

FACEBOOK OR FACE-TO-FACE?  
CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY  
IN A WIRED WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

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We live in a state of constant connection. Literally speaking, businesses provide free Wi-Fi connections to patrons, and smartphones allow people to connect to the Internet anywhere and everywhere. Social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, establish personal connections. These technical and personal connections can enhance feelings of belonging and help people follow current events, but they also create new expectations regarding communication and relationships. Technology provides more opportunities than ever before for people to maintain relationships with each other and the world around them, but that same technology allows people to connect without any face-to-face contact. Technology encourages us to be more engaged and involved, but by doing so, we distance ourselves from true reality, in favor of a virtual reality. This theoretical study distinguishes between “connection” and “community” and focuses on the boundary between electronic connection and face-to-face community.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When I wake up every morning, I do three things: drink a cup of coffee, check my email, and read the Facebook News Feed. Ten years ago, I only did one of these things, requiring caffeine above all else. Ten years ago, I also had my very first cell phone; it was given to me when I went away to college, and it was for emergencies. Now, I use my cell phone to update and review my Facebook, send and receive email, check sports scores, do my banking, follow the latest news and entertainment gossip, and, of course, make and receive phone calls (even non-emergency ones). My cell phone has been anthropomorphized; it is now a “smart”phone. And its main function is no longer the ability to make and receive phone calls; my smartphone is more like a mini-computer that I use to stay connected in a variety of ways.

Wireless Internet connections make it possible for me to stay connected to my work, family, friends, and the world from my phone or computer. In many ways this technology is wonderful. I can send emails to my grandfather in Florida; he has hearing problems that make it impossible for him to have meaningful telephone conversations. The Internet allows us to maintain a close relationship that would otherwise rely on my yearly visits to Florida. On the other hand, this technology never allows one to fully disconnect. Even when on vacation, most people take a laptop and/or smartphone and check their work email; there is an unspoken expectation that, since the technology makes it possible, one should stay connected even when on an approved absence.

The Internet, smartphones, and social media create a constant connection; people are always “plugged in.” According to the Pew Research Center, most adults (18 or older) go online

and many go online daily (2011). Businesses provide free Wi-Fi connections to patrons, and smartphones allow people to connect to the Internet anywhere and everywhere. Social networking sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, establish personal connections. These technical and personal connections can enhance feelings of belonging and help people follow current events, but they also create new expectations regarding communication and relationships. Technology provides more opportunities than ever before for people to maintain relationships with each other and the world around them, but that same technology allows people to connect without any face-to-face (F2F) contact. Technology encourages us to be more engaged and involved, but by doing so, we distance ourselves from an intimate interpersonal reality, in favor of a virtual reality. Chatting replaces engagement, even as it augments intimacy under certain circumstances. While the average number of face-to-face, traditional friends per person is approximately two, Facebook users boast an average of 130 friends (Brashears 2011; Facebook.com 2011). Is Facebook just establishing a connection or is it building a community?

We are connected in a variety of ways: to our self and each other through Facebook and Twitter and to the world via smartphones and Wi-Fi. From a sociological perspective, one has to ask what effect the constant connection has on our culture and sensibilities. Facebook, Twitter, and smartphones are probably here to stay, and we need to know how can use them without being used by them. Are we expanding our community or are we replacing a hug with a {}?



## CHAPTER 2

### FACEBOOK: A TALE OF 845 MILLION FRIENDS

#### 2.1 “Real”ationships

We no longer write letters and send them via “snail mail”; now, emails and instant messages are the new forms of communication. We no longer rely on friends and bars to meet “the one”; online dating is now a common way to meet potential mates. We no longer have to wait for the nightly news to come on at 6pm each evening; there is a 24-hour news cycle viewable online or on television. We no longer have to wait in line at the bank to make a deposit; smart phones scan checks and make deposits from the palm of your hand. Music and movies can be downloaded instantly, and you can shop for anything from clothes to food to cars without ever leaving your home. People can even work from their house and never get out of their pajamas! The world and the way we live have changed and continue to evolve.

All of these changes lead us to live at a more hurried pace; we expect things to happen instantaneously but we also expect to be able to do them at our convenience. Many aspects of our lives are now conducted in front of a screen and at a time and place of our choosing, why would the cultivation and maintenance of friendships be any different? Facebook has done for friendship what eHarmony and Match have done for dating, what Amazon has done for shopping, and what iTunes has done for music – Facebook has brought friendship into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At stake in this thesis is the nature of friendship in this postmodern time, by which I mean a time when boundaries blur and melt (Jameson [1984] 2001). Friendship is an elastic category, including various offline and online relationships. I am especially interested in

relationships that cross this boundary, perhaps being reinforced by existing on both sides of this divide. Facebook names the problem when it characterizes people's ties as friendships. One "friends" people on Facebook, a verb of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps paralleling the conversion of the noun "party" into a verb as emblems of our times. Friendship is at stake because people are alone together in the vast Sargasso Sea of cyberspace. Not having friends, a symptom of alienation, is to be remedied by having "friends" of the Facebook kind. In what follows, I examine whether this works.

Facebook now claims more than 845 million active users and 483 million of those active users log-on to Facebook on any given day (Facebook.com 2012). Facebook's motto is, "Facebook helps you connect with and share with the people in your life" (Facebook.com 2011). The average Facebook user has 130 friends (Facebook.com 2011). A Facebook friend is established when a Facebook user sends another Facebook user a "friend request." This request must be confirmed before the two users are considered friends. Facebook offers a variety of mechanisms for maintaining these friendships, including status updates, wall posts, personal messages, blogging (notes), and instant chatting. However, maintaining 130 friendships, even given the variety of mechanisms, seems daunting. Before I joined Facebook, I could count my friendships on two hands; I proudly proclaim 175 friends! Facebook is not only changing our relationships, it is also changing the number of relationships in which we engage and the time we invest in maintaining those relationships.

Social media impose "relationship maintenance" as a new set of obligations: checking mail, texts, Facebook, Twitter and responding appropriately. Life on the screen (Turkle 1997) becomes life itself, especially where much of this work is done on the phone, as I mentioned earlier. Although email, Facebook and Twitter are asynchronous, allowing people to defer responding, texting can be synchronous, involving the user not only in constant conversation but requiring a whole new e-etiquette governing when to end dialogue. The traditional phone call would be easier, but, in a sense, emotionally riskier as people cannot conceal or ignore.

What exactly does it mean to be a friend? In her book (2011) Alone Together, Sherry Turkle explores technology's effect on relationships in depth; from robots to smartphones and social media, Turkle's view is primarily negative. We are relying on technology to fulfill needs once met by traditional, F2F human interaction. While thorough and thought-provoking, I believe that her analysis may lack nuance. Turkle reminisces about the time before Facebook and texting; she fondly recalls sharing handwritten letters and urges her distant daughter to do the same. Children maturing today may not have the same memories of handwritten letters. Instead of a note passed asking a crush to check "yes" or "no," relationships are now made official by a Facebook status update; once one's status has changed, the relationship is FBO, Facebook official. While Turkle's negative interpretation is valid in that people increasingly inhabit a world of only weak ties; I, instead, choose to take a more balanced approach. Social media, including Facebook, are wildly popular, and, as an idealist, I want to believe that there is some good in it all, including both making connections and even facilitating social change (e.g., the Arab Spring).

Traditionally, friends were the people with whom one shared her life. Friends get together for dinner, perhaps travel together, and share life's triumphs and tragedies. Friendships implied F2F contact and time shared together. Personally, I see the people whom I consider friends on a weekly, if not daily, basis. We have coffee together and spend time talking together, F2F. Facebook is changing that. Now, in addition to my F2F friends, I have the aforementioned 175 Facebook friends. I never see most of these friends F2F, but I do share my life with them – through pictures, status updates, wall posts, and comments on what they share. In some ways, my Facebook friendships may not be as fulfilling as my F2F friendships. However, I do believe that the two friendships are vital in modern society and can complement one another.

"The classroom has changed; the workplace and home space have changed. The effect is that never has it been so difficult *not* to be distracted, and never has our resistance to it

been so low and feeble” (Hassan 2012:2). The Internet offers an infinite amount of information at our fingertips, and we accept it into our lives with open arms. Our “networked life” is now deemed “banal to the extent that no one any longer looks twice at people engaged in Bluetooth-enabled mobile phone conversation, whereas a decade ago one would have thought them schizophrenic” (Hassan 2012:112). The Internet, and network created, are “an increasingly indispensable part of normal life” (Hassan 2012:112).

In our fast-paced, activities-driven society, it is often difficult for two people to find time during which they are both available to simply meet to talk, and, if more than two friends want to get together, that is even more difficult. Facebook allows friends to send messages or post to each other’s walls without requiring an immediate response; Facebook provides friendship on one’s own terms. I can reach out to a friend when it is convenient for me, and that friend can respond when it is convenient for her. Timothy Luke describes “screenal space,” in relation to television; he states, “television does not ‘bring the entire world into our homes’ as much as it moves everybody who is watching to the same place and into the same events. Such ‘screenal space’, likewise, builds a new sense of social time based upon synchronic concepts of simultaneity” (1989:48). Facebook works in a similar fashion, bringing people from all over the globe together to be a part of the same conversations and relationships.

It is not socially acceptable to say it, but trying to fit friendships in our busy schedules is difficult; as much as people desire to maintain a strong group of friends, life often gets in the way. For dual-career families with children involved in a different activity each night of the week, time is extremely valuable. Mom and Dad may have a difficult time finding time to be Husband and Wife – let alone find time to have a girls’ or guys’ night out. Facebook allows one to maintain a large number of friendships in a short amount of time; so, instead of not having time for any friends, people have time for hundreds of friends. Facebook makes friendship more efficient, if, potentially, more ephemeral.

In addition to efficiency, Facebook also reduces the pressures associated with making friendships and establishing new relationships. As we age, making friends gets more difficult; friendships are no longer as easy as an invitation to sit at a certain table at lunch. For adults, friendships are often driven by children; if their children develop a friendship, the parents often follow. Facebook to the rescue! Mark Zuckerberg took the guess work out of developing friendships; he invented the "friend request." With the click of a button, a "friend request" is sent to a potential new friend; the potential friend may either accept or ignore. If accepted, the requester receives a message letting her know that she has a new friend. However, if ignored, no message is sent; thus, the ignore option is face-saving for both parties. The requester is not notified that she has been rejected, and the requestee does not have to face the guilt of selecting reject or deny; instead, she can simply ignore, a seemingly less harsh fate. But perhaps being ignored hurts as much as overt rejection, given that everyone understands the "language game" of Facebook and given that cell phones come equipped with an "ignore" option. Perhaps being ignored is limbo, part way between heaven and hell in the Internet age. Perhaps approach/avoidance is our way of dealing with too many connections.

This demonstrates the profound ambiguity of electronically-mediated relationships that are, in their nature, casual. Although, Facebook allows users to maintain hundreds, if not thousands, of friendships in a fraction of convenient time, the depth of the relationship has to come into question. Just how strong of a connection can two people have if they only share the occasional LOL or comment on a status update? As with any relationship, a Facebook relationship is what one makes of it; it is easier to have a mass quantity of superficial relationships on Facebook than to maintain a few deeply-connected F2F friendships. If one chooses to share meaningful messages or have deep conversations via chat, meaningful relationships may be established and maintained via Facebook. Friends who once had a F2F relationship may move apart geographically but may choose to maintain their connection via Facebook. If the friends put the same time and effort into their Facebook relationship as they

would a F2F relationship, it is possible that their depth of connection could withstand the physical distance between them; however, it is much easier to neglect a Facebook friendship than it is to ignore the friend that you see every day when you pick up your child from school. Additionally, with hundreds of friendships to maintain, not all of them can receive the attention that friendships deserve. One wonders whether “friend” is the correct terms for all this. Sociologically, these easily-proffered and accepted (but sometimes ignored) connections seem more like ties—tethers that join people, but ephemerally and insubstantially unless the interlocutors are already real friends. In other words, the term “friend” fails to distinguish between strong and weak friendships.

The quality of interaction may also be considered less desirable via Facebook. Simply stated, typing messages back-and-forth on Facebook chat is not the same as looking into your friend’s eyes as you share your latest life news. When talking with a friend F2F, you can tell if you have that person’s full attention; you feel their engagement and can see their commitment to the relationship and conversation at hand. You have no idea what your online friend is doing while you are chatting; she may be chatting with several other people, surfing the net, shopping online, or even having dinner with a F2F friend!

One of the biggest hurdles for Facebook friendships is a lack of established boundaries that govern online behavior or the crossover from online to offline. There are no set boundaries or explicit rules for interaction on Facebook or for interaction with Facebook friends F2F. Once you accept a friend request, you never have to have any interaction with the person who is now considered your friend; unless one of you deletes the friendship using Facebook’s “unfriend” option, you are friends forever – without any contact of any kind. This behavior would not be acceptable at all for F2F friendships. With Facebook, however, the expectations of what constitutes minimal relationship maintenance are not defined. Furthermore, the boundaries for those with whom one does have regular Facebook interaction are not clearly defined, either. If someone posts something on your wall, do you have to respond? When do you have to

respond? Should you expect a response back? When should you expect a response back? When talking with a friend F2F, an immediate response is understood to be required; a back-and-forth dialogue is accurately expected. Boundaries also include how to cross over from a Facebook interaction when you meet F2F. Is it socially acceptable to bring up a topic first introduced on Facebook in a F2F discussion? For me, it is always a little awkward to tell a person, "So, I saw on Facebook where..." I worry; does this person think that I am spying on her? Even though the information may be posted for all Facebook friends to see, there is no clear understanding of when, and how, to broach online topics in F2F interaction.

## 2.2 From the Mundane to the Monumental

Facebook not only affects making friends and maintaining those friendships; it also affects what you share with those friends. People share everything on Facebook. From the monumental, the birth of a new child, to the mundane, having scrambled eggs for breakfast, Facebook provides a platform for expression. Expression and sharing are key components of establishing friendships. People may feel alienated by the banality of their existence, and Facebook provides a forum that makes the everyday newsworthy; in fact, Facebook labels such information the "News Feed" (Facebook.com 2011). The News Feed is constantly updated with posts from Facebook friends. The News Feed allows people to share with all of their Facebook friends at one time, with one click. Whether it be an announcement of a major life-event like a pregnancy or a simple statement concerning the weather, all status updates are given the same priority on Facebook. I receive notification of the day of the week from one Facebook friend and at the same time I receive notification that another is being shipped off to war in Afghanistan.

It could easily seem that sharing the minutiae of everyday life would only further cement a connection between individuals but not really enhance a sense of community; however, on further examination, the opposite may be true. Unless friends see each other frequently, it is not likely that they would share the tiny details of their lives, but, through Facebook, it is easy to share everything with everyone. My friend in Switzerland would not send me a letter in the mail

to tell me that she made her first pumpkin pie, but she did post pictures to Facebook; now, I know more about her than I would without Facebook and feel closer to her and her life.

Virginia Vitzthum (2007) explores online dating in her book I Love You, Let's Meet. On online dating websites, people create profiles describing themselves to potential mates; Facebook offers the same thing for friends. Instead of putting yourself out there for potential suitors, Facebook users create their profile for their friends. The authenticity of dating profiles is always in question; the fear that the person you are going to meet for a F2F date will be nothing like the person described on his profile is omnipresent. While we all know of a story about a friend whose online prince charming turned out to be a toad, Vitzthum also offers tales of the counterargument; some online daters find it easier to be more open and honest online than in person. It is easier to create an online profile detailing your strengths and weaknesses than laying out all of your baggage on the first date. It would break all the laws of dating to disclose your negative traits on a first date, but spelling them out on an online dating form is requested, accepted, and encouraged. And, it is not just your own deficiencies that are published; online dating sites also ask what you are looking for in a mate. Again, it is easier to say that you want a certain type of partner when filling out a form online, than telling the guy who just asked you out in line at the coffee shop that you are not interested because he does not meet your height requirement. While all of these circumstances do not necessarily apply to Facebook, the presentation of self and interaction with others is what Facebook is all about. To understand Facebook, it makes sense to look back at online dating; Facebook was born from an idea for a college online dating site.

Facebook does allow users to share information freely; however, Facebook users' level of openness is not viewed positively by all. For some, a certain level of sharing crosses the line into "oversharing". In her 2008 New York Times article, "Exposed", Emily Gould coined the term "oversharing" to describe how people express the most personal aspects of their lives on the Internet. Gould writes, "In real life, we wouldn't invite any passing stranger into these situations,



but the remove of the Internet makes it seem OK” (Gould 2008). Gould, a self-proclaimed oversharer, expressed some regret for sharing private, personal details about her life and relationships on her blog. However, Gould’s 2010 book chronicling various events in her life, And The Heart Says Whatever, offers intimate stories that seem to be blatant examples of oversharing. And yet the book was written after Gould experienced the consequences of oversharing on her blog, suggesting either that old dogs cannot learn new tricks or that her agent and editor enticed her to deliver a spicy account of her past as a Gawker blogger in order to turn a profit.

People speak of Facebook addictions, and I admit to having one myself. It is not really Facebook that is the drug, though; sharing with others and peeking into their lives keeps us all coming back for more. Agger (2012) in Oversharing addresses the ways in which exhibitionism and voyeurism are facilitated by the Internet. The euphoria of telling someone about yourself and then the high of being invited into other’s lives sustains Facebook, and, if you are not on Facebook, you may feel like you are being left out, not part of the “in” group. Humans may have a desire to be accepted for who they are. Facebook allows that very thing with the Facebook “like” button. Facebook users post a status update about their life, feelings, opinions, etc. and other users can “like” the original comment with the click of a button; by liking what you like, your self is validated and affirmed. Connection has turned into community.

Facebook also allows us to frame “who” we are, allowing us to choose our identity, although not without limits. We cannot be forever young, or much taller than we are, or concert pianists if we are not. But Facebook allows us to flex our identities, airbrushing ourselves so that our friends “like” us. As Turkle explored in (1997) Life on the Screen, and before her George Herbert Mead ([1934] 1962), identity is the interplay between our inner selves and the selves we portray to others, who then react to us by liking us, ignoring us or even dating us. In framing ourselves, we condition the response to us, thus affecting the ways we enact the selves we announce ourselves to be. “I am popular” makes us popular, indirectly.

Especially for younger people, it is easy to get caught up in the Facebook world. On Facebook, competition is alive and well. Status updates can be used to paint the glossiest pictures of life; one cannot help but wonder whether and how, they live such a charmed life. People may be honest about who they are but that does not stop them from only posting the most positive aspects of their life. For instance, I am not going to lie about my age or political views on Facebook, but I am not going to post a status update about a disagreement with my husband, either. A quick trip to a nearby town for lunch morphs into a weekend getaway to experience a hidden culinary gem; an eager guy picking up your dropped pencil means he has flirted with you; planning a trip to Los Angeles with friends can mean that you watch the weekend's Keeping Up With the Kardashians marathon. Reading through status updates about exotic vacations, wonderful partners, and perfect children, it is easy for a person to get discouraged about her life; one starts wondering what she is doing wrong and why her life is not as glamorous. It is more difficult to put such an appealing face forward each day F2F; bad days are more obvious in person. On a bad day, Facebook users can simply choose not to participate; however, the luxury of hiding out in bed on every bad day is not a realistic option. Facebook's spin zone is negative yet natural. It is common to feel competition with peers; however, we must remember that Facebook is only as real, and complete, as we make it, and people put on the same masks in person. As Mead said, "We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another. There are parts of the self which exist only for the self in relationship to itself. We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances" (Mead [1929] 2004:223). Looking around campus, most students seem fine; they do not outwardly present their family problems, personal struggles, and issues. Facebook may emphasize the good times, but it does not necessarily de-emphasize the less desirable aspects of life any more than people do F2F.

The knowledge gleaned from Facebook cannot realistically be separated from real-world interactions; as humans living in a technology-driven society, we must learn how to move between online and F2F without losing the freedom and security of the screen or the engagement and intimacy of reality. Perhaps a key difference between Facebook and F2F presentations of self is that people on screen make the private public, while people in public hide their “backstage” selves, as Goffman (1959) termed it. One might argue that people, to be emotionally healthy, need to “share” but perhaps not in ways that cause them to risk losing face as they blush and stammer. In this sense, Facebook postings are the equivalent of a trip to the therapist, and “likes” and emoticons won in response are our postmodern version of non-directive therapy. The winking smiley stands in for the therapist’s “I see.”

### 2.3 Community Versus False Need

As Durkheim points out in his theory of social integration, having a network of people with whom to interact and connect promotes mental well-being (1897). The network creates a sense of community. Durkheim describes social integration as “the degree [to which a society or group] possess a ‘common conscience’ of shared beliefs and sentiments, interact with one another, and have a sense of devotion to common goals” (Johnson 1965: 876). Societies can have varying levels of social integration and depending on their level of social integration, an approximate rate of suicide may be determined. Levels of high and low social integration lead to many suicides, while moderate social integration caused fewer suicides (Johnson 1965). Where there are low levels of social integration, interaction is limited and “life derives no meaning and purpose from the group” (Johnson 1965: 876). In levels of high social integration, “social regulation is intense” (Johnson 1965: 877). Facebook creates a society that is based on moderate social integration. Facebook allows users to maintain a large number of friendships, which would increase social interaction; however, the user can participate in those friendships as often as she chooses and when is convenient. Facebook also allows people to share their thoughts and opinions and have those feelings validated. If a Facebook user posts a status

update about a terrible work-day and five people respond with their condolences, the person who had the terrible day is validated and vindicated. Facebook also offers an extensive variety of groups for users to join. These “virtual communities” allow Facebook users with like-minded views to share their common goals and beliefs.

The question here arises about how much people use Facebook to establish a positive sense of community and integration. In Ben Agger’s pre-Facebook treatment, The Virtual Self: A Contemporary Sociology, he anticipates the quandary of whether or not Facebook is beneficial or harmful, before it was even a household word; he says, “one of my main questions...is whether we should view the solitary Web surfer, alone in her darkened study staring at the illuminated screen, as anomic and lonely or plugged-in and connected” (2004:46). Is Facebook connecting us to more people or is it allowing us to disconnect from “real” life? Or is this a false dichotomy, as people blur and bend the boundaries between online and offline friends? Perhaps Agger’s early study of the Internet fails to anticipate the weakening of boundaries as a postmodern condition promoted by the Internet, among other things. He comes closer to this understanding in his (2002) Postponing the Postmodern, which explores the interstitial space between online and offline existence, especially in his consideration of John Labriola’s blog post immediately after 9/11. Labriola, the only person to shoot photographs inside the Towers on that tragic day, announced his safety to his friends immediately after the event by going online. But his account was more than a message in a bottle; it was therapeutic, enabling him to work through his shock, depression and survivor’s guilt, suggesting that Internet confessions and ruminations might enable people to heal themselves.

The lack of clear boundaries regarding Facebook could easily be argued as enhancing feelings of Durkheim’s anomie. Because Facebook norms have not been firmly established, users may feel stress, pressure, and confusion leading to unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Negotiating the liminal boundary between offline and online relationships might be another aspect of relationship maintenance imposed by the new communication technologies.

While Facebook is free for users, and claims that it always will be, it is still a capitalist's dream – valued at over \$70 billion dollars and rising. Horkheimer and Adorno ([1947] 2002) discuss the commodification of culture in their book, Dialectic of Enlightenment. Facebook could be construed as commodifying friendship. Like the culture industry, Facebook's friendship industry does distract the masses from the world's larger issues. I distract myself from typing this manuscript by browsing my Facebook News Feed! My readers might punctuate their perusal of my manuscript by working their phones or watching television. It is difficult to stay focused. Facebook provides an escape from the daily F2F reality to a daily virtual reality. Reading the Facebook News Feed and perusing friend's pictures is like watching your favorite reality show starring people you actually know; Facebook provides simple and ceaseless entertainment, but it can become work

A person who receives a hundred emails and texts a day, and who has Facebook humming in the background, might come to view social-media management as work. The response to this alienation might be "ignoring," which is now built into smartphones as an appropriate option. No one really knows when to end a text-message thread and feelings can get hurt and time wasted awaiting a response that never comes. One's phone becomes a prosthetic device that must be monitored, even in silent or vibrating mode. There is a sense that one might miss something or, perhaps, that one will be ignored, which stings.

Marcuse (1964) distinguishes between true needs and false needs. It is very easy to see how Facebook would be considered a false need. People do not need hundreds of disembodied friends to survive and be happy. However, because of the proliferation of Facebook and the ability to view the number of Facebook friends of all of one's friends, people may think that something is wrong with their life if they do not boast a hundred or more friends. My own university houses someone with over a thousand friends, displayed for all to see. Not

only do people not need hundreds of friends online, people do not need Facebook at all. My husband lives and breathes without a Facebook account. He has several strong friendships that he has sustained since college, and he maintains these relationships, despite geographic distance, without a Facebook profile. He does, however, rely on my Facebook account to stay in the loop regarding mutual friends and family, and he regularly ponders the question of joining the Facebook family.

The need-value, whether or not something is a true or false need and to what extent, of Facebook itself is not of the only concern. Facebook fosters a whole host of false needs: Facebook friends post pictures of new cars, new homes, new purses – all false needs; because of our consumption-driven society, when we are inundated with these images online, we instantly think that we need to go shopping, which we can do online. To make the issue more personal, instead of a commercial with a stranger instructing us to buy the new model BMW, our childhood friend is raving about the luxuries from a first-hand perspective. False needs are more at home than ever. Since it is free for users, Facebook relies on advertising for revenue. On my Facebook page, targeted ads are presented just for me. The advertisements urge me to try new products or “like” a certain company’s page; all a Facebook user has to do to “like” a company’s page is click the “like” button. Then, that company’s page is linked to my personal Facebook profile, and all of my friends know that I like that company. Often, there is a reward for liking a company’s Facebook page. As an example, I recently received a coupon from one of my favorite clothing retailers for liking their page. While clothing may be a true need, I do not need the \$100 sweaters sold from this particular retailer. Facebook provides an ample playground for the advertising machines that perpetuate false needs.

In contrast, Facebook is not necessarily built upon false needs. Facebook allows users to articulate their self and identity by providing a forum for creative expression. Facebook’s main goal, to connect friends, speaks to a true need, companionship. Facebook provides a sense of connection to the world and thus feeds a true need for interaction with others.

Naysayers would argue that the true need of friendship was met before Facebook, and Facebook is merely a false need decorated as a true need. While the base needs of a society may not change over time, how those needs are met may. Therefore, is needing Facebook to provide that companionship a true need or a false need? Water is a true need. Whether procured with a wooden bucket from a well or from a running faucet in a modern kitchen, the fact that water is a true need does not change. Whether we meet a friend F2F at the local coffee shop or chat on Facebook messaging, the true need of friendship is still being met. Again, there seems to be no clear-cut answer. Depending on how it is used, or abused, Facebook is the epitome of a false need yet when more thoughtfully considered, the true need of social media such as Facebook may emerge. Facebook is what you make of it, and only time will tell what the 845 million users will decide to make of Facebook. And yet perhaps Facebook positions us in an elaborate electronic grid of surveillance, advertising and weak ties that thwart our ability to “use” Facebook rationally, to connect and form community. Life on the screen has a certain inevitable rhythm that makes it difficult to disconnect, given the tentacles that tether us to each other as we search for friendship, meaning, identity, even love. Vitzthum describes the alienating phenomenon of coming home from an Internet date and going online to shop for someone new and different.

CHAPTER 3  
FACEBOOK'S LITTLE SISTER, TWITTER

3.1 Tweet, Tweet

Twitter is “a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting” (Twitter.com 2012). As in Facebook’s slogan, the word connect is mentioned again, but, while Facebook connects you to people, Twitter connects you to information, albeit provided by people who describe their everyday lives and opinions. Twitter is Facebook Lite; it offers the instant information relay of Facebook’s status update without all of the other options. Facebook supplies detailed personal profiles including marital status, current residence, current workplace, and educational background; Facebook even offers an “About You” section where users can add as much information about themselves as they wish. Twitter, on the other hand, provides little, if any, background information about a person. Twitter’s main focus is not establishing relationships; Twitter’s goal is to share current information.

Based on reports from September 2011, Twitter hosts over 100 million active users; to be deemed an “active user,” a user must log in at least once a month. Of those active users, half log in on a daily basis and 40% have not posted a tweet in the last month (Tsotsis 2011). In comparison, Facebook reported having “845 million monthly active users at the end of December 2011 and 483 million daily active users on average in December 2011” (Facebook.com 2012). These data support the difference between Twitter’s purpose and Facebook’s. Friendship maintenance, through Facebook, requires more frequent activity; people log in to Twitter for quick updates about specific topics. Facebook promotes a more



interactive culture with “friends” while Twitter promotes a consumption-based model with “followers.” Instead of participating in Twitter, users log in to read tweets from celebrities, athletes, news outlets, and other organizations. Twitter is like the ticker at the bottom of the television screen on CNN or ESPN; Twitter is the Internet’s ticker. Twitter advertises itself as a way to “Follow your interests” (Twitter.com 2012). It promises “instant updates from your friends, industry experts, favorite celebrities, and what’s happening around the world” (Twitter.com 2012). Like Facebook, Twitter is changing the way we interact with the world around us. “Tweets” have been introduced into our vernacular, and the definition of a “follower” has been altered. A “tweet” is described, by Twitter itself, as “a small burst of information...140 characters in length (or less)” (Twitter.com 2012). Twitter “followers” are those users who subscribe to another user’s Twitter page; they then “follow” that user’s tweets as they are updated. Celebrities play a driving force in the popularity of Twitter, and Twitter makes everyone feel like a celebrity. The questions are at what cost and to what benefit?

### 3.2 Life in 140 Characters or Less

Life is now played out in sound-bytes, quick hits of information delivered in headline fashion. Twitter’s mode of communication is the aforementioned tweet and each tweet is limited to 140 characters – not words, characters. The character limit restricts the information exchanged and affects depth and quality but, at the same time, allows a wide variety of information to be absorbed with little time and effort. Instead of having to visit several websites for updates on news, entertainment, and friends, Twitter loads all of the information in real-time chronological order, beginning with the most current tweets and working backwards.

Twitter has its strengths. The ability to connect to such a large amount of varied information from one platform is convenient and efficient. Twitter can also provide an insider’s view into the world of celebrities, athletes, and other public figures once unattainable to the masses. By following someone like Kim Kardashian, LeBron James, or even President Obama, the feeling is that you are tied directly to that individual; you are receiving thoughts, opinions,

and information straight from the source. This creates a sense of closeness and connection to people often considered off-limits or out of the average person's league. Twitter allows us to track the lives of the rich and famous without the elaborate mediations and spinning of their public-relations apparatuses, especially where we learn that Kim and LeBron are not the best spellers in the world! They tweet; we tweet; we are them. However, how close and connected can one be with a 140 character limit? And, if 40% of active users do not participate by tweeting, are they truly connected at all?

Twitter's appeal seems to be driven by our ADD culture in which people flit from topic to topic and restrict themselves to sound-byte analyses. Agger (2012) describes an age of instantaneity in which private opinion goes public as people overshare about a celebrity culture and about their own lives. When social networkers do not have time for Facebook, they can pop over to Twitter and get a downsized version of today's events. Facebook is flooded with friend's birthdays, personal profiles, and messages; Twitter allows users to log on, quickly peruse the daily news, and log off. My husband, who I mentioned previously, will not join Facebook because he says he does not have time, recently joined Twitter. Twitter requires much less effort initially (you do not have to set up a personal profile like on Facebook) and since he mostly follows political commentators and religious figures, he does not feel compelled to participate by tweeting; he logs on, reads the current tweets, and logs off – in a matter of minutes. Were he to join Facebook, he feels like he would feel compelled to invest time in his Facebook friendships and thus lose precious time in his F2F life. Twitter, even more than Facebook, appeals to our hurried pace and time-sensitive lifestyle. For those who do not tweet, Twitter is like television—a medium of reception.

Twitter is, however, not without its problems. With the vast sources of news and entertainment available, Twitter has many competitors. Twitter differentiates itself by promising to relay information almost instantly. Because the information is disseminated so quickly, there is little time to check for accuracy and content. Mistakes may be more easily made and the

depth of content is constrained. When it comes to an important news story, 140 characters or less is less. By relying on Twitter for news and current events, users will miss the true story. Headlines are often misleading, and Twitter works like a stream of headlines. The meat and meaning of a story cannot be pared down to 140 characters; users will need to look further, beyond Twitter, for the story behind the headline, and I am not sure if that is consistently being done. I am guilty of this myself; I will see a headline, on Twitter or another website, and never research any further. Then, if the topic is brought up in conversation, I may feel like I have a base knowledge of the incident only to find out that I was completely wrong. What I read, or what I thought I read, was inaccurate. In and of itself, this is not a new phenomenon; however, acceptance is. People no longer are as concerned about an inaccurate, or even false, news story; corrections are not always printed or requested. Because Twitter is updated constantly, many mistakes, inaccuracies, or ambiguity due to lack of detail are quickly overlooked and forgotten when the new tweet is loaded. Tweeting is writing in the stream of consciousness, begging for editorial mediation and, of course, more than 140 characters.

### 3.3 Dear Twitter: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diary

Twitter is the millennials' version of the diary. Instead of pouring out their hearts and souls in a tiny book with a lock and key, Twitter users tweet their thoughts and feelings. Obviously, an important difference between a traditional diary and Twitter is the fact that Twitter is public; however, often this does not resonate or seem to detract from sharing. People often tweet as if they are writing a personal entry into a diary yet, at the same time, Twitter makes it clear that tweets are available for public consumption. Twitter has an option for sending a direct message, which is a private message sent to a particular follower; direct messages work in a similar fashion to email and Facebook messages but are limited in characters just like public tweets. Twitter's primary focus is not the direct, private message, though; public tweets are center stage. Through Twitter, users fulfill their need for their voice to be heard by others, and simultaneously fill their need for private self-expression and reflection. Counselors often

suggest journaling as a way to work through life's ups and downs, and Twitter is a public journal. The "take me as I am" culture places little value on privacy and instead works off of the assumption that all thoughts and opinions are worthy of a public forum. To many, this may seem narcissistic, and, perhaps by definition, it is. However, it could also be considered a positive move towards a more accepting, open society.

Turkle and Agger disagree about the therapeutic value of journaling, which could be dismissed as oversharing. Both identify narcissistic personality disorder as a central affliction in our culture of exhibitionism and instantaneity. Turkle highlights the downside of making the private public, and Agger certainly agrees. But in his Oversharing, he argues that various personality disorders such as narcissistic and borderline can perhaps be eased by redirecting "acting out" from real life and relationships to the Internet, although the point of his recent work is to imply a new "oversharing" personality disorder. It is difficult to imagine people "getting better" by tweeting about the mundane details of their lives. Yet, as we learned from the Labriola anecdote, above, one can write one's way out of depression and isolation without having to have a literary agent and the right connections. The Internet makes "dialogue chances" (Habermas) available to everyone with a computer and basic literacy. Writing is perhaps best viewed as a response to alienation, which explains why young people write furiously to, and about, each other and themselves, but in code (LOL) and with media (texting) inaccessible to hovering, hectoring adults (Agger and Shelton 2007). Superficially, Twitter does seem to support narcissism. The term "followers," instead of Facebook's "friends," is inherently narcissistic; having followers implies that one is one a higher plane, worthy of being followed. I do not have friends; I have followers - this strikes me as somewhat arrogant. Twitter is also built upon the general idea that every person has something to say that is important enough to be broadcast on the Internet. I confess that I do not tweet very often, and when I do, I always hesitate and think, who on earth would care to read this? But, then, I tweet anyway! For me, even though I rationally understand that my tweets are public, I am most often tweeting for

myself. I really do not expect anyone to read or follow my Twitter account; my tweets are personal, self-expressions, and I view them as a mechanism in which to share my voice – even if I am the only one listening.

For enhanced sharing pleasure, Twitter accounts can be easily linked to a user's Facebook account. Thus, each time a tweet is posted, it automatically posts to the user's Facebook wall. I receive most replies and comments to my posts on Facebook; there, my friends do have an interest in my life. Granted, I have few Twitter followers (two to be exact); however, I do not think that even if I had many followers my tweets would garner much reaction on Twitter. The Twitter platform seems to be geared towards expression without dialogue and even more so towards celebrity culture. Perhaps tweeters seek to convert themselves into celebrities by going public, and in exactly the same way that the rich and famous do. We become heroes of our own lives.

#### 3.4 The Twitterati

One major driving force of Twitter is celebrities. The term "twitterati" refers to Twitter users who attract huge numbers of followers; it is based on the term for the socially elite, glitterati (Urbandictionary.com 2012). As one would assume, celebrities are synonymous with the twitterati; Lady Gaga has over 21 million followers on Twitter (Twitter.com 2012). As she adds tweets, Lady Gaga's followers can instantly read about her thoughts, information about her latest music, and anything else that she decides is worthy of a tweet! Of course, Twitter also provides more pressing news (although one might argue what is more pressing than the release date of Lady Gaga's new single!); one can follow CNN for breaking news updates. However, it seems that Twitter's main focus is on the celebrity (CNN has just under seven million followers [Twitter.com 2012]). Twitter advances a celebrity-centric culture by allowing followers to feel like they are connected to their favorite celebrities; followers are updated with information in a conversation-like format, making them feel as if Lady Gaga is their BFF (best friend forever). Following celebrity tweets is very similar to watching a reality show; they often tweet pictures

along with their comments which takes the entire premise to another level. Followers begin to feel as if they are part of the celebrity entourage, even if in a distant, indirect way.

In addition to following celebrities, users can post their own tweets and recruit followers of their own, making them feel like a celebrity. Andy Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame is now stretched out in fifteen second bursts on Twitter.

### 3.5 The Introverts Become Extroverts

Behind the shield of the screen, shy introverts share and interact like their extroverted counterparts. On Twitter and Facebook, people post comments that they would not likely make in a face-to-face conversation. This harkens back to the notion that Twitter is a public forum. Since people do things on social media sites that they would not do in a public, F2F arena, social media has created a new realm that blurs the lines between public and private. It is simultaneously private and public. Private thoughts are displayed on a public platform. Just like with Facebook, addressing topics introduced on Twitter in F2F life has not been given full approval; there is a hesitation before introducing Twitter topics F2F. Twitter may be public; however, the hesitation indicates that Twitter, and all social media, has its own version of public. Mark Poster calls on Derrida as he considers the loss of privacy; "in his [Derrida's] words, 'electronic mail today...is on the way to transforming the entire public and private space of humanity, and first of all the limit between the private, the secret (private or public), and the public or phenomenal'" (2001:141). Twitter or Facebook could be easily substituted for Derrida's use of electronic mail; social media transform private and public space.

If 'public' discourse exists as pixels on screens generated at remote locations by individuals one has never and probably will never meet, as it is in the case of the Internet with its 'virtual communities,' 'electronic cafes,' bulletin boards, email, computer conferencing, and even videoconferencing, then how is it to be distinguished from 'private' letters, print and so forth? The age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over...(Poster 2001:181)

The freedom to share private thoughts and opinions in a public forum is reminiscent of Habermas' description of the public sphere ([1962] 1989). Habermas' public sphere was a place where all people could come together to freely discuss important societal issues and

debate appropriate action; the decline of the public sphere was brought about by the growth of capitalism and consumerism; people were persuaded away from political action by advertising and consumption. This analysis seems to fit easily into our society; people are more interested in the newest pair of Air Jordan tennis shoes than being politically engaged. However, Twitter may provide a resurrection of Habermas' public sphere, although simply because discourse is public does not mean that it is elevated. He tended to assume that everything that occurs in the public sphere will be elevated as people talked about the big issues of the day in early-modern coffee houses or, today, on message boards. Again, this matter of discourse is nuanced: Kim Kardashian can tweet her celebrity-culture trivia, or activists can tweet politically and use change.org to bring the Trayvon Martin murder case into the public sphere.

### 3.6 Privacy and Surveillance

One of the themes in Turkle's book is privacy and surveillance (2011). Turkle discusses teens using Facebook, "Are they being watched? Who is watching? Do you have to do something to provoke surveillance, or is it routine? Is surveillance legal? They don't really understand the terms of service for Facebook..." (2011:254). Through her conversations with Facebook users, Turkle finds that teens accept surveillance and are willing to give up some of their privacy to be a part of Facebook. The same applies to Twitter; tweets are public, but people are willing to sacrifice some privacy to be a part of the social scene. And, it is not that Facebook or Twitter necessarily have a police force that monitors every post or tweet; the surveillance concern is more internal. Friends, family, teachers, colleagues, or employers may be watching. If your Twitter or Facebook account includes a varied social circle, you may pause before your next update; do you really want you mother or pastor to read about your hot date last night?

Foucault discusses self-surveillance as he describes the panopticon, a prison structure that is designed to create a sense of always being watched ([1977] 1995; Turkle 2011). "The panopticon serves as a metaphor for how, in the modern state, every citizen becomes his or her

own policeman” (Turkle 2011:262). Social media work much in the same manner; we are never sure who, if anyone, is reading our tweets or following our status updates so we must assume that someone is always watching. One would assume that this would give people a reason to stop and think before tweeting, and for some, I am sure it does; however, for others, it lessens the privacy concern. Because everyone’s information is available, more tolerance is expected. “Some teenagers say that their privacy concerns are not as bad as they might seem because, in the future, everyone...will have an accessible Internet past with significant indiscretions. In this narrative, implacable digital memory will not be punishing but will create a more tolerant society” (Turkle 2011:255). Instead of imprisoning, self-surveillance will set us free.



## CHAPTER 4

### CONNECTION VERSUS COMMUNITY OR A CONNECTED COMMUNITY

#### 4.1 Expanded Network

Facebook and Twitter certainly expand the reach of user's social networks. Instead of primarily maintaining friendships based on geographic proximity; the entire world is at our fingertips. It would be impractical to consider maintaining the relationship that I have with my aforementioned friend who lives in Switzerland without the features of Facebook. Even if we had sporadic phone conversations, I would not have the benefit of seeing her pictures and even videos that she has filmed of her daughter. I would not be able to know her thoughts on a daily basis or have an insider's view into her life so far away. In fact, because we have not stayed in constant contact since high school, without Facebook, it is highly likely that I would not have even known that she is so far away. Facebook has allowed me to rekindle and maintain this friendship. And, Facebook is not just for friendships across the miles. I have Facebook friends as close as next door, and I believe that our Facebook friendship enhances our F2F friendship. Even though she is just next door, we share things on Facebook that we might not F2F, due to time or other reasons.

Twitter expands my network in an entirely different way. Twitter provides news and commentary from my favorite celebrities, athletes, religious figures, and political analysts; instead of getting information from mainstream media sources, I can read tweets directly from those making the news.

Relying solely on Facebook to maintain a friendship may only foster a superficial connection, but when paired with consistent F2F (or even telephone) interaction, a deeper sense of community can flourish. Instead of drawing distinct lines between Facebook and F2F, using them together can lead to more fulfilling, stronger relationships. In the same way, pairing Twitter with traditional news outlets may give a broader, more detailed picture of the true story.

#### 4.2 Superficial Lives

Whenever I try to explain Facebook or Twitter to those (few) who are not users, the immediate response is, “Why would any care about what I have to say?” That then begs the question - do we really need to know everything about everyone?

I must admit that I had the same preconceived ideas. Then, I created my profile page and received my first friend requests. It felt good; all of these people want to be my friend! Then, I posted my first status update, and someone “liked” it! That felt even better! Not only did they want to be my friend, but they read my status and liked it. I admit to having low self-esteem and even simple validations or acknowledgements mean a lot to me, but, if we are all honest, does it not feel good to have friends and have those friends confirm our feelings? Perhaps we begin with no self-esteem, having endured the primal pain of separation and then the battering of the world—failed relationships, lost opportunities, meanness—whittles away our identity still further. Perhaps self-esteem—identity, by another name—is the intrapsychic equivalent of Marx’s alienation, a Freudian take on it. This is Agger’s opening to his argument, against Turkle, for the therapeutic, indeed existential, value of life on the screen, especially if subjectivity becomes intersubjectivity and issues in cyberdemocracy—new social movements by another name. But, as the Frankfurt School understood, the self is an important agenda in its own right (Jacoby 1975).

Of course, this may seem rather shallow, and it can be; however, Facebook and Twitter are only as superficial as people make them. If I only make superficial comments and only follow the celebrity-du-jour on Twitter, then, I will reap superficial rewards from my social media

experience. If, instead, I put forth more effort into my Facebook friendships, like with any friendship, I can develop more meaningful relationships, and, if I choose to follow more thought-provoking Twitter users, then, the tweets I receive will be more significant. I think that if one compartmentalizes Facebook and Twitter, instead of considering them as a part of modern, everyday life, it is easy to write them off as shallow time thieves. When paired with real, F2F relationships and a full life away from technology, social media can provide entertainment, light education, and simple, convenient friendship. Alone, social media may be superficial but, again, when social media plays a complementary role to a fulfilling life, it may bring additional enhancement and satisfaction.

#### 4.3 Connection Hostage

On any given night at any given restaurant you will find *that* couple; the couple that is sitting across from each other, heads down, glowing smartphones in hand. Are they texting each other? Texting other people? Facebook stalking or tweeting? This has become such a cliché that there are even commercials about it. And, you do not have to be one of those couples to get caught up in technology. You may be giving your date your full attention when a song comes on in the restaurant; your date says that he likes that song and wonders who sings it. Naturally, you pull out your cellphone, open your song identification app, and provide the requested information. The seduction of the smartphone is subtle yet powerful.

Before I had a smartphone, I could rarely tell you where my cellphone was – and wherever it was, the battery was probably dead. Now, I never leave home without my phone; in fact, I don't think that I leave a room without my phone, and, if the battery dies, well, we won't even go there. I don't really use the phone function that much either; I use my phone more like I would a computer than a telephone. Having a computer in my purse or pocket is incredibly convenient yet binding. I know that I functioned before I had my smartphone, but I am just not sure that I remember how.

It is amazing that I can talk, or text, anyone, anywhere, anytime. It is amazing that I can check my email anywhere and anytime. It is amazing that I can access the Internet anywhere and anytime. It is also amazing how much time I spend glued to my phone and not always by my own choice. Smartphones have changed expectations.

Vacation was once a time to get away from the office and leave all of your work behind. Now, you may get away from the office but work comes with you – on your smartphone. Employers know, and expect, you to at least be “on-call” during vacation, in case of crisis; although, the definition of a crisis varies wildly. In today’s troubled economy, employees feel even more compelled to work while on vacation; the fear of losing employment forces them to stay connected. The only way to have a truly unplugged vacation is to find a remote destination with no cell or Internet service, and those places are getting fewer and fewer. I even had Internet service on a tiny island in the Caribbean while on vacation last summer; my husband and I made a pact only to check our phones once a day. I am sorry to report that I cheated! Facebook’s allure and my desire to stay abreast of what was happening in the office were too strong.

Clients, bosses, and everyone else also expect an immediate response to emails and texts and expect all calls to be answered. The 8-5 workday is a thing of the past as nearly half of the U.S. labor force work non-traditional hours (Presser 1999). The same goes for our private, home lives; the personal spills over into work. People answer personal calls, texts, and emails during the work day. If you have a disagreement with your spouse, it can carry over through the commute and into the office. Aspects distinguishing home and work life are becoming blurry; we can’t get away from work at home and we can’t get away from home at work. Parents expect their children to be available at any given moment. When I was in school, I went the entire school day without speaking to my parents; we really had no way, or reason, to need to contact one another. Now, parents text and call their children throughout the day. From the young to the old, we are now all on-call, all the time; technology is holding us hostage.

Marx once said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses;" today it seems that social media are the opiate. Social media, smartphones, and the Internet now pacify and entertain people keeping them from focusing on the important social issues of our time. Yes, Twitter and Facebook may provide a forum to freely discuss these issues, but while perusing Facebook and Twitter feeds, the topics of discussion focus more on new babies, new relationships, and new hair instead of the pressing issues of modern society. On the other hand, Twitter has sparked several true revolutions, proving that, if used properly, social media can change the world in bigger ways.

For the most part, we are tethered to our smartphones and constantly checking Facebook; we are addicted to the connection. We are so busy with our on-line lives that we miss the world around us; this is no more clearly visible than when strolling across campus. Students, walking between classes, have their heads down and are engrossed in their phones; they will literally walk right into you because all they see is the world on the tiny screen.

#### 4.4 Community Connoisseur

Smartphones and social media are new to our lives; people are still enthralled with all they have to offer and learning to navigate how the technology works best in everyday life. We must find a healthy balance and not look at life on-and-off-screen as mutually exclusive. Emily Post and social etiquette are going to have to face the new frontier and include social media and smartphones in their do's and don't's. I propose the following ideas, as a place to start:

- If you are out with a real, live, breathing person, put down the smartphone. Give your date, friend, colleague, or whomever you are with your full, undivided attention.
- Be honest with yourself about Facebook and its meaning. If you just want to use Facebook passively to look into other's lives, that is okay – just do not expect to develop meaningful relationships. Also, understand that a Facebook

friend request does not automatically guarantee friendship in the traditional sense of the word; just accepting a friend request will not instantly create a deep bond between two people. Like F2F friendships, meaningful Facebook friendships require time and effort.

- Do not take everything you read on Facebook at face-value. The spin is in. Some people may tend to post glamourized versions of their lives online. This does not mean that your life is lackluster; anyone can spin anything or simply just make something up.
- Be wary of Twitter. I am not anti-Twitter; in fact, I enjoy it. At the same time, I understand that due to the short character-limit and constant updates, the information relayed may not be complete and fact-checked. Do not use Twitter as your only source of information. Also, do not get too wrapped up in celebrity culture by following stars on Twitter; what they offer as reality is not true reality. Instead of reading about others' lives, go out and live your own. Then, when you need a little mindless entertainment, read Kim Kardashian's tweets for the day.
- Some things are not appropriate for text, email, Facebook, or Twitter; they must be said F2F or perhaps do not need to be shared at all. If you want to ask a girl out on a date, ask her in person; do not send her a text or tweet. If you announcing that you are pregnant, tell your mother in person or call her if you cannot; do not post a picture of your positive pregnancy test on Facebook first. If you have an argument with your partner, do not air out all of your dirty laundry on Facebook and Twitter; imagine how you would feel if the tables were turned. It is hard to take words back when they have been posted online for the world to see.

- The screen is not a shield; it will not protect you. Even if someone does not bring up something you said online F2F, it is still out there. Do not act one way online and think that you can act another way in person; you cannot hide behind your computer or smartphone screen. The screen is a tool to use to enhance your life and relationships not a suit of armor to protect you because you said something that you would not have the guts, or stupidity, to say out loud.
- Do not forget your grammar. With all the hashtags, RTs, and @ symbols, reading tweets may seem like a foreign language; the same goes for texts and Facebook posts. Potential employers may look into your social media activity and make judgments about you based on what they find. Also, be careful that that same style of writing does not carry over into your emails and professional correspondence. A few capital letters and punctuation can go a long way.
- Give yourself a break. Do not check your Facebook for a weekend. The world will not end (I am reassuring myself here more than anyone). You may come to enjoy Facebook-free weekends!
- Finally, make sure that social media are enhancing your life and not detracting from it. If you are living life on-screen at the expense of being an active participant in the real world, social media is harming you. You may need to quit all together until you are ready to use social media as a tool rather than an excuse or escape.

I, myself, have not mastered all of these ideas; in fact, I had not even considered many of them until I began writing. Exploring Twitter and Facebook has caused me to look at myself and what social media mean to me. I hope to be able to employ my own advice to get the most benefit from my online life while still fully living life F2F.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 User or Used?

When I explain my thesis topic to people, they always want to know – is Facebook good or bad? It is as if they want me to tell them that it is good to justify their account or bad to give them an excuse to quit; they assume that there is a definitive answer. In some ways, I wish I could give them a clear cut answer; I wish that I could say 4 out of 5 users say Facebook is good, but I cannot. Facebook is still so young, and it is constantly reinventing itself. In fact, it recently released the Facebook timeline. The timeline profile allows users to tell the story of their life through pictures, posts, and life events in chronological order; it is an online biography of life as it is lived. Before we begin to really explore Facebook, Twitter, and social media in a more pointed manner; I believe that it is important to consider social media in a theoretical context.

I think that it is important for each of us to thoughtfully consider social media's impact on our lives and why they are attractive to us. Then, we can begin to figure out how to use social media so that they do not use us. At stake here is the status of relationships, especially of friendship, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Social media begin to establish convenience as a new value of friendship when, traditionally, F2F friendships are not always convenient. The inquiry into Facebook allows us to consider the meaning of friendship and thus of intimacy. Postmodernity blurs boundaries and renders relationships elastic. The concept of "friendship" means all sorts of things: Facebook connections, romantic partners in crime, friends-with-benefits, just pals. "Friend" has become elastic, where, before the Internet and our sexualized culture, it just meant "pal," including, possibly, close pal. This elasticity is not all bad; relationships come in many hues and are conducted in many tones. But, increasingly,



friendship is ephemeral and insubstantial. Friends have loose ties or, perhaps, only sexual ties. And, importantly, friendship (in the old-fashioned sense of cordial intimates or pals) can blossom into love, a possibility nearly totally neglect in the Facebook and friends-with-benefits usages of the term.

Increasingly, we have weak ties and use each other for various reasons, including sex. The Internet promotes this, as Turkle and Agger argue as they explore being alone together and oversharing. Missing are love and community, based on enduring ties and shared intimacy. Whether this is in the nature of the Internet's technology, as the original Frankfurt School would have argued, or whether this is simply a product of how the Internet is used, as Habermas would contend (refusing to assign Technology an unchanging essence) is certainly debatable. In this thesis, I have sided with Habermas, for the most part, in viewing Facebook as "what one makes of it." On the other hand, I acknowledge Marcuse's and also Foucault's perspectives that the Internet positions us in relationships nearly beyond our control as we compulsively work our phones and are worked by them. Whether we can simply take a break from this electronic compulsiveness (as Cooper [2011] recommends) or should reconfigure the technologies, and their underlying social relations, is an open question—perhaps the subject of my next writing!

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