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Facebook: Privacy and Popularity

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It seems to be that the more advancements a civilization makes, the greater the need becomes for its people to seek escape. In past centuries, this escape has taken on many different forms. Looking at American history, Sunday was one of the main escapes the early American settlers took from the harrowing labor of the weekday. In the 19th century, transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau encouraged escape from the inefficiency of mindless, mechanical labor by going into nature, where the virtues and goodness of life were to be found. Even in the 20th century, this need for escape is clear. The birth of the 1920's flapper era was a response to the stringencies of the Victorian Era, and an escape from them. The hippie era of the 1960's was another form of escape for young adults of this time period who were disillusioned with American culture and sought escape through the use of drugs and the relaxing of society's moral norms. Now America has reached the 21st century, appropriately called the Digital Age; we live in a culture greatly affected by a technology boom. Though our era differs from past eras, that need for escape is as strong, if not stronger, than that felt by the first settlers to America. I say if not stronger, because I truly believe that escape has become a much more integral part of American life than it once was. Today we have even less time to accomplish all we need to do because we are involved in so many different activities. And technology, though a boon to us, can also be a burden—a relentless distraction that takes up any free time we have left.

Though the 21st century has experienced much technological advancement in its first ten years, and a result of this advancement that has risen with unsurpassed rapidity is the social networking site, Facebook. Though relatively new, its popularity and use has spread swiftly through America and around the world. In this time period, I believe Facebook is the American's present mode of escape from the busy life that he leads. What are the benefits of such social

networking, and what are the dangers? I intend to explore these in this paper. To do this, I will begin by looking at what Facebook is, how it is constructed, and how it can be used. I will then move into how it affects various sectors of American society, how we view privacy and friendship. Finally, I will look at what Facebook means to the world, and how it is affecting international relationships. In this way, I hope to explore Facebook as an artifact created by humans, and one whose effects touch not only its users, but the world at large. What I hope to prove is that Facebook, as a social institution of modern society is fostering change in human interaction, but the extent of this change depends on the individual. Though there are many in this world who do not have a Facebook account, they are nevertheless touched by Facebook. In an age where technology serves to seemingly unite large amounts of people together, it is clear that there is also a downside to being so connected. I feel Facebook can unite us on a community level with those we already know, but in terms of the broader nation, and the world, this unity becomes less and less possible (a conclusion I draw from the research to follow). And through research and interviews with college students and senior citizens, I intend to depict various aspects of the complex face of Facebook.

With new times, come new modes of communication. Facebook, invented by Mark Zuckerberg, then a sophomore at Harvard, “launched at Harvard in February 2004” (Kirkpatrick 12). In its infancy, it was “a very basic communication tool, aimed at solving the simple problem of keeping track of your schoolmates and what was going on with them” (Kirkpatrick 29). Originally only intended for Harvard students, what was first called “Thefacebook” rapidly gained users from different colleges: in fact, it “had 10,000 active users [from Harvard, Columbia, and Yale]....[after being] operational for one month” (Kirkpatrick 35). And it did not stop there: besides opening to other colleges, “Facebook added high school students in fall 2005

and opened to everyone in fall 2006” (Kirkpatrick 16). Now Facebook reaches an “international audience....of well over 400 million” (Smith 1). As a matter of fact, the number of users worldwide is over 500 million people, as an article from *Time* called “Friends Without Borders” suggests: as of May 31st, 2010, “Sometime in the next few weeks, Facebook will officially log its 500 millionth active citizen” (Fletcher, Ford 1). This is amazing growth for less than seven years of existence. An *Associated Press* article dated September 9, 2010 even says, “U.S. Web surfers are spending more time socializing on Facebook than searching with Google, according to new data from researchers at comScore Inc.” making Facebook number one in terms of time spent on an Internet site (“Facebook inches past Google for web users’ minutes” 1). From these facts, it is apparent that Facebook has become influential, not only on Americans, but on the world as “about 75 percent of its active users are outside the United States” (Kirkpatrick 16). This expansion says something about the character of the world today, and how we share information. To examine Facebook properly, we must first look at how it is constructed.

As an artifact crafted by humans, Facebook is a blend of many modes of communication. A Facebook user can send an e-mail, instant message a friend, and share pictures and statuses.¹ Entering into the virtual world of Facebook, it seems that Facebook is becoming, if it has not already become, a major part of one’s social life. According to Ana M. Martínez Alemán and Katherine Lynk Wartman, writers of the book, Online Social Networking on Campus: Understanding What Matters in Student Culture, “today’s college students are active in several online communities in which they explore new forms of self-expression, create connections in the past improbable, and more and more blur the line between their real worlds and their virtual worlds” (Alemán, Wartman 1). Though this quotation pertains to college students, it can be increasingly applied to all who use the Internet to socialize. In the last ten years, we have seen

the birth of many new ways to communicate. And this is evidenced in American culture. For example, finding pay phones today is virtually impossible. Many have been removed with the advent and wide use of the cell phone. Instead of dating someone in person, individuals can meet and maintain relationships through online dating sites, like eharmony.com and match.com. Our technology is increasingly allowing people to feel connected even when they are not physically with other people. And this is what Facebook also allows the individual to do. A person gets online and can see how many of his friends are also online. If he wants to talk to them, he can contact them in many ways. He can send them a message, chat through the instant messenger, or post to their wall. He can also see what his friends are up to, their relationship status, and any new pictures they have taken by glancing over the news feed. Facebook allows a person to organize his friendships online and to keep in contact with more people than he could in real life.

People use Facebook in a variety of ways. And its use is tied into its effect. Part of my research for this paper included talking to a small group of college students and to a larger group of senior citizens about Facebook. From hearing the opinions of both of these groups, I found that Facebook's effects on the individual differ depending on age, one's previous experience with the site, one's previous life experience, and one's openness to new ideas. Facebook's influence on the individual also depends on how it is used by the individual. Like all things, Facebook can be used or abused. The general impression of Facebook on the college students differs greatly from the impression it makes on the senior citizens. Exploring both views will bring to light some of the problems and benefits of this complex social network.

Speaking to a group of four college students about issues regarding Facebook, they offered a view of this social networking site that was largely positive. They mentioned the fact that some of the benefits Facebook offered them were that it allowed them to "organize groups of

people, keep track of people, and [assisted them in] getting together” with others more easily. From this, it can be concluded that Facebook is used by college students mainly to keep in contact with other people and as a way of organizing their social lives. Facebook helps users remember friends’ birthdays and events that are coming up. As Alemán and Wartman mention, “Part campus bulletin board and part campus square, social networking sites are now fundamental to the culture of the campus and student life” (Alemán, Wartman 3). I asked the college students how true this statement is to their campus. College Student A² told me that to her, Facebook does serve the functions cited by Alemán and Wartman “100% of the time because events are planned through Facebook...and picture sharing is important in college” (College Discussion Group). College Student B added that this quote is “more true on a big campus because...[the campus these students live on is] so big” (College Discussion Group).

Though optimistic, these college students were realistic in speaking about the benefits and pitfalls of Facebook. I read them a quote that Alemán and Wartman cite from a college undergraduate named Laura: “I don’t often walk around with words printed on my body about my interests...but Facebook is just an extension of me. I try to put my personality on the page, which is difficult because it is a set format. But through photos of myself and the way I word things, I can present my personality in my page” (Laura in Alemán, Wartman 1). I was interested in hearing how true this quote was for the college students. College Student D³ agreed with Laura: “Facebook is a place where I present myself. Because I present who I am (with pictures, quotes, etc.) my profile DOES express my personality” (College Student D, E-mail). College Student A said that Laura’s statement did not apply to herself: “I have very little personal info on [F]acebook except for pictures. [I] think [people] should be able to get to know me in person” (College Student A, E-mail). College Student B agrees:

I don't think I need to necessarily put my personality up on Facebook because all of my friends should already know me. I think that my personality shines through regardless because of how the website is structured, such as what pictures I'm in. But I am not going to go out of my way to tell people who I am because I believe that is something that should be conveyed over human interaction (College Student B, E-mail).

College Student C said that “I think it’s wrong to say that my Facebook page could tell someone who I am. Personalities are abstract, but Facebook posts are concrete. Also, there’s an element of reservation, secrecy if you will, in our personalities that we don’t necessarily want to share with the world” (College Student C, E-mail). This same student added that Facebook can “unite if [you and someone else are] not close geographically but divide if you’re already living close [to that person]” (College Focus Discussion Group). And this is a definite benefit. When face-to-face contact is not possible, it is still possible to maintain a relationship with a person that allows us to actually see what is going on in our friends’ lives. As humans, we are very visual creatures. The pictures posted on Facebook, the wall posts, and the news feed that holds both of them, help us to get a sense of what is going on with our friends’ in a way that merely talking on the phone or sending an e-mail could not do. These college students were in agreement with Kirkpatrick, that

Popular though it may be, Facebook was never intended as a substitute for face-to-face communication. Though many people do not use it this way, it has always been explicitly conceived and engineered by Zuckerberg and colleagues as a tool to enhance your relationships with the people you know in the flesh—your real-world friends, acquaintances, classmates, or co-workers” (Kirkpatrick 12).

Now if you compare the responses of these college students to Laura's response, it becomes apparent that how one uses Facebook even differs within age groups. Because this social networking site can be used in so many ways, the effect it has on one college student may not mirror the effect it has on another. The individual's personality, how much they share on Facebook, and how big a role this site plays in everyday life, are a few of many factors to consider when gauging the effect of Facebook on college students.

Though the benefits of Facebook were clearly stated by the college students, they were also able to clearly define dangers they saw with Facebook. One is the potential for Facebook to be used as a way to shield us from actually conversing with others in person. College Student C said, "I hide behind it" and College Student D added that "[Interacting through Facebook] is easier than face-to-face conversation" and actually "cheapens face-to-face conversation when it's an option" (College Discussion Group). And from personal experience, I agree. Like sending a text message, an e-mail, or even a letter, Facebook does not allow you to communicate tone and facial expression, (something also mentioned by College Student C) two things vital for giving social interaction a context for response. Though Facebook users can help friends understand their mood or feeling through the use of emoticons and abbreviated words like lol, the subtleties of human communication (e.g. a facial expression that communicates something different than what was said) are largely lost. Another issue mentioned was issues with privacy. The college students talked about the potential for parents and employers to see their activities on Facebook. Though they mentioned that employers are now able to find out what their employees are doing on Facebook, College Student D said that "I am totally okay with employers seeing my Facebook" because he has "nothing to hide" (College Discussion Group). Though one of the other college students was a little more uncomfortable with this idea, the general feeling was that

employers are not always able to get a complete perspective of a person by looking at their Facebook profile, though there was concern for how much an employer can see of a person's profile on Facebook. At this point in their lives the college students seemed to have more to say about their parents being on Facebook. College Student D mentioned that "my mom uses it to write embarrassing things on my wall" (College Discussion Group). College Student A said that "I did not befriend my mom on Facebook. She'd creep on me daily" (College Discussion Group).

I asked these college students what they believe is the purpose of Facebook. College Student A said that Facebook "helps us plan" and that there is an "immediacy of Facebook" that is appealing (College Discussion Group). In addition, this student said that it allows for "keeping in contact with old friends" (College Discussion Group). That idea of staying connected, that is, within the social loop of what is going on in friends' lives is important. I also wanted to gauge whether or not these students felt that Facebook would be something permanent. The general feeling was, no—that Facebook is a current fad. Yet they do expect it to be around for their children's generation. In terms of technology in general and its overall effect on the lives of college students, College Student C said that "technology aids us in doing more" (College Discussion Group). College Student D added that "we could be doing something every minute of every day" due to the amount of technology we have (College Discussion Group). Though it makes things easier for us, it also has a way of taking up time we could be spending on other things.

I was also able to hear the voice of an older generation, and their opinion of Facebook was, for the most part, negative. In terms of presentation, I started with giving the senior citizens a look at my own Facebook account. Here I explained certain aspects of Facebook: the jargon

that comes with using Facebook and how Facebook is used. I then asked them some of the same questions I asked the college students, though some were different. They, in turn, asked me many questions. Through these questions, I was able to hear their concerns. The senior citizens brought up concerns that are necessary when addressing so multi-faceted an artifact. Senior Citizen A asked a good question: “How do you really know anyone from making a comment...the word social, to me, means getting together and having an actual back and forth. Here you’re making a statement for everyone...to read, and there’s nothing personal about it.” I feel that it is vital to consider this point when looking at Facebook because it really does have the potential to change the way we interact with each other. These senior citizens grew up in an age when social interaction was mostly conducted face-to-face. There were no cell phones or computers to serve as substitutes for real conversation. If you wanted to talk to someone, you physically had to go see them and talk to them. Now that these components of communication, the physical setting and the act of actually talking to someone, have been superseded by text messaging and online social networking, a “conversation” is often reduced to brief messages. I do not doubt that a person can have real conversations on Facebook (through the chat feature), but overall, there is something lacking in technological communication. The people who are communicating are not physically present to each other.

Part of the conversation with the senior citizens was to get them to look at the college experience today in relation to their own experiences as college students. Senior Citizen A brought up this idea: “Well I think our timing was compartmentalized. We went to school, we studied...so we had special times that we socialized. We didn’t socialize all the time...It was definitely certain times, certain days, so I don’t think we wasted as much time” (Senior Discussion Group). The fact that the individual has the ability, as College Student D mentioned,

to “be doing something every minute of every day,” is something I believe the older generation grapples with (College Discussion Group). The balance of life, between schoolwork, sleeping, and socializing is not what it was in early twentieth century. Senior Citizen B brought up another question related to this point: “What time do college students study because we’ve got Facebook and we’ve got e-mail and we’ve got cell phones—when do people ever have time to concentrate on courses?” (Senior Discussion Group). With all the distractions we have, how do we manage our time? College Student A said Facebook “allows you to multi-task” and in the college setting it seems that in order for many students to get done everything they need to accomplish and stay socially connected, they have to sacrifice their undivided attention (College Discussion Group).

In terms of keeping connected, the senior citizens seem to prefer Skype to Facebook. Senior Citizen C mentioned that “The thing I always find very appealing [about Skype] is I can see my grandchildren although they’re far away....My grandparents were always in other countries and we never saw them. But now I can see [my grandchildren]” (Senior Discussion Group). As the college students are, and as I believe people in general are, the senior citizens are also visual people. The benefit Skype offers that Facebook does not is that it allows for face to face conversation though a person may be geographically far from another person. It appears that the senior citizens prefer the moving picture of human interaction to the still pictures and quick posts of Facebook. Skype better replicates the social interaction they grew up with. The idea that parents could not necessarily see what their children were doing on Facebook seemed to bother some of the senior citizens. Senior Citizen D mentioned that “I think it divides teenagers from families... they’re really into all the friend business” (Senior Discussion Group). For these senior citizens who grew up in an era where society was more family oriented, they see a definite change in the attitudes of the younger generation. Today, as the traditional family itself becomes

more and more obsolete (due to many factors, including divorce and single parenthood, to name a few), I believe senior citizens feel that the younger generation is even more connected to their friends than earlier generations because of the many new modes of communication that have emerged. I sensed more of a confusion among the senior citizens in terms of the “target audience” for Facebook. Senior Citizen D said “high school and college” aged people, while Senior Citizen E said “I think even younger” (Senior Discussion Group). I believe this discomfort with the fact that parents can’t always monitor their children’s activities on Facebook stemmed from a more protective outlook when it comes to Facebook: that the younger generation is not being adequately supervised by their parents when they are allowed to create Facebook accounts. When the college students were asked this same question, there was also a bit of hesitancy to pin down the audience as “high school and college students” as College Student A said (College Discussion Group). College Student D mentioned that “as it evolves, [Facebook] targets whoever’s interested” (College Discussion Group).

By hearing the perspectives of both the older and younger generation, I think we are able to better understand Facebook’s effect on the individual in American society and on society as a whole. At the individual level, we are social creatures. We seek relationship with others. In fact, according to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, after the basic “*Physiological*” and “*Safety*” needs are met, a person needs “*Belongingness and love*” in order to promote “subjective well being” (Bernstein, Nash 320). To meet this need in an ever-changing world, successful technology must adapt. And it has. Online social networks allow for individuals to feel that this human need has been achieved, even if it has not really been met. But can one really experience a sense of belonging from technology? I believe this may be true to some degree, but technology cannot come to substitute human interaction. Technology makes life easier, but it also has the potential

to monopolize our time, to tear us away from real human relationships. Facebook, though it involves interactions between real people allows for what I term the Bubble Theory. Americans, seem to enjoy their personal space. Facebook is an extension of this bubble to the virtual world. It allows us to hold people at an arm's length. We can interact with the people we want to interact with on Facebook. If we don't want to interact with them, we can still gain information about them without ever talking to them. Social interaction becomes easier when it's a passive process—when all we have to do is look at a screen to learn what we could have learned by actually talking with a person.

What is Facebook doing to privacy in America? Let me start out by a little personal experience that occurred rather recently. Searching my name via Google, I was surprised to see that the second search item was the last post I made on Facebook. The strange thing is that the last time I checked, my privacy settings are set so that only friends of friends can find me on Facebook. I share hardly any personal information, yet someone searching for me on Google only has to type in my name, and presto, they can find something I wrote! This is a bit scary to me. Early last year, there was a time when I did not log on to Facebook for about a month and a half. After about thirty days, Facebook sent me a message, saying something along the lines of “You haven't been on in a while” (Facebook: <update+hddd1-wi@facebookmail.com>). I am now currently off of Facebook for a few weeks. I stopped using it in late November of this year. Facebook responded to my lack of activity even faster than it did less than a year ago. On Friday, December 3rd, Facebook sent me a message saying “Hi Lindsey, You haven't been back to Facebook recently. You have received notifications while you were gone” (Facebook: <update+hddd1-wi@facebookmail.com> “7 friends awaiting your response” 1). It's comforting to know Facebook is keeping such good track of me. And they haven't stopped there. If a friend

has not been on Facebook in a while, their picture used to pop up in the right corner of the news feed saying something like “[Name] hasn’t been on Facebook in a while. Send them a message.”

Now Facebook even has a way for me to *locate* my friends:

Now we have Facebook Places, which...lets people tell everyone where they are to the nearest square foot - via their mobiles....Places is a simple proposition. It is designed to tell your social network where you are. You ‘check in’ using your mobile phone: log on to Facebook and, with a simple click, post your whereabouts online - complete with GPS location and map. Friends who see you at a location can also check you in (Armstrong 1).

A bit invasive, isn’t it? It brings me to the question, is Facebook a creative way to monitor what people are doing and saying? It is apparent it can be used by the average citizen to obtain information about people that would otherwise be unavailable? But who else can see our activity on Facebook? Information is not limited to our friends alone.

In October 2010, there was an article from *The New York Times* by Miguel Helft entitled “Marketers Can Glean Private Data on Facebook.” Facebook is a source many advertisers use to draw Facebook users’ attention to their products. This article informs readers that “in certain circumstances, advertisers -- or snoops posing as advertisers -- may be able to learn sensitive profile information, like a person's sexual orientation or religion, even if the person is sharing that information only with a small circle of friends” (Helft 1). Though this is only a possible threat to privacy, the changes frequently made to Facebook in order to improve it, often prove to make it more public, and less private. On December 6, 2010, Facebook again changed the site. Though only slight changes were made, “Facebook said its changes were intended to make it ‘even easier for you to tell your story and learn about your friends’” (Heussner 1). Such

enhancements include, “Instead of listing biographical information under the profile picture on the left, the new design places the information at the top of the page. A row of recently tagged photographs will appear below a brief bio” (Heussner 1). Perhaps the change that most effects the privacy of the user is the ability for friends to trace all the interactions two individuals on Facebook have had: “Instead of only showing members' mutual friends...the site will now link to a separate page that includes all the comments, pictures and online information shared between two friends” (Heussner 1). It used to be that the interaction between two friends could be seen by others as it appeared in the news feed or on one of the friends' walls. Now, I am able to trace conversations that two of my friends had on Facebook, thus enabling me to enter deeper into their lives. Fletcher and Ford acknowledge that when it comes to its effect on American society, “Facebook has changed our social DNA, making us more accustomed to openness” (Fletcher, Ford 1). And these little changes that happen on Facebook function to advance a certain message. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer for Facebook, puts it this way: “‘Mark really does believe very much in transparency and the vision of an open society and an open world, and so he wants to push people that way....I think he also understands that the way to get there is to give people granular control and comfort. He hopes you'll get more open, and he's kind of happy to help you get there. So for him, it's more of a means to an end’” (Sandberg in Kirkpatrick 207-208).

Though the goal of Facebook is to become a mode of self-expression, in much the same way the college student mentioned by Alemán and Wartman, Laura, described, there are those who feel that too much is being shared, and that too many people have access to what is being shared. For example, employers can search Facebook for information on their potential employees. Since “only about 25 percent of users actively use...[privacy] controls,” employers have a good chance of finding the open profiles of their employees (Kirkpatrick 208). They can look at pictures and interests of those who are applying for a job. From what they see and what

they read, they can make a decision about whether they want to hire a certain person. This becomes a problem when there are pictures all over Facebook of an employee partying, for example. Though Zuckerberg is hoping for users to share more with others, there seems to be a limit as to what the older generation would deem acceptable in this online world that seemingly has no limits. As is quoted in Stephen Armstrong's article for the *Sunday Times* in London entitled "The Dark Side of Facebook,"

'We're evolving into a nation split largely along generational lines who have completely different ideas of what information can and should be in the public sphere,' said Alan Redman, a business psychologist. 'There are digital natives, who put everything out there, and digital immigrants or digital aliens, who don't understand why. You see it most clearly in the workplace. Employers don't understand why people would reveal so much of their private lives, and there are many documented sackings [firings] because of this' (Armstrong 3).

And the fact for right now is that it is those who did not grow up in the Digital Age who are the employers today. As was demonstrated in the conversations I had with the senior citizens and the college students, I believe attitudes about Facebook differ between the younger and older generations because my generation lives in a world that is different from the one my grandparents were born into. We can read all about the older generation and the way they lived in history textbooks, but we have not lived it. And the difference is in the living. The younger generation's realm of experience does not reach to a time when people could live in much greater anonymity than they can today. Though the idea of making their lives more accessible via Facebook did not appeal to most of the senior citizens, they seemed dismayed that parents did not necessarily have access to their child's Facebook accounts. And interestingly, at least one of

the college students implied that it would be a breach of her personal privacy if her mother had access (i.e., was her friend on Facebook). It seems, then, that privacy is something each of us values in contemporary society. We want to be in control of what we share and who we share with. The problem with Facebook is that users largely lose the control to who can see their information. Advertisers, employers, parents, Facebook friends, and (for those without privacy settings), friends of Facebook friends, and even random people whom I have never met may all have access to my “personal” account. Facebook does not serve as a place where two people can have a private conversation because, according to one of the college students, “nothing on the Internet is private.”

Though considering what privacy will do to American society is important, there is still a much more vital question to be addressed: what will Facebook do to the modern friendship? Maybe I should be asking what it has already done. From research and personal experience, I know there are two sides to this issue, and both are intricately woven into the complex fabric of human interaction. According to an article entitled “In the age of Facebook, students have few secrets” written by Dan Bobkoff, the executive director of the *Wesleyan Argus* newspaper, Facebook is definitely making a changing the way we interact with each other:

‘We’re coming from a tradition going back tens of thousands of years in which when people met, they didn’t know anything about each other, or just [knew] what a friend told them,’ said Paul Levinson, Professor and Chair of Media Studies at Fordham University.... ‘What I think something like the Facebook does is that it gives everyone a little dossier, and it does profoundly change the rules of engagement when they do meet.... It obsolesces small talk’ (Levinson in Bobkoff 2).

Bobkoff adds that “finding friends has become akin to shopping online. You can see customer reviews (what someone's friends have added to a profile), and even add or cancel a relationship with the push of a button. In the information age, we expect to do the same kind of research on a potential girlfriend or boyfriend as we would a new toaster” (Bobkoff 4). From this perspective, it seems that even our social life has become part of the consumer culture. If we don't like what we see on Facebook, we don't have to friend someone. We are free to do with friendship what we do with a product: examine it and set it aside if we don't want it. And, as Kirkpatrick queries, “What does being a ‘friend’ on Facebook really mean? The average Facebook user has 130. Can you really have 500 friends....What about 5000, Facebook's maximum? For some, Facebook may generate a false sense of companionship and over time increase a feeling of aloneness” (Kirkpatrick 14). To call someone a Facebook friend does not necessarily imply closeness or even a desire to get to know another person.

Yet, I think Facebook can also be used for positive human interaction. I know this from experience. Sometimes it is impossible to meet someone face to face. Maybe I am at home working on my homework, and a friend lives in a dorm eight miles away. I am not going out tonight, but I do want to talk to her. During the summer, my friends who live on the college campus go home. It is nice to know that within a few seconds of logging on to the Internet, I can be talking to them. It is like College Student A said about the “immediacy of Facebook.” I know I can reach my friends and keep connected with them, even if they are far away. There are also some things that are hard to talk about in person. Facebook chat allows me to organize my thoughts and present them in writing so that I say what I mean in the clearest way. I think Facebook is altering the way friendships are formed, but when used correctly and in moderation,

I think Facebook has the potential to “enhance relationships with people you know in the flesh” (Kirkpatrick 12).

In a consumer culture like America, Facebook friendship also has that commercial appeal Bobkoff mentioned. Erika L. Rosenberg, author of the article “Mindfulness and Consumerism” says “the consumption of goods quickly but temporarily satisfies an underlying need for fulfillment” (Rosenberg 113). And this need is a need for belongingness, a need to feel. As Dan Fletcher and Andréa Ford say in their article for *Time* entitled “Friends Without Borders”:

“Microsoft made computers easy for everyone to use. Google helps us search out data. YouTube keeps us entertained. But Facebook has a huge advantage over those other sites: the emotional investment of its users. Facebook makes us smile, shudder, squeeze into photographs so we can see ourselves online later” (Fletcher, Ford 1). And they add, “Facebook is so good at making itself indispensable. Losing Facebook hurts.... For many people, it's a second home.” (Fletcher, Ford 2). Facebook is addicting for many users because it becomes a place where they can come to relieve that emptiness they feel and that is often experienced in our country. Though we have so much, none of the things we have seem to truly fulfill us. Our response to this emptiness is to try and fill it. Facebook seems to be a solution. It is a world where our friends are sharing what's going on with their lives, and we *feel* connected. In a consumer society, emotional appeal is key. Facebook is a place where we can mentally and emotionally escape reality. According to Ronald J. Faber, in his study, “Self-Control and Compulsive Buying”, he mentions escape theory:

To avoid the occurrence of negative self-awareness, people attempt to narrow their attention to a single element in their environment. By focusing on just the immediate present and the sights and sounds within it, people are able to block out more painful

thoughts about themselves. Such cognitive narrowing prevents consideration of long-term implications of an action, as well as of cause and effect thinking (Faber 177).

In our busy lives, I think there is a real need for escape from reality, especially in American society. We are overwhelmed and we seek a mental break from the anxiety, lack of sleep, and stress that come with having too many activities. Facebook then becomes the answer. We spend ample time on it, and during the time we spend on it, our worries and troubles become secondary, and Facebook becomes our focus. In our consumer culture, we are trying to buy ourselves some peace of mind by spending our time.

In a culture where bigger is seen as better, where more is always desired, consumerism even extends beyond being a mode of escape and a remedy for fulfillment. How we use Facebook says something about what it means to be an American, what our society values. In his book, The McDonaldization of Society, sociologist George Ritzer explains his theory of McDonaldization, “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world” (Ritzer 1). This book was published in 2004 when Facebook was just getting its start. I feel that McDonaldization can now be applied to our Internet lives on Facebook. It is important to note, however, that only some aspects of McDonaldization apply to Facebook. Because it is a different business than McDonald’s, Facebook does depart from the McDonaldization theory in some ways.

An aspect of McDonaldization is “*efficiency*”: “In a society where people rush from one spot to another, usually by car, the efficiency of a fast-food meal, perhaps even a drive-through meal, often proves impossible to resist” (Ritzer 12-13). This statement also applies to Facebook.

Because we are so busy, we do not usually have sufficient time to meet friends face-to-face in a real social context, so we must resort to a more efficient way of communicating with them. This is where Facebook comes in. Maybe I can't meet my friend and go out to coffee with her tonight because I have a paper due tomorrow, but I can talk to her via Facebook. In this way, a person can feel connected with another person much more quickly and easily than our grandparents did. Instead of driving to meet someone, I can meet them within seconds of logging into Facebook.

Another aspect of McDonaldization is “Control through Nonhuman Technology” which involves these characteristics: “*control*, is exerted over the people who enter the world of McDonald's. Lines, limited menus, few options, and uncomfortable seats all lead diners to do what management wishes them to do—eat quickly and leave” (Ritzer 15). Though Facebook seems to be intended for users to stay on Facebook for longer periods of time, especially because Facebook is a business that does not involve lines or customer service, there is control over what users can do on Facebook. One example is that users can choose to like something a friend has posted, but they cannot dislike it because there is no dislike button. Sociology Department PhD candidate, Nathan Jurgenson offers the fact that “Interaction itself, on Facebook, follows preset and centrally controlled principles and structures....Identity is chosen from selecting from Facebook-determined options and checkboxes, with the result that the profile pages look very similar” (Jurgenson 168). Another aspect of McDonaldization is “*predictability*”: “the assurance that products and services will be the same over time and in all locales” (Ritzer 14). Facebook, in part, is not able to meet this principle of McDonaldization first because it is an ever-changing site. How Facebook looks, and how it can be used is altered over short amounts of time. However, there are some things that users can count on, at least for now. One is that the site will be free, as is stated on the log-in page. Another thing they can be assured of is that they will be

able to interact and keep in contact with their friends, as well as have access to their friends' profiles

Yet, there are some who would disagree that McDonaldization can truly be applied to Facebook. As Jurgenson argues:

Facebook is *de*-McDonaldizing the web experience....[because] it makes the web more human through increased social interaction. This makes the experience highly unpredictable since one is interacting with humans....[Facebook] is also highly inefficient in that it also facilitates *more* socialization through the maintaining of social ties that one might have lost in the past (Jurgenson 169).

Though I understand Jurgenson's points, I feel that what could be called the McDonaldization of communication does exist beyond the individual components of McDonaldization. I believe McDonaldization in this sector occurs in its effect on society. Like a McDonald's, one can go into Facebook and choose what they want to display about themselves. The categories for what you can display (e.g. religious/political views, interests, favorite quotations, etc.) are set, like the quarter pounder is a set menu item at McDonalds. Yet the choices in the categories have variety (e.g. you can type in anything when it comes to most of the categories on Facebook), kind of like how you can ask for a quarter pounder without cheese, or you can choose which soft drink you will get. The fact that Facebook has spread to many countries around the world is another indicator of the McDonaldization process. Think of how many McDonalds exist on this planet. According to www.mcdonalds.ca, the McDonald's site for Canada, today there are "31,000 [McDonald's] restaurants worldwide" ("FAQs" 1). Tone of voice and facial expression, two very important elements of conversation in a face-to-face social setting, are not needed on Facebook,

making the process of communicating easier, especially for those who find it hard to communicate with others in person. Our modes of communication are becoming increasingly similar, especially with the growing amount of Facebook users in the U.S. and abroad. And this is where McDonaldization comes in. Like McDonald's, Facebook's influence can be experienced worldwide.

According to Peter Thiel, “the very first professional investor to put money in Facebook” (Kirkpatrick 9): “The most important investment theme for the first half of the twenty-first century will be the question of how globalization happens....If globalization *doesn't* happen, then there is no future for the world....The question then becomes what are the best investments that are geared towards good globalization. Facebook is perhaps the purest expression of that I can think of”(Thiel in Kirkpatrick 9-10). It is clear that Facebook has had an effect on American society. But a bigger question remains: is Facebook a global force? How is it influencing the world? At the time Kirkpatrick wrote The Facebook Effect in 2010, “about 75 percent of Facebook users [were] outside the United States” (Kirkpatrick 16). I believe Facebook has succeeded in this globalization. And part of its success is due to its ability to adapt to other cultures: as www.insidefacebook.com tells us, “Now translated into over 100 languages [as of June 2010], Facebook has shown that it can penetrate nearly one third of the entire national population in multiple developed markets, and we expect this to be true of many more countries in the near future” (Smith 1). I believe this fact makes Facebook more of a globalizing factor than even McDonald's because Facebook is more accommodating to different cultures. It is not merely seen as a symbol of American domination, like McDonald's is in some countries. Though an American institution, it enters countries more subtly—through the Internet. It is something accessed by the individual, and can be logged off when viewers are done looking at it. Facebook,

to me, is a subtler form of McDonaldization with a more global face. Because of its goal—that push for people to share more about their lives—Facebook is less about sharing American culture, and more about sharing yourself.

Kirkpatrick makes the claim that “Facebook is bringing the world together. It has become an overarching common cultural experience for people worldwide, especially young people” (Kirkpatrick 15). But the question becomes, does this common experience unite us? Does my being on Facebook unite me to a college student on the other side of the globe whom I have never met, but who also uses Facebook? When I posed this question in general terms (i.e., Do you think Facebook serves to unite us or to divide us from each other more?) to the senior citizens, there was some difference of opinion. From their conversation, it was apparent that they took my question to ask if Facebook was dividing or uniting those of us within America. From their point of view, the dividing and uniting aspects of Facebook seemed to happen on a smaller scale. Divisions occurred within the family unit; and unifications within the broader community where the individual deals more closely with his or her friends. I presented the actual quotation from Kirkpatrick to the college students. Since my generation has been brought up in a society that has begun to look beyond the local community and more toward the global, I thought they would agree with Kirkpatrick. But College Student A said “Facebook is not bringing the world together. It could, but I don’t have international friends [as friends on Facebook]” (College Discussion Group). College Student C added that in terms of maintaining friends on Facebook, there are “too many people to bring the world together” (College Discussion Group). When it comes to friends on Facebook, you have many, many more than you could ever have in real life. So the question becomes: does something we have in common with another nation actually draw us closer to that nation?

To even attempt to answer this question, we must see how Facebook is affecting other nations and other cultures. Kirkpatrick offers numerous examples of how “Governments around the world are struggling to figure out how to handle Facebook’s users when they take advantage of its freedoms” (Kirkpatrick 279). He also mentions that “In the United States, people take a certain amount of transparency and freedom of speech for granted, but it comes at great cost in some other cultures” (Kirkpatrick 279). For cultures that are more restrictive of what their people do and say, for nations that do not allow their citizens freedom of speech, Facebook can be a powerful tool for its people. In his book, The World is Flat, Thomas L. Friedman talks about what he calls “Globalization 3.0,” his name for the current time period: “Globalization 3.0 is shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny and flattening the playing field at the same time.... The force that gives it its unique character—is the newfound power for *individuals* to collaborate and compete globally” (Friedman 10). And Facebook is a product of this new form of globalization. As Kirkpatrick suggests, “On Facebook, everyone can be an editor, a content creator, a producer, and a distributor” (Kirkpatrick 9). It is a place where people have the authority to affect change, something that becomes even more apparent with the fact that “International political causes have also surfaced on Facebook” (Alemán, Wartman 118). It has also been used for self-expression: for example, “Educated young people in the Middle East are often passionate and active Facebook users. ‘Kids there have some of the most intricate profiles,’ says Cohen [author who wrote Children of Jihad]. ‘These are repressive countries, with little outlet for expression, so people can feel more real online than they are in real life.’ Facebook can become a way to assert one’s right to be oneself” (Kirkpatrick 281).

What can we make of all this information? Can Facebook bring an individual, a community, a nation, closer to the rest of the world? I would say, to some degree, yes. Facebook

is a commonwealth of information open to the whole world. Through it, I can interact with people all over the world. But what if I don't have friends from other countries, as College Student A mentioned? How can I connect with a student, who uses Facebook just like me, if I've never met her? The answer is simply, I can't. Even if I join a group on Facebook that is made of thousands of individuals from all over the world, it is similar to walking through a throng of people in a crowded city street. I can see their faces and I may feel connected to them in the sense that we are all walking on the same street. But I do not know them—these people are not real friends that I would talk to or seek further acquaintance with. They are, perhaps, Facebook friends, meaning that I can look at their information and learn more about them, but I may never truly know them. The very fact that we are so greatly separated geographically may be part of the reason. Another reason is that differing language settings on Facebook allow for a person from Germany, for example, to write in his native language. If an American is friends with someone in Germany, it may be hard for them to understand each other's posts if they don't know each other's language (though in today's world, this will probably be a bigger problem for the American, than the German who has probably taken English as a part of his formal schooling). It is now helpful to consider something Kirkpatrick said, that was stated earlier in this paper: "Facebook was never intended as a substitute for face-to-face communication" but to "enhance your relationships with people you know in the flesh" (Kirkpatrick 12). If I don't know someone from another country, what are the odds that I will find them on Facebook and become their friend? It seems that Kirkpatrick's claim is a bit too optimistic. I do think Facebook is bringing people closer together—not across countries, not across the world, but across communities within countries.

Within the time it has taken me to write this paper, Facebook has made changes to its site. Like the world today, it is fast-paced. No matter what country we live in, it is a mode of release—of escape—from the reality of life. For me, it is an escape from my over-scheduled life, that does not allow me many breaks. For a person living on the other side of the world, Facebook may be the only way she can express her feelings about life and about the world, because her society says it socially unacceptable for her to convey what she feels in the broader community. Facebook is a tangible symbol of an intangible idea: that we share. Though a basic idea, it has taken on new complexities. Maybe in the future nations will share more than food, medicine, and money. Maybe they will share with each other the lives of their people. To some, this idea is frightening; to others, freeing. If you, reader, have made it to the end of this long paper, you may realize that my opening paragraph started on a national level, describing means of escape in America. Like Facebook, my paper has evolved from its national focus to a global one, broadening the definition of escape to fit the global face of Facebook. Though I do not think that Facebook will ever unite the whole world because of the diversity of cultures and the complexity of governmental systems, we cannot ignore the global aspect of Facebook, and its influence within other countries. A complex vehicle for interaction, Facebook's complete influence on societies both national and global is still to be experienced. Now, more than ever before, it seems the world—or at least the little section of the globe that makes up our individual worlds—is in our hands.

1. See vocabulary list below for definitions to terms associated with Facebook.
2. For the sake of the privacy of those I interviewed, I have chosen not to refer to any interviewees by name.
3. College Student D is a bit older than a college student, but is under the age of thirty and is employed within a college setting. Therefore I believe this student's insight is valid.

Facebook Vocabulary:

With new forms of communication come new words or old words with new meanings. Here are some that have come with the birth of Facebook.

1. Friend-
 - a. v.- to friend someone on Facebook is to allow them access to your information.
 - b. n. – a Facebook friend is anyone who has access to your information.
2. Profile -n.- Your personal page on Facebook. It contains your information, pictures, and interests. It is a place for people to learn more about you.
3. Wall-n.- page on my profile that documents anything you write or do on Facebook. The wall also contains any messages your friends have written to you.
4. Post-
 - a. v.- to post to someone's wall is to write a message on a friend's Facebook page.
 - b. n.- a post is a short typed message that lets friends know what you are thinking.
5. Status-n.- A short message you or one of your friends writes. This appears in the news feed.
6. News feed-n.- Facebook page that tells you what your friends on Facebook are up to.
7. Tag-v.- in reference to pictures on Facebook, to tag someone is to identify them in a picture.
8. Comment-
 - a. v.- to comment means to respond to someone's wall post, picture, or other activity on Facebook.
 - b. n.- a comment is a response to someone's wall post, picture, or other activity on Facebook; it comprises a user's response what they have read or what they have seen on Facebook.

9. Notification-n.- whenever any activity happens on your Facebook account, a little number will appear by the globe icon in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. This tells you that you have notifications and informs you of how many are there. Notifications inform you about such things as a friend “liking” your post, that someone else commented on the same post you commented on, that a friend commented on your picture or wall post, or that a person accepted your friend request.
10. Like-v.- to like something on Facebook (e.g. maybe you agree with something a friend has posted, or maybe you really enjoy a picture taken by one of your friends), you click the word “like” located near the item you are liking. A little thumbs-up sign will appear and the words “You like this” will appear under the post (www.facebook.com).
11. Emoticon-n.- little smiley face images that have different expressions. On Facebook, they allow you to convey tone. On Facebook chat, an emoticon looks something like this: 😊 (www.yahoo.com). This is the general smiley face emoticon. It is created by typing :) (colon and end parenthesis). In the wall posts, the emoticon will appear in this form.
12. Creep-v.-To creep on someone is to keep track of what they are doing on Facebook by looking at their wall or pictures frequently.
Noun variation: Creeper-Someone who keeps track of a particular person’s activities and/or pictures on Facebook. Most commonly applied when the person who is keeping track (i.e. the creeper) does not know the person they are creeping on very well, or would probably not interact with them were it not for Facebook.

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