Facebook: Encouraging Authentic or Inauthentic Identity Construction?

Ashley Jennings Wollam

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_____   _____

Faculty thesis advisor   Date

_____   _____

Thesis committee member   Date

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Abstract

A recent concern has developed regarding what identity construction has been translated into within the backdrop of burgeoning amounts of computer-mediated communication and social-networking sites. Studies have addressed titanic social-networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, but they have failed to adequately address the issue of whether or not these sites encourage or discourage the construction of an authentic self. Within this thesis, I take up that question and utilize the theoretical model provided by Dr. Corey Anton, author of *Selfhood and Authenticity*. I trace the development of social-networking sites, provide background information on Facebook and its use, and ultimately bring to bear four principles of Corey Anton's authenticity to show that our use of Facebook does not promote authentic identity construction.

CHAPTER I : CAN FACEBOOK AND AUTHENTICITY BE RECONCILED?

Introduction

> "Looking at the proliferation of personal Web pages on the Net,
> it looks like very soon everyone on Earth will have 15 megabytes of fame."
> – M.G. Siriam[1]

Facebook, the Social Network Site (SNS) developed by Harvard graduate Mark Zuckerberg, has frequently taken the spotlight in American headlines and airwaves. Considering that Facebook can boast more than 68 million users as of March 12, 2008, this attention seems a propos.[2] These users have transformed this flagship of Internet technology into the sixth most trafficked website in the United States in just four years since Facebook's founding in February 2004.[3] This exodus of people to SNS, especially to a juggernaut such as Facebook, begs for critical attention from scholars with a vested interest in identity construction.[4] After all, as technology grows increasingly more accessible and more routinely used, it should be no surprise that individuals frequently turn to SNS as a locus for constructing their identity. Andrew Wood and Matt Smith, in *Online Communication: Linking Technology, Identity, and Culture*, frame the issue well by noting that,

> Computer-mediated communication contexts, like no other person-to-person media before them, offer communicators the ability to manipulate their personal identities in ways that call into question assumptions about what is possible and what is appropriate in the presentation of self.[5]

This tendency to turn to SNS for identity construction likely occurs in part due to how easy it is to use this technology and in part because people feel

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1 David Borenstein, "Quoteland.com," http://www.quoteland.com, qtd. in Wood and Smith, 47.

2 "Statistics | Facebook.com," Facebook.com, http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics (accessed April 18, 2008).

3 Ibid.

4 Throughout this piece, I use the phrases "identity construction," "identity manipulation," and "self-discovery" interchangeably. Also, I tend to conflate the words "identity" and "selfhood." I do so in the pursuit of providing less repetitive prose.

5 Andrew Wood and Matthew J. Smith, *Online Communication* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 51.

deeply the impetus to explore and construct their identity, and so will choose the easiest/most accessible route to do so. As Charles Taylor observed, the point about identity construction in the contemporary West is that "many people feel called to do this, feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it."[6] Corey Anton, who ardently subscribes to Taylor's perspective, furthers the discovery of "the modern 'quest' for self-fulfillment, self-realization, or personal development" in his *Selfhood and Authenticity*. He acknowledges that many people "feel it is their right to live personally meaningful lives," but warns that the means do not always tally up to the same end; in essence he warns that in constructing their identities, people may rely on the faulty "assumptions about what is possible and what is appropriate," which Wood and Smith called attention to in the above block quotation.[7]

This study examines Facebook from a rhetorical perspective informed by Anton's work in order to highlight how users engage themselves with this SNS in the construction of their identities and to suggest whether this engagement encourages the construction of an authentic or inauthentic selfhood. I will argue (1) that, rather than a means for self-discovery, Facebook is increasingly becoming a means of persuading oneself and others to falsely perceive the communicator, because (2) Facebook circumvents the appropriate communicative praxis for establishing an authentic self, and (3) therefore provides an inauthentic, or false, sense of identity. To phrase this differently, Facebook creates a mirage on the road to authentic self-discovery which seems to be one's destination, when it is merely a reductive, though convincing, diversion.

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6 Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 17.

7 Andrew Wood and Matthew J. Smith, *Online Communication* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 51.

Statement of Purpose

My purpose is twofold: to reveal and better understand the social processes involved in self-representation at work within Facebook and to provide a model to clarify, criticize, and contribute to the conversation on SNS and Facebook specifically. In service of my purpose, I will be guided by a two research questions: (1) how do users present themselves on Facebook and, (2) does communicative praxis via Facebook encourage or discourage the construction of an authentic identity?

Key Terms and Definitions

This study employs words and phrases which are particular to the Facebook culture or are evolving within the vernacular. In an effort to maintain clarity, this section defines terms which might provoke confusion and identify their source. As a general rule, words which hold a special meaning within the context of Facebook will be capitalized (e.g. "Wall," "Friend," "Group").

Clients – Although most often referred to as "users," this study identifies those who make use of Facebook as "clients" in order to reduce confusion that may arise out of syntax.

Friend – Demonstrating the primary characteristics of a SNS, Facebook allows for the articulation of one's social network. The chief and most basic way of expressing this on Facebook is through Friendship. Clients who desire a more intimate Facebook relationship with another client must send a "Friend request,"

which that client may then either accept or reject. Friendship (or network membership, discussed below) dictates the amount of access a client has to any given profile. Clients may (and often do) opt to privatize their profile by allowing only Friends to view some or all components of their profile.

Groups – Facebook Groups are yet another way in which clients may articulate their social network. Groups are constructs which any client has the power to create. Clients who construct a group are known as Administrators, and are responsible for creating a Group's profile and thus its identity. These Administrators have the ability to accept or reject requests to join the Group in question. A Group's identity is based on some ideological stance or self-expression (affiliation with a religion, political organization, sports team, or expressing a favorite food or activity, for example).

Identity – Andrew Wood and Matthew Smith provide a concisely packaged definition of identity, which will inform my work here. They define identity as "a complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceive us."[8] They go on to note that many researchers actively working in the field of computer-mediated communication (CMC) have honed in on the second aspect in their definition of identity: how we wish others to perceive us. Obviously, this component of identity is crucial to my work, as I am highlighting how Facebook, a SNS and form of CMC, may be a reflexive speech act of persuasion.

Network – In discussing Facebook, the word "network" describes the community or communities to which a client belongs. In the earliest stages,

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8 Wood and Smith, 52.

Facebook clients were required to belong to a college/university network. Their membership was demonstrated by registering with an active institutional email address (an .edu address). Since that time, the networks permitted on Facebook have widened to include college/university networks, high school networks, corporate networks, and city networks. The networks to which a client belongs are listed on her profile and carry implications for the level of interaction she may have with other clients. Clients who belong to the same network are typically permitted general access to each other's profiles. When a client does not belong to the same profile as someone they wish to view the profile of, she typically must request their "Friendship."

Pictures – Facebook clients are also able to upload pictures to Facebook. An important distinguishing feature about Facebook's picture feature is that clients are able to "tag" other clients who appear in a given picture. Tagging a client in a picture associates that picture with a client's profile, and it may be accessed when her profile is being viewed.

Self-presentation – Andrew Wood and Matthew Smith write at length on the relationship between identity and technology in *Online Communication: Linking Technology, Identity, and Culture.* In their text, they adjust many previously established ideas to better fit within the context of a technologized society. One of the ideas which Wood and Smith appropriately redefine, and which is an essential component of identity (see above), is self-presentation, which they identify as "the process of setting forth an image we want others to perceive."[9] Viewing self-presentation as a process, as an intentional act, is fundamental to this study, as it

9 Wood and Smith, 52

intimates the control people hold in the construction of their identities, especially via technology.

Social Network Sites (SNS) – boyd (sic)[10] and Ellison provide helpful, comprehensive work in defining, detailing the history of, and synthesizing the scholarship on SNS. The result of their effort is a definition of social network sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other clients with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."[11] boyd and Ellison distinguish this term and their definition from "social network*ing* sites." They stray from the latter version because they opine that the word networking "emphasizes relationship initiation" and not the *articulation* of one's social network, which is what they see as the "primary practice" of SNS.

Telepresence – A term coined in an effort to redefine virtual reality, Jonathan Steur defines telepresence first by differentiating it from presence. Presence, he observes, "can be thought of as the experience of one's physical environment; it refers not to one's surroundings as they exist in the physical world, but to the perception of those surroundings as mediated by both automatic and controlled mental processes."[12] Telepresence, then, is the "extent to which one feels present in the mediated environment, rather than in the immediate physical environment."[13] Steur establishes telepresence in addition to two component terms: vividness and interactivity. Vividness is, in short, "the sense of 'being there' that

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10 danah boyd displays a preference for a lower-case representation of her name, which is maintained throughout this essay.

11 boyd and Ellison, "Social Networking Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 211.

12 Steur, 5

13 Steur, 10

many report experiencing while being engaged" in an online environment, while interactivity is the "degree to which a person can manipulate the environment of a medium."[14] These terms provide a qualitative measure of some aspects of SNS. Interactivity will prove especially useful in discussing Facebook, while vividness might be more appropriate and more compelling in research discussing virtual SNS such as Second Life or multi-player games.

Wall, Wall-post, Wall-posting – One of the five basic components of Facebook addressed by this study, the Wall constitutes a central locus for social activity in this community. This Wall is included in every Facebook profile, and consists of a place where clients may post comments visible to other members of the community. Clients have the ability to restrict who can post to their Wall by stipulating what Facebook relationship they must share in order to allow for posting (for example, a client may choose only to let people they have designated as Friends post to their Wall). Clients may also restrict who can view their Wall (i.e. anyone, people from within a specific network, just Friends, and so forth).

Rationale

Since January of 2007, Facebook experienced an average of 250,000 new registrations every day.[15] If the number of Facebook clients joined in an evenly distributed way, 46, 101.69 clients would have created a new Facebook account every day since its creation. Another way to conceive of this is to imagine the entire population of Albuquerque, New Mexico joining Facebook every two days.

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14 Wood and Smith, 51.

15 "Statistics | Facebook.com," Facebook.com, http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics (accessed April 18,2008).

Despite this exceptional growth in clients and increased attention from the media, society has yet to properly address the issues presented by it. In fact, scholars are just now devoting attention to precursors of Facebook, albeit a few years too late. This study is both timely – Facebook is booming in comparison to MySpace or other competitors, demonstrating 81% growth in 2007, compared to MySpace's 7% — and appropriate, for there is growing concern over how self-representation online affects or supplants routine communicative practices[16]. Facebook, as one of the primary, if not *the* primary loci for self-representation online, provides a critical testing ground for scholars to identify the social processes of self-presentation at work within SNS and how, rooted in this online context, they positively or negatively impact the construction of an authentic identity.

In addition to providing a timely and appropriate examination of Facebook, I am also writing out of a more personal motivation. Sonja Foss maintains that in selecting an artifact, a critic ought to choose something which "intrigues, baffles, or excites" her, and that there ought to be something about the artifact which the rhetorician "cannot explain, even if what [the critic] cannot explain is why [the critic] likes the artifact as much as [he or she] does."[17] I have taken this advice to heart in choosing Facebook as my text.

At this time, I should also address why I have chosen Facebook and not MySpace, or both. First, Facebook is a more compelling object of study for me personally. This compulsion speaks to the veracity in Foss' claim, for I find myself

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16 For more information on the concern of online self-representation, see "Growing Up Online." January 22, 2008. PBS. Documentary. (can also be accessed at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/); Nick Yee, "The Proteus Effect: The Effect of Transformed Self-Representation on Behavior," *Human Communication Research*, 33: 271-290; Brian Braiker, "A New World Order: MySpace is Glam, Facebook is Geek," *Newsweek*, Nov 12, 2007; James Gilmore and Joseph Pine, *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2007); Steven Levy, "Social Networking and Class Warfare," *Newsweek* Web Exclusive, August 13, 2007, http://www.newsweek.com/id/32541; and Stephen Levy, "The Peachfuzz Billionaires," *Newsweek* January 14, 2008.

17 Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2004), 12.

unable to fully account for why I am attracted to this text. Second, Facebook strikes me as a more reliable object of study. Having developed at a relatively slower pace with controlled releases to specific audiences, Facebook can claim the coherent community that SNS like Friendster and MySpace lack. Furthermore, data pertaining to MySpace frequently proves spurious in comparison to Facebook. For example, MySpace recently celebrated a 100 million user account milestone. Numerous analysts have turned their attention to this claim, and some have critiqued MySpace for failing to differentiate between user accounts and active clients. One organization has assembled data which suggests that MySpace has roughly 43 million active clients (clients who return within one month's time), in contrast to the 100 million which they previously claimed.[18]In contrast, more than half of Facebook's active clients return daily.[19]

Methodology

In outlining my methodology, I take inspiration from Kathleen German, who notes that "In general, the rhetorical critic has a responsibility to increase our understanding of the unique qualities of the rhetorical artifact and offer evaluative judgments."[20] First, then, Facebook's "unique qualities" and basic components are identified; their function and common usage described. This identification and description of Facebook's fundamental elements builds towards critical, "evaluative," observations of the text, at which point I will apply the lens of Corey

18 "Debunking the MySpace Myth of 100 Million Users," ForeverGreek,

http://forevergeek.com/articles/debunking_the_myspace_myth_of_100_million_users.php

19 "Statistics | Facebook.com," Facebook.com, http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics (accessed April 18, 2008).

20 Kathleen German, "Finding a Methodology for Rhetorical Criticism," *The National Forensic Journal* III (1985): 87.

Anton's theory to examine the self-presentation processes at work within Facebook and how, within this context, they encourage or discourage the construction of an authentic self.

In *Selfhood and Authenticity,* Corey Anton pays homage to communication scholar Lee Thayer by including the aphorism, "As we communicate, so shall we be." Quoting Thayer as an epigraph to his own manuscript proves fitting for more than just expressing an intellectual fondness Anton may feel for the author's work. Rather, Anton uses this quotation to succinctly articulate one of the major concepts underpinning his entire body of theory: the inescapable relationship between communication and existence, which is inherently a social one. Establishing his theoretical origin in this imposing conversation, Anton began examining the quests for selfhood and authenticity. He used the first thrust of his research to construct his dissertation in 1998 at Purdue University and, after attaining his PhD, returned to his original work and published a revised, lengthier version of his dissertation under the title *Selfhood and Authenticity* in 2001.

In his dissertation, Anton notes that the purpose of his research is to "explore the changing character of ethics in modernity by giving specific attention to individuals' quest for personally meaningful lives."[21] The manner in which he sought to execute this exploration was through a phenomenology of selfhood, which would account for the "key relationships between and among embodiment, sociality, symbolicity, and temporality."[22] In his dissertation he asserts that the underlying intent for this project is to describe how the "shallower and lower forms of authenticity can be eschewed while richer and higher forms can be

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21 Corey Anton, "Selfhood and Authenticity," (PhD diss., Purdue University, 1998), abstract.

22 Ibid.

artfully sought."[23] Furthermore, Anton maintains that "the notion of authenticity should be a central concept to general communication theory."[24] To support his argument, he refers to Charles Taylor and his treatise *The Ethics of Authenticity*. In his work Taylor demonstrates that a hallmark of "modernity" is the moral ideal of authenticity which Western cultures hold dear. In fact, Anton and Taylor suggest, these cultures are consumed by a "'quest' for self-fulfillment, self-realization, or personal development."[25] In this quest people feel "called to [seek authenticity], feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it."[26] In feeling called to pursue "personal quests for development and fulfillment," Anton remarks, people feel an inalienable "right to live personally meaningful lives."[27] However, Anton stresses that a "personally meaningful life" is not necessarily an authentic one. To clarify this issue, Anton seeks to define authenticity and the culture which privileges it.

In the culture of authenticity Anton and Thayer describe, there are two dominant camps.[28] On one side the boosters "celebrate the modern individual's sense of freedom and right to 'do their own thing'."[29] These boosters seek to increase every individual's "'poetic license' for composing" and seek to preserve their individual right to achieve a "sense of meaning" in their efforts.[30] People who subscribe to the boosters' way of thinking call out for greater and greater individualization in society and abhor mass morals or meanings.

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23 Ibid.

24 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 12.

25 bid., 3.

26 Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 17.

27 Ibid.

28 Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

29 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 4.

30 Ibid.

Standing opposed to the boosters, the knockers view authenticity as a "license for moral sloth" at best.[31] Too much focus on individual purpose and potential, the knockers would suggest, leads people to follow degraded or "trivialized modes of existence, if not socially irresponsible ones."[32] They see the individualizing of human life creating an ego-centric paradigm for living, which may "'flatten and narrow" life's moral and ethical significance."[33] For them, then, too great a focus on "I" results in a stagnant life, whereas an authentic life would place significant emphasis on "We." Knockers would concede that while poetic license is conceivably allowed, it is manifested best when limited by a conscious responsibility to the social whole of which each communicator is but an inseparable part.

Having outlined a culture of authenticity marked by diametrically opposed stances, Anton and Taylor argue that each faction is at least slightly off the mark. One of the boosters' primary failures is that they ignore the "dialogical nature of the self."[34] In ignoring this aspect of the self, boosters overlook the essential human capacity of being able to converse with other individuals about moral choices and, through that effort, personally exploring and defining them.[35] Meanwhile the knockers give too much credence to the idea of authenticity as a form of moral laxity; they forget that too little individuality results in the absence of selfhood and the presence of mindless, purposeless presence [36]

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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 5.

35 That is, boosters ignore that moral differences may be "arbitrated by reason," and are thus subject to discussion with others.

36 Ibid., 5.

Having specified where established groups have failed to appropriately define authenticity, Anton explores how authenticity *should* be regarded. First, Anton and Taylor call for people to avoid self-centered, or self-referential, approaches towards authenticity. Such approaches "opt for self-fulfillment without regard (a) to the demands of our ties with others or (b) to demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations."[37] For these two scholars, such approaches are "self-defeating" and "destroy the conditions for realizing authenticity itself."[38] Modes of authenticity which are too self-centered run the risk of making interpersonal relationships seem instrumental, expendable, or worthless. This view of relationships as instrumental only to "personal interests" is "self-stultifying,"[39] and makes it possible to overlook both our inability to "separate ourselves from others" as well as "the extent to which we discover and negotiate selfhood through dialogue," which necessitates interaction with others.[40]

Beyond an intrinsic connection to others and the necessity of dialogue to the establishment of selfhood, true authenticity also constitutes dwelling within "the things into which [people] meaningfully weave their lives."[41] This component of authenticity rests on acknowledging that people are continually outside of themselves, "actively caught up attending to and caring for the things that matter to them."[42] Eventually Anton concludes that "to say…we are authentic selves is to recognize that we can exist as responsible flights of passionate care over" the

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37 Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 35.

38 Ibid.

39 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 6

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 7

42 Ibid.

world we live in and the people with whom we interact.[43] Roughly paraphrased, Anton guides his readers to understand that an authentic existence is one in which people meaningfully invest themselves into meaningful activities with a meaningful purpose.

Current research on SNS has already begun to examine how people construct impressions online and whether or not those impressions are authentic[44]. However, this research has largely neglected Facebook as a discrete text, has failed to address the deeper issue of how impression management and identity management may collide within Facebook, and has ignored Anton on questions of authenticity, on which subject his treatise is certainly a modern urtext. Placing Facebook under Anton's lens of authenticity enables rhetoricians to heuristically consider how people advance or stunt their quest for an authentic identity and whether they are artfully effecting an act of self-discovery, or one of self-delusion. To better consider this question, Facebook must first be better understood through an exploration of its historical and theoretical contexts.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Historical Context of Facebook's Emergence

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43 Anton, "Selfhood and Authenticity," abstract.

44 See danah boyd, "Friendster and Publicly Articulated Social Networks," *Proceedings of ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: ACM Press, 1279-1282); Judith Donath and danah boyd, "Public Displays of Connection," BT Technology Journal, 22: 71-82; David Fono and Kate Raynes, "Hyperfriendship and Beyond: Friends and Social Norms on Livejournal," in M. Consalvo & C. Haythornthwaite (eds.), Internet Research Annual Volume 4: Selected Papers from the AOIR Conference (New York: Peter Lang, 91-103); Hugo Liu, Pattie Maes, and Glorianna Davenport, "Unraveling the Taste Fabric of Social Networks," *International Journal on Semantic Web and Information Systems* (42-71); and Judith Donath, "Signals in Social Supernets," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13(2008): 231-251.

Facebook emerged from a long list of predecessors established in an impressively brief period of time. The first construct recognizable as a SNS, SixDegrees.com, began in 1997 and lasted until 2000, when it was subsumed in the presence of other, more successful models.[45] At its height, SixDegrees.com enrolled several million clients on the premise of making networking more efficient.[46] Nestled at its core was the idea advanced by 19th century Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi, who determined that technology would one day advance to allow contact with any human on the planet through 5.83 other people. When enrolling for this particular website, clients were required to provide the email address of ten friends – one's first "degree" of friends – who were then invited to use the service. Ever widening groups of friends and friends of friends constituted progressive "degrees," until one became connected with the total population of the SixDegrees' network. Enrolled clients could make use of bulletin boards, an email service, and online messaging. Although this service started with a promising future, its collapse was as steady as it was certain. In hindsight, its founder, Andrew Weinreich, supposed SixDegrees was "simply ahead of its time."[47] danah boyd, a scholar on the subject, notes that "early adopters complained that there was little to do after accepting Friend requests, and most clients were not interested in meeting strangers."[48]

Concomitant to SixDegrees' rise and after its fall, dozens of other SNS's began to populate the Internet landscape. Many sites provided clients with the opportunity to present themselves to the network's community through a profile of

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45 boyd and Ellison, 214.

46 Doug Bedell, "Meeting Your New Best Friends Six Degrees Widens Your Contacts in Exchange for Sampling Websites," *The Dallas Morning News*, October 17, 1998, Person@l Technology Section.

47 Andrew Weinreich, personal communication with danah boyd, July 11, 2007, quoted in boyd and Ellison, 214.

48 boyd and Ellison, 214.

their own creation and a list of publicly articulated friends. These sites established themselves on overriding premises, such as developing one's professional network, discovering a new job, finding new local or remote friendships, or finding romantic partners. Additionally, some SNS's were designed to capture the attention of individuals who privilege one or more parts of their identity, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, political preference, education level, or other categories: each of these sites attracted members of a target demographic; thus they maintained sizable, stable memberships.

Over the last ten years, the technological affordances provided by SNS evolved in a determined fashion. While SixDegrees provided the basic services described previously, its progeny have developed a wide array of capabilities, such as photo and video-sharing, blogging, instant messaging, music trading, and mobile phone interactions. In some cases, SNS's have been created with one or more of these technological affordances at the core of its operations, such as the photo-sharing network of Flickr, the music listening network of Last.fm, or the video-sharing network of YouTube. By far, the most successful SNS have blended these technological affordances. Three such networks, identified by danah boyd and Nicole Ellison as the "key SNSs that shaped the business, cultural, and research landscape" are Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook.[49]

Launched in 2002, Friendster's design took into consideration its major anticipated source of competition: the successful dating engine, Match.com.[50] Though the majority of dating sites sought to connect strangers who espoused similar interests and/or beliefs, Friendster doffed its cap to SixDegrees by seeking

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49 boyd and Ellison, 215.

50 Rachel Cohen, "Livewire: Websites Try to Make Internet Dating Less Creepy," *Reuters*, July 5, 2003.

to connect friends-of-friends, "based on the assumption that friends-of-friends would make better romantic partners than would strangers."[51] Friendster quickly gained an unprecedented amount of clients and its sudden popularity proved to be its bane as well as its boon. As the site rapidly burgeoned beyond its expectations, it encountered technical and social complications.[52] On the technical side, the website's service was frequently interrupted, causing many clients continued annoyance.[53] On the social side, issues cropped up with regularity. Most notably, the "exponential growth" experience by Friendster led to a "collapse in social contexts: Clients had to face their bosses and former classmates alongside their close friends," which discomfited some and motivated others to leave the service outright.[54] Additionally, faithful clients and website administrators alike were displeased with a subversive community of "Fakstsers," who constructed fake profiles based on fictional characters, celebrities, or other entities. Ultimately, Friendster lost a majority of its early clients due to a combination of "technical difficulties, social collisions, and a rupture of trust between clients and the site."[55]

After the relative demise of Friendster, MySpace succeeded it in popularity. Founded in August 2003, its creators designed MySpace to compete with sites like Friendster and sought to attract estranged Friendster clients.[56] As a result, MySpace benefited from a massive exodus of estranged Friendster expatriates, who subsequently settled themselves anew on MySpace. MySpace also attracted a number of indie-rock bands, who they readily welcomed by seeking to support

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51 A Scott, personal communication with danah boyd, June 14, 2007, quoted in boyd and Ellison 215.

52 danah m. boyd, "Friendster Lost Steam. Is MySpace Just a Fad?"(*Apohenia Blog*, March 21,2006): http://www.danah.org/papers/FriendsterMySpaceEssay.html.

53 boyd and Ellison, 215.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid, 216.

56 Ibid.

them through the development of new technological affordances. The bands and associated fans who became active on the site benefited MySpace in its earliest stages by becoming a core audience. Furthermore, the "bands-and-fans dynamic was mutually beneficial" because just as "bands wanted to be able to contact fans," "fans desired attention from their favorite bands and used [MySpace] Friend connections to signal identity and affiliation."[57]

Perhaps the most significant component of MySpace was its most singular technological affordance: the ability of clients to create their own pages, both through a personalization engine operated by MySpace and the opportunity for clients to add and edit their own HTML code. This second option birthed a shockingly large community of HTML-savvy clients who provided vast amounts of code to less proficient clients who sought to create unique profile backgrounds and layouts.

In 2004, teenagers began to flock to MySpace's banner. By and large, teenagers had not regularly joined other SNS, such as Friendster. Membership in MySpace was promoted by older family members or a desire to connect with a favorite band. Rather than reject minors outright, MySpace adjusted its user policy to permit them. Consequently, MySpace developed with three key groups: the musically inclined, teenagers, and the "post-college urban social crowd."[58] In spite of its rapid growth, MySpace remained largely under the radar until purchased by the News Corporation for $580 million, which gained it the media's scrutinizing spotlight.[59] Although MySpace suffered from accusations of permitting inappropriate sexual encounters between adults and minors and a panic

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57 Ibid, 217.

58 Ibid, 217.

59 boyd and Ellison, 217.

concerning sexual predation, its number of clients soared steadily into the tens of millions.[60]

In February 2004, Facebook entered into this rapidly evolving environment as a network solely for Harvard students – a type of online yearbook – with the prerequisite for membership as a harvard.edu email address. Facebook gradually opened itself to wider and wider demographics based on user demand: in May 2005 it had opened to the students of 800 collegiate institutions, in September 2005 it opened to high school networks, in May 2006 it added corporate networks, and in September 2006 it became open to the public, amid controversy from some clients who bemoaned a diminished sense of privacy.[61] Although Clients lack the degree of creative freedom permitted on MySpace, Facebook does boast one completely singular technological affordance: the ability for unaffiliated developers to construct "Applications," which clients may then add to their profiles or perform tasks, such as compare music or movie interests, diagram travel history, and publicly support sports teams.

Currently MySpace and Facebook dominate the Internet, claiming 11.602% of global Internet traffic in the last three months.[62] Likewise, they frequently appear in media headlines and blogs as pundits and profile peddlers debate whether one will drive the other into a digital graveyard, or if they will peacefully coexist, contented with their own respective share of the market. As this argument unravels on the one hand, a separate issue is also being deliberated on the other: one with greater scope and more pressing implications. This conversation arises from a curiosity to discover why SNS sites have become so popular and in

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60 boyd and Ellison, 217.

61 "Statistics | Facebook.com," Facebook.com, http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistic (accessed April 18, 2008).

62 Alexa, The Web Information Company, http://www.alexa.com. From a report generated on March 12, 2008 for January – March.

discovering what role they are taking in people's day-to-day lives. A concern emerging from this conversation is focused on how these SNS are being appropriately or inappropriately used in fulfilling the daily, personal quest to construct an authentic identity.

CHAPTER III: CONSIDERING THE IMPLICATIONS OF FACEBOOK THROUGH AN ANTONIAN LENS

> "We have a generation who is faced with a society with fundamentally different properties, thanks to the Internet. We could turn our backs and say this is bad, we don't want a world like this, but it's not going away. So instead of saying this is terrible, stop MySpace, stop Facebook… it's a question of how we teach ourselves and our children to live in a society where these properties are fundamentally a way of life.
> *-danah boyd, Harvard Berkman Center for Internet and Society* (Frontline, January 2008)

Anton's theory may be brought to bear on Facebook in evaluating the issues represented by this SNS on a holistic level. Four essential tenets he raises in his book are especially a propos to considering this SNS. These notions may be summarized as (1) particularity, (2) the paradox of substance, (3) the dialogical nature of the self, and (4) the self in reflection.

Privileging Particularity

In *Selfhood and Authenticity* and a later essay devoted to the subject, Anton discusses the idea of particularity, which refers to each individual's uniqueness, or the fact that an individual cannot be interchanged with another individual in an

interpersonal interaction and result in the same interaction.[63] As Anton explains, "I bear a unique history (e.g. various previous and particular 'growing-older-togethers'), a unique set [of] opportunities (e.g. various 'with-whichs' and 'toward-whichs'), as well as a unique set of possibilities (e.g. various capacities of 'being-toward')."[64] He illustrates the "vitality of particularity" by emphasizing that "this person here and now, *and not an other (nor even at a different moment)* [is] necessary for both agency and efficacy within interpersonal interaction"[65] and draws several distinct contrasts between what is offered by face-to-face and by mass-mediated communication, such as Facebook.

Anton observes that interactant interchangeability – the ability for one person to be replaced by another person – is the norm for mass-communication technologies today. He quotes Norbert Wiener, who suggested that the "mass mediated world 'may be viewed as a myriad of To Whom It May Concern messages,'" to underscore that mass media messages, such as those offered through Facebook Profiles, rely "upon a fundamental *anonymity* and *interchangeability* of recipients."[66] That is, much of the content of mass media messages is "designed to retain relevance to any individual who can be equally classified as from the same population segment."[67] What's worse is that many of these mass media messages appear as authentic as face-to-face encounters by presenting "a semblance of recognition of a person's existential particularity,"

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63 Anton notes that "uniqueness" as he uses it must be distinguished from popular conceptions of the word. It is not simply referring to the fact that a person is different from all other people, but that it is "a record and living registrar of the particular others to whom a particular person has become related." (Anton, "Particularity," 10).

64 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 77

65 Anton, "Particularity," 9.

66 Ibid, 3.

67 Ibid, 2.

despite the fact that these exchanges are between individuals who have never met, or whose only acquaintance has been computer-mediated.

In this manner, Facebook profiles replicate what Horton and Whorl documented in the middle of the twentieth century as para-social relations, which cultivate the false "sense of an unmediated, intimate, interpersonal relationship with audience members."[68] Anton recognizes that such feigned intimacy might be useful in some forms of communication, such as by radio DJs and performers who reach out to audience members as if they were face-to-face, but stresses that the authenticity of interpersonal relationships relies on particularity: that is, real non-interchangeability. The danger of feigned intimacy runs rampant throughout Facebook, and is especially noticeable in the Wall, Picture, Status, and Group components of Facebook. Viewing a client's Wall and Pictures might suggest to the voyeur that she has unmitigated access to the client's relationships and social activities, while viewing a client's Status and Groups might suggest an intimacy derived from access to expressions of ideology or self-disclosure. Additionally, the Newsfeed function Facebook offers allows an individual to scan through and/or track all the activity associated with a client's Facebook, increasing the sense of intimacy.

Another danger to particularity presented by Facebook lies in abstraction. When people abstract themselves, "they not only lose presence, but also agency."[69]Anton illustrates this by the use of Mikhail Bakhtin, who explains how abstract thought may elide over the social relationships which are essential to arriving at our authentic selfhood. Bakhtin states that if a person abstracts herself

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68 Ibid.

69 Ibid, 8.

in any fashion (abstracting oneself from physical or emotional existence, for example), she does not just relinquish their presence, but also their agency. [70]

As clients construct their profiles, they work to deduct all but the most essential qualities or aspects by which they wish to be known. In this way, they abstract themselves and present an identity which is by its very nature general and non-particular. Thus they "cover-over their actual 'non-interchangeable' existence, and as a consequence, unwittingly relinquish their agency" in achieving an authentic selfhood. [71]

The Paradox of Substance

Ostensibly, Facebook might appear to promote an authentic existence by encouraging sociality through a more dexterous avenue for communication with others. However, careful consideration of this rapidly evolving technology reveals that it truly contradicts much of what is required for an authentic experience of the self because the sociality it fosters is necessarily flawed.

Anton, like many philosophers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, places special emphasis on sociality: the state or quality of being with others. Within a phenomenological frame, sociality is the prime ingredient to understanding the "world" and the "self."[72] An individual cannot come to understand herself fully, nor can she come to truly perceive the world, without other people around her – "others are part of the way world and self become

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70 M.M. Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* , trans V. Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 58, quoted in Anton, "Particularity," 8.

71 Anton, "Particularity," 8.

72 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 55.

manifest."[73] Indeed, Anton holds that "more commonly than not, we gather with others to share in mutual 'toward-whichs' of intentional concern."[74] That is, people come together with the greatest potential for discovering their authentic selves when the focus is not on the self or "selves" gathered, but on some outside object, purpose, or belief. It is positive and constructive when people join together for meals, worship, professions, recreation, or celebrating. In these activities people come together with a common purpose and a common "toward-which" and thus experience a "We-relationship" that involves a sharing of the substance from which the self is composed. In this way humans achieve a synergistic relationship in which their social combination makes them greater than their division. [75] Anton describes the We-relationship further in writing:

> When I encounter you face-to-face I know you as a person in one unique moment of experience. While this We-relationship remains unbroken, we are open and accessible to each other's intentional Acts. For a little while we grow older together, experiencing each other's flow of consciousness in a kind of intimate mutual possession.[76]

Anton observes that these "We-relationships" demonstrate what Kenneth Burke termed "'the paradox of substance,' whereby persons can become themselves only with the help of others.'"[77] Thus these We-relationships are a healthy and necessary part of sociality: a way in which individuals arrive at an identity and develop a worldview.

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73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 62.

75 The We-Relationship is a product of Alfred Schutz's philosophy – a precious thing for Schutz and Anton, denoting the encounters in which people share a part of themselves through their interaction. See Alfred Schutz, *Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 171.

76 Schutz, *Phenomenology of the Social World*, 181.

77 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 75.

Anton deepens the concept of sociality as integral to authenticity in providing a complement to the We-relationship: the idea of ""being-with-others-being-toward-world."[78] This concept expresses the ideal We-relationship: a bond with others focused on an external object or concern which thus encourages the authentic discovery of the self.

The danger of Facebook on a relationship level is that while it gives the appearance of providing a be-with-others-being-toward-which relationship, in reality it most often only provides being-with-others-being-toward-*ourselves*, as clients are focused on *self*-expression and *self*-exploration more than they are interested in joining or enabled to join with others towards a common external object, belief, or purpose. This focus results from the profile component of Facebook, which demands continued attention in establishing and keeping current an abstraction of oneself via the expression of one's favorite music, movies, books, interests, and an "about me" section. Rather than concernfully comporting themselves towards something together with others and thus entering into reciprocal We-relationships, Facebook encourages clients to enter into mutual I-relationships in which the focus remains on two selves, two I's, rather than something beyond the self(ves).

As Anton observes, one of the "red herrings within contemporary thought…is the notion of individualism" in which "the individual person is set in varying degrees over and against the society and/or 'others'."[79] Instead of "imagining an 'I' separable' from 'society'…we need to see 'the individual' as a particular constellation of relations with particular others in a particular space and

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78 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 62.

79 Anton, "Particularity," 11.

time."[80] While Facebook might attract clients by appearing to provide a pictographic representation of a constellation of relationships with particular others, in reality these connections are formed through shallow self-disclosure aimed toward a general public, rather than a particular other.

As a social-networking site, Facebook excels in providing clients with the opportunity to publish an abstraction of themselves to a defined public, or network. Contrary to clients' expectations, this does not fulfill the same need of authentic selfhood as interpersonal connection, in which people demonstrate the paradox of substance in becoming themselves through the help of others. Instead of encouraging We-relationships to form, Facebook stimulates a focus on clients' profiles, which are articulated abstractions of their own self-perception. Thus, Facebook involves clients in a mutual masturbation of egos, rather than a mutual incorporation of interests. This turning inward towards ourselves cripples the social interaction requisite to establishing an authentic self.

Dialogical Nature of the Self

Anton further explores the construction of the authentic self by demonstrating that authentic identity is arrived at "through various communicative practices and is implicated according to what is appropriate and acceptable;" not the least of which are certain ritualized practices of face-to-face communication. Anton intones that the "sacredness of face-to-face-involvements is generated according to our compliance with or our neglect of the traditions that self be

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80 Ibid.

treated with appropriate ritual care and be presented properly to others." Anton elucidates this by distilling the work of Erving Goffman, the famed sociologist responsible for the dramaturgical perspective of symbolic interaction and author of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* down to three interdependent, everyday communicative practices in which the self is constructed in face-to-face interactions. These practices are: (1) expressing a "regard for the situation," (2) concernfully comporting oneself to give a "regard to particular…participants," and (3) giving "expressions which can be taken as ritualized statements on [an individual's] own character."[81] Although Facebook fulfills the third practice for socialized self-construction in allowing for the expression of an individual's character, it also places an inappropriate emphasis on that expression. This emphasis, combined with Facebook's unmistakable circumvention of the first two practices (regard for the situation and regard for particular others) creates an unbalanced communicative exchange which fails to encourage the construction of an authentic self.

In using Facebook, clients neglect the first two practices essential to establishing character wholesale. The first of these two practices is showing a regard for the situation. By situation, Anton and Goffman refer to the situation or "'encompassing social occasion'" in which communicators find themselves in.[82] This occasion or situation constitutes the "toward-which" which makes the "being-with-others-being-toward-which" existence and the We-relationship possible. In communication which allows for discovering an authentic self, people not only come together around some common goal, idea, or task; they also show regard for

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81 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 70-71.

82 Goffman, 25, quoted in Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 71.

the goal, idea, or task for which they share a concern, and through that regard, present and construct their identities for themselves and others. Facebook, as I have already obliquely suggested, is a construct which transforms the ego (the perception of oneself) into a situation or occasion. Although the degree to which clients are able to pay appropriate regard to that situation is arguable,[83] that the self cannot constitute a "toward-which" of mutual concern on the path to authentic self-discovery is not. This is because the ego-as-situation is nothing but one person's own desires or wants, which fails to properly acknowledge the "demands of our ties with others" that are a necessary part of our existence as social beings.[84]

Clients are also unable to show a regard for particular participants, the second communicative practice outlined above, due to the artificiality of this atmosphere. We communicate each day with more people than we might initially think, and these encounters are necessary to developing who we are, for "others are our condition…they are part and parcel of the way we see things" and the way we come to see ourselves.[85] In reality, communication with others is continual and ubiquitous. Contrary to this reality, Facebook encourages its clients to believe that they are in complete control of whom they communicate with – that their sociality is autonomously and autocratically directed – by allowing them to construct their personal network, accept or decline Friendship attempts, and manipulate their presentations of self with extreme, artificial ease. This divorces clients from the reality of communication, in which people interact on some level even when neither party is actively searching for communication. This redirection back to the

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83 The regard clients show for the ego-as-situation is expressed through ultra-artificial symbols: words and images which are created and deleted with extreme facility and no permanent repercussions.

84 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 6.

85 Ibid, 61.

self without privileging others contradicts the essence of sociality and frustrates the path to realization of the authentic self. Thus while "within the ongoing event of communicative praxis we find many ritual practices which sustain a sacredness to human existence," Facebook, as a self-centered construct, enables its clients to subvert this sacredness by neglecting the ritual practices involved in sociality which establish authentic selfhood.

In preventing clients from appropriately fulfilling all three practices in social identity construction, Facebook becomes what Anton and Taylor warned against: a mode of self-fulfillment which fails to recognize the "demands of our ties with others" or to demands which come from something more than personal desire.[86] Its circumvention of the two practices which embody the social fabric to which one necessarily belongs and overwhelming emphasis on the self, makes it overly self-centered, which tends to falsely "direct the idea of fulfillment toward the individual."[87] As a consequence, this makes "personal affiliations seem to be purely instrumental," or expendable.[88] As Anton stresses, such a perspective unfailingly leads to an artificial understand of authenticity, which overlooks "that we cannot separate ourselves from others."[89] Additionally this perspective proves false in leading people to believe that identities can be "individually or 'monologically' generated," thereby overlooking "the extent to which we discover and negotiate [identity] through dialogue," which necessitates interaction with others.[90]

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86 Ibid, 6.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

The Self in Reflection: Presentation of the Self by the Self and by Others

Self-presentation, an essential communicative process inseparable from identity construction, has been "tied to social (and even physical) survival."[91] Furthermore, it has been "complicated" by new technologies.[92] As CMC technologies have proliferated, a series of questions have been raised regarding self-presentation and impression management, such as "whether and at what rate impressions are formed online, how online impressions may be like or unlike offline impressions, and how people judge the authenticity of self-presentation online."[93] Anton's theory may be used to evaluate how authentic online impressions may be.

Original research on CMC maintained that "interpersonal impressions were occluded by CMC," due to the absence of nonverbal communication.[94] More recent research has shown that "CMC users readily translate the production and detection of affective messages from nonverbal behavior to verbal equivalents" despite the fact that this translation usually results in impressions which are "discordant with later offline impression of the same people."[95] In another study, researchers have identified a direct correlation between how attractive we think we are online, and how confident we act both on- and offline.[96] In this study, individuals who were assigned visually attractive identities behaved more confidently than those who

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91 Hogan, Jones, and Cheek, 1985, "Socioanalytic Theory: An Alternative to Armadillo Psychology." In Barry Schlenker (ed) *The Self and Social Life* (175-198), quoted in Joseph Walther, et al, "The Role of Friends' Appearance and Behavior on Evaluations of Individuals on Facebook: Are We Known by the Company We Keep?" *Human Communication Research* 34: 31.

92 Walther, et al, 28.

93 Walther, et al,. 28.

94 Walther, et al, 32.

95 D. Jacobson, "Impression Formation in Cyberspace." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 5 (1999), quoted in Walther, et al, 32.

96 Yee.

were assigned less attractive identities, demonstrating the connection between self-presentation and feelings of self-worth.[97] At the heart of what makes self-presentation and impressions formed via Facebook so unique is that impressions can be derived from two different authors: the client and a client's Friends.

On the surface, clients appear able to manage impressions made of them through the construction of their online identity. This identity is largely achieved by filling out a detailed, self-descriptive profile, as well as through tagging oneself in pictures or videos. These identities should be highly suspect, because clients "can organize the information flow and enhance self-image by strategically selecting how and what to convey to the receiver."[98] Research has shown that "inflating or even manipulating others' perceptions of oneself has come to be expected, and no small portion of [clients'] disclosures involves a modicum of exaggeration, even with good chances of meeting offline observers of their online portraits."[99] Furthermore, scholars have determined that the "self-directed identity claims" which may be found in clients' profiles are likely 'symbolic statements made by [clients] for their own benefit, intended to reinforce their" self-perception.[100] Despite what some clients may expect, an authentic identity cannot be reached "by merely surrounding oneself with artifacts which can be taken as signs of authentic selfhood."[101] Authentic selfhood does not exist in obtaining or displaying things, it does not exist in the what, but in the *how* those things are regarded. Anton maintains that an authentic identity is a "passionate responsibility"

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97 Yee.

98 Walther, 32

99 Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, "Managing Impressions Online," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11, qtd. in Walther 32.

100 Egon Brunswick, "Perception and the Representative Design of Psychological Experiments,, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1956), qtd in Walther, 34.

101 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity*, 151.

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anyone from that network to see. A Wall post may take the form of affectionate statements, defamatory messages, or generic comments, for example, and are accompanied by a thumbnail image of the poster's profile picture and a timestamp. Clients may not know that they have received a message on their Wall until they log into Facebook, unless they have requested to be notified via email when they receive a Wall post. Although clients are able to delete unwanted messages, research has indicated that popular Facebook norms demand that they "leave questionable posts on display."[105] This practice proves especially interesting when considering the perceived validity of second degree disclosure.

One recent study examined the relationship between self-generated and other-generated online clues to a client's identity and how valid those clues were perceived to be.[106] This study found that "the objectivity and validity" of second degree disclosure could "be considered more reliable than self-disclosed claims of the same nature."[107] Another study which aimed at identifying how people set about assessing the personalities of other clients found that people "rely both on things that [clients] deliberately display and on things that [clients] unintentionally display," such as Wall posts. Interestingly, the amount which people rely on second degree disclosure is deepened by the perception of attractiveness – not of the client in question, but of the Friends who have commented on that client's Wall. This attractiveness is tied to source credibility, "which pertains to how people evaluate others as acceptable information sources, and generally pertains

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105 Walther, 30.

106 Walther and Parks, "Cues Filtered Out, Cues Filtered In," *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (Thousand Oaks, Sage: 2002), quoted in Walther, 32.

107 Walther, 33

to their expertise and trustworthiness, although the precise factors comprising credibility may vary due to a variety of reasons."[108]

In short, although second degree information is already typically viewed as more authentic than first degree information, the credibility of second degree claims is increased dramatically by the perceived attractiveness of the client that the second degree information originated from.

Anton is very clear on the implications of this type of self-presentation. Not only does an authentic identity not come from a focus on oneself, but this type of self-presentation poses the risk of focusing a client's attention away from what is important. As Friends edit a client's online presentation of her perceived self, their comments and her own combine to make an identity which she then believes embodies who she is. This mode of constructing an identity "mistakenly assumes that emotions or feelings…are objects to be pursued in their own right, a kind of content of self that we need to attend to and care over."[109] Instead, Anton maintains, "we are mostly ourselves when we concernfully face others, events, and things," and that "a serious reduction in the quest for authenticity awaits those who would pursue self-fulfillment to that self whom appears only in reflection," such as the self who appears on one's Facebook profile.[110]

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108 Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher, *Communication Research Measurers: A Sourcebook* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).

109 Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity,* 149.

110 Ibid.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

Despite confidence that my work here is worthwhile, if only in voicing questions which I feel are not being appropriately addressed, I acknowledge two significant opportunities for improvement and expansion. One area of opportunity my work leaves is to utilize a range of other philosophical models, whereas I have relied on only a single lens. Additionally, this work is entirely my own subjective application of theory to communicative praxis. A worthwhile sequel to my thesis may take the form of scholars formulating questions inspired by philosophy and then pursuing answers based on their subsequent empirical research.

In many ways, technology is a modern holy grail. Although its technical qualities seem simple to identify, quantify, and systematically explain – the full scope of its effects on us are not. Science fiction gurus have spawned a burgeoning genre of films and novels which depict the possibility of humans going one step too far and unleashing something disastrous that we cannot control. Realistically speaking, stories taking this turn are mere fancy meant to capitalize on a growing uncertainty about the technology on which our society rests and depends. However, it is not altogether inappropriate to take that uncertainty and bring it to bear on technology with the aim of identifying what monsters, if any, we should be cautious of. Modern research has started doing just that, and a subtle theme underpinning scholarship investigating technology suggests that the greatest monster we have to fear is ourselves.

Scholars from various disciplines may take a stance for or against technology, but few can deny its implications on our moral and ethical landscape. Some scientists will proudly proclaim technology's potential to unlock the human genome, while others might fearfully declaim the possibility of taking eugenics too far. Scholars in softer disciplines, such as psychology, political science, and communication, have a responsibility to weigh in on the technology issue as well. Though our interests will be notably different, they are no less important or compelling. In essence, what we must ask ourselves is if technology is a tool which we know how to use appropriately for a worthwhile cause, or if we are being irresponsible and, perhaps, damaging to ourselves. This line of questioning is especially appropriate where the subject of identity is concerned. Identity has deservedly attracted great attention from across the disciplines for the last century, and scholars are now realizing a direct relationship between it and technology.

Although he presents simply one lens out of many which may be applied with heuristic results, Corey Anton's philosophy fits well in considering this issue. He distills the work of many of his predecessors (such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke, Erving Goffman, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Taylor) into one cohesive conceptual model and brings it to bear on our modern society and the issues that plague it. Although he only obliquely addresses technology, such as CMC or SNS, his philosophy complements well the communication research that has investigated it. When viewed together, Anton's work and the body of research examining technology and communication call into serious question the way we are using it to communicate ourselves into being and whether or not our communicative praxis through CMC is healthy or appropriate.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, I see people fleeing the pressures of their "real" lives and using technology as an anesthetic, or a placebo. On the surface, many of us feel that technology fulfills our communicative needs and helps us to explore who we are. Facebook is a perfect example of a technological construct which is seen in this light. Once it is subjected to careful examination, such as through Anton's theoretical lens, I feel that Facebook is revealed not to have satisfied our needs, but to have deepened them and complicated them. It should be noted that I hold Facebook blameless in this affair. Rather, I fault our lack of awareness of what is healthy in constructing our identity and our failure to consciously and thoroughly consider how our computer-mediated communication encourages or discourages authenticity. In essence, I see CMC as way of lazily compiling an identity from filtered fragments and regarding the mosaic that results as an authentic portrait of who we and others are.

It is my fervent hope that more people seriously consider the challenge before us. We cannot ignore the ubiquity of technology in our society, nor do I propose that we cast it in a negative light and work to limit its proliferation or use. Instead, I heartily call for us to evaluate our use of this tool and realize that there are healthy and unhealthy approaches to it. More than anything else, I hope that we recognize the value of Thayer's aphorism, which Corey Anton started his work with, and with which I will end mine: that "as we communicate, so shall we be."

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