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Facebook 'unfriending' and its real world consequences



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(Fotolia)

When it's not enough for someone to just hide you from his or her Facebook newsfeed, you meet the delete reaper.

Whether you're unfriended by a childhood buddy, or somebody whom you've never even met, it can be very difficult to be faced with an endship.

A new study from the University of Colorado Denver finds serious fallout from this. Of those surveyed, 40% said they would avoid anyone in real life who unfriended them in their Facebook life. In a press release, the study's author, Christopher Sibona, cited an experiment that showed subjects who experienced social media ostracism had lower moods, less feeling of belonging, less sense of control and reduced self-esteem.

"People who are unfriended may face similar psychological effects..because unfriending may be viewed as a form of social exclusion," Sibona said.

Social medialite Stella Zhamkochian counters, "I'd rather be unfriended than have fake friends." While some of us may agree, others may actually grieve.

A different study by Chapman University revealed that when relationships are deleted as a result of something that happened on Facebook, people experience more emotional pain than if precipitated by something that happened in the

real world.

"I hate how it makes me feel when someone unfriends me," says Evan Randall.

In a previous column I wrote on National UnFriend Day, I introduced Randall. In what he called a confession, the 35-year-old explained how in the past, he created an Excel file to cross-reference with his friend list to identify any defrienders. "I needed to know who no longer wanted me in their lives that badly that they would unfriend me."

Today Randall reveals more. "If it costs nothing to have us connected on Facebook - no effort, no fees, no harm to their reputations by association - then someone who takes the time and effort to search me out and remove me from their life is doing so with intended purpose. And that, of course, is offensive.

"It makes you question yourself: Am I not cool enough? Am I not friendly enough?"

And what happens when a family member unfriends you? Does that mean they have unfamiled you too? Family functions may feel more like family dysfunctions.

Deb Fisher was unfriended by her brother-in-law - and then his wife. "It's hard to feel like part of the family in real life when you've been excluded by it online," she says.

While friendships may fade away in real life, friendships on Facebook may instantly be clicked away. The social platform allows us to form identities and grow our social currency with "Likes" and connections. So when we lose a friend, we may feel less valuable. But how valuable are best friends faux-ever anyway?

Have you ever 'unfriended' someone on Facebook?

Yes

No

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