave of data enabled triangulation via member validation and negative

case analysis (Strauss, 1987). All groups were conducted in the same building in similar rooms

to maintain continuity across groups. Each focus group was video-recorded to obtain both verbal

and nonverbal (e.g., nodding) cues for later data analysis (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

The discussions were conducted by three female moderators (a faculty member, an

undergraduate student, and an external faculty researcher) trained in focus group methodology.

One or two moderators were present for each session. Given some knowledge on the topic was

required to probe participants on relevant topics, the authors served as moderators for the study.

One author was kept blind to the goals of the study to provide an unbiased interpretation of the data during analysis.

**Participants**

Participants were 24 men and 31 women from a small Midwestern university who had romantic relationship experience in the time since they started using Facebook and ranged in age from 18 to 23. They were recruited by soliciting from courses across the university. Some were offered extra credit in exchange for their participation, whereas others participated without compensation. The data for this study comes from a larger set of focus groups conducted on Facebook users. Ten mixed-sex groups ranging in size from four to eight participants were analyzed. Participants reported spending an average of 2.39 hours ($SD = 1.25$) each day actively using Facebook (i.e., not just logged in, but using the interface).

**Procedure**

When participants arrived at the study location, they were greeted by the moderator(s) and asked to check in. Next, they were given the consent form, asked to read it, and told to ask the moderator if they had questions. Signed forms were then returned to the moderator. Moderators worked from the same general script to maintain homogeneity across groups (see Appendix for instructions and questions). As an introductory discussion and warm-up (Morgan, 1997), we asked participants to describe the phenomenon of romantic relationships in terms of how they come together. When appropriate, researchers would prompt questions regarding the role of SNSs, specifically Facebook, in the formation of romantic relationships. Though moderators worked from a list of questions generated in advance, the format was semi-structured and the natural flow of conversation dictated which questions were addressed in each group.

**Analysis**

Focus group discussions were transcribed by the first author (formally trained in transcription) and a research assistant trained by the first author. The authors then engaged in an open coding process (Strauss, 1987). In vivo coding was also conducted to identify the terms that participants chose to describe their experiences (e.g., *Facebook official*, *creeping*). Through iterations of the data, a constant-comparative method was applied to identify, elaborate, and clarify categories (Strauss, 1987). These categories were examined within and across groups to determine salience and recurrence.

Common themes were identified by the researchers within each of the ten focus groups. The emergent categories were described as: *relationship initiation, relationship development*, *Facebook official*, *information seeking*, *relational problems*, *creeping/monitoring*, and *social context*. We focused on content related to Knapp's (1978) stages of relational development (i.e., initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding). Though this operationalization is specific to Knapp's model, the conceptualization is common to most stage models of relational formation. The authors coded discrete statements based on the identified categories. Any discrepancies were resolved through subsequent re-evaluation of the data and discussion. An intercoder reliability of Cohen's $\kappa = .89$ was achieved. Where relevant, direct quotes were transcribed and used as examples of categorical content.

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**Results**

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**Relationship Formation**

The first theme that emerged was that Facebook has changed the way people enter into relationships. Facebook was rarely cited as a place to search through profiles to initiate relationships with potential partners; typically, participants did not view Facebook as an online

dating site. Instead, pursuers initiated relationships offline and then, whether or not an initial

two-way interaction occurred, turned to Facebook to continue communication (i.e., send a friend

request to link and share profiles on the site) or seek more information about the target if the

profile was public or otherwise accessible.

Participants almost universally cited Facebook as their primary tool for interaction early

in the experimenting stage of romantic relationship development. One recurring topic was how

Facebook interactions have replaced the role of phone calls. Tricia described the shift as such: "It

used to be, like, 'Can I get your number?' But now, you'll see the next day they're friending you,

and then you start talking on Facebook. And that leads to 'Can I get your number? I'll text you.'"

Facebook users can avoid the tension of having to directly express relational interest in the first

meeting by asking for a phone number, which several participants described as "too forward."

Rather, they can retreat to the nearest computer or smart phone and look the person up on

Facebook. If they wish to pursue further contact, they can send an informal friend request to the

target so that they can access each other's profiles fully and open the lines of communication.

Many participants liked that contacting someone via Facebook was less direct and ego-

protective than the traditional approach of asking for someone's phone number. As Lissa noted:

> There's, like, less rejection too. I feel like if you're really forward and you just ask them
>
> to their face, there's, like, more of a fear of rejection, but if you're just sending them a
>
> message, it's just like, "Oh, well, I wasn't trying to be really forward, I was just, you
>
> know, being casual."

Rather than risk rejection in a face-to-face situation, a Facebook user can capitalize on the

affordances of the system. A Facebook friend request is a depersonalized, system-generated

message that requires minimal effort or emotional investment. If the request is ignored, it is

easier to brush off or excuse than a direct, face-to-face turndown, giving the pursuer the chance to save face (Wilson, Kunkel, Robson, Olufowote, & Soliz, 2009).

Another reason that participants appreciated Facebook during these stages is that it gives users an opportunity to get to know someone at their own pace without the pressure of having to make an immediate favorable impression. Terrence felt that "The communicating is a little bit more controlled. There's not as much pressure. You can think out what you want to say, and they have time to respond." Facebook also enabled slower progression, as liking could be developed over time before the gamble of asking someone out. Chris liked that Facebook enabled him to show casual interest in someone and simultaneously build up the opportunity to have a meaningful interaction offline:

> I think it's a good way to show, like, to informally show that you're interested in someone. If you kind of, like, maybe like them and you're interested in talking to them more, then, like, writing on their wall or commenting on their pictures every now and again kind of gives them like a base. So, if you ever see them in public then, like, you have something to talk about, or like, so that it shows that you're kind of interested in a not serious way.

Thus, Facebook empowers the pursuer to a certain degree during the initiating and experimenting phases (Knapp, 1978), allowing him or her to save face by using the medium to initiate or pursue a relationship with a target. Participants indicated the pursuer also has a variety of convenient ways to interact with the target after initiating via posting on the target's wall, commenting on pictures, or sending a Facebook message. Participants preferred Facebook over the phone because of the lack of immediacy. All of these cited advantages reflect the

asynchronicity of computer-mediated communication (Walther, 1996), which permits the pursuer to take his or her time in creating and reflecting upon interactions with the target.

**Relational Information-Seeking**

The second theme that emerged is that Facebook plays an integral role in information seeking and uncertainty reduction about a potential relational partner (Afifi & Lucas, 2008; Afifi & Weiner, 2004; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002) which may occur before the relationship is initiated or during the experimenting stage (Knapp, 1978). Facebook allows individuals to post as much personal information as they feel like sharing, and depending on the privacy settings, that information can be viewed by everyone (if public) or by one's friends (if private). As such, Facebook is a rich source for information about a person's activities, interests, friends, and his or her current relationship status. Facebook does not publicize information on who has looked at a users' pages; viewing a page is an anonymous activity, so beyond any privacy restrictions users have enacted, they have no way of knowing if anyone is checking out their online profile unless that person comments on a picture or writes a wall post.

Participants described the process of scoping out another's Facebook page as *creeping*. Creeping is not necessarily defined by the target of one's snooping (i.e., it does not have to be a romantic interest; it could be an ex, an ex's new flame, an old high school friend, or a classmate) nor the amount of time spend viewing the page (in contrast to *Facebook stalking*, which refers to frequently revisiting the page of a particular person). Rather, creeping is defined as viewing a person's page without their knowledge, typically not leaving any markers of your visit (such as wall posts or picture comments) that would indicate how in-depth the profile was viewed. Participants agreed that, as Tamara stated, "Everybody does it, whether they admit it or not." Despite the commonality of the behavior, participants agreed that it was awkward and socially

frowned upon to admit to creeping or to reveal information learned while creeping, as the name

implies. Another aspect of creeping is that is mimics one-sided disclosure: the pursuer is seeking

information and reducing uncertainty about a target, although the target is not necessarily

reciprocating. This process may yield a discrepancy in perceptions of similarity, intimacy, and

closeness if a relationship between the two proceeds (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Theiss &

Solomon, 2008).

Facebook creeping is consistent with Baxter and Wilmot's (1984) conceptualization of

secret tests. Specifically, it is similar to "asking third parties," except that the third party is

technological content rather than a person and thus this test can be conducted more covertly.

Most relationships terminate in the experimenting stage of relationships because one (or both)

person in the dyad discovers information about the other that they perceive as incompatible

(Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Facebook, thus, can accelerate the filtering process during the

initial stages of relational escalation (Duck, 1977).

What participants chose to examine when they were creeping was also notable.

Predominantly, participants were interested in checking out relationship status (to see if the

target was available or not), friends of the target, and pictures. Contrary to some ideas about

filtering (e.g., Duck, 1977), participants said it was uncommon to look at, or care much about, a

target's religious or political affiliation. As Ellen noted, "I think that's something that you learn

as you get to know someone." Participants indicated that type of information should be

approached organically at a later point in the relationship. Largely, participants also indicated

little interest in the About section, wherein Facebook users can share direct information about

themselves, including activities, interests, affiliations, and favorites. As Steve explained,

I don't look at their interests a lot. I really don't know why that's on Facebook because I

don't know anyone that really cares. Like I--if I'm interested in someone I'm not gonna

go on their page and go right to their info and click Interests and say "Oh, you like

snowboarding. I like snowboarding too. We should date."

This finding seems to conflict with many perspectives (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Knapp &

Vangelisti, 2009) that suggest that common interests often guide relationship development.

Deeper probing revealed, however, that participants were still likely to note similarities, but

rather than relying on text provided by the target in the About section, participants gleaned this

information from pictures, particularly those uploaded by other parties.

The reliance on pictures over text offers support for Walther and Parks's (2002)

*warranting principle*, which argues that when people are asked to evaluate online information

about a target and judge its accuracy, they are more likely to trust information if it cannot be

easily manipulated by the target. As Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai (2011) asserted, "online identity

claims with high warranting value are harder to fake and thus more trustworthy" (p. 74).

Although the user can upload favorable images or choose to untag him- or herself from

photographs, the nature of Facebook is such that there are an overwhelming number of pictures

to monitor from all of one's connections; one's ability to selectively self-present (Walther, 1996)

is related to the frequency of visitation and time one has available. Given a collegiate workload,

participants claimed it is difficult to manage every photograph, particularly after a weekend with

multiple social events. Also, because it is unlikely that an individual would upload pictures of

themselves using other friends' accounts, photographs are perceived to have high warranting

value and to be a relatively credible source of information about an individual.

According to participants, pictures are the primary source of judgment about romantic

targets and are paramount in the experimenting stage of relationship development. From their

experiences, participants had developed "red flags" for picture content that would terminate their

interest in a target. The most commonly cited red flags were promiscuous behavior and reckless

substance abuse. Nancy asserted, "If you have photos of you kissing three different girls in one

night? Okay, not so much anymore." Michelle was turned off by hard partying: "I know that

there's some people that, like, have pictures of them passed out on the floor as their profile

pictures and I just wouldn't be into that at all." Others inferred traits about the individuals based

their posted pictures. Anthony said he would avoid a woman with provocative pictures on her

profile because "If you have respect for yourself, you're not posting raunchy pictures of

yourself." Joe suggested that women posting closeup pictures of themselves "shows that they

lack self-esteem," a statement other men in the group unanimously supported. Women similarly

frowned on so-called "mirror shots" wherein men take a photograph while posing shirtless in the

mirror. Both men and women suggested that these self-presentations indicated undesirable

characteristics in a potential romantic partner.

     In addition to pictures, another source of information about the target is any common

friends the pursuer might share with the target. Offline, it might take surveying several people or

directly asking the target to identify mutual friends, but Facebook makes this information easily

visible on their interface. Although other studies have indicated that friends' characteristics may

reflect upon perceptions of the target (Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008;

Walther et al., 2008), our participants' spontaneous responses did not suggest these judgments

were occurring. Rather, participants examined wall posts and the friends list to identify any

friends they may have in common with the target. Common friends were perceived positively.

More importantly, common friends provided a potential source of additional information about a

target. Nancy checks out a target's profile to "figure out who we are, like, friends with and stuff

like that, 'cause that would kind of help, like, determine kind of where I could go if I had more

interest in this person." Participants indicated it was not uncommon to identify these social

sources using Facebook and then approach them offline to obtain more information about a

target than what might be available on Facebook.

These Facebook behaviors map closely to the uncertainty reduction strategies described

by Berger (1979). Uncertainty reduction suggests that in interpersonal relationships, people are

motivated to learn about others and thus enact knowledge-seeking behaviors (Berger &

Calabrese, 1975; Ramirez & Walther, 2009; Ramirez et al., 2002). Interested parties may seek

information *passively*, by observing the target; *actively*, by asking common friends about the

target; or *interactively*, by directly contacting and communicating with the target (Berger, 1979;

Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). Participants reported engaging in all three of these strategies on

Facebook. If a target's profile is public, a pursuer may "creep" and passively observe all of the

aforementioned content and glean whatever information they desire. If the profile is private, the

pursuer might contact a friend to see if the friend can access the target's profile. Jeff revealed

that this is a common behavior, especially to check relationship status: "I think that's one of the

big things that I tend to do on Facebook. You know, not just for myself, but for other people

too." Alternatively, the pursuer might begin with an interactive strategy of *friending* a target, and

then return to passively observing the activity on the profile or actively contacting common

Facebook friends to seek information. Seeking friends to confirm the content of a target's profile

reflects the *social triangulation* that Gibbs et al. (2011) observed with online dating participants

as well as the secret test of asking a third party (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). Regardless of the

choice of strategies, it is apparent that Facebook plays a prominent role in college students'

relational information-seeking and uncertainty reduction, which are common in the

experimenting stage of Knapp's (1978) model.

Facebook's structure enables this information-seeking. The anonymous nature of profile

viewing on Facebook is what enables participants to comfortably, freely, and frequently monitor

others: there is no existing feature that permits users to track who has viewed their profile. As

Carolyn stated, "The fun thing about Facebook is, like, you can check up on your boyfriend, you

can check up on your ex, and, like, no one has to know. Like, they don't have to know you're

stalking them." Erika also noted that Facebook offered a unique opportunity that people were

unlikely to pursue offline: "Most people wouldn't go out and spy on their boyfriend or girlfriend,

but on Facebook they definitely do."

In sum, these first two themes indicate that Facebook plays a major role in the initiating

and experimenting stages of developing relationships. Unlike peeling away the layers of an onion

as Altman and Taylor (1973) proposed in social penetration theory, however, Facebook allows

one to slice right into a target's personality and social history, thus more deeply accessing the

features closer to one's core. Carolyn explained: "I think the beginning phases of getting to know

someone kind of get skipped over. It definitely does take away, like, the get-to-know you phase

because I, like, already know everything about you in, like, two seconds." Indeed, participants

did not suggest that they "sipped" at the information on a new romantic interest's page, as

Walther's (1996) traditional perspective on CMC suggests; rather, they "chugged" by delving

rather deeply into current and historical content, particularly picture albums. It is possible that

this instant exposure to this depth of information about a partner is altering the course of

relational development. Rather than having to ask direct questions that often prompt

reciprocation during dates or other social interaction in the natural course of courtship, a pursuer

can tap into a wealth of personal information by simply accessing a target's Facebook profile.

Relational partners thus have a shortcut for traditional self-disclosure in the experimenting and

intensifying stages of relational escalation because of their access to a vast breadth of

information on an SNS. This violates the assumption that intimacy develops slowly via self-

disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and rather implies that norms of self-disclosure have

morphed in light of new communication technologies.

**Relationship Status as Social Statement**

Facebook continued to play a role beyond the experimenting stage. The third recurring

theme was that listing a relationship status on Facebook is perceived as both a social and

interpersonal statement about the commitment two people share in a romantic relationship.

Publicly posting this information reduces uncertainty within the social circle. Additionally, Niki

explained there were defensive and proprietary reasons why you would list your relationship

status: "It's sort of like, 'Girls, don't touch my man.'" According to Damon, advertising a

relationship online is a "way of saying this person is mine."  This has implications for both the

intensifying and integrating stages of Knapp's (1978) model, as dyads are working not only to

define their level of commitment to one another, but also on how to share that information within

their social network.

Whereas there may be some benefit to announcing your status, the downside is that, as

Alesia noted, "It becomes everyone's business, not your own." Alan mentioned that it was

common to have face-to-face conversations concerning others' relationship status on Facebook.

Nancy said that the downside of stating one's status is that problems seem to take a life of their

own: "It's not just, like, between you and the other person…the issues are between you, the

person, and, like, his best friend, and your best friend, and random people that you knew in high

school." Because Facebook makes the relationship a topic of social discussion, it may ultimately

affect the magnitude of the problem and ultimately the outcome of that relationship. Blair and

Holmberg (2008), for example, found that individuals' perceptions of support among their social

network affect their relational well-being.

One instance of social network involvement occurs when "It's Complicated" is listed as

one's relationship status. Participants tended to view this option negatively. Were there actually

problems, as Tricia noted, "That's our business. I don't think it needs to be public." Rather,

participants perceived people who chose that status as soliciting social feedback and sympathy:

Nancy: I just think it's, like, a ploy for people to get attention.

Tricia: Agreed. (*Jeff nods*.)

Michael: To feel sorry for them.

Nancy (*adopting a mock-concerned voice*): Oh, it's complicated, what's wrong?

Because listing a relationship status can make it a social issue, many participants

identified workarounds. Indeed, according to participants, the easiest way to avoid making a

social statement about one's relationship was not to list a relationship status at all. Tricia pointed

out that, "I think that a lot of people are starting to just say 'In a Relationship' but not listing,

like, the name, because there's so much drama that comes along with breaking up on Facebook."

If one goes from having a relationship status to not having one, however, participants agreed that

there was a social meaning attached. If an individual goes from single to not having a status, it is

assumed that the person is in the beginning stages of a relationship but not necessarily ready to

publicize it. Alternatively, if a person is listed as "In a Relationship" but the status disappears,

this is taken as a sign that a couple is in the process of breaking up but wishes to avoid a public

spectacle. Chris summed up how he interpreted when a friend's relationship status went missing:

To me, that's more of a sign of "it's complicated" than if you put the "It's Complicated"

status on there…If it goes from "Single" to nothing, maybe you're moving towards

something but you're not exclusive yet, or if it's the other way where you're "In a

Relationship" then you kind of take it off, it's like, well, I'm not really sure what's going

on, but like…if something ever happens I don't want the whole world to see it and for it

to be, like, this abrupt change where everybody comments on it.

The possibility of a public debacle is why some participants such as Pam agreed that, when it

comes to relationship statuses, "I think it's better not to have any." Other participants indicated

that there were certain social gains achieved by declaring one's status. Participants must thus

weigh the costs and benefits of changing or hiding their relationship status during the

intensifying and integrating stages in light of the possible social consequences (Knapp, 1978).

**"Facebook Official"**

The fourth theme was clarifying the social meaning behind being "In a Relationship"

with another person and publicly listing his or her name in one's profile. Participants referred to

this relationship status as *Facebook official* or *FBO*. Three-quarters of our participants (77.1%)

reported being FBO at some point in their romantic relationships. Participants universally agreed

that if a couple was FBO, this meant that they were exclusively dating and "off the market."

Nancy compared her generation to previous generations and concluded that "our '[going] steady'

is becoming Facebook official, and not wearing someone's class ring around."

Additionally, participants agreed that FBO represented a stage beyond exclusivity. As

Damon stated, being Facebook official "is like a whole other level of the relationship."

Typically, weeks if not months transpire between the time that a couple is exclusive and the time

they go FBO. Participants agreed that because of the public nature of going FBO, it was

important that the relationship was well-established. As Lissa noted, "Your relationship has to be

stable enough to go FBO." Because of this accepted norm, relationships that are not FBO can

sometimes be viewed with skepticism, as participants expressed in the following exchange:

> Tamara: It's legit once it's on there.
>
> Leah (*adopting a different voice*): "Are you FBO?"
>
> Samantha (*nodding*): …if you're Facebook official, then you're official in real life.
>
> Carolyn: Yeah, a lot of people will say it's not official unless it's on Facebook.

As this exchange indicates, there is a reflexive understanding about FBO. Both men and women

agreed that not only must a couple decide that they are serious about defining themselves as FBO

in the online setting, but they must acknowledge that their online status will define the legitimacy

of their relationship offline as well.

Because of this norm and the associated social pressure of going FBO, it is difficult for

couples to avoid discussions about the status, expectations, and progress of their romantic

relationship. Uncertainty about the nature of the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) must

be confronted. An explicit conversation about going FBO directly addresses this uncertainty

because FBO status instantly provides both a label and a social proclamation of togetherness.

Isaac elaborated this process:

> You and your partner have to be sure because it's a process of going into your account
>
> settings and changing that, consciously clicking on that button to say "In a
>
> Relationship"…without the Facebook, you and your--your partner could just have this
>
> knowing between each other that sometimes might be ambiguous. But when you go on
>
> Facebook, you actually have to decide to put this on there so everyone can see.

Many participants suggested that, to cope with the social pressure and the suggestion that Facebook actually mattered to them, the topic was often broached in a joking manner. Alesia reported that "There's a lot of humor about becoming Facebook official, in addition to the discussion, the more serious discussion." Steve, who waited several weeks to go FBO with his current girlfriend recalled, "I remember when we ended up putting our statuses up, we did it together. It was kind of in a joking way."

Injecting humor in the situation seems to alleviate couples' anxiety about going public with their networks and the possible feedback from their peers. As several participants noted, it is not uncommon for people to *like* (i.e., click a button to record the user's liking or approval of something posted) or comment on a new relationship. In a world without Facebook, these comments and other gossip could be circulated privately within smaller social circles. On Facebook, however, these declarations can be viewed by anyone within the party's social network, providing a public sounding board regarding one's romantic decisions. The ability to garner public feedback that is simultaneously distributed to every corner of a person's social network is a unique affordance of SNSs, and thus going FBO represents a bold declaration in light of other forms of integrating as elaborated in Knapp's (1978) model.

**Facebook as Double-Edged Sword**

Given the benefits and drawbacks of information accessibility and the social context, a final theme that emerged was the idea that Facebook was both a blessing and a curse to romantic relationships. Participants largely agreed that Facebook made the initial stages of relational development less effortful and less anxious. As Terrence stated, "Facebook makes starting a relationship more accessible and easier." Isaac, who had initiated his current relationship on Facebook, said, "I'm extremely introverted, so it's a lot easier for me to initiate conversation by

going to the inbox or writing on the wall or something like that to take the first step." Not

everyone agreed that Facebook was healthy for the beginning stages of a relationship, however.

Leah articulated that, "On a relationship end, it kind of hurts it. It provides too much information

too soon in a relationship and then it also just—it makes everything too instant and you know

everything about them." Thus, Facebook may appeal more to some users than others in early

stages.

Beyond the stages of initiating and experimenting, however, it seems that Facebook often

becomes a burden to users in romantic relationships. Perry expressed a common sentiment that

"It's good in the beginning, just getting to know people. But if the relationship actually takes off,

then Facebook can't do any good." Marcus suggested that because of Facebook, with any

problems within the relationship "the consequences are more drastic and they spread through

your friends and the like much faster."

Participants agreed that publicizing one's relationship leads to new forms of social

pressures. When networks can view your relationship status, your partner's page, and wall posts,

pictures, and other artifacts of your relationship, the relationship becomes shaped by its actual

and perceived audience. Here, an interesting sex difference emerged: although men and women

both cited pressure from their friends on Facebook about their relationship, men were far more

likely than women to claim that pressure from their partner about their Facebook status and

behavior was an issue. Perry said that serious offline commitment was not sufficient for some

women; they pushed for making the public proclamation and going FBO: "If you're the guy, and

you don't put that you're 'In a Relationship' on Facebook, then you're in trouble with your

girlfriend." Keeping up with one's female partner through comments, wall posts, and replies was

also a problem for some men; in general, men claimed their female partners were heavier users

and thus created pressure for reciprocity in Facebook-based interaction. José claimed that when

you are in a relationship and on Facebook, "It's a lot more maintenance." Marcus remarked,

"Girls put too much faith in this Facebook stuff." Steve noted that he had to spend more time on

Facebook to appease his current girlfriend, who is more openly affectionate on his profile than he

is accustomed to:

> I feel that kind of puts pressure on me a little bit. Um, that I'm kind of expected to show
>
> that affection back, so, um. I know I got in trouble once because she said she loved me on
>
> Facebook and I didn't reply back.

Thus, for some couples, Facebook may serve as a tool for relationship maintenance; for others, it

may be burdensome, particularly if partners' expectations or behaviors do not match.

A few participants revealed that they had deleted their profiles in the past or were

considering deleting them in the near future. Damon, who recalled several instances of relational

jealousy and other drama on account of Facebook, claimed that "The costs are definitely higher

than the rewards. For me, it puts more stress than joy in my life." He had recently returned to

Facebook, but was already considering deleting his profile again because of relationship issues.

Samantha agreed that, when it came to relationships, "I've seen a lot more bad come out of it

than good." Tamara argued that Facebook provided too much information to consider: "I feel

like Facebook has definitely, like, made relationships kind of harder…there's so much nitpicking

into your relationship, which kind of makes it, like, more difficult to just *be* in the relationship."

One group that collectively agreed that Facebook was damaging for romantic

relationships began to challenge any of its utility, concluding:

Tamara: I kind of wish Facebook didn't exist.

Leah (*nods*): It's ruining the world.

Despite the drawbacks, however, the majority of participants said the benefits outweighed the costs and that, overall, it was an integral part of their collegiate social lives.

**Discussion**

In this exploratory study, focus group participants offered insights on the role Facebook plays in romantic relational development. Various themes manifested in these discussions. The data here indicate that Facebook is playing a crucial role in its users' romantic relationships. Regarding RQ1, Facebook's role is that it has altered the way by which college-aged students proceed through the initiating, experimenting, and intensifying phases of relationships (Knapp, 1978) and learn about potential and current partners: in many cases, one can privately seek out information on Facebook without having to interact with a target or a common friend. Also, it appears that phone calls have been supplanted by Facebook chat and texting. RQ2 inquired about the role of Facebook's features, including the social context. We found that as partners progress through the stages of intensifying and integrating (Knapp, 1978), they face new pressures about making aspects of the relationship public on Facebook, whether through relationship status, uploaded pictures, or exchanged wall posts. Most notably, RQ3 revealed that Facebook has created a new tier in the relational hierarchy, the legitimacy of going *Facebook official*. Rather than serving as merely a box checked in an online environment, this status is a new milestone for couples in the integrating phase (Knapp, 1978). FBO is understood both on the social networking site and offline as meaning an individual is in an exclusive, long-term, and public commitment. Finally, RQ4 revealed that many tensions existed around Facebook use in romantic relationships, and participants felt it was detrimental to the success of their relationship offline.

When asked how relationships begin to form, most participants indicated that they identify or meet potential romantic partners offline. In this regard, relationships still seem to

abide by Knapp's (1978) initiating stage. During this phase or immediately following, it appears

that interested parties go to the target's Facebook page to ascertain information about that

person. The first goal was to determine the target's relationship status; if the person was listed as

"In a Relationship," they would be less likely to pursue a relationship with that person than if he

or she is listed as "Single" or if no relationship status was posted. When asked what other content

they examine on Facebook pages, participants indicated that they look at pictures and identify

common friends in the information-seeking process.

This information then shapes how the relationship proceeds during the experimenting

stage (Knapp, 1978). Our findings also provide new insights into the steps of relational

escalation during this stage. As one of our participants, Alesia, pointed out, it used to be that you

were introduced, then you dated, and then you were "going steady" in an exclusive, committed

relationship. Now, the common process seems to be that you meet (or observe someone)

socially, then you Facebook friend request, then you Facebook message, then you exchange

phone numbers via Facebook message, then you text (not call), then you hang out in social

groups, then you date, and *then* you date exclusively and adopt the titles of boyfriend or

girlfriend as appropriate. Then, there is another step: once your exclusive relationship has proven

stable, you proceed to go Facebook official, declaring before friends and family and your old

high school lab partner that you are, indeed, in a committed, exclusive relationship that you

expect to last—and the details of your partner are hyperlinked for convenient viewing.

This study also delved into the social meaning of being Facebook official. Clarifying the

nature of this term and its significance to Facebook users is crucial for understanding modern

romantic relationship development among young and emerging adults. In a study on relational

terminology, Welch and Rubin (2002) found that participants used different terms to classify the

same described relationship (e.g., friend as opposed to acquaintance). They concluded that:

> Dating relationships are often similarly confusing with one partner labeling the other as a
>
> "steady" and the other identifying the partner as a "casual friend." Thus, relationship
>
> definitions are individually constructed and interpreted, and sometimes two people in the
>
> same relationship see the relationship existing at different stages of development. (p. 24)

Because of the affordances of Facebook, these terms must often be confronted and clarified

within couples, reducing the amount of relationship uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002).

As participants noted, explicit conversations took place when participants agreed to go Facebook

official, and by virtue of the medium, both members of the couple thus define themselves by the

same relationship status. This public proclamation is more concrete and explicit to the public

because of the nature of social networking (Fox & Warber, in press).

Though it appears that couples discuss commitment and exclusivity in relationships

before becoming Facebook official, the FBO conversation is one that is unique and distinct in

defining the parameters of the relationship and merits further research. Participants explained

that, before becoming Facebook official, the relationship is already exclusive and stabilized;

FBO seems to be a step further in Knapp's integrating stage. Due to the new ability to notify the

breadth of one's network in a single click on an SNS, going FBO serves as an instantaneous

public declaration of commitment to both those in one's immediate social network as well as to

weaker ties. In previous generations, such widespread notification would not have occurred

unless a public engagement announcement was made in a local newspaper or wedding

invitations were distributed. Further research is needed to determine the prevalence and

consequences of going FBO, and how exactly this new form of pronouncement fits within the

process of integrating within Knapp's model. Future studies should also consider processes of relational maintenance and relational dissolution in the context of SNSs.

Future extensions of this work may also address some of the limitations of this study. Although focus groups can offer deep insights into several issues, the commonality of these beliefs across broader populations is unknown. Thus, the rich data provided by this study may be complemented by further quantitative research to examine how widely these perspectives are held among emerging adults on Facebook.

Another limitation is the use of male and female participants in the same focus groups. Because we were interested in the dynamic between men and women, this study relied on mixed-sex focus groups, but some participants may have felt more comfortable disclosing to members of their own sex. Additionally, all moderators were female, which may have influenced or limited some participants' responding. Replications with single-sex groups or sex-matched moderators are advisable.

This study used a sample of college students to gain insights on emerging adults, the most devoted users of Facebook, but experiences beyond college and across different populations may be drastically different. For example, individual participants were recruited in this study; further insights in the area of relational development may be gained from jointly interviewing couples or conducting dyadic surveys. Future research also needs to investigate different age groups in different settings. Given Facebook's global appeal—over 80% of Facebook users are outside of the U.S. and Canada (Facebook, 2012)—cross-cultural studies would offer further insight and bases of comparison for relational experiences in different countries.

Another particularly rich area for further research is the process of uncertainty reduction on Facebook. As Afifi and Lucas (2008) proposed, we found that individuals rely upon Facebook

to seek information about their romantic targets during initial development stages. The ease of accessing information via Facebook profiles, as well as the reduction of anxiety through asynchronous Facebook messaging, may impact individuals' feelings of efficacy in information seeking (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Further quantitative research should determine the prevalence of these behaviors as well as users' experiences of efficacy during these processes. Another consideration is that the reduction and production of uncertainty on Facebook likely continues throughout the relationship. Facebook provides relational partners the unique ability to continuously monitor each other's behaviors by viewing pictures of weekend escapades and wall posts made by acquaintances, potential competition, and ex-partners. This surveillance potentially reduces and produces both partner and relationship uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002), which may play a role in the experience of intimacy within the relationship (Theiss & Solomon, 2008).

In addition to relationship escalation, participants' responses also provided directions for research on the role of Facebook in relational maintenance. Facebook provides the same abilities as other electronic media such as email and IMing for relational maintenance (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009), with the added affordances of wall posting and picture sharing to add a social element to the process of maintenance. Because the amount of time users spend on the site, however, Facebook relational maintenance may be considered an additional burden rather than a convenience; some participants expressed that when there was a disparity in use between couples, having to keep up with the partner's Facebook behavior became a source of stress. Further studies should explore the occurrence, process, and effects of these maintenance behaviors in stabilized relationships (Knapp, 1978; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Differences in men's and women's Facebook behaviors also merit further investigation. Research indicates that women spend more time on social networking sites than men do (Nielsen, 2011), perhaps because women are often tasked with nurturing and maintaining relationships (Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997). Data from this study indicated that although there are many similarities in men's and women's experiences on Facebook, there appear to be some differences that merit future probing. Mansson and Myers (2011) recently found that women are more likely than men to express affection over Facebook, but it is unclear if this is an artifact of inherent differences in men's and women's relational communication patterns or differences in social norms that influence this communication (Canary & Dindia, 1998). Men and women may be more compelled to abide by gendered norms in their relationship behaviors on Facebook due to social pressure communicated by their network (Baxter, Dun, & Sahlstein, 2001). Indeed, men in our study revealed that expressing commitment to their partner was looked down upon by their male friends, which may lead men to restrict or stifle romantic communication to their partners on the site. Future research should consider whether the disparate social norms for men and women in romantic relationships carry over to Facebook and how those norms influence communication within the dyad.

Another limitation is that this analysis did not broach the other side of Knapp's staircase, namely relational dissolution. The affordances of Facebook may have a significant impact on existing scripts and strategies for dissolution (Battaglia, Richard, Datteri, & Lord, 1998; Wilson et al., 2009), as users may choose to make a breakup public, hide their relationship status, or choose to defriend, block, or remain friends with their ex. Breaking up can be publicly performed on Facebook with the click of a button, and users must work around the site's design if they want to ensure the breakup is not broadcast to everyone in the social network. Within the network, the

affordances of Facebook provide a social context for the public discussion of breakups via wall posts and "like" buttons, which may influence the experience of the dissolution process by providing a forum for ex-partners to air dirty laundry or summon social support and for friends to provide that support or take sides publicly. Thus, there are many opportunities on Facebook to alleviate or exacerbate the sting of a breakup. After the breakup, Facebook still provides the opportunity to monitor the ex's profile either through direct friending or common friends—and to monitor the ex's new relationships. Thus, ex-partners may experience additional social pressure to rebound into a new relationship or put up a public front of being unaffected to save face in the post-dissolution phase (Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008).

As emergent communication technologies continue to permeate our social interactions and personal relationships, we must continue to investigate their role. It is imperative that relationship scholars investigate how traditional theories of interpersonal communication apply to modern contexts as we cannot assume that decades-old findings will hold in an ever-changing communication climate. Social networking websites afford individuals the ability to constantly and covertly gather, interpret, and evaluate information about potential, current, and past romantic partners, which has implications for how relationships escalate, persevere, and decline. These findings provide the basis for many lines of future inquiry about social networking sites in the context of relational development from the perspective of relational stage models, social exchange perspectives, and uncertainty reduction. Whether or not Facebook is a blip or an era in the context of human history, social technologies will continue to play a seminal role in future relationships. As one participant, Damon, stated: "As Facebook changes, relationships are going to change and evolve along with it."

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Appendix

**Introduction and Instructions**

Today in this focus group, we are going to be talking about relationships and the roles that technologies may play in relationships. We are interested in hearing about your feelings and experiences regarding these topics. We have a list of questions to ask, but are also open to your thoughts and ideas. So, if you think anything seems relevant to our discussion, please feel comfortable offering your input. We want you to feel comfortable sharing information with the group, but you should not feel pressured to share anything you do not want to. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, so please answer the questions honestly based on your personal experiences. Does anybody have any questions?

**Focus Group Questions**

What do you consider the stages or steps of starting a romantic relationship?

How do people tell others that they're in a romantic relationship?

What role do technologies play in the stages of a relationship?

If you are romantically interested in someone, how would you learn more about that person?

If you are romantically interested in someone, what would you look at on their Facebook profile?

What does it mean if you are "In a Relationship" with someone on Facebook?

How do you and a partner get to the point that you are "In a Relationship" on Facebook?

What does it mean if your relationship status is "It's complicated"?

What does it mean if your relationship status is not visible on Facebook?

What kind of benefits does Facebook have for romantic relationships?

What kind of drawbacks does Facebook have for romantic relationships?

Overall, do you think Facebook has had a positive effect, a negative effect, or no effect on

romantic relationships?