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# The Facebook Story

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## Brief Description

Since its creation in 2004, Facebook has revolutionized the way people communicate and share information. Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg and his fellow computer-science classmates designed Facebook as a social-networking site originally for Harvard students. The site expanded to include all colleges, then high schools, and finally anyone over age thirteen with a valid e-mail address. What was at first used only by young college students has now been adopted by their bosses and their parents (and grandparents) as a way to promote business and to keep in touch with friends and family.

In 2009, Facebook surpassed Myspace as the most used social networking site (Hoadley et al. 50). Its global popularity and success have not been without controversy, ranging from privacy and safety issues to resistance from its own members to changes in design and function. Teenagers are not the only ones getting in trouble with authority figures for posting inappropriate content on their profiles. Employees have learned the hard way not to post sensitive information or photos on a site accessible to their employers.

One of the greatest cultural events of the 21st century, Facebook is a modern social phenomenon that deserves critical study. This book explores the following topics: the creation of Facebook and how it evolved into the world's largest social-networking site; the concerns over privacy, security, and safety; and how online communication affects and relates to relationships, personality, and identity presentation.

## Target Audience and Reading Level

These days, it is hard to find someone who doesn't have a Facebook account or someone who hasn't been pressured to create one. Facebook use among young people is so common that it's taken for granted that every teen to twentysomething has a profile. Increasingly, though, people middle-aged and older are finding their way onto the site. As one friend told me, it's the adults who really need Facebook to find and reconnect with friends not seen or heard from since school days. With friends spread all over the world, what better way is there for people to keep in touch?

Given Facebook's widespread recognition and appeal, there is a natural audience for a book like *The Facebook Story*. People interested in the story of Harvard students' creating a multi-billion-dollar web site will appreciate the book's historical overview. The book's sociological and psychological focus will attract readers curious about Facebook friendships and interactions—the hows and whys of online communication. And the book's subject matter will naturally fascinate people interested in the Internet, modern culture, and phenomena.

This book will be useful to students and professors at the college level although it will be accessible to people without a college education. The book will offer an in-depth analysis of the issues surrounding Facebook, but it will not be overly academic or pedantic.

## Competing Titles

Currently, few books detail Facebook's history, controversial issues, and cultural impact. There is one book that focuses on the story behind Facebook's founding: *The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook: A Tale of Sex, Money, Genius and Betrayal* (by Ben Mezrich, $25.00, 272 pages, hardcover, Doubleday, 2009). According to a review by *Bookmarks Magazine*, however, the book relies too heavily on conjecture and juicy, lurid stories about Mark

Zuckerberg and his friends. My book aims not for sensationalism but an in-depth overview and analysis.

Most books now available are instructional how-to books. For example, there is the recent release, *Facebook Me! A Guide to Having Fun with Your Friends and Promoting Your Projects on Facebook* (by Dave Awl, $19.99, 216 pages, paperback, Peachpit Press, 2009), which serves as a guide for adults venturing into the Facebook world. It covers the website's features, etiquette rules, and advice for publicizing businesses, projects, and causes.

Another title, *The Facebook Era: Tapping Online Social Networks to Build Better Products, Reach New Audiences, and Sell More Stuff* (by Clara Shih, $24.99, 256 pages, paperback, Prentice Hall, 2009), is aimed more directly at business executives keen to stay competitive by taking advantage of social-networking sites.

There are dozens of titles in the same vein: guides for newcomers to Facebook, whether they join to chat with friends or to promote businesses and causes. My book takes a different approach: exploring the cultural and social issues that surround online communication today, the how and why of Facebook, not the how-to.

## Technical Specifications

This book comprises six chapters, each approximately 2500 to 3750 words (ten to fifteen pages). It will include some pictures and tables, but the book will be primarily text. Illustrations may include examples of Facebook pages so that readers will have a visual to go with the descriptions of the different Facebook features.

## Annotated Table of Contents

### Chapter One—The Facebook Story

Facebook may be the most remarkable thing ever to originate from a college kid's dorm room. It started with a group of computer-savvy students soon caught up in the whirlwind of their creation. Mark Zuckerberg and his friends, Harvard students, created a stir with Facemash.com, a website that let viewers vote on the "hottest" of two Harvard students. It was taken down, and Zuckerberg faced the university's discipline committee for hacking into the school system and using copyrighted material without permission (Cassidy). But this experience laid the groundwork for his later project: an online facebook of all Harvard students that would let them share information with one another. Thefacebook.com became a hit at Harvard and soon spread to other Ivy League schools. The site quickly expanded to let anyone with a college e-mail join. There was an initial controversy when Facebook first included high school students (Cassidy), but today anyone with a legitimate e-mail address can create a account.

Facebook's success did not come without its controversy. Zuckerberg's classmates sued him for stealing their ideas and work to create the popular website (Cassidy). Interviewed before the lawsuit was settled, Zuckerberg seemed unconcerned and calm. He ended up making a private settlement with his former friends.

In recent years Facebook has grown to involve more than idle chat between friends. It is the new popular spot for causes and groups to attract new members and for businesses to market their products and look up job applicants. And Facebook is not just for kids anymore; parents and grandparents are joining to reconnect with friends (and keep an eye on their children). Even in times of crisis, people can use Facebook to keep family and friends updated.

While it could be called the greatest time-waster since 2004, the year of its creation, a procrastination aid for students everywhere, Facebook has effectively linked the world together as never before. It has an array of features: photos, the posting Wall, groups, poke wars, games, and other applications. I will describe the landscape of Facebook for readers unfamiliar with the site.

**Chapter Two—Facebook Relationships: Who Am I, Who Are You, and Why Are We Friends?**

To explore Facebook, I have to examine both the individual and the group: the identity of the individual user and the interactions between Facebook friends. People have been constructing their online identities since the dawn of the Internet age. Facebook, unlike anonymous chat rooms and message boards, displays true identities, so users must carefully present themselves to their peers. Sociologists and psychologists have been quick to study the new Facebook phenomenon. One study suggests that users overwhelmingly prefer implicit to explicit identity claims. They let their photos, Wall posts, and lists of media preferences say more about themselves than the explicit "About Me" feature (Zhao et al. 1826). Traditional markers of identity, like religion, politics, and work, are often ignored in favor of media preferences (e.g., favorite films, music, and books) on the Facebook profile. Users try to present themselves in a favorable light, emphasizing traits like sociability, well-roundedness, and thoughtfulness. Photos usually feature at least two people—users want to appear group-oriented and fun-loving. Since they are linked to their real-life friends and acquaintances, Facebookers cannot blatantly lie about themselves, but they often strive to present their brightest, most optimistic selves (Zhao et al. 1821).

Researchers have also studied how users interact with one another on social-networking sites. Users observe or lurk as often (if not more) than they actively post. There is an acknowledged element of voyeurism on Facebook. It has become the new public commons, where everyone knows everyone else's business, and almost immediately. Users post on Facebook to seek peer feedback and boost their self-esteem, but excessive use smacks of narcissism. Facebook and other forms of "me media" (like Twitter) let people update their statuses whenever they want, even with minutiae or seemingly random and pointless posts. People used to fear that the new millennium would herald an age of social isolation and weak personal ties. However, the opposite may be true, with Facebook and Twitter creating a communication overload. To be fair, these tools can aid in problem-solving (granting each user access to wide circle of consultants), and all the small, seemingly meaningless posts and Tweets can add to up to create a portrait of someone's life. People may argue over how meaningful these relationships are, and some sociologists worry that having hundreds of "friends" can spread emotions too thin (Thompson). Users can casually "friend" and "unfriend" people with the click of a button. While Facebook can widen one's social circle, it doesn't appear to increase the Dunbar number—that is, the supposed limit on how many people someone can know at a time. The number of intimate friends doesn't increase, but users can hold on to weak ties that they would otherwise forget about.

Facebook use is almost universal at colleges; it has become as ubiquitous and taken for granted as the iPod and alcohol consumption. Its ubiquity among young people, however, creates an incredible pressure to join and conform to a certain image. Not participating means being out of the loop. Even users who report feeling harried and overwhelmed by the glut of online communication say they cannot imagine living without it. It has become the accepted form of

social interaction because it is fast, convenient, and easier than picking up a phone. People find that, unless they join, they won't have an online identity; they must present themselves the way they want, or risk letting others do it for them.

**Chapter Three— The News Feed Controversy and Other Privacy and Security Concerns**

In 2006, Facebook introduced the News Feed, which created an uproar among users. People objected to having their every update broadcast immediately on the home page. Even though News Feed did not display anything more than what users themselves posted, people perceived a lack of control and loss of privacy. For instance, a News Feed post might announce to an entire network that "John changed his relationship status to single," thus broadcasting to all his friends that he just broke up with his girlfriend. People complained that News Feed fed voyeuristic tendencies and facilitated Facebook stalking (Thompson). The protests prompted Zuckerberg to apologize and add privacy settings to give back a sense of control to Facebookers. However, he predicted correctly that they would soon adjust to the change. He was right: few people actually cancelled their accounts, and Facebook soon experienced a boom in popularity, prompting Zuckerberg to open the site to the general public. While the News Feed ultimately worked in the company's favor, it brought up the issue of familiarity and comfort; not only do users want to feel in control of their profiles, they also find sudden changes jolting.

However, Facebook does have genuine risks to privacy and security. Inappropriate photos and Wall posts have gotten too many students, teachers, and employees in hot water. Coaches frequently check their football players' profiles on Saturday nights for evidence of partying; students can face suspension or expulsion for posting incriminating photos of underage drinking. College students entering the job market often learn the hard way that employers can check Facebook profiles for unprofessional conduct. Even teachers, usually held to a high moral

standard, have been suspended, fired, or not hired for letting students see questionable material on their Facebooks. Even when someone "untags" himself in a photo (i.e., removes the link to his name and profile), the picture doesn't go away. That person still risks being recognized doing something he would prefer to remain private.

Facebook's response has been to let users block certain people (e.g., employers or parents) from seeing parts of or the entire profile. Users can even block people from finding them in a Facebook search. But these measures seem to run contrary to Facebook's purpose—to reconnect with friends, to see and be seen. The downside is that some people realize they do not want contact with some people.

Cyberbullying has become a serious problem for young people. Taunting and bullying become much easier when done online or through texts. It is easier to be cruel when not face-to-face. When these media tools are all around us, a bombardment of bullying messages can have damaging results (Claburn). For Phoebe Prince, a 15-year-old student in Massachusetts, the unrelenting bullying at school and through texts and Facebook was too much for her to bear. In March 2010, nine of her classmates were charged with criminal harassment following Prince's suicide in January (Goldman).

Children's safety here is a major concern for most parents and teachers. While Facebook requires users to use a legitimate e-mail account (thus cutting down on predators disguising themselves), it is hard for Facebook to ensure that every user is truly over age thirteen. There was concern when high schoolers were first allowed to join Facebook because of young teens' immaturity. Many lack the life experience and good judgment to know how to censor themselves online. Parental supervision is necessary to keep children from sharing sensitive information about themselves. And it doesn't take a formal study to know that excessive Internet use can

affect school performance. Even college students will readily admit to using Facebook to procrastinate instead of working on an assignment.

Beyond issues of privacy, Facebook also has its occasional security gaps. Recent smartphone glitches have resulted in people pulling up strangers' Facebook accounts. While hackers would need to have access to hundreds of accounts to cause serious damage to the website, there is no way to judge how much damage an individual user could face if a stranger accessed her profile.

## Annotated Bibliography

Carter, Heather L., Teresa S. Foulger, and Ann Dutton Ewbank. "Have You Googled Your Teacher Lately? Teachers' Use of Social Networking Sites." *The Phi Delta Kappan* 89.9 May 2008: 681–685. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

With the growing popularity of social-networking sites, teachers are learning the hard way that what they post on Facebook or YouTube could endanger their professional careers. Digital communication is infinitely useful in today's world, but it is necessary to remember that once something is put online, it can be difficult or even impossible to get rid of.

Teachers have always been held to a higher moral standard than most other adults, and they need to use good judgment and caution in what they share on social-networking sites. Their reputation, credibility, and even their jobs may be at stake. Several teachers have been reprimanded, fired, or prevented from getting hired because of inappropriate material or criticisms of the school system posted online. The offending material can be as simple as photos from a party involving alcohol or racy song lyrics to more controversial matters like professional nude photographs and inappropriate contact with students.

Teachers have the same right to free speech as other Americans, but the legal system has not yet decided what disciplinary actions are necessary for teachers' off-duty expression that is "not of public concern."

**Response:**

Regardless of whether it is fair, professional conduct for teachers extends outside the classroom. While the legal system and school boards may still be wrestling with the issue of free speech and teachers' inappropriate web content, teachers need to keep a clear boundary between

their professional and personal lives. High school teachers who "friend" students on Facebook are opening themselves up to scrutiny and recriminations if they post anything inappropriate. People may have different standards for what is appropriate, but the key fact is that there are certain things that students and parents should not know about the teacher.

This article shares some themes with Thompson's "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy," such as the high degree of online connectedness and loss of privacy. "Privacy as information access and illusory control" by Hoadley and others also delves into the issues of privacy and the risks of posting inappropriate content on Facebook.

Cassidy, John. "Me Media." *The New Yorker* 15 May 2006. *NewYorker.com*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard psychology major, attained a reputation as a "programming prodigy" when he and some friends developed a social networking site called Thefacebook.com. The site allowed Harvard students to enter and share details about themselves: birthday, photo, classes and clubs, favorite movies, books, music, etc. The site went up February 4, 2004. By the end of the month, about three-fourths of Harvard's undergraduates had joined. Zuckerberg and his friends launched the site at Columbia, Yale, and Stanford, and by June 2004 it had spread to at least forty schools with 150,000 users.

When Facebook first granted access to high school students, some college students objected to the merging of two different worlds. Some high schoolers had trouble creating accounts if they had no school e-mail address, and Facebook had trouble ensuring that users were over age thirteen. Another growing concern was the possible lack of privacy, with incriminating

party photos being one issue. Even if a user "untagged" himself in a photo, the image remained online for his peers and teachers to see.

One sociologist studying the phenomenon of social-networking sites credits not networking with their success but "voyeurism and exhibitionism." He compares spending time on these sites to mingling at shopping malls: the young like to hang out with friends, "see and be seen," and they have the spare time to do it. There is also a great pressure on young people to create a profile: if they don't, then they lack an online identity. In one important aspect of student life—the Internet—they don't exist.

**Response:**

This article includes a detailed background of Facebook's development, including Zuckerberg's catapulting to fame and billionaire status. It also delves into the issues of privacy and what users may not like to think about: narcissism and voyeurism. An undeniable fact of Facebook is that it allows users to "spy" on their friends. And the young users (particularly high schoolers) may not have the maturity and good judgment to censor what they post about themselves.

This article shares themes with Thompson's "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy," which discusses the alarming narcissism of some Facebookers and Twitterers and the pressure many young people feel to conform and participate in these social networking tools. It also shares similarities with Alan Tabak's article for *The Harvard Crimson* in that it covers the early history of Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg.

Hoadley, Christopher M., Heng Xu, Joey J. Lee, and Mary Beth Rosson. "Privacy as information access and illusory: The case of the Facebook News Feed privacy outcry." *Electronic*

*Commerce Research and Applications* 9 (2010): 50–60. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 15 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

On September 5, 2006, Facebook introduced News Feed and Mini Feed. These features pulled new information posted by Facebook users on their profiles and displayed it in "headline-news format" on the site's first page for the users' networks of friends to see. Suddenly, users could instantly see what their friends had done and said on Facebook, including Wall posts and changes in relationship status. Facebook promoted News Feed as an even more convenient way for friends to exchange and learn new information about each other. Instead, there was a large outcry over what users considered a privacy intrusion. Why, if the information available before and after News Feed was introduced was the same (and accessible to the same selected group of people), were Facebook users upset about a loss of privacy? A study involving 172 Facebook users at a university led the researchers to believe that easier information access and an illusory loss of control set off the News Feed backlash. By broadcasting new information, News Feed called attention to changes that previously only users who actively searched for them would find. Facebook responded to the outcry by introducing new privacy control features that allowed users to set limits on what could appear on News Feed.

**Response:**

I remember the News Feed controversy and the Facebook groups protesting the feature that attracted thousands of members. While no information was shared on News Feed that wasn't posted on users' profiles or Walls, Facebook users were against the feature because it made it too easy to spy on other people. Users worried about Facebook stalking—suddenly, everyone would instantly know if a friend went from being "in a relationship" to "single." While a majority of

users protested or criticized News Feed, few actually deleted their accounts. Rather, users changed their privacy settings. Interestingly, the more friends users had, the more likely they were to change their privacy settings. This fact suggests that users were more concerned about personal information being accessed by their friends than what personal information was posted by themselves.

Thompson's "Brave New World" also discusses the initial outcry over the introduction of News Feed and how Zuckerberg correctly predicted that users would adjust to it. "Have You Googled Your Teacher Lately?" by Heather Carter and her colleagues also focuses on the erosion of privacy on social-networking sites and how people are growing less concerned about it.

Keen, Judy. "Facebook, Twitter 2-way 'lifeline' for news, relief, people's statuses." *USA Today* 14 Jan. 2010: A7. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 15 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

With the devastating earthquake in Haiti, phones stopped working in the country. E-mail was unreliable or inaccessible. One woman relied on Facebook through a satellite Internet connection to contact family members and friends in the United States. Others used Facebook to ask for help finding missing family members and donations. They were able to contact the media through Facebook messaging and by posting pictures. A Facebook spokesman said, "There have been more than 1,500 Facebook status updates per minute containing the word 'Haiti' since the quake."

These events have shown what a powerful tool social-networking sites can be in a crisis. Facebook is not the only channel being used to communicate. Twitter allows Haitians to share

firsthand accounts and pictures of the earthquake. Twitterers like Wyclef Jean (a native Haitian) and charity organizations asked for donations. A Verizon Wireless spokesman said that texters gave more than $1 million to the American Red Cross just hours after the quake by texting a certain number. Blogs written in Haiti were online bulletin boards for the missing and injured.

**Response:**

Modern technology allows people in crisis to seek relief and contact loved ones faster than ever before. Even telephones and e-mail cannot compete with the efficiency and convenience of Facebook, Twitter, and other online sites. As much as Facebook is used for entertainment and socializing, the earthquake in Haiti shows that it can also be used for humanitarian purposes and to give people in emergencies some peace of mind.

This article suggests that Facebook and other social networking tools have become such a common and everyday part of our lives that we may not even realize how much we use them. The more familiar and ubiquitous a tool becomes, the less we notice it when we use it (think of the telephone and now the cell phone). And the more familiar Facebook becomes, the more it will be used in new and innovative ways, often without anyone's even realizing its new place in our lives. This idea of modern technology becoming familiar and invisible appears in "Personality and motivations associated with Facebook use" by Craig Ross and others.

Pempek, Tiffany A., Yevdokiya A. Yermolayeva, and Sandra L. Calvert. "College students' social networking experiences on Facebook." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 30 (2009): 227–238. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

Today social-networking sites are a primary way for young people to interact and share information. Young people's use of such sites contributes to the development of identity and peer relationships. According to surveys of college students in several U.S. universities, 91% of students use Facebook. In this article, the researchers discuss the findings of a study they conducted in which 92 undergraduate students measured their time spent on Facebook and the activities they participated in with a daily diary. At the end of the week-long study, the students also completed a 54-question survey that asked for demographic information (e.g., gender, race, age) and information about Facebook activity over the past week.

The study's findings suggest that young adults use Facebook as a means of self-disclosure. The site is designed to allow its users to broadcast personal information to a hand-selected audience of friends. Young Facebook users desire peer feedback. They express themselves by posting information about their interests and personal identity, and their friends' responses validate their sense of self-identity, boost self-esteem, and facilitate social interaction. The average time spent on Facebook was approximately 30 minutes per day. While college students create their profiles and post messages on their friends' Walls, Facebook users also spend a considerable amount of time lurking on the site, viewing other people's profiles without posting anything. Most users use the site to keep up with existing friends, not to find new ones.

**Response:**

The researchers conducted this study to learn how much, why, and how college students use Facebook. The article presents the findings in statistics and tables. It also analyzes in great detail the students' answers to the survey. I find this article useful because it sheds light on the how and why of Facebook use. One interesting fact I noted was that students cited media preferences (favorite books, movies, music, etc.) as greater markers of identity than the

traditional markers, such as religion, political ideology, and work. As for the issue of lurking (also jokingly referred to as Facebook stalking), some of the students surveyed reported a voyeuristic aspect to Facebook. It is human nature, the article suggests, to want to observe others, even over cyberspace. The article is a good source for analyzing college students' use of Facebook.

This article and the ones by Craig Ross and others and Shanyang Zhao and others all present the results of studies of college students' Facebook use. They all explore the different factors involved in online interaction. Because Facebook originally limited access to college students, it is critical to examine and understand Facebook use by this predominant group. These three studies were among the first to explore the phenomenon of social-networking sites in the college setting.

Robertson, Jordan. "Facebook a bit too friendly to Georgians." *Atlanta Journal Constitution* 19 Jan. 2010: B8. Print.

**Summary:**

In early January, some Georgian women logged onto Facebook on their mobile phones and found themselves in strangers' accounts. Other people have reported similar problems. The glitch seems to stem from AT&T, not Facebook. Security experts say that such flaws can occur with e-mail and other personal accounts and on personal computers as well as mobile phones. In the Georgians' case, according to Robertson, the problem is not with the phones but with the "infrastructure connecting the phones to the Internet." These glitches pose security risks, if strangers can gain access to others' personal information. However, hackers would have to have access to the network that routes the Internet to individual users to cause significant damage. As

it its, they would only have access to one person's account at a time. Facebook offered no comment and directed complaints to AT&T.

**Response:**

Even computer and phone experts seem befuddled by these bizarre occurrences. These glitches show that security risks exist with social-networking sites and personal accounts when the infrastructure connecting users to the Internet starts malfunctioning.

The disturbing part of this issue is that users may never know if a stranger happens to pull up sensitive information on their accounts. People have become accustomed to having the Internet constantly at their fingertips with devices like Blackberries and iPhones, but the technology presents new problems when such gaps appear and experts cannot figure out why.

The articles by Heather Carter and others and Christopher Hoadley and others also discuss the concerns over privacy and security. With the uncertainties of online interaction on sites like Facebook, there are important concerns about people's privacy and safety. Understanding the risks involved in social networking can prevent dangers to children and protect users from Facebook conflicts at work or school.

Ross, Craig, Emily S. Orr, Mia Sisic, Jaime M. Arseneault, Mary G. Simmering, and R. Robert Orr. "Personality and motivations associated with Facebook use." *Computers in Human Behavior* 25 (2009): 578–586. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

While most social-networking sites demonstrate an online-to-offline trend (that is, relationships formed online often result in meetings in the real world), Facebook relationships tend to work the other way. Users friend people they already know from real-life contact.

Facebook is generally not used as a tool to find new people online but to reconnect with or maintain existing friends.

The authors chose to study how different personality traits affect Facebook use. The Five-Factor Model divides personality into five traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Ninety-seven students at a university were surveyed about their Facebook use and took a test to measure their personality trait levels. Neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience were found to have varying effects on Facebook activity, while agreeableness and conscientiousness were not significant factors in the study.

Certain personality traits may affect how Facebook users interact with others. Highly neurotic people prefer posting on Walls because they can control what is revealed to others. Those low in neuroticism prefer posting photos, which may reveal more than the poster intends. Extroverts do not have more Facebook friends (as was hypothesized) because they do not use the Internet as a substitute for real-life activities. Extroverts do tend to join more Facebook groups, however.

**Response:**

Other traits that the study did not examine could also be factors in Facebook use, such as shyness and narcissism. People may also be seeking entertainment, social support, and basic communication. Competency and familiarity are also important factors. The more familiar a mode of communication becomes, the less people think about it and the more natural (and invisible) it seems. This study will be useful when I examine how personality traits affect interaction with Facebook friends and the differences between online and offline communication.

Thompson's "Brave New World" also covers the different personality traits associated with excessive Facebook and Twitter use.

Tabak, Alan J. "Hundreds Register for New Facebook Website: Facemash creator seeks new reputation with latest online project." *The Harvard Crimson* 9 Feb. 2004. *The Harvard Crimson Online*. Web. 21 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student, created Facemash.com in the fall of 2003. The website took unauthorized photos of random Harvard undergraduates and asked viewers to vote on their attractiveness. Drawing complaints from school administrators and students, Zuckerberg removed the site after a few days. He also had to go before the Administrative Board. The problem was not just over the site's content but also the fact that he hacked into Harvard's computer network and used copyrighted material without permission.

Zuckerberg learned an important lesson from the Facemash experience. When he created thefacebook.com in early 2004, he made sure the site did not contain copyrighted material and did not break any Harvard rules. Thefacebook.com allowed Harvard students to search for classmates in their Houses, courses, and social organizations. In less than a week after it launched, it gained over 650 members. Zuckerberg beat the campus's plans to upload an official Harvard facebook, and he boasted of the site's privacy controls that allowed users to limit who can access and view their profiles.

**Response:**

This article from Harvard's newspaper shows the school's initial response to Zuckerberg's creation of the earliest form of Facebook. It is interesting to note that Facemash, a

website he created almost as a prank, taught him some valuable lessons and in part inspired thefacebook.com.

Another key point of the article is Zuckerberg's assertion that he did not create thefacebook to turn a profit. He expressed no interest in selling users' e-mail addresses, and the thought of turning the site into a résumé directory, with businesses paying fees to search for job applicants, seemed to take the fun out of the website. The point of Facebook (at least originally) was to have an easy online way to keep track of and interact with friends. It was designed with young people in mind because students generally have more time on their hands than those in the working world. This article, written at Harvard soon after Facebook's first launch, provides an initial response to the website and some of its early controversy. John Cassidy's "Me Media" continues the story of Facebook's expansion, success, and controversy.

Thompson, Clive. "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy." *The New York Times* 7 Sept. 2008. *Nytimes.com*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

When Zuckerberg introduced News Feed to Facebook in September 2006, the new feature created an immediate panic and backlash over the sudden loss of privacy. Zuckerberg allowed users to adjust their privacy settings, but he predicted that once they got over the shock, they would grow to love the increased connectedness with their friends. He was right: within a few weeks, Facebook use boomed, and Zuckerberg opened the site to the public (not just students).

Facebook and other awareness tools (like Twitter, Flickr, and Loopt) allow people to update their followers on the minutiae of their everyday lives. Some see it as extreme narcissism.

Today's youth, raised on these Internet tools and obsessed with celebrity, start to believe that everything they say and do is fascinating to others. However, such tools do increase people's social circles and can help them solve problems. A person seeking advice has literally hundreds of consultants at his fingertips. Others worry that users will form too many parasocial relationships (with remote strangers) and neglect close friends and family because their emotions are spread too thin.

Studying the grooming techniques of people and primates, anthropologist Robin Dunbar came up with the "Dunbar number"—the number of acquaintances a person (or ape) can know at a time. For humans, the limit seems to be 150 (for apes, it's 55). Facebook and Twitter may be increasing users' social circles, but the number of intimate friends and family doesn't increase. Rather, "weak ties" (loose friends and acquaintances) remain in users' lives when otherwise they would not think about them.

**Response:**

This article explores the nature of friendships in today's media-driven, Internet-connected world. Sociologists of the 20th century worried that people would become increasingly isolated, drifting through life, living in large, impersonal cities, and not forming intimate attachments. Instead, the opposite seems to be true with the advent of the Internet. People are going back to the old way of life, with everyone knowing everyone else's business.

As much as Facebook decreases privacy and adds drama to users' lives, young people cannot give it up. It has become the only way they know to keep up with friends and, more important, present their identities to those friends. This article falls into my discussion of identity construction and the nature of online friendships. It will help me explore the levels of emotional connectedness and the backlash against the incessant and all-consuming media presence in our

lives. The article by Christopher Hoadley and his colleagues delves into a more in-depth discussion of the News Feed controversy, and study by Craig Ross and others also discusses various personality factors that influence Facebook use, including introversion and extraversion.

Zhao, Shanyang, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin. "Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships." *Computers in Human Behavior* 24 (2008): 1816–1836. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 11 Jan. 2010.

**Summary:**

This article explores Facebook use from a sociological perspective. Identity construction in online, anonymous settings has often involved role-playing and stretching the truth. In a "nonymous" (not anonymous) setting like Facebook, however, where the users may be held accountable for what they post, people present what Zhao and his colleagues call their "hoped-for possible selves." The researchers performed a content analysis of 63 Facebook accounts at a university and found that users predominantly establish their identities implicitly, not explicitly. They show rather than tell. Wall posts and pictures show them to be sociable and popular. Descriptions of hobbies and interests indicate their coolness and "cultural selves" (i.e., their media preferences). Explicit claims of identity, such as the "About Me" category, are typically brief and playfully cryptic.

Facebook users attempt to show themselves to be popular, well-rounded, and thoughtful. These traits may be true to some extent, but they are the most positive and optimistic portrayals possible. Less positive traits and deviance are usually hidden. Additionally, academic and religious values, while meaningful to many Facebook users, are generally not highlighted on Facebook pages.

**Response:**

This article is useful because it goes into an in-depth discussion of the differences in identity construction in various online settings. With anonymous settings like chat rooms, people can pretend to be anyone they want. Social-networking sites like Facebook, however, are more likely to show the users' real identities and affiliated institutions. In this nonymous setting, the users can be held accountable for their words and actions. While their presentations of self may be more truthful, they can also be one-sided and misleading. Zhao and colleagues also stress that users like to establish their identities in terms of groups and cultural media, not strictly as individuals. This article will be helpful in my discussion of the construction of identity. It focuses on the self-image and how people present themselves to others through visual and written representations. Even with varying backgrounds, interests, and personalities, almost all Facebook users want to project themselves the same way, as fun-loving, group oriented, and well-rounded. The article by Pempek and colleagues also explores the specific ways that users, particularly college students, interact on Facebook.

## Introduction

As I came home late one evening after class, my husband Steve told me, “You have to see Amanda’s new Facebook status. It’s Doppelgänger week.”

“It’s what?” I asked. Logging onto my profile, I saw my friend Amanda’s status displayed on News Feed. “It's Doppelgänger week; change your profile picture to someone famous you have been told you look like. After you update your profile with your evil twin photo then cut and paste this to your status!”

“I think I guess who her Doppelgänger is,” I said. Sure enough, her profile picture was of Molly Ringwald, *Breakfast Club*-era. People had always told her she was a dead ringer for the Brat Pack actress—same fair skin, facial expressions, hairstyle. It wasn’t just Amanda who had posted her Doppelgänger on Facebook. The latest viral trend was spreading quickly across Facebook, with amusing results. Steve’s friend David, a tall slender man with dark hair and glasses, had chosen Waldo of *Where’s Waldo?* My brother-in-law Jerry had picked Urkel, the sitcom character, even though they shared nothing in common, except for glasses. Steve had become Chris Farley, the funnyman.

“Who should I be?” I wondered. Steve suggested Tina Fey. “I like the way you think!” I said. Being much more computer proficient than I, he helped me find a good picture of the *30 Rock* actress, upload it to my Facebook, and set it as my profile picture. People started commenting on the photo within minutes.

My sister Carly was the first to respond on my Wall: “you do not look like tina fey. sorry babe.”

“What are you talking about? Everyone says I look like her!” I typed back, being facetious.

Alicia, Carly's best friend, chimed in. "ahaha this makes me laugh :) im going to have to side with britt on this one...there is a bit of a resemblance."

It's all in the hair and glasses and Greek features, I tried to reason with Carly. Not surprisingly, considering the actress's popular *SNL* skits, several people confused my Doppelgänger with Sarah Palin.

While posting copyrighted material on Facebook is against the website's terms of service, Facebook apparently let the transgressions slide, even as Doppelgänger Week turned into two weeks and even longer in some users' cases. I'll admit I was one of those users who was reluctant to give up her celebrity look-alike profile picture. "doppleganger week is over brittany. the end," Alicia wrote on my Wall a few weeks later.

It was admittedly just another silly trend, fun but pointless, which nonetheless rekindled my interest in Facebook. After my initial fervor over Facebook when I first joined, my activity on the site had waned over the years, until I was logging on only a few times a month just to see if I'd received any new messages or Wall posts. My sister and some other friends noticed and would preface their messages with "I know you won't see this for a long time, but…" While my interest in (and dependence on) Facebook had fizzled, I was well aware of my friends' steady reliance on the social-networking site and of more and more people joining every day.

What surprised me was how many of those new members were adults, and by that I mean *real* grown-ups, not my college-aged peers. Increasingly, I was getting friend requests from my parents' friends, aunts and uncles, and friends' parents. Some were just as active on Facebook as any of my highly dedicated friends. Walking into Carly's bedroom at any time of the day, I would find her engaged in what I called "Facebook studying"—that is, flipping back and forth between Facebook and whatever paper she had to write for school. Not surprisingly, she had her

Facebook window opened more often than her Word document. I witnessed her engaging in separate endless chats with multiple friends at a time. “You see these people for hours every day at school,” I’d say. “Don’t you run out of things to talk about?” Apparently not! Why didn’t she just call them, I’d ask, instead of having fragmented conversations that could take hours? At this point, Carly would fix me with a look that clearly meant, *You just don’t get it.* Maybe there was a way to learn more.

*How I found Facebook*

I first heard about Facebook six years ago, as an undergraduate student at Kennesaw State University. In a block of time between classes, I would meet my friend Roseanne in the student center for lunch and to surf the Web on our laptops. She told me I had to check out Facebook. “Everybody’s getting on it,” she said.

I stored the information away, not interested at first. Weeks later, I asked her, “What was the name of that website again?”

That night I set to work designing my profile. Name, sex, birthday, hometown, school. Those were easy. The hard part came when I got to the Likes and Interests section. How could I winnow my favorite movies and bands into manageable lists? Describing my favorite hobbies and activities reminded me of the letters to pen pals I used to write in the third grade. I was stumped by the About Me section—I think I ended up describing my school and my job more than myself. Was it possible to compress all of my interests, likes, thoughts, and personality factors into a neat set of lists?

It was this question and my observations of friends’ steady, religious Facebook use that piqued my interest in studying the phenomenon of social-networking sites. Not surprisingly, there were several sociological studies of Facebook use and thoughtful analyses of the site’s

impact on modern culture. As an added bonus, I could jokingly tell my friends that I was doing my own Facebook studying. Rediscovering the constant online chatter and interaction on News Feed and friends' profiles also provided dizzying distractions to my research!

*The Facebook survey*

Dr. Anne Richards, one of my capstone committee members, suggested asking Facebook users about their views and habits on the site. A Facebook survey could add another dimension to my research, providing direct, in-depth opinions about the strengths and weaknesses, benefits and pitfalls of social networking. Seeking approval from KSU's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) and following its guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects was yet another eye-opening experience. I had to be mindful of the effects my survey could have on any participants. To reduce any possible complications, I decided to restrict the survey to Facebook users aged 18 and older. I intended to send my survey to the people on my friends list, and the vast majority of them were of age anyway.

Responses came in within an hour of posting the survey on a Facebook group I created called "Complete a Facebook Survey—Help a Graduate Student." (I wanted to appeal to people's sense of altruism!) Thanks to my husband Steve, Carly, and some of her friends, the survey spread to other friend circles and networks. By the end of the month, I had 40 participants who had provided insightful, detailed responses to my questions. Some of the respondents were close friends and family, even some friends' parents. There were also complete strangers. One woman I didn't know, a friend of a friend, sent me a private message expressing her wish to participate but confessing that she didn't know how to copy and paste the survey into a message box. If I had to do the survey over again, I would spend more planning on the technical aspects, making it as simple as possible for those with limited technological skills. Yes, I also had to give

special instructions to my mom and some of her friends. I'm grateful to them for being so patient and good-natured about it!

Designing the survey required more thought and planning than I had expected. It wasn't enough to ask Facebook users general questions about their activities on the site. I also wanted questions that would reveal their opinions about the pros and cons of social networking. How did they view Facebook friendships and their interacting via Wall posts and messaging? Knowing how many friends each user had would be helpful in determining to what extent users rely on Facebook to keep up with friends. Because I was exploring privacy and security issues in one of my chapters, I also wanted to ask if users had any concerns about privacy on Facebook. How did they feel about frequent Facebook upgrades that can potentially alter users' security settings? How high do they rank the importance of privacy?

Since the third chapter also discusses cases of people's being penalized at work for their Facebook content, I included questions like, "Have you ever posted something on Facebook you later regretted?" and "Have you ever gotten in trouble with someone (e.g., a friend, parent, teacher, or employer) for something you posted on Facebook?" While not many participants had juicy stories to share, those that did reported surprisingly predictable issues: posts that led to misunderstandings between friends, drunken photos removed because of embarrassment or fear of consequences, fights breaking out on groups featuring political debates. Users' actions in these situations were also generally uniform: removing the offending post or picture and, in some cases, apologizing to offended friends.

There were only a couple reported instances of users' getting in trouble at work for Facebook use. One man said his supervisor reprimanded him for revealing something private about work. A young woman said her boss discovered her logging onto Facebook during work

hours by checking her posts against her work schedule. This last instance surprised me, not because the boss decided to check up on her employee, but because it was so simple to do so. Everything that a Facebooker does on the website is marked with the date and time.

When I later read in the newspaper that FBI agents were starting to track suspects' activities by friending them on Facebook, I thought, *Now it begins*. It's not that I particularly care that the government is using Facebook to catch criminals and terrorists dumb enough to record their actions on a social-networking site (okay, I actually find it amusing), but the technique raises other questions. What we view as innocuous participation in a popular social-networking site could potentially be used to monitor our behavior. I know that I'm not a paranoid person, and I'm always careful not to reveal incriminating evidence of my secret criminal life, but what about the other 400 million Facebook users? What about other countries that have police states, whose people live in fear of governments with harsher and stricter citizen surveillance? If I were to continue my studies of Facebook, I would explore its impact in other parts of the world and any ensuing conflicts.

Studying Facebook turned out to be a more complicated and in-depth task than I had expected. There was much more to it than describing its creation, history, and unique features. I wanted to capture the life of Facebook, the spark that attracts so many users excited to have an online interactive hub. It's not just teenagers like Carly and her friends who spend hours a day Facebooking—it's a growing legion of adults, businesses, and FBI agents.

*My MAPW journey*

Joining the MAPW program at Kennesaw State University seemed like the logical next step to take after getting my bachelor's degree in English. While it made sense, I'll admit that my thought process at that point was still a bit simple, not completely formed. All through college I

struggled with the question, what do I want to do? I knew that I liked to write. Reading and writing and English classes had always been my favorites in school. I knew that I wanted to write. Some writing job, combined in some way with being paid to read novels, would be ideal. When people asked me what I was studying and I told them I was an English major, their next question was always, “Oh, so you want to teach?” Well, not exactly. It was hard for me to explain, though, what else I wanted to do with a background in English and literature besides teach.

And surprisingly (to me and others who knew me), I did teach for a while, returning to my high school as a substitute English teacher. I came upon the job unexpectedly. It was December 2008; I had just graduated from KSU with a BA in English, and my brother Greg was home from his first semester away at LSU. We went to our old high school to pick up our sister Carly and visit our teachers. It was my freshman English teacher Mrs. Wright who told me I should apply for a substitute teacher position. Mrs. Sizemore, another English teacher, was expecting her baby early next year, and someone was needed to cover her classes while she was on maternity leave for the rest of the spring semester.

I was hesitant. I don’t have any teaching experience, I told her. Mrs. Wright said the school needed someone with an English degree. Because it was a private school, it had different rules about teachers’ licenses. “But I couldn’t stand up there and teach a class,” I said. I thought this point should be obvious to most people who knew me. I’ve never come across as someone comfortable with speaking to large groups of people. How would I handle teaching five rooms full of teenagers, some of them only five years younger than I?

I’m grateful for Mrs. Wright for believing in me and encouraging me. She never expressed any doubts about my ability. The principal, Mr. Moore, she said, would not be

opposed to hiring an alumna. Talking about it with Greg and Carly on the ride home, the idea became intriguing, giving me a giddy feeling. My siblings were for it—they even had another thought. If I did get the position, I would have Carly as one of my students. My parents encouraged me, too. I had a semester off before I could start graduate school, if I were accepted. This, my first professional job, would be an invaluable experience, they said. The pieces quickly fell into place: I had my first successful interview; I attended a seminar in Atlanta to learn the procedures and regulations; and within a month I was in the trenches.

I don't want to make my brief teaching experience sound like a disappointment, because it wasn't. Far from it. The administration and other teachers, some of whom I had known since I was 14, were the best colleagues and guides I could hope for. I was apprehensive at first. "You have to be mean at first," another teacher advised me, to let the students know you mean business. "Give out a couple detentions in the first week," she said. I don't know that any teacher has avoided having discipline issues with at least a couple students, and I didn't, but overall the kids were bright, fun, and good-natured. They made me want to do the best job I could. And I remember giving out my first detention, not in the first week, but soon after. The other teachers congratulated me. "Soon you'll be handing them out like candy," said one of the administrators in the front office.

As proud as I was for taking on something that had seemed so daunting, I realized at the end of the semester that teaching wasn't for me. It wasn't that I didn't like the students or the work, but I felt that I didn't have the right mentality and personality to make it a career. I gained a great respect and admiration for my colleagues, my former teachers, for what they do every day. Teaching requires great passion and a love for the job, which is often thankless. I didn't want to be one of those burnouts who couldn't effectively reach her students. Grading a hundred

freshmen research papers almost brought me to tears a few times, but working my way through the giant cardboard box and reading my students' work made me proud. I got to know their writing styles and gained insights into their thoughts and personalities, which was helpful in the case of the quiet ones who, like me, didn't talk much in class. While I saw my experience as a substitute as a personal achievement, a challenge that I successfully faced, I also knew at the end that I had other plans for my future. I wanted to learn about career options for people who wanted to read and write but didn't want to hand out detention slips to saucy, hyperactive teenagers.

I came into the MAPW program not knowing exactly what to expect. I knew since it was a graduate program for professional writing that there would be writing. I wish I'd known how much writing. With a full course load, I learned quickly that my procrastination habit would not serve me well. It wasn't enough to dash off a paper at the last minute in a burst of frantic energy and deliver it in its raw form. The MAPW program challenged me to truly follow the revision process. Group peer reviews became for me an invaluable element of the writing process. Having fellow students read and evaluate my work opened my eyes to things in my pieces that worked and things that didn't work. These weren't like the peer reviews of my high school days, when I'd exchange papers with a friend, and we'd mark some grammatical errors and draw smiley faces in the margins. I valued what my professors and classmates had to say about my writing because I realized how much I wanted to improve it and make something of my passions.

As much as I appreciated my fellow students in the classroom, I also came to value them as friends. The MAPW program at KSU is an insular, sometimes intimate community. After having the same familiar faces in my classes each semester, I became comfortable with them, in some cases almost as close as with some of my best high school friends. It helped that we shared

each others' writings. We learned not only each others' styles and strengths but also life stories and dreams. I don't want to forget my graduate school friends.

Being in a community of writers made my dreams of being a writer and an author seem more attainable. Not only was I in the company of professors who were published writers, but some of my classmates had had their works published. Hearing about another student's publishing his second novel and going on book tours was a vicarious thrill for me. So was sharing in the success of another student who had a piece she wrote for class about monadnocks, small isolated mountains, accepted by a regional glossy journal. Seeing my peers achieve their goals of becoming professional writers, novel writers, poets, and screenwriters proved to me that success was possible with hard work and dedication.

*Thanks*

My professors were also important guides in my MAPW journey. I've never in all my years at KSU met a professor who wouldn't listen to a student's questions or concerns and do whatever possible to help. The professors in the MAPW program were no exception. They were there to teach and to challenge us. I wish to thank my professors and especially my capstone committee advisors, Dr. Anne Richards and Dr. Laura Dabundo, for their guidance and support. Without their explanations, encouragement, and tireless copyedits, my Facebook project would not have been successful. With what I have learned in the MAPW from class discussions, writing assignments, and professors' sharing of knowledge, I have greater confidence in my skills and renewed interest in becoming a professional writer.

## Chapter One

## The Facebook Story

Facebook's explosion of popularity since 2004 is a stunning feat and more evidence of the power of the Internet to propagate its own phenomena. Just consider the statistics: According to a 2009 survey by PEW Internet and American Life Project, 75% of adult Internet users (age 18–24) in the U.S. have a profile on a social networking site (Hoadley et al. 50). Facebook isn't the first social networking site, but it has slowly crept to the front of the pack, surpassing MySpace. In November 2008, according to M. Arrington, a technology blogger on TechCrunch.com, Facebook had more than 200 million separate visitors, compared to MySpace's 125 million (Hoadley et al. 50). In 2005, John Cassidy of *The New Yorker* noted that "when Accel Partners invested in Facebook, the company was valued at about a hundred million dollars, a figure some media experts considered excessive." Just a year later, the estimated value went up even more (Cassidy). Think of Facebook as the ultimate Internet success story, bringing together millions of users in a complex interactive network, and then remember that it was started by a group of Harvard students in their late teens and early twenties. If you think about it, Facebook may be the most remarkable thing ever to originate from a college kid's dorm room.

### *A Young Entrepreneur*

From a young age, Mark Zuckerberg was a computer wiz, learning how to write software in the sixth grade with the aid of *C++ for Dummies*. In the ninth grade, because his Latin class was studying the Roman Empire, Zuckerberg designed an online version of the game *Risk*, with Julius Caesar as one of the virtual generals developing strategies for world domination. It was an advanced hobby for a computer geek kid from Westchester County, New York (Cassidy).

His interest didn't wane after high school. At Phillips Exeter Academy, in New Hampshire, Zuckerberg and his roommate Adam D'Angelo created software for the mp3 player WinAmp that picked songs to play from a user's online library based on his prior selections. Zuckerberg and D'Angelo's program, called *Synapse*, made connections among similar types of music, so users could have automatic playlists of hard rock, rap, classical, etc. *Synapse* had some success when the boys put it online, and Microsoft and other software companies made some informal offers to purchase it. The boys declined.

In fall 2002, Zuckerberg began classes at Harvard University, majoring in psychology because he expressed an interest in knowing about other people. He continued developing his software writing skills, creating a program called *Coursematch*. Students could use the program to find out who was enrolled in each class. The program that caused the most stir at Harvard, however, was *Facemash*, similar to the website Hot or Not. Zuckerberg downloaded students' pictures from the university houses' websites and posted two at a time on *Facemash*. Viewers voted on the "sexier" photo, and Zuckerberg compiled a "cuteness top-ten list for each house" (Cassidy).

Alan J. Tabak, a writer for *The Harvard Crimson*, covered the flap over *Facemash*. Students and administrators alike objected to the site for being offensive (Tabak). However, this was after more than 22,000 votes were recorded. Zuckerberg was called before the administrative board for "violating students' privacy and . . . stealing the university's intellectual property by downloading pictures without permission" (Cassidy). He avoided suspension or expulsion by agreeing to take down the site. Zuckerberg acknowledged the problems with the site: "Facemash was a joke, it was funny, but at its root it had its problems—not only the idea, but the implementation. It was distributing materials that were Harvard's" (qtd. in Tabak).

Although *Facemash* was a prank, a college kid's ill-advised experiment, it was also a significant precursor to Facebook. The lessons Zuckerberg learned and the flak he received from *Facemash* made a lasting impression. When he launched Facebook, he made sure to give students privacy controls—an effort to placate his classmates and repair his reputation after the *Facemash* fiasco. The charges of stealing intellectual property also had their effect. "I was very careful with [Facebook] to make sure that people don't upload copyrighted materials," said Zuckerberg (qtd. in Tabak).

*Thefacebook.com*

It wasn't long before Zuckerberg was planning his next project. At the time, Harvard, like many colleges, offered each freshman a "facebook" of all the other students: a class directory with a picture of each person and a few details like "name, date of birth, home town, and high school" (Cassidy). Zuckerberg decided to beat Harvard to putting the facebook online. He shared the plan with two roommates, Chris Hughes and Dustin Moskovitz, and they spent a week building the site. Working around the clock during a school break, Zuckerberg and his friends completed most of the site in ten days. They named it thefacebook.com (Cassidy).

A key concept behind thefacebook.com was that it gave users control over their own profiles. Zuckerberg thought that "being able to have access to different people's profiles would be interesting. Obviously, there's no way you can get access to that stuff unless people are throwing up profiles, so I wanted to make an application that would allow people to do that, to share as much information as they wanted while having control over what they put up" (qtd. in Cassidy). Thefacebook.com collected a user's photograph, college major, favorite movies, books, music, and quotes. Users who created profiles could search for their friends' and link their

pages together. The basic bones of Facebook as we know it were in place. Even the "poke" function was available for users to get each others' attention (Cassidy).

Zuckerberg, Hughes, and Moskovitz created their own profiles and then opened the site to the rest of Harvard on February 4, 2004. They sent it through the Kirkland House mailing list and watched it spread through the rest of the school. "By the end of the night, we were, like, actively watching the registration process," said Moskovitz. "Within twenty-four hours, we had somewhere between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred registrants" (qtd. in Cassidy).

*The Harvard Crimson* ran a story on the facebook's success five days after its release. Zuckerberg told the paper: "Everyone's been talking a lot about a universal face book within Harvard. I think it's kind of silly that it would take the University a couple of years to get around to it. I can do it better than they can, and I can do it in a week" (qtd. in Tabak). Arrogant and self-assured, perhaps, but Zuckerberg made good on his assertion. However, the *Crimson* recorded different numbers than the site's creators—just over 650 members in the first few days, significantly lower than Moskovitz's estimate. Whether he exaggerated the number in his excitement or recollected incorrectly, by the end of that February, three-fourths of the school had signed up. "Everyone was talking about it," said one student (Cassidy).

From the start, Zuckerberg specified his intentions for the site. Privacy was a key factor of the facebook's success. He explained to the *Crimson*: "You can limit who can see the information, if you only want current students to see your information, or people in your year, in your house, in your classes" (qtd. in Tabak). Zuckerberg's attention to privacy controls when the site was only available to Harvard would prove even more critical when the site expanded to include other schools and groups. And after the *Facemash* flap, Zuckerberg was careful not to violate any school rules or copyright laws. Kevin S. Davis, Director of Residential Computing at

Harvard, acknowledged that “There’s nothing inherently wrong with a third party site on which students choose to create a personal network.” There would be a problem only if such a site let students upload course syllabi or videos, which thefacebook.com did not.

At the same time, Davis said that Harvard was not as far off from completing its official Facebook as Zuckerberg assumed—the university planned to finish it by the end of that spring semester (Tabak). Zuckerberg just beat Harvard to it. And he and his friends were lucky to have acted when they did. They easily “tapped into a powerful yearning: the desire of hundreds of ambitious and impressionable young people to establish themselves and make friends in an unfamiliar environment” (Cassidy). Facebook arrived at the cusp of a new online social media trend. MySpace had just started in January 2004, and it, Friendster, and other social-networking sites were open to anyone to join. Facebook was unique in that it had links to the physical world. Users had to provide their true identities, and as a result, they might recognize Facebook friends and other users in class or at lunch. The site had an intimate and clubby appeal (Cassidy).

*Facebook’s Expansion*

Word of Facebook’s popularity spread quickly, and before long students from other campuses were asking Zuckerberg to let them join. Zuckerberg asked Moskovitz, who worked at the campus computer lab, to begin expanding thefacebook.com to other Ivy League schools. By the end of February 2004, the site opened to Columbia, Yale, and Stanford. In June, Facebook included forty schools and 150,000 members. That month, Zuckerberg, Moskovitz, and friend Andrew McCollom rented a house in Palo Alto (dubbed “Casa Facebook”) to become their company’s new headquarters (Cassidy).

Maintenance costs were still low, but the work was constant and time consuming. Moskovitz recalled: “We were doing fourteen- or sixteen-hour days. We had, like, a kitchen

table, which we sat around. We had our laptops there, and we, like hammered away" (qtd. in Cassidy). Already, companies had offered to invest in the site, but Zuckerberg chose to rely on his own money, an investment from a Harvard friend, and revenue from advertisements. Renting space on the server for Facebook was their biggest expense, an $85 monthly fee (Cassidy).

When September came, the young men opted not to return to school. They needed money to buy more servers (Facebook then had 250,000 users), so Zuckerberg asked venture capitalists to invest in the rapidly growing site. One such investor was Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal. In exchange for an ownership stake, Thiel lent Zuckerberg the money he needed to open the site to hundreds of other schools that fall.

The year 2005 arrived, and Zuckerberg and company had moved to office suites not far from Stanford University. Over the next few years, Facebook grew to include hundreds of workers—programmers, advertising staff, customer-service reps, etc. Zuckerberg is CEO of Facebook (which dropped the "the" from its title in fall 2005). The site does not employ pop-up ads, and what ads do appear are tailored to match each user's profile (e.g.; his taste in music and movies, etc.; Cassidy).

*New Horizons: High School*

In late 2005, Facebook opened its doors to another group of students: high schoolers. The initial activity was tepid at first; in the first six months only about a million high school students joined, not enough to compete with MySpace's membership. The real stir occurred in February 2006, when Facebook merged its high-school and college networks, letting users from each group friend request and view each others' profiles. Some of the original Facebookers were not so welcoming. Harvard students formed the group Advocates for the Return of Facebook to College-Only Exclusivity (Cassidy). Over the past five years, the group has dwindled down to

four members, but it still describes itself as “a haven for all those who: believe that waiting anxiously for your .edu e-mail account is a seminal college experience that the current generation is being deprived of; don’t want kids from our high school to find out that we’re not as cool as they think we are; just want the barrage of friend requests from high schoolers to stop; [and] don’t want facebook to become the new myspace.” Clearly these college students wanted to reserve the special privilege of belonging on Facebook for those who had “earned it” by graduating from high school.

Besides the possible friction between college and high school students, there were other challenges for younger members who wished to join to overcome. Because at that time Facebook required a school e-mail address to register, some high schoolers whose schools didn’t provide e-mail accounts were left in the lurch. Making sure that Facebook applicants were at least thirteen years old was another difficulty for the website. Then Facebook had to contend with some unexpected maturity issues, such as cyber-bullying and instances of students creating hate groups for teachers or classmates. Jim Breyer, a venture capitalist with Accel Partners and an investor in Facebook, acknowledged that “The high-school experience is fundamentally different from the college experience” (qtd. in Cassidy).

*The ConnectU Lawsuit*

Facebook’s greatest challenge came in the form of a lawsuit by three of Zuckerberg’s former Harvard classmates. In September 2004, the founders of ConnectU—Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss and Divya Narendra—filed a suit against Zuckerberg claiming that he stole their ideas and purposefully delayed his work on their website so he could launch Facebook first.

Zuckerberg’s connections with Narendra and the Winklevoss twins went back to the fall of 2003, when they approached Zuckerberg about helping them finish a social-networking site

called HarvardConnection (later ConnectU), a site similar in many ways to Facebook. It allowed users to post a photograph and personal information on their profiles and link their pages to one another's. Zuckerberg agreed to work with his classmates in November 2003. But by January 2004, he was at work at his own Facebook project.

Zuckerberg claimed that the programming work for ConnectU was more complex than he'd anticipated, and he had to slow down to keep up with his schoolwork. But the Winklevosses and Narendra allege that Zuckerberg's procrastinating on work on their site was a deliberate ploy to advance his own Facebook site. They kept records of Zuckerberg's spotty e-mails describing how he was swamped with other assignments and projects. When Zuckerberg met with them on January 14, 2004, to discuss the delays, Zuckerberg made no mention of his registering the domain name for thefacebook.com just three days prior. It wasn't until they read Alan Tabak's article in *The Harvard Crimson* that they knew anything of Facebook. Tyler Winklevoss said, "He didn't say he was working on anything similar to our site. It just seems like the way he acted was very duplicitous" (qtd. in Cassidy).

Their grievances against Zuckerberg were many, including "copyright infringement, misappropriation of trade secrets, and breach of contract" (Cassidy). While Facebook argued in court and in public statements that Zuckerberg hadn't formed a contract with ConnectU and that he did the work for no pay, Tyler Winklevoss believed they'd made an oral contract. "An oral contract is just as sacred as a written contract," he said. "It is sometimes more difficult to prove its existence, but there is an extensive written record: fifty-two e-mails between us and Mark" (qtd. in Cassidy). Zuckerberg remained remarkably calm and unfazed about the lawsuit proceedings, telling Cassidy that "we know that we didn't take anything from them. There is really good documentation of this: our code base versus theirs."

ConnectU and Facebook tried to settle the suit in mediation, but the plaintiffs contested the settlement when they questioned Facebook's $15 million valuation. The "long-running, multi-front legal battle" between the rival college social-networking sites finally ended in June 2008, when Judge James Ware of the San Jose, California, Federal District Court enforced the earlier February settlement. He rejected ConnectU's claims that Facebook had fraudulently misrepresented the company's valuation. Facebook released a statement expressing relief that the case was finally over and "wish[ed] the Winklevoss brothers the best of luck in their future endeavors" (Stone).

*The Evolution of Social Media*

Facebook's efforts to help its growth continued. In April 2006, it made a radical move when it let adults join the site with workplace e-mails. It was a bold effort to copy the network model of college campuses in the workforce (Cassidy). The opportunities for companies to network, market, and promote business on Facebook suddenly widened. The online world has become the new hot spot of media business. Breyer explained why his company Accel Partners invested in Facebook. The online ad market has more than doubled in size since 2002, while print advertising has largely remained stagnant. Breyer said, "It's not that the Googles and Facebooks are going to suddenly make the old-media companies obsolete. However, three to five years from now, the very best media companies will have Facebook- and Google-like characteristics" (qtd. in Cassidy).

Businesses aren't the only ones taking advantage of social media. Charities and social causes can promote their messages and recruit members. Users can invite their friends to join their favorite causes—Canine Assistants, Save School Music!—the way they invite others to join Facebook groups or attend an event.

Facebook use has become so widespread in today's world that it's now a tool for responding to political and social movements and even crises and natural disasters. When the devastating earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010, phone lines went down and people were left worrying over the fates of friends and family. Terri Vruggink, a photographer who was working with a missionary group in Saint-Marc, described Facebook as her lifeline, her only way to let family back in Michigan know she was okay. Many people used Facebook and Twitter "to share news and photos, ask for help finding missing loved ones or seek donations" (Keen). People in Haiti also used blogs to post reports on the missing and injured. Within days of the earthquake, according to Facebook spokesman Andrew Noyes, there were "more than 1,500 Facebook status updates per minute containing the word 'Haiti'" (Keen).

The use of Facebook and Twitter in such tragic events is evidence of the evolving power of social media. The urge to send aid and relief to Haiti was so great that these media tools were used to channel some of that energy. People who texted "Haiti" to 90999 gave more than $1 million to the American Red Cross in the first few days after the quake. Wyclef Jean, a popular singer and native Haitian, used Twitter to ask fans for donations to his charity Yele Haiti. A spokeswoman said the website crashed due to the heavy response, but it still raised thousands of dollars (Keen). Just as important to some people was the peace of mind Facebook provided in the face of the calamity. Just a decade ago families would have had limited means to contact their loved ones.

*The Future*

The founders of Facebook have come a long way since early February 2004. As of 2010, Mark Zuckerberg, according to Forbes.com, is the youngest self-made billionaire in the world at age 25 (Kelly). Dustin Moskovitz, in October 2008, announced that he was leaving Facebook.

He and Justin Rosenstein, an engineer manager from Google, plan to develop software that will be “to your work life what Facebook.com is to your social life.” Despite Moskovitz’s departure, he and Zuckerberg remain close friends. Zuckerberg said, “Dustin has always had Facebook’s best interest at heart and will always be someone I turn to for advice” (qtd. in Guynn). Chris Hughes, spokesman for Facebook, graduated from Harvard in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in history and literature of France. He stayed with Facebook even after he decided to return to school, and he also created his own start-up social-networking site that spearheaded the 2008 Barack Obama campaign (McGirt).

If it seems like the young men’s story would make a good Hollywood movie, Michael De Luca Productions agrees. *The Social Network,* a film about the founding of Facebook starring Justin Timberlake, Joseph Mazzello, and Jesse Eisenberg as Zuckerberg, is scheduled for release on October 15, 2010, according to the Internet Movie Database.

As for Facebook itself, change is the only constant. The site has evolved to include videos, blogs, and games, from Scrabble and Mafia Wars to the commonly mocked but admittedly addictive Farm Town. Users can adapt Facebook for whatever purposes they have in mind: networking, chatting with friends, business, advertising, or simply letting off steam. For better or for worse, Facebook has revolutionized the social-media landscape, changing the way people think, talk, and share online.

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## Chapter Two

### Facebook Relationships: Who Am I, Who Are You, and Why Are We Friends?

In February 2010, I conducted a survey to gauge Facebook habits and people's opinions about the site. What better way to ask about Facebook than on Facebook itself? Users are already at their most sociable and openness when they are on a social networking site. So I created a Facebook group with the survey and distributed it to my friends—approximately 200 people. I asked for participants aged 18 and older to respond to a series of questions, some close-ended (multiple-choice response), some open-ended (free response), and some on a Likert scale (1, for strongly disagree; 5, for strongly agree). Their answers would remain confidential, I assured them.

In the end, I had 40 respondents, 21 women and 19 men. Some of my friends passed the survey along to their group of friends, so I heard from acquaintances and strangers alike. A majority of the respondents were ages 18 to 22 (42.5%) or 23 to 27 (32.5%), but I had a smattering of respondents in their thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties also. Only one participant was still in high school. College students made up 45% of the group, but 55% were out of school altogether.

I tried to gauge whether each participant was a heavy Facebook user or logged on only occasionally. A sweeping majority, 65%, reported checking Facebook multiple times a day. Nine people, or 22.5%, logged on every day; 10%, a couple times a week; and 5%, a couple times a month. No one reported logging on every few months or less frequently than that. When they surf Facebook, many of them (32.5%) spent up to 30 minutes a day. Forty-eight percent spent up to two hours, and twenty percent topped two hours every day.

When designing the survey, I was curious about many aspects of Facebook, good and bad. I was interested in discovering why people join Facebook and how it lets them interact with their friends. What are the advantages and pitfalls of spending so much time on the site? What methods do they use to identify themselves to their peers? Do users' friend counts correspond to their sense of dependence on the site? Ultimately, I chose to examine two sides of the Facebook world: the individual and the community. Constructing an online identity is a critical aspect of Facebook, but it's just the first step. It's how people interact on the site—exchange ideas, argue, and form and break relationships—that gives it its life force and drives its wild popularity.

**The Question of Identity**

Once someone decides to join Facebook, her first main concern is creating the profile page. It can be an exhilarating or daunting task, laying out everything about oneself: likes, hobbies, personal descriptions, photographs. Users must decide what and how much to reveal. Do they include political leanings, religion, sexual orientation? Should they give out e-mail addresses or phone numbers, or specify where they work? Besides these personal safety and privacy concerns, a new user has to think about identity, albeit an online, virtual identity.

A lot more thought goes into online identity construction than one might believe, which is why sociologists and psychologists have been so keen to study this new Facebook phenomenon. Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin studied the differences between identity presentation in anonymous online environments (such as chat rooms) and "nonymous" (not anonymous) ones like Facebook. Based on content analysis of sixty-three college students' profiles, they found that users overwhelmingly choose the "show, don't tell" approach. Identity is established implicitly, not explicitly (1826).

And what is identity, exactly? People may identify themselves by the fundamental, physical (and obvious) characteristics of gender, race, and age, for instance. Group affiliations also contribute to identity—religion, nationality, family, political party, etc. We are defined not just by who we are by ourselves, but by whom we align ourselves with. Personality, life experiences, and background, even our likes and dislikes contribute to how others see us. In face-to-face interactions, it can be hard, even impossible, to hide or disguise some of our identifying factors (e.g., skin color, sex). The dawn of the Internet, with millions of chat rooms, message boards, and social-networking sites, introduced a new facet to identity presentation. With online, disembodied voices speaking across cyberspace, people may suddenly present themselves any way they like, truthfully or not (Zhao et al. 1817). The rule is that there are no rules.

Everyone has heard stories of men and women claiming to be older or younger, prettier, richer, or more muscular on online dating sites. And just as many people have heard horror stories of predators misleading the young and gullible—grown men posing as preteen girls on chat sites or con artists bilking the elderly after gaining their personal information. Whether people play-act or stretch the truth online for innocent or nefarious purposes, anonymous sites by their nature allow users to reinvent their identities to any degree desired. Sometimes that's a good thing. Certain "gating features," or stigmatizing attributes like shyness, unattractiveness, disability, or speech impediment, might hinder a person's identity construction in face-to-face communication. People are often quick to judge and may form opinions about someone based on these factors alone before getting to know the person at all. Interacting online lets them get around these obstacles to some extent (Zhao et al. 1818).

Facebook, unlike other social-networking sites like MySpace, collects and displays personal identifying information. Users must provide a legitimate e-mail address, usually linked

to an institution, be it a school or company, and a real name (Zhao et al. 1820). Nonymity introduces accountability. The fact that others know your true identity constrains your ability to redefine or lie about yourself. At least, if you try, it won't be long before someone who knows you in real life calls you on it.

This is not to say that Facebook users have no control over how they construct their identities. In fact, the opposite is true. Zhao and others hypothesized that, instead of concealing their true selves, Facebook users put their "hoped-for possible selves" on display. Their study confirmed this theory—that people emphasize (and perhaps overestimate) their positive attributes and present themselves in the best possible light. Furthermore, because Facebook users join the site to keep up with existing, real-world friends, and not to find new ones, they usually tailor their online identities to suit different audiences—friends versus family or employer, for example (1821).

**A "Show, Don't Tell" Approach**

Zhao and his colleagues measured the identity claims made on the sampled Facebook profiles and found that users overwhelmingly showed their identity with more implicit than explicit claims. What does that mean exactly? On a site developed to allow users to share information about themselves, most of them refrained from spelling out their life stories *David Copperfield*-style. Rather, they often let their pictures, Wall posts, and media preferences speak for themselves.

*Photographs*

By creating a continuum between the implicit and the explicit identity claims, the researchers determined that the visual representations of the self belonged on the implicit end (Zhao et al. 1824). John Cassidy claims that Facebook is the biggest online photo site, with more

than a million and a half photos uploaded every day. Facebook lets users post an unlimited amount of photos, and most people take advantage of this feature, creating dozens of albums. The album feature is a digital interactive photobook—complete with titles and captions. Albums also link users to one another. Anyone can tag someone in a photo—that is, identify a person from the shot and create a link to that person's profile. A Facebook user with a digital camera and a lot of time on her hands can upload thousands of photos. But what exactly is she trying to say about herself by doing so? Zhao and colleagues said that users ultimately try to make an impression, consciously or not, that they possess special traits (i.e. sociability, popularity, and well-roundedness) (1825). Hence the abundance of albums dedicated to parties, road trips, and other activities with friends. The cliché *a picture speaks a thousand words* certainly holds true, and having a thousand photos says a lot about a person's social life. *Yes, look at me, I have friends*.

Being part of a group has from prehistoric times increased the chances of survival. And while today we may not be facing any saber-toothed tigers, we still need the support and companionship of other people to get through work and start a family (not to mention surviving high school). Facebook users are just as anxious as anyone else to prove themselves to be part of the group, the in-crowd. Even the profile picture, which goes at the top of the profile to identify the user visually, more often than not shows a group of two or more. Zhao and others found that the majority of users either used a group photo or no photo at all rather than a single-person shot for the profile picture. Being group-oriented is an essential aspect of sociability, so it is often built into the user's online identity (1827).

Tiffany Pempek, Yevdokiya Yermolayeva, and Sandra Calvert studied college students' Facebook use. Their sample of ninety-two undergraduates reported that they posted photos to

express themselves to others "'a whole lot.'" Tests revealed that girls posted a significantly greater number of photos than boys and were more likely to "untag" themselves from photos. Users generally untag themselves (remove the link to their names) for two main reasons: they were dissatisfied with their appearance (especially girls) or the photo depicted them in an inappropriate light (e.g., engaging in underaged drinking). Either way, both young men and women agreed that photographs are an important part of showing who they are (Pempek et al. 233).

*Wall posts*

Wall posts, notes written on the profile's public bulletin board, show interactions among friends in the written mode. Users post on one another's and their own Walls, initiating and responding to a handful of conversations at a time. Visit someone's profile, scroll down his Wall, and you will see snippets of maybe a dozen different chats going on at once. Pempek and her colleagues found that, while Facebook allows users to send private messages, users are "twice as likely" to communicate through public Wall posts. The reasons for Wall posts vary—most often to catch up or to refer to some inside joke—but they are rarely made on strangers' Walls (and for youths, almost never on their parents'; 235).

*Activities and media preferences*

In the middle of the implicit-explicit continuum are representations of the "cultural self" or what Zhao and colleagues call "self of consumption preferences and tastes" (1825). These identity claims are made in the interests, hobbies, and favorite books, movies, TV shows, and music sections. Users can define themselves by listing their likes and media preferences. "In terms of a continuum of identity claims," Zhao and colleagues assert, "the cultural self is in the in-between category, more explicit than the 'watch me' implied by photos, but it is still indirect:

‘see what I like/do/read/listen to’” (1825–26). A majority of the students they tested included highly elaborative lists in this cultural category (see Table 1).

Table 1: Enumerative Self-Descriptions on Facebook

| Enumerative Description | Users responded (%) |
|---|---|
| Interests/hobbies | 73 |
| Quotes | 71 |
| Movie | 65 |
| Music | 65 |
| Book | 57 |
| TV Show | 48 |

Zhao, et al. 2008

Of course there’s the question of individuality. Is a person a mindless sheep if she only highlights mainstream, popular bands and movies, jumping on the bandwagon, so to speak? Is a guy pretentious or elitist if he sets himself apart by choosing obscure, highbrow titles? Being well-rounded (liking a variety of activities) is vastly preferred over being narrowly focused (i.e., nerdy; Zhao et al. 1827), but what if someone’s true passion is something decidedly geeky and uncool? There are many questions about identity presentation that can trouble any Facebook user.

*What About Me?*

Finally, on the explicit side of the continuum is the “About Me” category, the space where users are invited to make direct, specific claims about themselves. Here is the opportunity for people to provide narratives of their lives or describe their personalities. It’s surprising then that most Facebook users are not as elaborative and detailed in this section as in the other ones.

According to the study by Zhao and colleagues, while 67% of users chose to include the About Me section, most of them wrote only a couple brief sentences. Fewer users wrote one to two short paragraphs, and only five students reported writing long paragraphs (1826).

Not only were they brief, but the users generally held back on their explicit descriptions, teasingly minimalist: “What you see is what you get, 50% of the time”; “Currently in Zen mode”; “It’s for me to know and you to find out” (Zhao et al. 1826). I can almost see these Facebookers rolling their eyes, thinking: *Don’t expect me to spell it all out for you*. They almost certainly expect people to look at their photos, Wall posts, and media preferences and put the pieces together.

Pempek and others also note that students often used the About Me section to post “funny facts, clever statements, or provide links to pictures and websites that they like” (233). Once again, the evidence shows Facebookers using pictures and media as buffers or filters between themselves and the outside world, the observers. These implicit identity claims act as sort of a lens through which to view a person. But the viewer never sees the true person, just the viewing glass.

Another reason for users’ shying away from direct identity claims may be modesty. Nobody likes to toot his own horn (okay, some people do, but they come across as arrogant or pompous), and many people feel put on the spot when asked to describe themselves. It’s safer to hide behind implicit claims. Having others leave positive comments on the Wall or in response to a photo is more satisfying than self-aggrandizement (Zhao et al. 1826). We naturally seek others’ approval, perhaps at the expense of looking inside ourselves for confidence and self-actualization.

This discussion of identity construction leads to the question, how can a Facebook profile be a complete and accurate portrayal of someone? Let's return to the idea of the "hoped-for possible self" that Zhao and his colleagues brought forth. Facebookers undoubtedly want to project positive, desirable traits—popularity, sociability, thoughtfulness, well-roundedness. What about the negative traits? No one is going to describe himself as awkward, unattractive, mean, unpopular, dumb, pessimistic, etc. So it follows that no one wants to project such undesirable characteristics on a Facebook page. Nearly everybody has some flaws at least some of the time (I'm being generous), just as they demonstrate only positive, optimistic traits some of the time.

*Traditional vs. media-based markers of identity*

Besides issues of personality, users often gloss over traditional markers of identity. Zhao and others found that only 13% of the college students they surveyed made explicit religious claims on their profiles (although 32% indicated religious values implicitly through favorite books, music, quotes, and groups). Similarly, 76% of those sampled chose *not* to present their academic selves by listing their school courses and networking with other students in those classes. Many students would agree that they hold religious and intellectual values, but not as many claim them on their profiles (Zhao et al. 1829).

My own survey produced some different results. I asked, "Did you specify your religious views and/or political views on your profile? Explain why or why not." Only 11 respondents (27.5%) said no. Five of them had no particular reason for not expressing their views. One said he uses Facebook to socialize and has no religious or political agenda. Another man, 26 years old, said he felt others are too narrow-minded and argumentative: "I don't really feel like sharing my views and/or discussing them with approximately 70% of my friend base." Four of the naysayers felt it was private, personal, and no one else's business.

The reasons people gave for sharing their views were just as varied and ranged from the lukewarm to the passionate. Five of the 29 had no particular reason. “It was just another field to fill out on the profile,” said a 26-year-old man. One person said he filled in the sections, but with reservations, feeling it was a personal matter. Eight, however, said that they answered yes because their views are important to them, part of who they are. A 19-year-old female college student said her religion “is a part of me, more so than filling out activities or TV shows.” Six respondents said they had nothing to hide or weren’t concerned what others thought. Another six expressed pride in their beliefs:

- “I am proud of who I am and my points of view. Plus I can’t imagine what my family would say if I even just chose to leave it all blank.” (a 23-year-old woman)
- “I am who I am, like it or not. It gives people I haven’t spoken to a basis to how I might or might not react.” (a 28-year-old man)
- “Religious, yes. I have no reason to hide my religion and judge no one by theirs.” (a 23-year-old woman)
- “Proudly, because I have spent the better part of the last 10 years of my life cultivating, researching and demonstrating my views both to myself, and to those who wish to know me.” (a 29-year-old man)
- “I want everyone to see the light.” (a 52-year-old man)

Only two people said they filled out inaccurate information in the religion and politics fields. One did it as a joke. “I put Nihilist, because it was in *The Great Lebowski*,” said the 29-year-old man. It’s not uncommon for people to create their own categories for religion: Jedi, Awesome, even Beer. Expect to see some users calling themselves Amish, too.

The survey by Pempek and others suggests that while people still use traditional markers of identity (e.g. religion, politics, work, and school) on their profiles, they were more likely to pick media preferences over traditional markers as important identity indicators. *It's how I express who I am*, the students seem to be saying (Pempek 233). By selecting movies, music, or books that are funny, thoughtful, serious, or cool, Facebook users hope to prove that they too possess those characteristics. They just don't have to specifically state it. Overall, the hodgepodge of implicit and explicit claims that appear on a typical Facebook profile seem to say: *See how many friends I have. Look at all the cool movies and bands I like. See these funny and inspiring quotes by famous people. That's what I believe, too.*

*Deviance: Breaking away from expectations*

While the pressure to conform to social norms and to a certain ideal self is strong, there are some people who buck the rules and demonstrate signs of rebellion. Deviance may take the form of shallow, hedonistic, or sexually provocative descriptions of interests. One girl indulges in "SHOPPING!!! Eating, men, going out drinking, partying, clubbing, flirting, be[ing] spontaneous and random, and being silly;" while a boy professes his interest in "Booze, chix, cars, and sports, you know the usual testosterone fueled crap" (Zhao et al. 1829). Deviance may also be expressed through violent or sexual quotes and song lyrics and through provocative photos. Nudity is forbidden on Facebook, but kids get away with pictures of themselves in bras and underpants.

Cultivating an online identity takes careful thought and raises more issues than one might suspect. When the Internet boomed in the 1990s, people expected to have complete freedom in constructing radically new identities. But with social-networking sites that collect and display identities, people found that they had to measure up to what they posted about themselves. If

there's one benefit to the constant monitoring and updating of our Facebook identities, it has to do with the consequences of self-disclosure. Clive Thompson explained that the "act of stopping several times a day to observe what you're feeling or thinking can become, after weeks and weeks, a sort of philosophical act. It's like the Greek dictum to 'know thyself,' or the therapeutic concept of mindfulness." For all those people in cyberspace wondering—"Who am I?"—working it all out on Facebook can be enlightening.

**Relationships: The Nature of Facebook Friendships**

Once a Facebooker has constructed his profile, carefully presenting himself to the world, he is set free in a cyberworld of friends, groups, games, and light-hearted discussions. It's no wonder, then, that Facebook is the favored online hangout of teens and college kids, what could be called the greatest time-waster since 2004 (the year of its birth). The question becomes: what is the nature of human interaction on social-networking sites? There are preferred ways to communicate on Facebook, almost a series of unspoken rules that govern online interaction. If there are different procedures on Facebook—"friending" and "unfriending," lurking and Facebook stalking—then I have to wonder if there's a marked difference between Facebook friendships and their real-life counterparts.

The 20th century brought revolutionary advancements in almost every aspect of human life—transportation, technology, medicine, and health. With these changes came new concerns about the way people socialize. In the olden days, families generally stayed together; neighbors knew one another; and small towns were hubs of intimate relationships. But when people became more mobile, free to spread to the corners of the globe, some feared that society would become impersonal, people isolated from one another. Clive Thompson described the emerging popularity of social-networking sites as a "reaction to social isolation, the modern American

disconnectedness." People either have to travel extensively for work, or they work from home. With TVs, computers, and websites that let people order groceries to be delivered right to their door, it has become frighteningly feasible never to have to leave the house. Ironically, the same people can turn to Internet tools like Facebook and Twitter to "feel less alone" (Thompson).

Kevin Smith's film *Mallrats*, about disaffected youth loitering in the mall all day, has the tagline: "They're not there to shop. They're not there to work. They're just there." The tagline could apply to most Facebookers. Duncan Watts, a sociologist at Columbia University, likens using social-networking sites to hanging out at the mall: "there's a certain lack of purpose to just hanging out in public, and it's hard to justify if you don't have a lot of free time" (qtd. in Cassidy). In a sense, Facebook has become the "de facto public commons" of the 21st century. If you thought living in a tight-knit community meant no privacy, with everyone knowing every bit of juicy gossip about everyone else, then imagine what it's like on Facebook. With the News Feed feature, users can instantly see every new nugget of information about their friends. News Feed is, as Thompson put it, "a single page that—like a social gazette from the 18th century—delivered a long list of up-to-the-minute gossip about their friends, around the clock, all in one place." It's as if people took the fears of social isolation and ran in the opposite direction, embracing an intense, albeit different, mode of social interaction. One girl said about observing her peers on Facebook: "'Facebook is extremely voyeuristic—there's something great, and at the same time, creepy, about knowing when someone you haven't talked to in 5 years broke up with a boyfriend who you never even met'" (qtd. in Pempek 235).

However, how much of Facebook activity is interactive, and how much is lurking? In Pempek's study students spent more time observing and reading others' profiles than actively participating (i.e., posting information themselves). In diaries that they kept logging their

Facebook activities over the length of a week, these students reported the frequency of lurking habits: “69.57% looked at or read others’ profiles often (5–7 days)…58.70% often looked at photographs, and 54.35% often read their news feed about what their friends were doing on Facebook” (Pempek et al. 235).

Users even came up with a term for lurking: Facebook stalking. Presumably, if one’s privacy controls are set accordingly, then only one’s friends will be lurking on the profile, so it seems ridiculous to worry about it. At the same time, though, it is unsettling wondering who, at any moment, may be checking up on your relationship status or clicking through pictures of someone in her home, or at a party where she had had a few drinks. Facebook is incredibly voyeuristic, but users actively invite people to peek into their private lives. And if the fascination with celebrities and important figures is any indication, people are naturally curious about the hidden lives of others. Observing is a natural human response.

Shifts in cultural attitudes also play a role in the growth of Internet communication. Young people, especially, have grown up with chat rooms, Napster, computer games, and social-networking sites. There’s nothing new or fascinating about the online world to them. Watts explains that youths today are so used to the idea that everyone is connected online that it’s no longer surprising. “If I had to guess why sites like Facebook are so popular, I would say it doesn’t have anything to do with networking at all,” he said. “It’s voyeurism and exhibitionism. People like to express themselves, and they are curious about other people” (qtd. in Cassidy).

*The one-to-many flow*

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, people participate in social-networking sites to gain peer feedback, which bolsters their self-esteem. So any information that’s posted on Facebook is best disseminated from one person to many. While Facebook provides private messaging—

similar to e-mail—users overwhelmingly prefer mass communication through Wall posts and status updates. It's as if conversation has evolved from one-on-one, face-to-face, to messages via e-mail, text, and IM (instant message), to public posts visible to dozens, even hundreds of spectators. A decade ago, we would have thought it strange to share a conversation with a friend with a host of onlookers—imagine talking to a friend on the phone with two hundred of her friends eavesdropping on the line. Yet, today, with Facebook, it's not unusual at all to post a message to a friend's Wall, knowing that all her friends can read it and that it will pop up on everyone's News Feeds. Except for the more serious, private conversations (and who has those on Facebook?), all interaction is thrown into the public mix.

With millions of Facebookers interacting around the clock in Wall posts, groups, and forums, some users have clamored for moderation and civility. With the Facebook group "Facebook Etiquette," creator Audrey Zola Nice made a list of tongue-in-cheek rules for Facebooking:

- There should be a limit [on] how many times you can update your status in one day.
- Wearing costumes in your profile picture is ONLY acceptable in October, and swimsuit pics are never as attractive as you think they are.
- If you post pictures of yourself and then say "I look fat"/"I look ugly" we all see that all you really want is attention. We're not as stupid as you.
- You don't have to post the results of EVERY quiz you take. No one really cares which Harry Potter character you are or how many children you'll have.
- Facebook stalking is acceptable, but leaving proof of it is not (i.e. commenting/liking things that you obviously had to dig to find)
- We get it. You have no life. Stop posting daily that you're "Moving up in Farmville."

- If you are using Facebook chat, it is rude to abruptly get offline without saying goodbye or something along those lines.
- If you end everything in an exclamation point, it no longer seems excited. It just feels like you're yelling at me.
- Don't post a status that says you're crying. It's just awkward.

All joking aside, even with a nonymous setting like Facebook (where everybody knows your name), users sometimes forget the basic rules of etiquette and good manners and blurt out things they wouldn't dare say to their friends face-to-face. In the Internet age, with online messages becoming increasingly clipped and abbreviated, some lessons in cyber-etiquette cannot go amiss, lest those messages are misinterpreted.

*Add Twitter to the Picture*

With its boom in popularity, Facebook was just a precursor to other online tools of mass communication, most noticeably Twitter. The website Twitter is a messaging service that lets its users broadcast brief updates, limited to 140 characters, on what they're doing or thinking at any moment of the day. Friends have told me it's like Facebook status updates, only more so. Thompson discusses how Twitter messages (called "tweets") differ from blogs. He says, "a blog post is usually a written piece, something quite long: a statement of opinion, a story, an analysis. But these new updates are something different. They're far shorter, far more frequent and less carefully considered." With the prevalence of smart phones—cell phones that let you check your e-mail, Facebook, and other websites—it's possible to send tweets anytime, anywhere.

But Twitter and Facebook aren't the only networking tools available. Dopplr lets users report where they're traveling. Tumblr users can put up streams of videos, photographs, and websites for others to view. And Loopt is a service that acts as a tracking device, "a piece of

software that automatically tells all your friends exactly where you are" (Thompson). Is this thrilling, innovative, and convenient or downright creepy?

With it now possible to share anything and everything, people are doing just that. Curious about what your friend is having for lunch today? (Come on, I'll bet you were.) Now he can describe his sandwich to you and all his other Twitter followers. The minutiae of ordinary, everyday life are now interesting and newsworthy. But, many people ask, who really cares what someone is doing every moment of the day? Not surprisingly, tools like Twitter have been criticized as ridiculous and silly. According to Thompson, the growth of constant online intimacy "can seem like modern narcissism taken to a new, supermetabolic extreme—the ultimate expression of a generation of celebrity-addled youths who believe their every utterance is fascinating and ought to be shared with the world."

This type of "incessant online contact" is what social scientists call "ambient awareness"—like being able to pick up somebody's mood and thoughts by being near her. All her little actions—body movement and posture, stray comments, sighs and laughs—are as apparent on these online tools as if she were sitting next to you (Thompson). Spend some time on Facebook and read your friends' throwaway comments—one says she's having a rough day, another is psyched that he passed his Spanish test—and you get an intimate look at what's on their minds. People who are especially attuned to others' feelings may start to feel as if they're a member of a beehive, part of a collective mind-meld.

While it's easy to mock obsessions with Twitter and Facebook, the tools do serve their purpose, in a unique way, of letting people know more about their friends. Every individual tweet or post, even the remarkably mundane ones, adds up over time to a larger picture. Follow a friend's Twitter long enough and you may be able to recognize the patterns and fluctuations of

his life. Thompson's friends, skeptical at first, grew to enjoy pulling up Twitter and reading the tweets, a page of little thoughts, each just a line or two long. Ben Haley, a 39-year-old software specialist from Seattle, described the ambient information as "a type of E.S.P." "It's like I can distantly read everyone's mind," he said, "like I'm getting to something raw about my friends" (qtd. in Thompson).

Proponents of Twitter point out another advantage: having literally hundreds of consultants at their fingertips. Say you need advice about buying a product, finding a job, or fixing a problem at work. The people closest to you, friends and family you see all the time, will want to help you, but they're so close to you they may not suggest anything you haven't thought of yourself. Acquaintances on Twitter, however, are remote enough that they can probably think of some fresh leads (and are emotionally distant enough to view your problems objectively). In some situations, you may prefer those weak ties—halfway strangers—to give counsel than people too close to you mentally and emotionally (Thompson).

*Relationships Made Effortless*

Facebook's members invariably cite its usefulness for keeping up with friends, but just how close and intimate are these Facebook friendships? One undeniable benefit of the website is that it "enables users to forgo the exertion that real relationships entail" (Cassidy). Friendships for lazy people, in other words? One Harvard graduate pointed out: "It's a way of maintaining a friendship without having to make any effort whatsoever. And the interface provides all the information you need to do that: birthdays, pictures, message boards, contact info, etc." (qtd. in Cassidy).

"Signing a Facebook wall is a lot easier and less time consuming than picking up the phone to call a friend. Not many in college have the time for that," said a college student in a

study of Facebook use (Pempek et al. 231). Indeed, for all the time that young people spend on Facebook (on average about 30 minutes a day), the direct interactions between friends are brief and fast-paced. Posting a message on a Wall takes all of a few seconds—just enough time to share a joke or catch up—and then it's on to another page. It is fast and convenient and requires less emotional investment. Posting a quip on someone's Wall is certainly less of a hassle than calling that person and having to engage in a prolonged conversation. The person may only be a Facebook friend, an acquaintance who, in real life, one wouldn't spend much time talking to.

Facebook friendships can be as close and involved as the user desires. Calling a friend that I haven't seen since high school might be awkward. How can I carry on a full conversation with someone I haven't seen for years without some degree of discomfort and uncertaincy? A quick, casual comment on a friend's Wall ("Hey, what's up?" or "Happy birthday!") is much easier. Catching up is made faster and virtually pain-free. Some Facebook friendships are from so long ago that they strain my memory—a member from my Girl Scout troop or my third-grade Australian pen pal. (Which raises the question: how far back can Facebook friendships go? I do have Facebook friends that I've known since preschool.) Other friends I added after one encounter. I worked with a fellow lifeguard for one day; we talked about our classes, and our favorite books, and we kept our fingers crossed for thunder so we could blow the whistle. Another time I met a friend of a friend at lunch at an outdoor table on campus; I recognized her years later when my friend invited her to a party. Even after these brief encounters I wanted to friend these people so I wouldn't forget them. They're tenuous relationships, to be sure, but adding them to my list of friends is like adding strands to a spiderweb. The web grows larger and stronger the more people I accept into my circle.

And with users' friend counts climbing into the high hundreds (one of my survey respondents reported having 1233 friends), I have to wonder if it is all too much. Psychologists worry that if people get constant updates from hundreds of friends and are expected to care about these friends' problems and happiness, their emotional energy could be spread too thin, "leaving less for true intimate relationships" (Thompson).

One anthropologist even tried to determine if there's a limit to how many friends and acquaintances a person can know at a time. In 1998, Robin Dunbar studied how humans and apes create social bonds through special grooming techniques. For humans, we develop relationships by chatting, having conversations. Apes get up close and personal by picking at one anothers' fur. Dunbar theorized that "unless we spend enough time doing social grooming—chitchatting, trading gossip or, for apes, picking lice—we won't really feel that we 'know' someone well enough to call him a friend" (Thompson). Apes' social circles seemed to be limited to 55 members; for humans, it's around 150. This hard-wired limit on the number of friends is called the "Dunbar number" (Thompson).

Do online tools like Facebook and Twitter increase people's Dunbar numbers? Sociology experts say no. While users' social circles have grown exponentially because of social-networking sites, their groups of close, intimate friends don't increase much. What's different is that Facebook keeps those weak ties—people we would ordinarily forget about—on our consciousnesses. Facebook pushes them from the back of our minds to the forefront every time they show up in a News Feed update. *Oh, yeah, that person exists*, we remember.

Weak ties may help solve problems, but may they also water down our emotional connectedness? Parasocial relationships, according to psychologists, occur when people become overly attached to a fictional character or celebrity. Think of the people who follow their soaps

avidly or the crazy stalkers who are convinced Johnny Depp's in love with them. Some experts worry that the weak ties in our online friend groups are nearly as parasocial, crowding out real-life people who are actually close to us. They are the acquaintances who come out of the peripheries of our minds and demand our time and thought on Facebook. There's no true intimacy, but some people may confuse the interaction for that.

*Adding and Dropping Friends*

One of the key activities on Facebook—the one that will guarantee interaction on the site—is friending people. Type a friend's name in the search box, find the right match (usually with the aid of a picture), and send that person a friend request. People are generally very open about accepting friend requests, provided they know the individual. In my survey, 95% of the respondents said they accept as friends only people they know. But 20% of that group said they would also accept anyone from their school or network. Only one person said she would accept anyone who asked her.

Not everything is friendly and harmonious on Facebook (as in real life), so the website also lets users unfriend their peers. Whether from a breakup, a tiff, or "we just don't talk anymore," Facebookers sometimes cull the herds, removing the unwanted. "It's usually people I didn't know very well to begin with, and that I don't talk to at all anymore," said a 23-year-old woman. "I have friended people to build up my mob, and then deleted them as well." This sentiment echoes what the original Harvard Facebookers said when the site first launched, that they found accumulating high numbers of friends something of a challenge (Cassidy). A 23-year-old female said she removed a friend because of "constant, obnoxious status updates." In fact, the main reasons for unfriending were due to a falling-out or disagreement; annoying, excessive posts; or realizing the connection is gone. Some expressed disapproval of others' crude language

or risqué pictures. Still others just lose interest: “I take off people I don’t want to Facebook stalk or talk to anymore.” People may scroll through their lists of friends and remove the old, uninteresting ones, as if they’re cleaning out the closet for clothes and shoes that no longer fit.

*The unspoken pressures*

From the beginning of Facebook, some people expressed a reluctance to join. Their main concern was that it would become a guilty pleasure, another addictive, time-wasting activity. Do college students really need another excuse to procrastinate? An original Harvard Facebooker remembers: “lots of students [were] using language like ‘resisting’ and ‘holding out’ when describing their hesitation to join” (Cassidy). Not much has changed since 2004—users still strive to tailor their profiles to gain their friends’ approval. The peer pressure to join Facebook and conform is enormous (college use is nearly universal, after all). So the simple act of listing one’s favorite bands or books can become an agonizing task for people especially cognizant of their peers’ expectations. Their friends may even form an opinion, a set idea, which makes it hard to break out of that mold. Zeynep Tufekci, a sociologist at the University of Maryland, said cyberspace is now “identity-constraining…You can’t play with your identity if your audience is always checking up on you” (qtd. in Thompson). There is always the pressure to present yourself in a positive light. “It’s not about changing who you are,” said Chris Hughes, one of Facebook’s founders, “It’s about emphasizing different aspects of your personality” (qtd. in Cassidy).

What happens to the people who refuse to join? Chris Hughes explained,

> “If you don’t have a Facebook profile, you don’t have an online identity. It doesn’t mean that you are antisocial, or you are a bad person, but where are the traces of your existence in the college community? You don’t exist—online, at

least. That's why we get so many people to join up. You need to be on it." (qtd. in Cassidy)

It sounds drastic, but to an extent it's true. Another concern that plagues users: what will people say about me online if I quit the site? For college students in their twenties, especially, who have never lived without "online awareness," participation seems mandatory. They need to present themselves to the world so others can't do it for them (Thompson).

However, the constant drama gets to some Facebookers, to an extent that they consider giving it up. One girl described breaking up with a boyfriend but remaining friends with him on Facebook. She realized that the ex and his new girlfriend were talking about her on his Facebook page, even quoting private e-mails from the relationship. The "weirdly subtle mind games" drove her crazy. "Sometimes I think this stuff is just crazy, and everybody has got to get a life and stop obsessing over everyone's trivia and gossip," she said (Thompson). Despite the drama and the loss of privacy, youths need Facebook now. Digital intimacy is what they've come to expect, and ignoring it—being out of the loop—is far too difficult and painful.

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## Chapter Three

### The News Feed Controversy and Other Privacy and Security Concerns

On September 5, 2006, millions of Facebookers across the world awoke, unaware that their favorite social-networking site had changed dramatically overnight. When they logged on, they were surprised to discover News Feed on Facebook's homepage. The new feature displayed all recent activity of a user's network of friends. Suddenly, a user could see that Justin had joined the group "Banana Runts: Worst Candy Ever," Andrea had posted on Sam's Wall, and Drew had changed his relationship status to "single."

Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Facebook, explained his rationale for introducing News Feed. Before, users had to make a conscious effort to search for new information on their friends' profiles. With an average of 200 friends (and in some cases many more), a typical Facebooker wouldn't be able to keep up with them all. "It was very primitive," said Zuckerberg, who wanted to modernize the site and give users instant access to any new, interesting, or juicy detail posted (qtd. in Thompson). Facebookers should be happy, he reasoned, to have Facebook made easier and more accessible—thus, more convenient.

The reaction to News Feed was not as Zuckerberg had expected. Users panicked, realizing that their every utterance, change in relationship status, and embarrassing party picture was suddenly broadcast to hundreds of people. Facebook before News Feed had "an inherent, built-in level of privacy" because users had to actively search for friends' updates. That luxury was erased with News Feed, giving users the feeling of "being at a giant, open party filled with everyone you know, able to eavesdrop on what everyone else was saying, all the time" (Thompson).

Panic quickly turned to anger, with people making references to Big Brother and complaining that Facebook stalking had been made easier. Ben Parr, a junior at Northwestern University, created one of the Facebook groups protesting News Feed—"Students Against Facebook News Feed" and "I Hate the New Facebook Format," for example. What Parr particularly wanted was Zuckerberg to give users the ability to opt out of the new feature and keep their information private. His group grew from 10,000 members the first day to 284,000 the next (Thompson). T. Schmidt in *Times* magazine called it Generation Y's "first official revolution" (qtd. in Hoadley et al. 50).

Why the vehement outrage over News Feed? It seems paradoxical that Facebookers would object to information that they freely posted being shared with all their friends. Nothing that appeared on News Feed wasn't already available to the same audience on individual users' profiles—so why the outcry?

Ultimately, Facebookers reacted to the change in format for information-sharing and the perceived loss of privacy control. What users previously had to search for and pull up was now being pushed at them. According to a study by Christopher M. Hoadley, Heng Xu, Joey J. Lee, and Mary Beth Rosson, Facebookers are overwhelmingly truthful about their personal information but are still selective about what to share (53–54). While the information on News Feed was no different from what was available before, just more easily accessible—people still reported feeling "less comfortable sharing the same information than [they] did before" the change (55). Hoadley and colleagues believed that "the old and new interfaces offer different levels of *perceived* control over personal information" (55). As one of their respondents put it: "[News Feed] seems to reveal a bit too much about other people's lives. It almost makes it too easy to 'spy' on people and what they're doing" (qtd. in Hoadley et al. 55).

Zuckerberg was surprised by the News Feed backlash, but he took immediate steps to placate his Facebookers, spending two days creating code for new privacy control options. He made a formal apology to his users, noting that: “In general the more control you can give people the better. If you give people control over everything they do, you’ll never put them in a situation that’s uncomfortable” (qtd. in Hoadley et al. 55). One Facebook user who responded to my survey, a 28-year-old man, echoed Zuckerberg’s opinion: “The Internet and privacy is always a concern. The more control I have over my data and its use, the happier I will be.”

At the same time, Zuckerberg decided not to take down News Feed, believing that once people adjusted to it they would appreciate it. He was correct. Few people made good on their threats to quit Facebook. On the contrary, within days they were thanking Zuckerberg in e-mails for letting them discover more about their friends. Trends and movements spread more quickly—a user could more easily share her love for a new TV show or her desire to volunteer, and like-minded friends could join her groups. Thompson noted that “Users’ worries about their privacy seemed to vanish within days, boiled away by their excitement at being so much more connected to their friends.” Once people got a taste of “omnipresent knowledge”—“constant, up-to-the-minute updates on what other people are doing” (a sort of foreshadowing of Twitter)—they were hooked, even addicted. News Feed ended up revitalizing Facebook, leading to a massive boom in use when Zuckerberg opened the site to the general public a few weeks later. Zuckerberg was right to see News Feed as the next logical step for Facebook, given that the site’s purpose is to share information and communicate in a quick, convenient fashion (Thompson).

*What’s happened to Facebook?*

Another factor of the News Feed outcry may be even simpler: a stubborn mistrust of change. “I don’t like change,” a 22-year-old female user said bluntly. Common complaints were

that Facebook updates and changes in design and function were annoying and frustrating. Several of my survey respondents dislike having to "relearn where everything is" when the layout changes. Besides their discomfort with adjusting to a new Facebook look, many worry that their privacy settings will be altered by the changes without their knowledge. Of course, not everyone is as concerned about these issues. A 19-year-old woman admitted indifference: "They [Facebook] let us all use it for free; they can do what they like." A 26-year-old man elaborated on the subject: "I think the people who get all pissy about layout settings just need something to do. It's always the same people, and they always want to go back to the 'old' Facebook, which is usually the version they protested back when it was released (they never seem to want to go further than that." There is indeed something of a recurring pattern: Facebook changes its layout, making pages more streamlined, less cluttered; people fuss over the new look and demand the old Facebook back; and after a few weeks users adjust and leave off their griping. Nevertheless, no matter how often users adjust to Facebook changes, their feeling that the site consistently disregards their opinions can gradually build up to a general sense of dissatisfaction.

Psychologists have studied the idea of competency and familiarity with communication technology, which may explain why users are often resistant to the unfamiliar. With enough time and experience, "individuals may eventually view communication technology as invisible; that is, they communicate without thinking about *how* they are communicating" (Ross et al. 579). For instance, no one reflects much on the marvels of the telephone—it has been fully integrated into society as an appropriate communication device. But ask someone to use an unfamiliar mode of technology—for instance, texting or Facebook—and some adults may be more hesitant, focusing more on *how* to use the technology than on *what* they're trying to communicate. Thus, even the young and computer savvy may balk at having to refamiliarize themselves with a new Facebook

layout or application. Change is not only jarring; it calls attention to users' incompetence with the new versus the old. Not surprisingly, the same research suggested that adolescents were very willing, perhaps more so than adults, to learn new forms of communication in order to contact friends outside of school (Ross et al. 580).

Zuckerberg may have averted disaster with News Feed, but the controversy raises other critical issues about privacy and security on Facebook. While sharing news, opinions, and photos with friends is a positive benefit, what about the risk of the wrong people's accessing the wrong information? In the Facebook age, high school and college coaches frequent their players' pages on Friday nights, looking for evidence of drunken revelry and other illicit behaviors. Students can no longer wait until the next morning to untag incriminating pictures and delete Wall posts (Hoadley et al. 58). Students have faced suspension, even expulsion, for inappropriate or illegal activities shared on social-networking sites. Deleting offensive photos or posts may seem like the obvious solution. But what if a photo belongs to someone else? Even if a Facebooker untags herself in a photo, the evidence doesn't go away. Other viewers may still recognize her in the picture.

Troubles at school are the least of people's worries. Some ill-advised online "mistakes" can haunt a person trying to enter the professional world, where employers regularly check out job applicants' and employees' Facebook and MySpace pages. As a result, career services advisors are as likely to promote cleaning up one's profile as they are to give tips for making a good impression at interviews. In effect, they serve the same purpose—presenting oneself in a professional, positive manner. A 22-year-old female college student said she has avoided getting into any trouble herself over Facebook posts, but as a member of her sorority's executive board,

she has asked people to remove inappropriate pictures of "when they were inebriated." Her rule of thumb: "If I don't want my grandma to see it, I don't post it."

*Teachers on Facebook, inside and outside the classroom*

Young people aren't the only ones at risk because of their Facebook content. Teachers have been "busted" for their profiles as much as students, and a particularly hot topic is teachers' use of social-networking sites and how much of their online profiles are protected by free speech. While some teachers see the benefits of using social-networking sites to open dialogue between teachers and students (in a forum that may be more comfortable for the shy students who rarely speak in class), other educators worry about the blurring of boundaries between teachers' professional and personal lives. Instances of questionable profile content—"candid photos, racy or suggestive song lyrics, and references to sex or to alcohol or drug use"—have gotten teachers suspended, fired, or blocked from being hired (Carter et al. 683).

In one instance, John Bush, a middle-school physical education teacher in St. Augustine, Florida, was fired over what he'd posted on his MySpace page—an inappropriate photo and comments. While the district superintendent acknowledged that the content wasn't pornographic, "the profile contained things that students and parents should not know about a teacher" (Carter et al. 683). This last point is a key fact—it seems that it doesn't matter so much what the content is, just that students may have access to it.

As some teachers have discovered, friending their students can be risky for both parties. It takes just one child repeating some off-color remark on his friend's (or homeroom teacher's) Facebook page to land that teacher in hot water. On the flip side, some teachers have unfortunately used social-networking sites to engage in lewd or otherwise inappropriate conversations with their charges (Carter et al. 683).

Even teachers who have taken every precaution to block their online profiles from students and parents have run into trouble. In Ashley Payne's case, it was some photos of her holding beer and wine glasses on her European vacation and the use of the word "bitch" in a comment that led to her suspension. The high-school teacher from Barrow County in Georgia was summoned to the assistant principal's office because of an e-mail from an anonymous sender complaining that his or her child had viewed offensive content on Payne's Facebook profile. The unidentified student was allegedly Payne's Facebook friend. The offensive content included some ten photos of Payne in European pubs and beer gardens and her note that she was off to play "Crazy Bitch Bingo," a popular game hosted by an Atlanta restaurant. The school authorities pressured her to resign, Payne claims, even though Barrow officials never determined the legitimacy of the anonymous e-mail.

Payne's Facebook account was set to the highest privacy level, accessible to only her approved friends, not to any students. Maureen Downey, an *Atlanta-Journal Constitution* columnist, spoke with Barrow officials and learned that the critical problem wasn't Payne's pictures or expletive. Rather, "it was the 'fact' that she had given a student inappropriate access to her personal Facebook account. A 'fact' for which there is no evidence whatsoever." Downey made the point that the charges were groundless, because the e-mail could have been sent by anyone: "an old boyfriend, a jealous teacher, a nutcase." The fact that there may have never been an impressionable student viewing Payne's profile apparently made no difference to the school board; she is currently contesting their decision (Downey).

Why the extra scrutiny of teachers' use of social-networking sites? Shouldn't teachers be free to enjoy a life outside the classroom without it jeopardizing their careers? Standards for professional conduct have always been high for educators. As late as the early 20th century,

teachers followed strict rules that went beyond what they taught in the classroom: “you are not to keep company with men” and “you must under no circumstances dye your hair” (Carter et al. 683). Even today, people expect teachers to exemplify their idea of high moral behavior. To do otherwise is to risk “discredit[ing] the teaching profession,” as Arizona warned in its state certification procedures (Carter et al. 684). While teachers in previous centuries worried about causing a scandal because of nosy neighbors’ eyes, today it’s even harder for them to maintain their privacy. Students and parents can easily Google them or look up their Facebook profile. The landscape of online, omnipresent social media is still largely uncharted and unfamiliar to many people.

Even the laws concerning teachers’ freedom of speech give only hazy guidelines, because some statutes have not caught up with modern technology. For instance, what happens if a teacher uses a social-networking site to complain about or protest a school policy? Two Supreme Court cases, *Pickering* v. *Board of Education* and *Connick* v. *Myers*, are used to balance a teacher’s right to speak freely about subjects of public importance against the school’s need to run effectively. Under what is known as the Pickering/Connick test, “a teacher could be disciplined for speaking out publicly against a school administrator only if that speech interfered with the efficient operations of the school” (Carter et al. 684). However, there is still not a clear system of handling discipline for “any off-duty free expression of a teacher that is *not of public concern*” (Carter et al. 684). As of yet, there is no legal litmus test for determining what teachers are allowed to do or say on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube that won’t jeopardize their jobs.

Regardless of whether it is fair, professional conduct for teachers extends outside the classroom. While the legal system and school boards may still be wrestling with the issue of free speech and teachers’ inappropriate web content, teachers may well want to keep a clear boundary

between their professional and personal lives. High school teachers who friend students on Facebook are clearly opening themselves up to scrutiny and recriminations if they post anything inappropriate. People obviously have different standards of what is appropriate, but there are certain things that many students and parents do not want to know about the teacher.

*"Most people, primarily the youth, are ignorant about privacy."*

Facebookers themselves have varying stances on privacy issues and the possible snares and controversies that can ensue online. In my survey of Facebook users, 57.5% of the respondents said that they strongly agree with the statement, "Privacy is very important to me." Those who agreed, 32.5%, were the second greatest group. Only 5% expressed ambivalence about the statement (neither agreed nor disagreed), and 5% said they disagreed.

Their free responses were even more revealing. A 23-year-old woman expressed irritation that people she didn't want contact with could find her on Facebook: "I have made it so that unless we have a friend in common, I am completely unsearchable." A 23-year-old man said that the most negative thing about Facebook is "the way the job force is using Facebook as a means to hire or fire individuals, or schools using it to check in on kids and punish them." Another young man, age 19, agrees: "Parents or employers can access Facebook now. It was better when only students could use it." A young woman got in trouble with her boss for being on Facebook while at work. "She could tell by what time I was scheduled and the times of my posts," the 20-year-old said. Even though it certainly rankles to feel checked up on, users have to realize how easy it is for others to monitor their activities when they lay it out in the open. Is it any wonder then that F.B.I. agents have started friending and spying on suspects through Facebook (Lardner)? A 26-year-old man cautions: "While nothing is *truly* private on the web, many people

will post information on Facebook that they do not intend to share with the wider world (keeping it locked under privacy settings)."

My brother and sister and I quickly learned to guard our Facebook passwords from each other after it became a game to hack on to one another's profiles and make subtle alterations that could go unnoticed for days. As much as users fear strangers and predators gaining sensitive information from their Facebook pages, they should probably worry more about what their friends and co-workers will see.

Instances of people hacking into Facebook accounts are rare, but they do happen, although sometimes completely by accident. In early January of 2010, some Georgian women logged onto Facebook on their mobile phones and found themselves in strangers' accounts. Other people have reported similar problems. The glitch apparently stemmed from AT&T, not Facebook. Security experts say that such flaws can occur with e-mail and other personal accounts and on personal computers as well as mobile phones. In the Georgians' case, the problem was not with the phones but with the "infrastructure connecting the phones to the Internet," according to Jordan Robertson. These glitches can pose security risks, if strangers can gain access to others' personal information. However, hackers would have to have access to the network that routes the Internet to individual users to cause significant damage. As it was, they would only have access to one person's account at a time. Facebook offered no comment at the time and directed complaints to AT&T (Robertson).

It is admittedly troubling when even computer and phone experts are befuddled by these bizarre occurrences. These glitches show that security risks exist with social-networking sites and personal accounts when the infrastructure connecting users to the Internet starts malfunctioning.

Another disturbing part of this story is that users may never know if a stranger happens to pull up sensitive information on their accounts. People have become accustomed to having the Internet constantly at their fingertips with devices like Blackberries and iPhones, but the technology presents new problems when such gaps appear and experts cannot figure out why. Welcome to the world of hyperconnectivity.

*Teach Your Children Well*

The creators of Facebook were aware when they opened the site to the general public that ensuring users are over age 13 would be a challenge. As much as young users hate their parents "spying" on their profiles, for many of these preteens it's a condition of their joining social-networking sites. Many parents insist on being their children's Facebook friends, too. Even mature users reported some awkward aspects of friending parents. The best thing about Facebook, according to a 26-year-old man, is easy dating. The worst: "My mom finds out who I'm sexing up." Another man in his late twenties heard a lecture from his father about alcohol use shortly after he posted his New Year's Eve photos. Years ago, parents usually had to rely on teachers, friends, and other parents to keep an eye on their kids out in public. My own mother would warn my siblings and me to behave at the pool or at the mall "because I know people everywhere, even people you don't know." She wasn't lying. There was a whole network of strangers out there who might come up to us and say, "Hey, how's your mother doing?" Today in the Internet age, moms and dads will see when their kids use foul language, share racy jokes and photos, and talk to people they shouldn't. With Facebook use expanding across all age groups, young users may potentially have a slew of aunts and uncles, family friends, and grandparents checking out their profiles.

Parents cannot be too assured of their children's online safety and behavior, however. A 23-year-old woman saw her younger brother, age 12, post an inappropriate status update and informed their mother. In the end, the brother deleted both of them from his network. Facebook now allows users to block their profiles, in part or in whole, from certain people, so it is conceivable that they could hide certain aspects of their life from others. Parents, no matter how computer-savvy, should assume that their children know even more. And with troubling reports of "sexting" (sending sexually-provocative text messages, often including pictures) and cyberbullying appearing on the news, many parents are increasingly wary of their children's use of social media.

The stories of teens assaulted by a barrage of cruel messages through texts, e-mails, and IM and Facebook messages seem to be appearing at an increasing rate. Cyberbullying, the ugly side of online social media, is a serious problem that schools and parents are just now starting to recognize. According to a 2007 report by PEW Internet & American Life Project, about a third of teenaged Internet users have been bullied online. Girls and users of social-networking sites are more likely to report being cyberbullied than other teens, and the forms of harassment range from annoying to hostile. The report stated that

> The most common form of online harassment was the forwarding of messages presumed to be private, experienced by 15% of teens surveyed. About 13% of teens said someone had spread a rumor about them online. An equal number reported receiving a threatening or aggressive e-mail, IM, or text message. Some 6% acknowledged that someone had posted an embarrassing picture without permission. (Claburn)

While face-to-face bullying may still be more prevalent than the online kind, the impersonal nature of cyberspace may allow for more thoughtless viciousness. It's far easier to be cruel to someone via cellphone or laptop than directly to her face. For Phoebe Prince, a 15-year-old student in Massachusetts, the unrelenting bullying at school and through texts and Facebook was too much for her to bear. In March 2010, nine of her classmates were charged with criminal harassment following Prince's suicide in January (Goldman).

Facebook doesn't have to be a danger to children and young people. With proper parental guidance, users as young as preteens can enjoy chatting and networking with friends and classmates. Many children see making a profile as a rite of passage, an entry into a larger cyber world. Common sense is the most useful tool in safeguarding young users—parents should teach their kids not to share sensitive information (address, phone number, etc.) on their profiles *and* to share with their parents any troubling online contact. Beyond that, Facebook will likely remain an influential form of communication and interaction for teens and everyone who used to be a teen.

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## Education

**BA English** (Cum Laude)
Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA. 3.67 GPA. 2007. Courses included fiction writing, grammar and linguistics, and theory-based studies in literature.

**MA in Professional Writing**
Kennesaw State University. 4.0 GPA. 2010. Courses included managing writing in organizations, public policy writing, professional and academic editing, fiction writing, and travel writing.

## Honors and Accomplishments

Dean's List; Governor's Scholar; AP Scholar with Distinction; National Honor Society; Academic Team MVP; Salutatorian of Blessed Trinity's Class of 2004.

## Educational Experience

*Substitute English teacher*, Blessed Trinity High School, Roswell, GA. Taught honors English and American literature to freshmen and juniors. 2008.

*Assistant PSR Teacher*, St. Michael the Archangel Church, Woodstock, GA. Taught a religious class for first grade students. 2006 to 2007.

*Tutor*, Woodstock, GA. Tutored elementary school children in reading and math. 2001 to 2004, 2009 to present.

## Work Experience

*Lifeguard/Pool Maintenance*, Crystal Blue Aquatic Services, Cartersville, GA. Supervised pool area and swimmers. Cleaned and maintained two subdivision pools. 2006 to 2009.

*Deli Clerk*, Publix, Woodstock, GA. Worked with the public and solved problems. 2004 to 2005.