



# FRIENDS OR FOLLOWERS?

Students find pros and cons of extensive social media use

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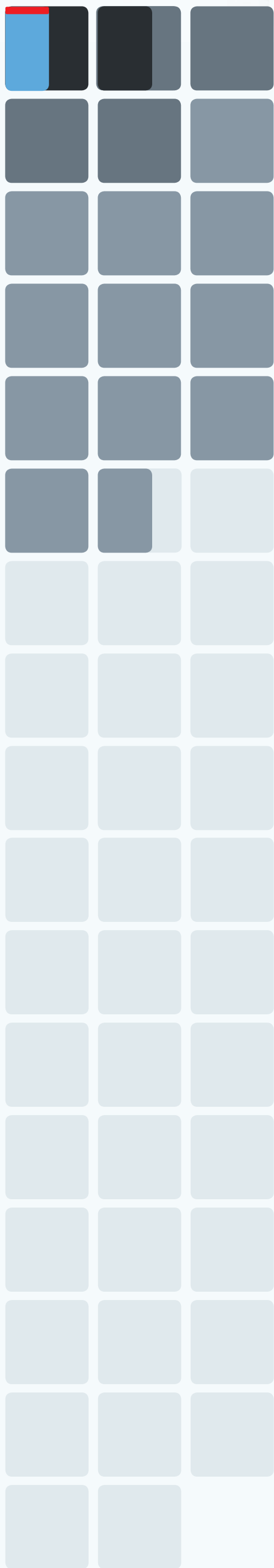
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## Friend circle

@whodoyouknow?

Dunbar numbers (represented below, one square represents 30 people) were a good representation of how many people the average person “knows.” In this age of expanding social media, are these statistics still relevant?

- intimate friends
- go-to friends
- close friends
- casual friends
- acquaintances
- names you know



PAGE DESIGN BY REY KAM (EDITOR-AT-LARGE)

Tweets Tweets & replies Photos & videos

By Lindsey Ramsdell & Alex Harring  
ASSISTANT EDITOR & STAFF REPORTER

A large group of friends has always been a sign of social status. In the digital age, donning that title now bears another expectation—a large group of followers. But, there could be a point where having too many friends becomes an issue in itself.

Despite having over 1,300 followers on Instagram, senior Laurel Kreuter has noticed that her close circle of friends remains small. She says if anything, social media has brought them closer together.

“I have two really really close friends, and all of our Instagrams and our Twitters very much influence each other,” Kreuter said. “(Instagram) really does bring us together. We fangirl over other Instagram accounts, and other Twitter accounts and stuff like that. So it’s definitely a common interest among us all.”

However, research conducted in 2014 by the University of Oxford psychologist and anthropologist Robert Dunbar suggests otherwise.

In 1992, Dunbar concluded that humans’ social relationships can be organized into multiple friend circles that decrease in number as they become more intimate. The largest consists of about 1,500 people a person knows by name, ending with a circle of five close friends or family members that he or she turns to for support during the hardest times.

According to Dunbar, as social media expands one’s circle of acquaintances, it may be taking away from those inner circles of close friends. School psychologist Christine Kuhl notices that as the outer circles grow, they can distract from our definition of friendship.

“I do think (social media) broadens (students’) connections, but maybe there’s more quantity and less quality,” Kuhl said. “I think it maybe confuses who’s really your friend and who’s somebody you just met one day or spent a little time with, and then you become friends online. So yes, I think it definitely expands your group, but maybe not everyone is close in that group.”

Senior Lakisha Pressley said she’s made connections through her 2,300 Instagram followers that she may not have made otherwise.

“Some of my followers, we have connections just based off Instagram even though we don’t know each other,” Pressley said. “But I know for example, this one girl—I got accepted into Bowling Green—and she’s just like, ‘Hey I got accepted into Bowling Green.’”

Like Pressley, Kreuter has made connections through common interests and experiences. Although Kreuter has made multiple distant friends over social media, she feels that it has not compromised her friendship with others. In fact, she sees that her online friends can be just as authentic as her real ones.

“Fandoms are all over social media accounts, so when you become friends with these people who have a same idol as you, you get to really know them,” Kreuter said. “You can even meet them in real life, and they help you with things. They give you advice and all that. There’s definitely a lot of girls that I’ve met personally through Instagram and Twitter, and they’re so nice, and I love them.”

Through mutual connections, your number of acquaintances will increase. However, this does not mean an increase in our ability to maintain multiple relationships at one time.

When Nicole Ellison, a researcher at Michigan State University, surveyed random undergraduate students in 2007, she found that the students’ median number of Facebook friends was 300. Of those friends, the students said they would only consider an average of 75 as actual friends. This means that the students surveyed would only consider approximately 25 percent of their Facebook friends companions in the non-virtual world.

The amount time social media users spend on continuing those 225 other distant relationships can distract from their more profound relationships by spreading their interactions with them too thin.

This is an effect that sociologists describe as “role strain” or the “frustration over multiple social obligations (and) an inability to meet the expectations of your social role,” according to Dr. Brian Gillespie, Ph.D., assistant professor of sociology at Sonoma State University.

Role strain can develop into real world problems, as trying to balance many relationships can sacrifice one’s own self-care, create stress and influence behavior. Kreuter has found herself having to apologize to people she barely knows but is distantly connected to through social media.

“I have actually got caught for my big mouth on Twitter,” Kreuter said. “I’ll say stuff, and then people who I don’t even know—I don’t even know how they find my tweets—they just tweet back at me, and I end up either having to apologize or erase the tweet.”

Kuhl feels teenagers benefit from multiple friendships, but she also advises students to discern which friends are worthy of trust.

“I think it can be stressful more in defining what those connections are and sometimes maybe even forgetting who those connections are,” Kuhl said. “Then you share information that maybe you’d share with your closer friends but not necessarily an entire group. I don’t know if it’s stressful for teens to just manage that amount of friends, but just navigating the different levels of friendship among your group of followers.”

## Role strain

The stress or strain experienced by an individual when incompatible behavior, expectations or obligations are associated with a single social role. (Dictionary.com)

*Social media use may increase role strain felt by students because of wider social circles.*

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## On friends and followers:

### Senior Laurel Kreuter

#### On likes

“I used to be obsessed with all those hashtags and stuff. And I would like go to celebrities’ Instagrams and comment like ‘Like back’ or ‘follow back’ and stuff. I don’t do that anymore but I guess it just kind of followed up to it. It kind of just caught up and now I just keep getting all these likes, but I have no idea why people like my pictures.”

#### On being a perfectionist

“This is gonna sound so crazy, but I’m kind of OCD about my Instagram feed. Like I have to post the picture and then take a screenshot of what my Instagram looks like with that picture and then I delete the picture really quickly. So then I have to decide like what picture I want to post. It’s like a whole process, it’s so embarrassing.”

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### Senior Lakisha Pressley

#### On Facebook Probs

“I had got this new smartphone, and I was on (Facebook)—I wasn’t being responsible with it—and so some drama had started, and I continued it on Facebook, and then that caused trouble in school. And then my parents found out, and they told me that I couldn’t have a Facebook account until I turned 16, and when I turned 16 I just didn’t care (enough) about it anymore to make another Facebook account. So, that’s definitely a lesson learned.”

#### On getting followers

“I guess I kinda promoted myself. I would ask my friends to promote me on their Instagrams, and I had an old account that I had lost my passwords to. And so when I made my new one I just re-followed everyone from that account.”

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