Adolescents' Reasons to Unfriend on Facebook

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## Sample

The participants included 1,316 adolescents from 14 Flemish schools, of which 1,117 individuals (84.9%) had Facebook profiles. Of the 1,117, there were 419 adolescents of them who mentioned reasons for unfriending in the questionnaire’s open text boxes. Thus, the final sample consisted of 419 adolescents, including 204 (48.7%) girls and 189 (45.1%) boys with an average age of 15.34

## Implications For Educators About

Other

# Abstract

The present study is the first to examine adolescents’ reasons for unfriending people on
Facebook. By means of open-end questions, 419 participants described the primary online (i.e.,
arising from friends’ behavior on Facebook) or offline (i.e., emerging from Facebook friends’
offline behavior) reason for which they recently unfriended someone. Two researchers took part
in the coding process. Qualitative analyses revealed that unfriending happened mainly for online
reasons, such as posting (too much) inappropriate, polarizing or uninteresting posts, seeking
attention, bragging or stalking, and other irritating behaviors (e.g., using bad grammar). Some
adolescents indicated that they unfriended people due to online reasons related to replacing
friendships or interests, quarrels, and incompatible friends/family. In previous studies among
adults, quarrels and incompatible friends/family were reported solely as offline reasons. These
findings suggest that adolescents potentially argue more often online or that their quarrel is so
intense it leads to unfriending decisions. Adults in turn, also unfriend people because of posts
related to everyday life (e.g., jobs and children). Such everyday life events seemed to be less
relevant for adolescents’ unfriending. The practical value of this study is that it provides a
typology of adolescents’ online and offline reasons for unfriending. This typology can be used
for further research or by practitioners developing awareness campaigns as it indicates which
behavior/events mostly provoke unfriending. Although viewing a post as inappropriate or
polarizing might be subjective, general guidelines on how to respectfully address sensitive issues
(e.g., political, religious, or other societal issues) can be given.

# Outcome

"The most common online reasons for adolescents to unfriend were related to inappropriate or polarizing posts (e.g., posts about politics or religions), uninteresting posts, seeking attention, bragging or stalking, posting too much, and other irritating behaviors (e.g., using bad grammar and sending game request). This might be related to their identity development and self-exploration. These online self-presentations and their shared opinions will be judged by others and especially by peers as adolescents are highly influenced by them.
Some adolescents indicated that they unfriended people on Facebook due to online quarrels, incompatible online friends/family (e.g., bad influences), replacing interests, and new friendships replacing former Facebook friendships. Adolescents and their friends potentially argue more often online or that their quarrel is so intense it leads to unfriending decisions such as relocation or alienation (e.g., having less contact).
Adolescents appear to be much less likely to unfriend someone if they initiated the friendship
themselves. This can be because of the fact that the initiator of the friend request has lower status than the receiver. As the initiator of the friendship sends a request (i.e., lower status person) which must be accepted by the person with whom the initiator wants to be connected (i.e., higher status person), each response of the higher status person generates the next move in the friendship process.
Regarding the findings, practitioners could develop campaigns to make adolescents more aware of potential online behavior that might be irritating for their Facebook connections and possibly leads to unfriending. These campaigns could raise awareness about the alternatives for unfriending, such as changing privacy settings to hide some posts." (Verswijvel et al., 2018, pp. 13-15)