

# Friends You Haven't Met Yet: A Documentary Short Film

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## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.7.4 [THE COMPUTING PROFESSION]: Professional Ethics – *Ethical dilemmas*.

### 1. SUMMARY

“Friends You Haven’t Met Yet” is a documentary short film that chronicles encounters between extremely prolific bloggers and a computer scientist who uses their personal narratives for research. It explores issues related to public sharing of personal stories, the ethical obligations of researchers who use web data, and the changing nature of online privacy.

The film was conceived by Andrew Gordon and Christopher Wienberg at the University of Southern California, whose research involves the collection of millions of personal stories posted to internet weblogs. In analyzing their data, these researchers discovered an unusual population of extremely prolific bloggers, people who post personal stories about their

daily lives everyday over the course of many years. They posed three questions about this population:

1. What motivates these people to post so frequently and publicly about their personal life?
2. To what degree do these people embellish their stories to make them more interesting than reality?
3. What expectations do these authors have about their readers, and what are the ethical implications for researchers like us who analyze their posts?

To answer these questions, PhD Student Christopher Wienberg contacted many of these bloggers directly and set up face-to-face interviews at their homes. Accompanied by a documentary film crew, Christopher traveled to locations around California, in both urban and rural settings, to better understand the people whose contributions on the web serve as data in social media research.

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