Philosophy 123
Project Topic: Privacy

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Case Statement

This project focuses on how easy it is to access other people's personal information on social networking sites in order to better conceptualize true online privacy.

Our goal was to see how readily people accept a friend request from a complete stranger on Facebook.

Problem Statement

Are we giving too much information about ourselves to the public? Are there consequences to this?

What we did:

We created six fake Facebook profiles - three female profiles and three male profiles. We wanted to see how age and gender played into this, so we had three age groups (16, 21, and 35). We constructed each profile to match the general stereotypes of males and females in each age category (pictures, likes, dislikes, etc)
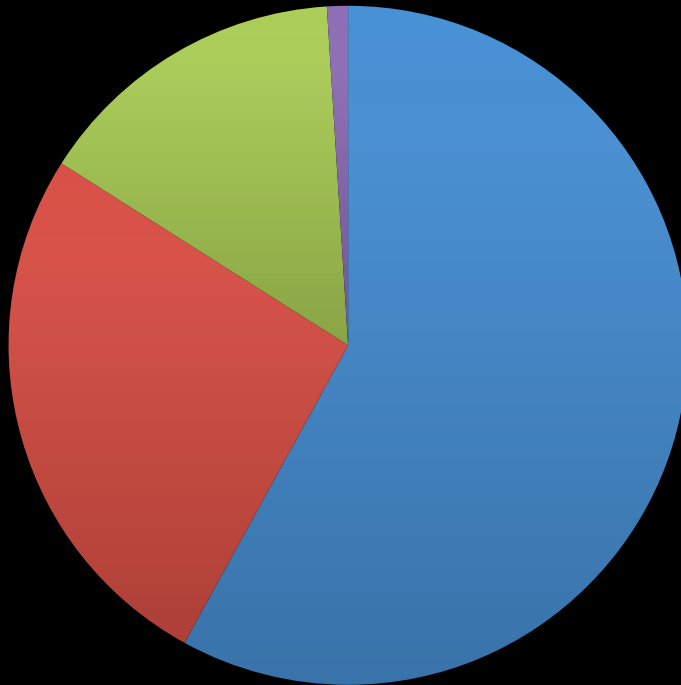
Note: in this process, we have no intentions of interacting with any of the people that we add.

We added 100 random friends on each profile. By joining a specific network, it was easy to add "people you may know" that have joined the same network.
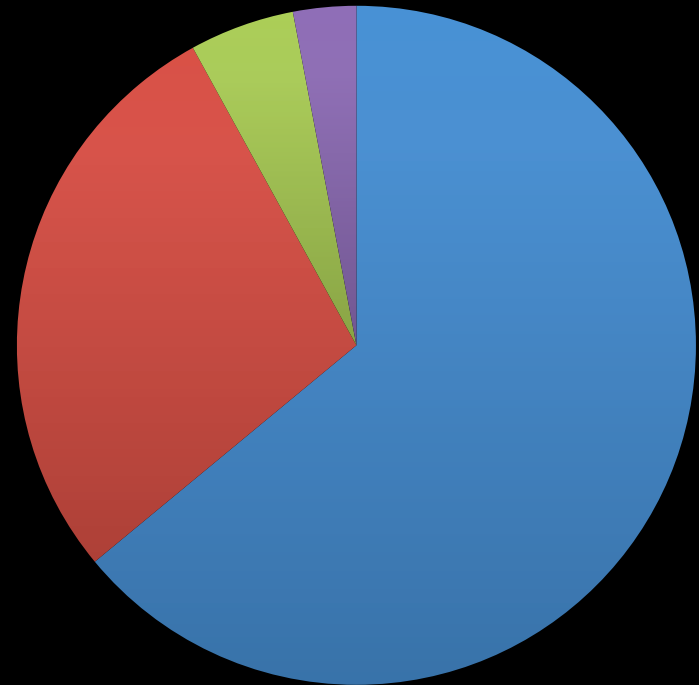
Over the month, we watched to see who accepted, rejected, messaged, or simply had no response. Here are our results:
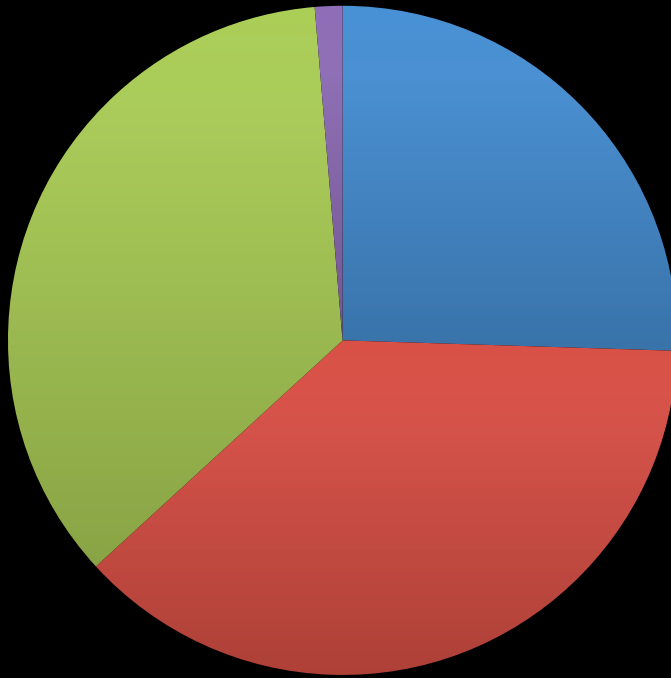
Age 16

Boy

Accepted (58)   No Response (26)
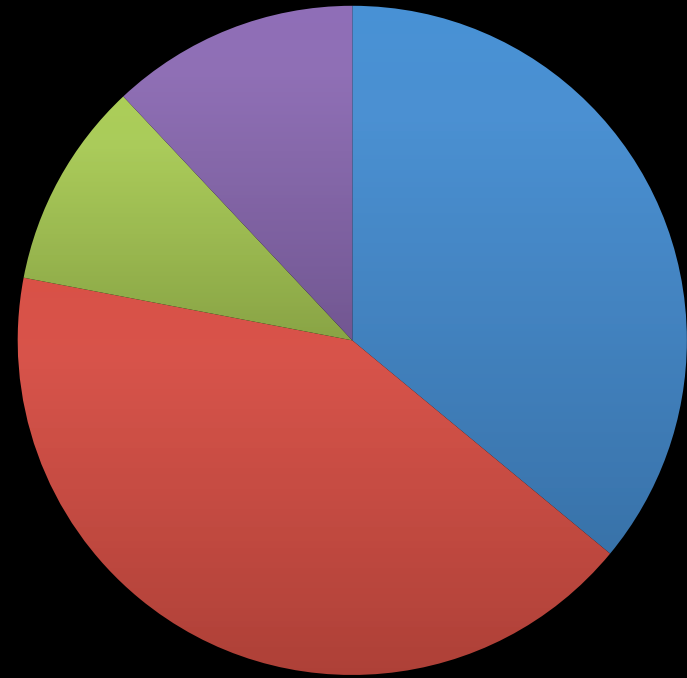
Rejected (15)   Message (1)

Girl

Accepted (64)   No Response (28)

Rejected (5)   Message (3)

Age 21

Boy

Girl

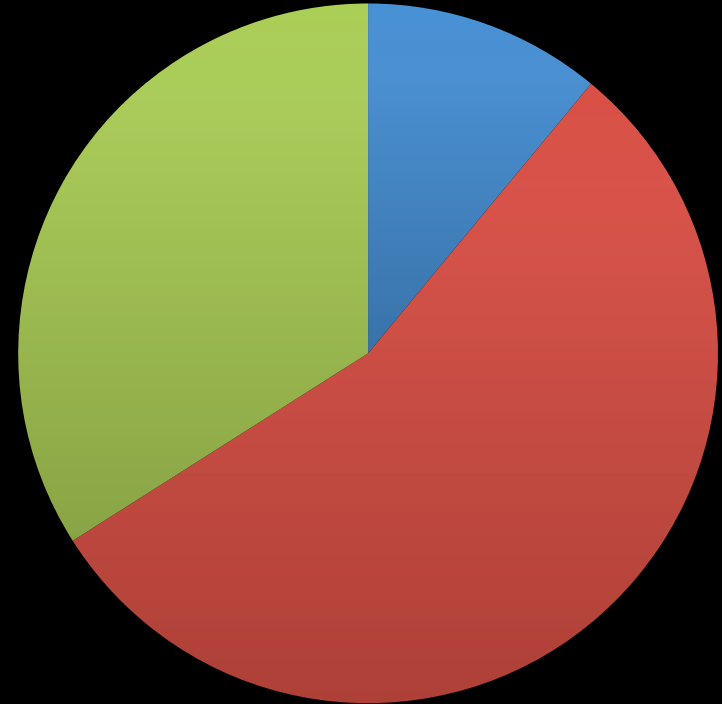Accepted (23)   No Response (34)   Accepted (36)   No Response (42)

Rejected (32)   Messaged (11)   Rejected (10)   Messaged (12)

Age 35
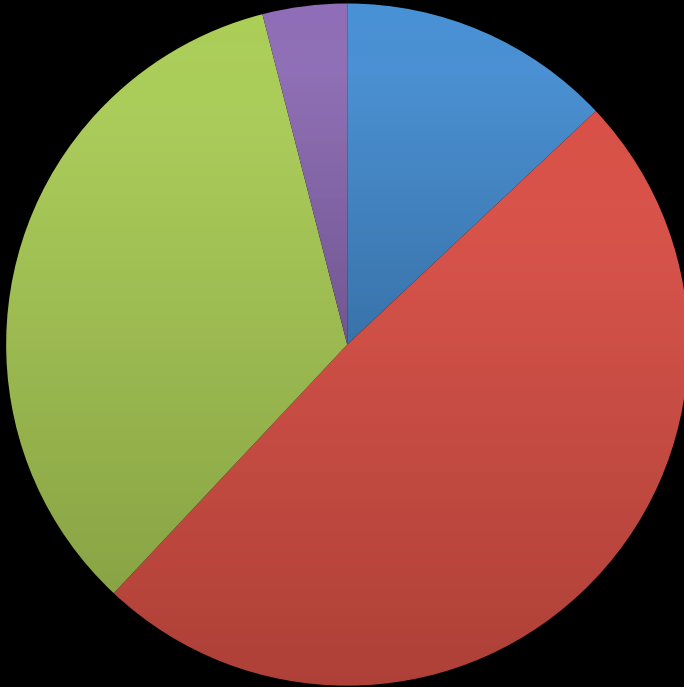
Next, we made note of the specific kind of [personal] information that the people who accepted our requests put on their profile (phone number, email, address, etc):

This graph shows all of the people who accepted (each age group combined)
Total: 205 people
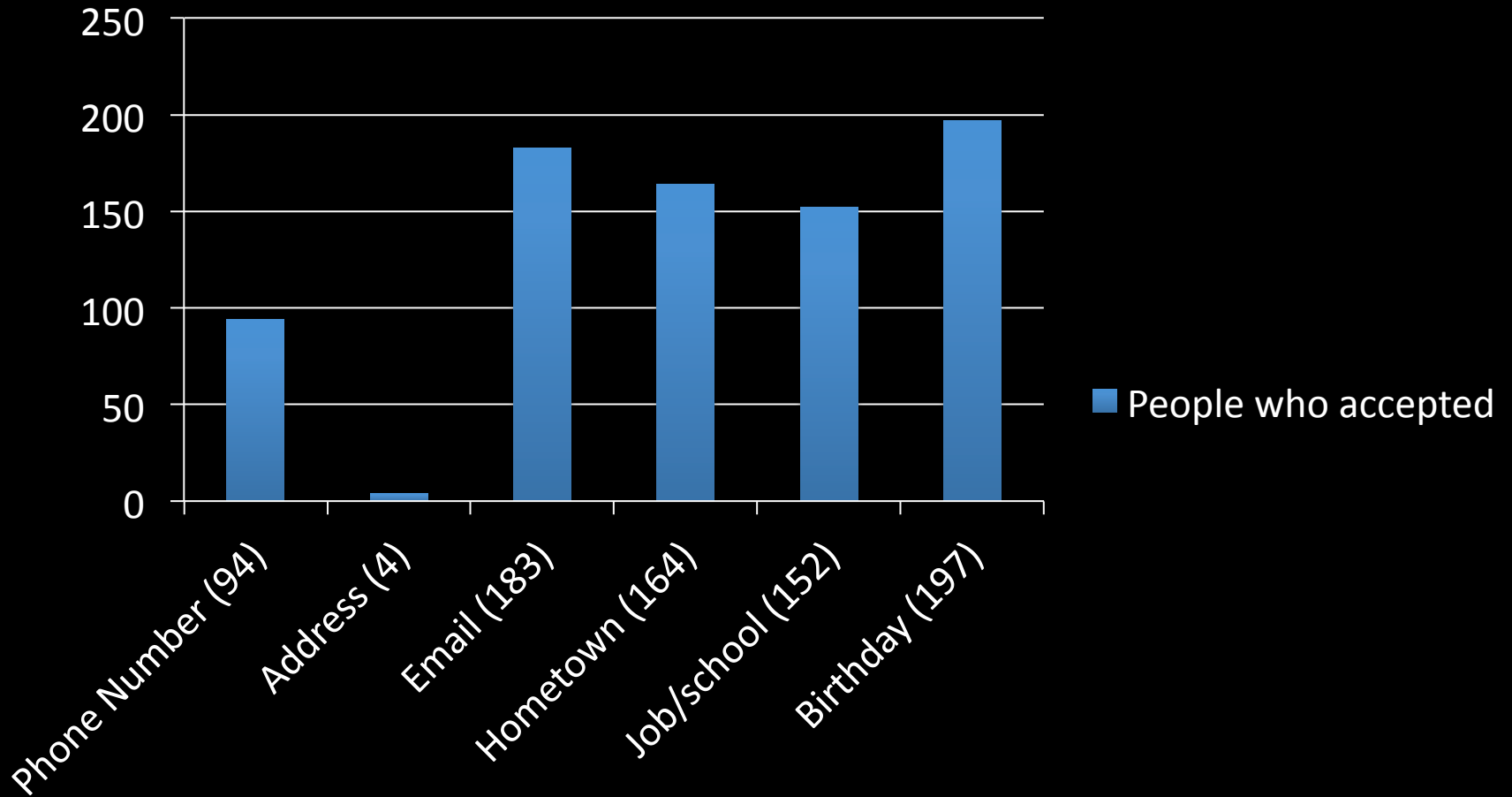
Results

Our results were as expected. We predicted that the younger the age, the more readily we would be accepted.

The 16 age group had the most accepted profiles. People didn't seem to question whether they knew these people or not.

The 21 age group received the most messages asking if we knew them, but still had a lot of people accept them.

The 35 age group mostly had no response, or plainly rejected the profiles.

This project was a great success. It was interesting to see how easily people are willing to give out information about themselves to complete strangers, and how that differs in age.