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Un-Friend My Heart: Facebook, Promiscuity, and Heartbreak in a Neoliberal Age

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ABSTRACT

In interviews with Indiana University college students, undergraduates insisted that Facebook could be a threat to their romantic relationships. Some students choose to deactivate their Facebook accounts to preserve their relationships. No other new media was described as harmful. This article explores why Facebook was singled out. I argue that Facebook encourages (but does not require) users to introduce a neoliberal logic to all their intimate relationships, which these particular users believe turns them into selves they do not want to be. [Keywords: Neoliberalism, new media, disconnection, Facebook, deactivation, romance, US college students]

In 2007 and 2008, I interviewed 72 people, mostly college students at my home institution, about how they use new media when they are breaking up. For my second interview, Rose,[1] one of my former students, brought a list of rules and suggestions for other people about how to manage their relationships. She was always a very well-prepared student and I suspect might have been under the impression that I was writing a self-help book. Her rules helped her to structure the interview; she would read out a rule and then explain her reasoning. Rule number

four was that the couple should not be on Facebook. Rose was clear: if people want to maintain a romantic relationship, both members of the couple should get off of Facebook.

Why Facebook? Rose and I weren't discussing Facebook exclusively: we talked about text message fights, about expressing misery through away messages on instant messaging, and similar matters. Yet Facebook was the new media that Rose considered singularly destructive of relationships. For her, it seemed perfectly reasonable that one could threaten a relationship by communicating through a particular medium, and save the relationship by rejecting that medium. As Rose told me this, I wondered if she and others I interviewed would be equally likely to say: "quit using a cell phone if you want to preserve your relationship" or "quit emailing." I didn't think so. Rose did not suggest Facebook was hazardous simply because it was new—she used other new media that she could have singled out but did not.

In offering her rules, Rose was introducing a theme that would emerge time and time again as I spoke to other students who also told me that using Facebook could lead to a break-up.[2] Several students said that they had deactivated their Facebook accounts either to preserve their romantic relationships or to make future relationships possible. I want to be clear here about where the hazard lies for those I interviewed, especially because my interviewees were so clear about this themselves: they believed that Facebook transformed them into anxious, jealous, and monitoring selves that they did not want to be.[3] After disconnecting from Facebook, they felt they shed these unwanted selves.[4] Facebook was constantly providing information about their identity and others' identity that they believed should be a basis for relationships, and yet was too vague to determine the actions which should accompany this information. This speaks to an underlying assumption about how knowledge and relationships are intertwined in the United States. Strathern argues that "in Euro-American thinking, knowledge creates relationships: the relationships come into being when the knowledge does" (1999:78). Yet my interviewees felt that the knowledge was too incomplete to allow them to evaluate the relationships created, and hence too incomplete to indicate what action was necessary. These students were experimenting with monogamy, and thus they were focused on how the incompleteness of information might signal risks to their romantic relationships, but also might not. No other media they discussed seemed to have this ability

to transform selves or threaten romantic relationships.[5] Why, then, did students single out Facebook as a destructive medium for romantic relationships? In this article, I discuss how students believed that Facebook transformed them into selves that they did not like being — suspicious and jealous selves based on neoliberal principles. If a US neoliberal perspective demands selves that consciously bring a market rationality to their relations, Facebook is a medium that urges, but does not determine, the creation and display of these sorts of selves.

While my interviewees insisted that Facebook turned them into jealous selves, I argue that the problem was in fact that Facebook encouraged them to be US neoliberal selves — selves that were not conducive for the romantic connections they had or wanted to have. Facebook asks its users to manage themselves as flexible collections of skills, usable traits, and tastes that need to be constantly maintained and enhanced. As Emily Martin points out, this is a quintessential element of the neoliberal self, that people are "a collection of assets that must be continually invested in, nurtured, managed, and developed" (Martin 2000:582, see also Urciuoli 2008). Facebook's interface, more than the other media these students use, is structured to encourage a neoliberal engagement with others because it allows people to present themselves as a compilation of both consumer tastes (preferred movies, books, music) and unweighted alliances (shown through the number of one's Facebook friends, wallpostings, and one's posted photos). The Facebook profile also presented people with a profile "self" that could be managed through a reflexive distance similar to what a US neoliberal perspective encourages in self-management and business management (see Gershon 2011, Rose 1990, Thrift 1998). Through Facebook, people can practice US neoliberal techniques for valuing, enhancing, and managing their alliances.[6]

In addition, Facebook, just like the market (see Knorr-Certina and Bruegger 2000), provides the conditions for presenting tantalizing, incomplete information. As users and former users of Facebook mentioned to me, they often find it difficult to interpret information on Facebook: they feel the site provides both too much information and incomplete data. They describe this combination of excess and incompleteness as flaws inherent to Facebook, with users trying to interpret the alliances performed on their lover's Facebook profiles.[7] Incomplete information on its own can be frustrating, yet by itself was not so anxiety-provoking to convince these college students to quit Facebook. They quit as a result of the combination

of incomplete information along with a socially constructed sense of obligation to perform being a neoliberal self (a compilation of represented assets and skills that constantly required attention and enhancement). The neoliberal performances of self that Facebook fosters, but does not force, are public performances of unweighted alliances expressed through the circulation of incomplete information, presenting a contextless promiscuity that some undergraduates fear should be read literally.

The Unbearable "Newness" of New Media

New media are often accompanied by anxieties about how a new technology will affect intimate connections of all types through the ways that it structures communication. John Durham Peters (1999) argues that in the West, people have historically feared new media because every new medium alters an earlier balance precariously established between *dialogue* and *dissemination*. Communicative technologies have been valued for how they allow for conversational turn-taking or for broadcasting knowledge. Dialogue and dissemination are seen as existing in an unsteady equilibrium. Each new technology can seem to change how dialogue or dissemination will occur, introducing new possibilities and new risks to communication. Peters suggests that one of the earliest reflections on the interplay between dialogue and dissemination, Plato's *Phaedrus,* is dominated by Socrates' concern that writing, as a new technology, threatens intimacy in the ways it alters relationships and how knowledge circulates: "Writing parodies live presence; it is inhuman, lacks interiority, destroys authentic dialogue, is impersonal, and cannot acknowledge the individuality of its interlocutors; and it is promiscuous in distribution…Communication must be soul-to-soul, among embodied live people, in an intimate interaction that is uniquely fit for each participant" (Peters 1999:47). Peters argues that for Socrates, disembodied dissemination undermines the care and attentiveness to personal perspectives with which ideas should be transmitted. Writing lacks an attentiveness to one's audience that in-person communication encourages, and as such can be distributed willy-nilly without being anchored to a particular time and place. As Peters points out, Socrates' concerns about the havoc writing will wreak on intimacy resonates with the anxieties about intimacy that often seem to travel alongside the introduction of new communicative technologies (see also Marvin 1988, Gitelman 2006, Sconce 2000, Umble 1996).

While the spread of new media is often accompanied by anxieties about how intimate connections might change, the content of the anxieties changes significantly depending on the historical and cultural context. Those I interviewed were not concerned, as Socrates was, with the ways new media might destroy true dialogue or overlook the interpretative uniqueness of each recipient of a message. Instead, they were concerned with the multiplicity of alliances portrayed through Facebook, and their inability to evaluate the nature of other alliances. It was a discomfort with what I argue here is a neoliberal enthusiasm for ever-expanding alliances and acontextual communication that was at the core of my interviewees' misgivings about Facebook. They quit Facebook because of the particular way in which it allowed them to extend an unwelcome neoliberal logic to their romantic relationships, relationships which they felt could not withstand its unsettling consequences.[8]

Because Facebook is a medium, it isn't inherently neoliberal, liberal capitalist, or socialist. While its interface can seem to reflect the neoliberal milieu of its designers, as I will discuss, its interface does not define in advance how people will use Facebook. As scholars of circulating technologies have shown (see Akrich 1992, Mol and de Laet 2000, Spitulnik 2002), social narratives do not determine the uses of these technologies even though these narratives are imbedded in their design. The focus of these studies has been to show how, as technologies travel further and further from the cultural contexts the designers presupposed, the implicit assumptions built into the objects become more visible and more troublesome to the actual users. For example, Akrich (1992) describes how French designers fashioned a photo-electric generator that did not take into account the needs of its intended African users. The designers created short, nonstandard connections that would easily fit a Parisian kitchen. In doing so, they were not thinking about the architectural spaces which might house the generator kits in Côte d'Ivoire or the resources that the users might have available. The differences between the imagined contexts and the actual contexts were great enough that the photo-electric generator kits quickly fell out of use (and simultaneously thwarted a nation-making project, since the Côte d'Ivoire state hoped to enroll villagers as citizens by supplying electricity). As technologies circulate, inbuilt assumptions about implied users can become obstacles that the actual users must imaginatively get around in order to use the objects in ways appropriate to the extant contexts.[9]

In my interviews, I came across tensions between the implied user and actual user which were not caused by cultural or spatial differences. I was interviewing college students from Indiana University who were using a social networking site first designed by students at Harvard University. Facebook was not traveling beyond the cultural contexts of its designers. Both designers and users shared similar understandings about how Facebook as a medium could channel social interactions, understandings shaped by their own neoliberal milieu. Just as the photo-electric generator was not inherently French, Facebook is not inherently neoliberal as a medium. Yet its designers created an interface that could readily be experienced as a technology that introduced a neoliberal logic when users with certain media ideologies were evaluating information and relationships through this medium. This was no accident. The designers began with a self-conscious metaphor of the market to compare and interweave Facebook profiles.[10] As the college students who had trouble with Facebook found out, US neoliberal principles become difficult to live with when used to sustain intimate relationships. Despite a widespread neoliberal faith in the United States that neoliberal logics should expand into all walks of life (see Cruikshank 1999; Rose 1990, 1996) my interviewees' ambivalent experiences with Facebook reveal some of the problems in living a more fully neoliberal life.

The students whose interviews inspired this article were all experimenting with monogamy. They were between the ages of 18 and 22, and they were actively trying to understand what it practically means to be in a monogamous relationship, and how to choose a loyal person to whom they wanted to be faithful. I interviewed other college students, both men and women, who saw monogamy as a widespread ideal that they did not have to practice (yet). Those who didn't want monogamy did not describe these particular difficulties with Facebook. Interestingly, there is a gender divide in my interviews. While both genders monitored other's Facebook profiles, women tended to describe monitoring the public portrayal of a relationship on Facebook whereas men tended to monitor their lovers by sharing or guessing passwords.[11] This article is also about what it means to be a college student attending a large state university[12] in the Midwest, uncertain about who they are and who they want romantically, soon to be entering a job market structured along US neoliberal capitalist principles, and anxious about Facebook.

A Brief History of Facebook

Facebook was launched in February 2004 by Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg. Originally called thefacebook.com, the site was based loosely on a hard copy photo album of all incoming freshman, the original facebook, which every Harvard freshman received. When Zuckerberg was a sophomore, different residential houses had their own online versions including photographs of all the residents in that house. Until Zuckerberg, no one had created a Harvard-wide online version. When he initially designed Facebook, it was available to anyone with a Harvard e-mail address. Soon afterwards, access to the social networking site spread to Columbia, Stanford, and other universities. In its first incarnation, a profile "consisted of a photograph and some personal information, such as the user's major; club memberships; taste in films, books, and music; and favorite quotes. There was a search box to help users call up other profiles, and a 'poking' button, which they could use to let other people know that their profile had been viewed. Users could also link to their friend's profiles—a feature popularized by [rival site] Friendster" (Cassidy 2006). Facebook shared many features with other social networking sites. What made it distinctive at first was that it was restricted to universities. Its initial popularity was greatly aided by the fact that only college students could use it, and that the students were participating in campus-specific networks. In 2005, Facebook opened its networks to high school students, and in 2006, it became available to anyone with an email account.

From the beginning, changes in Facebook design have been considered controversial by users whenever the changes affected how information circulated on the network. Allowing high school students to join was complicated enough, but when everyone (including parents and other authority figures) could join Facebook, college users felt that Facebook was changing for the worse. In September 2006, when Facebook introduced the newsfeed, which provides constant updates to everyone in one's network about how a profile has changed, this too created an uproar among users. Since its inception, Facebook has constantly been faced with users' ambivalence about ownership and circulation of information. Facebook designers are quite aware that issues of public and private information are at the heart of these controversies. In John Cassidy's (2006) *New Yorker* article on Facebook, Zuckerberg is quoted as saying: "The problem Facebook is solving is this one paradox…People want access to all the information around them, but they also want complete control

over their own information. Those two things are at odds with each other. Technologically, we could put all the information out there for everyone, but people wouldn't want that because they want to control their information." Zuckerberg is describing the basic dilemma as one of access—who has access to information and who controls this access.

There are two problems with Zuckerberg's account, however. First, Facebook does not solve the paradox of control and free circulation, but rather intensifies it. Second, in my interviewees' narratives of why they deactivated their Facebook accounts, the issue of access only played a minor role in shaping how knowledge circulation came to feel hazardous. A far bigger issue, according to my respondents, was that they did not know how to act on the information they viewed and yet the diffuse plethora of information seemed to require action. This drove them to seek out more and more information as clarification. The problem for these students was the paradoxical gap between too much and too little information presented by the site's interface.

Facebook remains a collection of profiles, with the common assumption that each profile indexes a single person, with chosen events in their life recorded on their profile through photos or text—not all of which will be posted by the person who manages that particular profile. Others in the person's network can add to the profile's public representation of a person as an individual by sending Facebook gifts, writing publicly available text on a person's wall, or adding photographs with the person tagged (that is, marking the photo with the person's name so it can be found quickly). A person with the profile's password can refuse to include a self-description, untagging[13] photos and deleting wallposts or gifts.

Each Facebook profile is a collection of information about a person compiled by a Facebook network, but selected by the profile's password-holder(s). These profiles are understood by the people I interviewed to be intrinsically linked to one's offline life. While there may be profiles that have no obvious living offline anchor—"Oedipa Maas" and "Franz Boas" have their own Facebook profiles—students understand them to be exceptions and "fake profiles." A Facebook profile is understood as a reflexively managed representation of an embodied self.[14] There is the ever-present possibility of playing with this generally shared expectation of locatable embodiment. After one creates a profile, one can then choose to friend[15] other people, allowing these Facebook friends access to the profile. The person controlling the profile chooses their level

of privacy, thus deciding who else is allowed to view the profile. Some people allow anyone to view their profile, many allow only Facebook friends, and a few restrict specific profile sections from their younger siblings and other inappropriate viewers.

Neoliberal Premises and Facebook Selves

The US neoliberal self is one that uses market rationality to manage its self as though the self was a business that attempts to balance risks and responsibility appropriately in its alliances with other selves/businesses[16] (see Cruikshank 1999; Maurer 1999; O'Malley 1996; Rankin 2001; Rose 1990, 1996). There is a reflexive distance inherent in this form of self, one takes oneself as something that requires care, attention, and management. Not only the self requires management, alliances require management as well to ensure that the balance of risk and responsibility is properly regulated between participants. I want to point out that my argument is that the US neoliberal self is a conglomeration of these attributes, all of which must be present for this neoliberal logic to take hold effectively. Simply taking oneself as a project to be enhanced is not sufficient. Being anxious about one's lovers' unweighted and ever multiplying alliances is not enough in itself to warrant being labeled a neoliberal anxiety. The US version of neoliberalism requires that people should be selves that reflexively understand themselves to be metaphorically structured like an idealized US business. This entails being a self that is flexible and following market logic; in short, a self comprised of an array of assets and skills that enters into alliances and competions with other selves who are also structured like idealized US businesses. These alliances and competitions are both necessary and hazardous, and the hazards lie in the ways risk and responsibility are allocated in these relationships. As a result, much of the negotiation in neoliberal relationships lies in figuring out how to distribute (and then re-distribute) risks and responsibilities.

When the self metaphorically becomes a business, it is a compilation of measurable skills and assets that enters into relationships with other selves that may have different arrays of skills. From a US neoliberal perspective, the more skills one has, the better. So too with alliances, the more alliances one has, the better. This is a view that Facebook seems to adopt as well, its interface is constantly suggesting that people add more and more alliances to their profile. Facebook users are visibly nodes in a

network, in which the number of alliances they have can, depending on their social circles, give them a certain symbolic capital. The Facebook interface encourages people to see their alliances in terms of quantity, and people can easily evaluate their and others' profiles in terms of how many friends they have. On every Facebook profile, on the left side, there is a box that announces how many Facebook friends you have. This is information that is visible to anyone who is your Facebook friend, and, depending on your privacy settings, can be visible to all other users. The number rises as more and more people ask or agree to be your Facebook friends, and falls as they defriend[17] you or deactivate their account.

The quantity of Facebook friends is more obvious and discernible than the quality of the Facebook friendship. Facebook profiles do not easily reveal the type of alliance they encode, only that the alliance exists. Distinguishing one alliance from another on Facebook requires effort. While it is relatively easy to demarcate one alliance as "The Lover" by linking profiles through Facebook's relationship status category[18] and one's profile photo, it is far more difficult to express the strength of other alliances. This incomplete information becomes treacherous for people who are attempting to balance risk and commitment in their romantic relationships, and in particular, for people who are dissecting Facebook profiles to evaluate the potential risks for infidelity embedded in the alliances. Jodi Dean sees this as a token of a larger problem of the internet, that the internet as a whole encourages information to circulate in a way conducive to neoliberal capitalism (and in her argument, ineffective political communication) as "the number of friends one has on Facebook or MySpace, the number of page-hits one gets on one's blog, and the number of videos featured on one's YouTube channel are the key markers of success, and details such as duration, depth of commitment…become the boring preoccupations of baby-boomers stuck in the past" (Dean 2009:17). For Dean, accumulation and circulation become symptomatic of internet communication, with disregard to the context and labor that underlies creating that context, and thus undercutting the potential for effective action[19] (2009:26).

Indeed, contextually rich interactions can often be disconnected from Facebook friendship. People can collect Facebook friends solely to increase their number of Facebook friends. Many people are friends on Facebook who have only met once or who have never met but have friends in common. Sometimes to be a Facebook friend is a virtually meaningless relationship. To say "oh, she is just a Facebook friend" is to indicate that

there are no obligations to each other in either direction, although there is staged information flowing between the two profiles.[20] People interact with each other on Facebook when they don't necessarily interact with each other offline—you can have 150 messages wishing you a happy birthday from your Facebook friends. One interviewee, who wanted the pseudonym Gunslinger, explained that his Facebook profile no longer contains information about his birthday. "I took the birthday thing off first because I found it utterly ridiculous that 90 people, 85 of which I never talk to, wished me a happy birthday like they give a damn. And the only reason they knew is because Facebook reminded them." As Gunslinger points out, Facebook alliances can seem more plentiful and more superficial. One can have many more connections to other people on Facebook than one does in co-present interactions—these are, in this sense, promiscuous alliances. If one is looking at a Facebook profile, it is often difficult to know how the person behind the profile feels about any of these alliances—are they actual friends, merely Facebook friends, and/or objects of desire?

Students can try to collect as many friends as possible, becoming "friends collectors," which is a slightly pejorative term for people a bit too interested in the sheer quantity of their Facebook friends. Even people who are not friends collectors might watch the Facebook record of how many friends they have when the number approaches a particular level. As one student, Frank, explained: "Right now I am at 399, and it sticks out. So if it dropped down to 393 in five days, I would wonder 'who the hell?'" In waiting to reach 400, Frank was forced to pay attention to the fact that people can defriend him and he will never be notified by Facebook. Indeed, the first indication on Facebook that someone has defriended you is that your Facebook friends' number decreases. While Frank was focused only on breaking the decimally significant 400 mark, others can feel competitive about the number of Facebook friends that people in their Facebook network have. In the following, Gunslinger discusses his ambivalently competitive feelings towards a friend of his with many more Facebook wallposts than he has.

> **Gunslinger:** One of my friends, he has close to 2000 wallposts. And he is a year younger than me. And I have like 600, which doesn't bug me.[21]
> **Ilana:** But you notice.

> **Gunslinger:** But I notice—yeah, yeah. Oh, he has a lot of friends and he is very very social. And I am very outgoing, but not very social. I like my private time. So it is one of those things that you notice.

Both Frank and Gunslinger are paying attention to the quantity of their Facebook friends and their traces because Facebook's interface so readily and visibly offers this information. Every time one examines the profiles of one's Facebook friends, the Facebook interface announces the number of friends one has. With this constant measure, Facebook encourages a focus on the quantity of one's network alliances which can inspire people such as Frank and Gunslinger to compete, however ambivalently, with others over the number of Facebook friends.

The quantity of one's Facebook friends might be seen as an asset on the job market. College students would tell me that potential employers checked how many Facebook friends a job applicant had (among other things), taking this to be a measure of how effective a networker one was. In general, the college students I interviewed and taught were uncomfortable about job interviewers' growing tendency to request to become their Facebook friends after an interview. Their Facebook profiles were composed with their friends and fellow students as the intended audience. When potential employers wanted to examine their Facebook profiles, the students were concerned that this was an attempt to see if they were irresponsible and too social. Some students did however feel that it was a fair request, since it would reveal how thoughtful people could be about managing their Facebook pages (presumably thoughtful in anticipating a range of audiences, some more professional than others). Students also felt that Facebook profiles could be good indications of how socially adept one was, a skill that certain employers might find valuable. Laura talked about her experiences trying to find a job: "For some people I interviewed with, I have gotten emails saying 'we want to check out your network and see if you are good at communicating with people and how many friends you have.' Like that is one of the questions that I got asked. I clearly was not ready for them to see my Facebook profile, so I ended up ignoring that opportunity." Here, Laura is describing the sheer quantity of one's Facebook friends as an indication of one's skills at networking, a skill that this potential employer viewed as an asset.

The job interviewers' requests accord with Bonnie Urciuoli's (2008) argument that there has been a century-long move to transform communication into a marketable asset. Urciuoli argues:

>…the denotational norms for all skills, including soft skills, include quantification: Skills are assumed to be segmentable, testable, and rankable. Listening and presenting are as assessable as speaking French or running Photoshop, however disparate they all might otherwise seem. The interrelatedness of skills, worker-selves, and labor arrangements goes back at least as far as the emergence of scientific management during the late 19th-century expansion of U.S. corporations…As aspects of worker performance, skills have become conceptualized as "things" that can be acquired and measured and that possess an inherent capacity to bring about desired outcomes, outcomes that can be measured in dollars. (2008:212)

Facebook contributes to the history of quantifying communication skills that Urciuoli describes. By quantifying one's Facebook friends, Facebook provides a mechanism for employers to treat communication as a measurable skill, regardless of what interactions the quantity of one's Facebook friends in fact measures.

When employers examine how many Facebook friends a job seeker has, they are paying attention to how the person reflexively manages their profile so that they appear well-connected. This reflexive management of one's profile is central both to people's understanding and interactions with their Facebook profiles, and to a neoliberal conception of the self. As I mentioned earlier, the neoliberal self is a bundle of traits and alliances which must be consciously managed and enhanced. The neoliberal self is a work in progress that requires constant care and effort. For the Facebook users I interviewed, this is made concrete through the need to add friends, to change their profile pictures constantly, or regularly formulate witty statements for their status updates.[22] As Audrey explained: "You have to have the perfect profile picture that you update at least once in a couple of months. If you don't, you are a loser." Facebook's design does not itself create any urgent reason to change a profile picture, for Audrey this was entirely social pressure. By contrast, status updates disappear from one's profile after a week. This disappearance is one of many ways in which the structure of the Facebook design encourages people to

regularly change their profile. This is an interface that encourages regular and conscious work enhancing one's Facebook self.

My interviewees were explicit about the ways in which their Facebook profiles gave them an arena in which to perform a self that was referentially tied to who they understood themselves to be but was not an exact match. This difference between their real life selves and their Facebook selves offers them a reflexive distance between who they are "truly" and who they are as a compilation of skills and alliances. Karen explained this while talking about how she felt competitive with someone she suspected was flirting with her boyfriend: "I have more friends than she does on Facebook. And I have more friends actively writing on my wall than she does, and more pictures than she does. So I am a more popular cyber-persona, even though I am really a hermit. I live alone, I have a dog. I don't really hang out with those people. But it looks like I do. Once again, my cyber-life is so much more interesting than what is really going on." Karen and other students talk easily about how there is a distance between themselves and the person they claim to be on Facebook. In doing so, they are pointing to a reflexive distance in their performance of self that is also central to how the neoliberal self is simultaneously manager and managed. The neoliberal self is one in which the reflexive distance lies in the ways one should take oneself to be a project or business to be carefully controlled or enhanced. Facebook's interface offers a medium that allows the enactment of this reflexive engagement with one's self—a self that manages (i.e., the one who logs on and changes the profile) and the representation of the self, the Facebook profile, which acts within Facebook networks.

Control, Cancellation, and Promiscuity

While one manages one's Facebook profile, one does not have complete control over what appears on one's profile. Other Facebook users can write on one's wall, can send virtual gifts, and can post photos with other people "tagged" in the photos. One can always delete wallposts or detag oneself from the photos (although only the one who posted the photos can remove them entirely from Facebook). And yet even detagging can leave its traces, people can find the photos that have been detagged with enough imagination and persistence. In our interview, Rose offered an example of imaginative Facebook searching along with her assumptions about how Facebook practices are gendered. "Women are much better

Facebook stalkers than men. Men don't think 'so Rose was with Megan last night, and Megan hangs out with Joseph, so I should check Joseph's pictures to see if they were hanging out.'" As Rose points out, uncovering a photograph that has been detagged requires persistence and creativity. People will search for a photo that has been detagged because they see this as a revelation of the detagger's intentions. Detagging allows others to know that someone has seen a photo of themselves, and the person decided that he or she did not want other people to look at this photo when examining his or her profile. It is an attempt to reassert control over one's profile. This effort at control is visible to anyone who comes across the detagged photo and realizes that detagging has taken place. Similarly, people can tell when their wallposts have been deleted, or their gifts removed from another person's profile, creating potential social dilemmas. Alan explained to me how a friend's Facebook gift to him ended up sparking a fight with his girlfriend, Rachel.

> **Alan:** You can give like a gift, you can use gifts of random things. I guess I was given a gift by a girl I used to be really close friends with freshman year. I really haven't talked to her much for awhile. She gave me a gift and I never knew it. There was this gift that was just on my profile that I never knew. She wrote me this past summer and she said, "you know, I can't wait for next year's school. We should watch *Lost* together, hang out" all this stuff. And I never knew it was there at all. Thanksgiving time, I am getting ready to go over to my aunt's house, and Rachel IMs me [his girlfriend writes him by instant message] and says: "I was about to send you a gift and I saw that you also got one." So I scrolled down to what I thought was my gift section, but there are two gift areas. So the gift I saw was one that me and her sent to each other last Valentine's Day. I opened it up, and I was like: "what is she talking about? This is her gift." I wrote her back: "no, no, no, it is from you. I am looking at it right now. It is the box of chocolate hearts from Valentines' Day." She goes: "So who sent the other one?" So I scroll down further and I see it. And I don't know why I did this. I still to this day don't know why I did this. Instead of looking at who it was from or anything, I deleted it.
>
> *[Ilana sighs deeply.]*
>
> **Alan:** Trust me, it was one of those mistakes, even if I thought I could get away with it, I still wouldn't have done it this way. I made a

mistake and I deleted it. Because I didn't think she saw who it was from. She saw who it was from and asked me: "well, who is it from?"

And now it was deleted, so I said my friend who she knows from home, Jen. [Alan is lying, the gift is in fact from April. He continues below by repeating his conversation with Rachel, and thus Rachel's words below]

Rachel: "Really? What did Jen have to say?"

Alan: "She gave me this gift, it was a graded piece of paper with an F on it. She was upset with me that we didn't hang out a lot together over break, so she gave that to me.

Rachel: "Oh, so it wasn't April saying that you should hang out? So why did you delete it?

Alan: And it actually led to a huge fight. I didn't even know it was there for months. I once again tried to beat Facebook, and tried to delete it…I don't know if I can really blame Facebook for that. I was more confused about Facebook, because there were two areas for gifts to appear.

Faced with the problems that others' Facebook activity caused, Alan ended up attributing a significant amount of agency to Facebook itself. It didn't help that he was often uncertain about what the Facebook interface allowed other viewers to know and what only he could know about items on his profile. Alan explained: "I always try to avert a big mess, and it ends up being a bigger mess by trying to go around the first mess…It is better off just dealing with the Facebook demon." At other moments in the interview, Alan talked about a variety of ways in which he had challenged Facebook, and Facebook won. While Alan was clearer than many others I interviewed in stating that Facebook was influential and agentive in his romantic relationship, others attributed varying degrees of agency to Facebook. People often described Facebook as a website that acts upon how people communicate or circulate knowledge, sometimes as consciously designed, and sometimes simply as an agent in its own right acting upon the world.

Facebook is not only easily turned into a neoliberal interface through the reflexive view of agency it allows, it also encourages people to assess others' profiles and create alliances based on neoliberal assumptions that link the self to consumer taste. When I asked people what they noticed about other people's Facebook profiles, they described noticing

their favorite movies, books, music—in short, the markers of how they were engaging with their class position (Bourdieu 1987). People would describe deciding that someone did not have potential as a romantic partner based on how they represented their interests on Facebook. While people found these class-based indications to be a reason not to pursue further interactions, some people also sought out connections based on how people presented their habitus on Facebook. Frank explained how noticing someone's musical tastes on their profile led to a friendship. "I saw a guy who was in a film class with me last fall. On his profile, he had a quote from Ray Davies from the Kinks…So I messaged him about it, and I said, 'hey, I got to see Ray Davies. I am a huge fan.' So we started talking after class, joined a band together, broke off from the band and formed our own band. It was good, and now we are like best friends." As Frank's example shows, Facebook profiles encourage people to see taste as a basis for a connection.

People also expanded their Facebook networks by friending the friends of their Facebook friends, and in particular, friending their lover's friends.

> **Audrey:** If you are dating someone, your friends have to become their friends on Facebook. Because everyone wants more friends. The more friends you have, the more popular you look. So everyone gets more and more friends.
> **Ilana:** So once you start dating someone, your networks merge?
> **Audrey:** Oh yes! And actually I do better. I end up better friends with their friends after we stop talking [that is, after the relationship ends].

As Audrey's example demonstrates, alliances spawn other alliances on Facebook, which Facebook encourages by suggesting possible Facebook friends when one logs on. One of the tacit assumptions in neoliberal contexts is that expanding the number of one's alliances is an unquestioned good. Facebook allows for this possibility, constantly recommending people one could add to his/her networks and creating emailed software requests to introduce new people to the site. Increasing each individual's network is beneficial to Facebook as a social networking site as a whole because Facebook measures its own success in terms of the number of users. Facebook's own literature from August 2009, recorded that there were more than 250 million Facebook users (and that each user had on average 120 friends) (Facebook 2009).

Despite Facebook's (and neoliberals') general tendency to encourage as many alliances as possible, alliances are not an uncontroversial or innocent good. At the heart of every alliance is a combination of risk and responsibility that, from a neoliberal perspective, will ideally be equitably shared.[23] Increasing alliances means increasing contact with potentially risky people—in this case, people who might say or do inappropriate things on Facebook. There are many ways to behave badly on Facebook, but those I interviewed tended to focus on two. First, people were concerned about fake or inappropriate people having access to one's profile. Just as official discourses encourage them to do, they worried that authority figures might gain access to people's profiles, putting the profile's animator(s) at risk of punishment. College students worried about the gaze of parents, friends' parents, employers, police, or university officials. Cole, for example, was on a sports team, and left Facebook because he didn't want potential employers to see his profile, but more importantly, he did not want coaches or university police to see his profile. He risked losing a scholarship if he got caught for the minor infractions that always seemed to get posted on Facebook in photographs. Cole said:

> That's another reason I got off Facebook. There is so much drama. It's adding another stress, I already have enough stress in my life… It's a big deal when people on the team are drinking and its on Facebook. Because last year we got four guys kicked off the team for getting drunk and doing a little vandalization. And we got three girls kicked off the team for being drunk and being a minor under the influence of alcohol. So they got two tickets, and there are three, four, five girls kicked off. So we had eight people kicked off the team last year. So it is a big deal that the freshmen are out drinking, being stupid and putting pictures on Facebook, or putting stuff on Facebook. So by getting off Facebook, I just eliminated the possibility of doing something stupid and putting it up on Facebook, or writing on someone's wall, making it available to people that it should not be available to.

Cole was responding in part to one of the official discourses surrounding Facebook. The year before I began doing this research, the university administration plastered posters all over the university stating: "I Facebooked You [and so did your chemistry professor and so did your

mother and so did…].” The campaign was to caution undergraduates to be careful about what they posted on Facebook. There are also frequent media stories warning that students regularly put up incriminating evidence on Facebook that the police or university officials will find. These stories present the threat as partially based on Facebook users' ignorance and that users are simply unaware that Facebook is a public forum filled with unanticipated audience members.

Second, students were also concerned that people with whom they had fallen out—former friends or lovers, or even ex-lovers' new romantic partners—might have access to their profiles. While they did not think that Facebook friends were actual friends, they were certainly concerned that their Facebook friends should not harbor ill feelings towards them. They did not necessarily want the information on their Facebook profile to become the topic of other people's hostile conversations or ruminations. My interviewees were also just as concerned that their interest in their former friends or lovers' profiles would be discovered. While they wanted to look at an ex-lover's profile, they would be mortified if their ex-lover knew. People would go to great lengths to conceal their curiosity; including creating fake profiles so that they could become Facebook friends with someone without revealing that they wanted to look at that person's profile. They were concerned that they might reveal emotional entanglements or inappropriate competitiveness. Alliances were risky on Facebook not only because of what profiles revealed, but also because of what wanting information might reveal. Finally, the alliances on Facebook were also risky for the college students I interviewed because they saw their lovers as constantly encountering other possible objects of desire. They were constantly seeing traces of their lover's social life yet did not always know how to evaluate this information.

Facebook creates these risks, allowing possibilities for people to seek out information or to display alliances, yet according to all the literature that the Facebook employees produce, people, not Facebook, are responsible for these risks. As Katherine Rankin (2001:29) points out, this is a relatively typical ploy in neoliberal contexts, revising who is responsible for what to protect the larger corporations' interests as much as possible. In the August 2009 version of Facebook user's rights and responsibilities, the Facebook corporation attempts to allocate as much responsibility as possible to the individual user, asserting that users are responsible not to provide false personal information, not to share passwords, not to

use Facebook if they are a convicted sex offender, and so on (Facebook 2009). According to this document, each person is responsible for safeguarding their own profile, and responsible for any risk that they encounter. The risks are not supposed to be due to the ways in which Facebook structures its interfaces. When the people I interviewed attributed agency to Facebook, it was clear that they did not agree. In attributing a form of agency to Facebook, people are suggesting that the interface plays a large role in why they feel that they become different selves on it.

To deactivate a Facebook account was to reject a particular type of circular reasoning, one that in the United States is commonly associated with communication in general. Peters (1999) suggests that a commonly held belief about communication is that only better techniques of communication can solve the problems that communication generates. More communication is the solution when communication breaks down. The students I interviewed described a medium-specific variation of this logical loop. They felt that the risks Facebook suggested could only be resolved by using Facebook more and more. Faced with incomplete information on Facebook, their response often was to search through more Facebook photos and more Facebook profiles. They would find creative ways on Facebook to search and continue searching, often using other people's profiles or creating fake profiles. Gwen described how she was caught, even after she deactivated her Facebook account, by the logic that only more searching on Facebook could answer the questions raised by the tantalizing and incomplete information on Facebook. She had broken up with a boyfriend when she began to respond badly to what she saw on his Facebook profile. She then deactivated her account in the hopes that she would never again be that obsessively jealous in a relationship. While she no longer thought they could be together (even after she deactivated her account), she still had feelings for him months later.

One time, I do have one friend who is now in Germany so she can't help me anymore, who was friends with him on Facebook. And one day, we just looked him up. We were in class, she had her laptop, and we weren't listening. And she said, "let's look him up really fast." Some girl had written in Italian on his wall. And I went crazy. I was like "what am I going to do? He is dating someone else. He is obviously attracted to her. He is writing on her wall. It's in Italian." So we had to go to a translating site to figure out what it actually said. Yes, this was

such a task. And then we tried to look her up, but she had blocked her profile. So after class, we spent, I am not even exaggerating, maybe *two hours* Facebook stalking to figure out who her friends were, what exactly she looks like, if she did hang out with any other guys. And through all of this, we found out that she had a boyfriend and we got to his profile…Why did I spend two hours through someone else's profile to find out if this girl had a boyfriend so that my guy isn't dating someone else? That is exactly why I deleted Facebook.

Gwen and others found that the information they got on Facebook, unsatisfying as it was, kept them on Facebook, searching for more. It was only the deactivation of Facebook accounts that led them not to want to know in the first place, and thus, in the second place, not to use Facebook to know. Avoiding Facebook entirely became the only way out of this circular experience for them.

Those I interviewed saw Facebook as responsible for this circular experience because it managed to offer simultaneously too much and too little information. They interpreted Facebook profiles as reliable indications of people's friendships and flirtations, and took others' profiles to be a collection of traces of people's daily social interactions which my interviewees sometimes saw as consciously collected (and sometimes not). This information often charted too much of another person's life and yet showed too little of the larger contexts. Facebook, my interviewees insisted, encouraged them to care about things that they understood intellectually were inconsequential. Gwen explained to me that she would never have been so anxious about her boyfriend's behavior while she was away on vacation if Facebook hadn't existed.

I feel like I couldn't decide whether it was the fact that I checked Facebook that triggered my not trusting him, or I already didn't trust him, and Facebook just perpetuated it. We really didn't have issues until I started seeing things on Facebook, like photos. And then I started thinking "oh, I had better ask him about this." And then anytime something new was put up, it just got worse and worse. And most of my arguments with him about something that he did, I would not have even known about had I not been on Facebook. I would have been completely oblivious and it wasn't things that I *should* know. It just didn't matter.

Others also found troubling the ways in which Facebook allowed too many incomplete glimpses into their lovers' daily lives. One woman explained to me that if she hadn't constantly seen the photos of her boyfriend with other women at parties, she wouldn't have cared. She knew that there were other women at parties. The problem was the photographs, was being able to see her boyfriend with other women but not being able to know what exactly was going on. She talked about how she had taken to asking prying questions by text messages (never by phone—she explained that texting would not carry uncontrollably anxious intonation. She also thought text messages were a more informal medium). These were questions she thought might seem innocent—oh, who are you partying with? And then she would check his answers with the traces on Facebook the next day. Once she quit using Facebook, she stopped asking these questions and worrying about her boyfriend and his alliances.

The incomplete yet copious traces are weighed differently by Facebook stalkers, depending on that person's particular understanding of how a medium affects a message. I often asked people whether they thought photographs or wallposts were more useful indicators of people's social interactions beyond Facebook. More often, people turned to photographs, describing those posted as reliable portraits of others' social interactions. Photographs are taken at social gatherings—cell phone cameras now ensure that someone is photographing at almost any party or social moment. Yet these photographs are seen as accidental, they are seen as trustworthy glimpses into people's social circles in part because anyone present can take a photograph and post it on Facebook.[24] People value the evidence photographs provide in part because they see photographs as minimally staged glimpses of others' alliances, visible evidence of who a person is socially. They are fragments of events that need to be pieced together to create a visual narrative of what occurred. Yet as pointed out by Alan, a boyfriend a bit beleaguered by his girlfriend's careful examination of his Facebook photographs, the photographs serve as visual evidence of social encounters where only presence is accounted for.

> What I don't like about a picture is that it is physically shot, and you see what you see. But you don't know any of the background of what was going on at the time. You only see whatever you see in the picture. So you don't see if maybe this person didn't want to be in

the picture, but they were forced to. You don't know if this person was maybe just walking by and someone said "hey, come get in this picture." All you see is that they were in the picture.

What is left out is the type of social interaction, the kinds of conversations people had at the party, the amount of time people spoke with each other. What is visible is that these particular people were in the same space at the same time long enough to be photographed. Photographs only offer incomplete information, leaving certain questions unanswered about the context of the photograph but revealing possible alliances.

Wallposts also reveal the traces of alliances only as incomplete information. These are messages that people write on each other's walls, short texts that are understood to be accessible to anyone who has access to that Facebook profile (whereas private messages can be sent as Facebook messages). These are the traces of public conversations, recording sentiments that Facebook stalkers frequently take to be assertions of connections that they then follow as detectives, checking the Facebook profiles of people who post on a particular person's wall. This can turn into an almost infinite regression of checking people's profiles and walls.

Part of what people find so compelling and troubling about the information on Facebook is an ambiguity about whether a profile is intended to be a dyadic exchange or widely disseminated. As Peters (1999) suggests, Facebook reconfigures how dialogue and dissemination intersect and mutually constitute each other. Facebook profiles can be designed with multiple publics in mind, but also can be geared towards communicating with only one person. My interviewees would interpret a Facebook profile as addressing one particular person or an entire Facebook network in different situations, and this multiplicity of address often troubled them. Sometimes the profile seemed designed solely to communicate with them; at other times, images and messages were posted that clearly did not seem to anticipate a lover's perusal. Traces of contact with people their lover might desire on their lover's profile clearly bothered the people I interviewed. These traces often remained, as their lovers chose to anticipate a broader public, their Facebook network, rather than only creating a lover-safe Facebook profile. Olivia's ex-boyfriend, Brian, was very sociable, and always had traces of how friendly and likeable he was on his Facebook profile. He was anticipating his friends' gaze, but never seemed to take into account that Olivia was part of his Facebook audience.

That was one of the things I always told him "you know, Brian, it says here 'in a relationship with Olivia.' Yet someone sees that and goes to look at your pictures, and they are probably thinking, 'well, is Olivia some kind of idiot?' because her boyfriend looks like some crazy insane guy with 8,000 girlfriends." I almost found it insulting, and I felt that it was degrading to me almost that he had these pictures. And it wasn't like these were naked pictures, but it was girls and girls and girls. And really not any pictures with me, I didn't use my digital camera. In our relationship, we never went "out-out" together all that much. We weren't in situations where you really take pictures, because generally you do that at the bars.

For Olivia, part of the problem was that Brian wasn't de-tagging photos or deleting flirty wallposts. He wasn't adding the material himself to his Facebook profile, but he also wasn't removing the ambiguous and troubling traces either. According to Olivia, he could have compensated for this by also clearly demarcating that she was his one love. He was willing to have their relationship openly marked through the Facebook relationship status (they were "Facebook official"), although that also changed over the course of their relationship; however, he wasn't willing to do anything else to his profile to show others how important she was to him. He seemed to utilize his Facebook profile's ability only to disseminate information, ignoring how it might also contribute to a one-to-one dialogue.

Monitoring one's own Facebook profile and anticipating a lover's gaze wasn't all that reassuring for my informants either, though. When these messages and images were deleted (and revealed somehow to be deleted), people would tell me that this sparked their suspicion, rather than assuaging them that their lover managed their profile with them in mind. They found the deletion itself ambiguous: was this a gesture of care or a gesture of concealment? They invariably read deletions of others' words as dialogic gestures, done only with them in mind.[25]

My interviewees insisted that Facebook gave them enough information to be curious, and keep searching, but not enough information to be satisfied, and never enough insight to know another's exact intentions or desires. Facebook allows you to know that there may be risk in your relationships, but the people I interviewed felt that Facebook does not give them enough information to evaluate it. In the following passage, Olivia explained that she began to monitor her very friendly boyfriend's profile

because of her inability to assess the alliances portrayed on his Facebook profile. Brian was a little older than she was, and so able to go to bars with a valid ID. She did not want to risk using a fake driver's license, so she stayed home and texted him.

> [About his Facebook profile] And every other picture was his face mashed up against another girl's face. And they are hugging him, and these girls, you know you can write your caption, and every girl writes "oh, I love Brian so much, isn't Brian so cute, isn't he awesome? You're my lover Brian!" And remember, for a long time, I was like, well you know, I have flirted with guys in this way and meant nothing by it. It is possible to have girl friends, and not to have infidelity involved. Eventually my good friends were saying, "hey, have you looked at Brian's Facebook lately." My friend wasn't trying to start anything, it was just as a concerned friend. How do you look at these things and be normal with that. And when it got so bad that my friends were trying to tell me—are you sure he is an okay guy? I started to really wonder. That's how it begins. At first it just became this obsession with checking his Facebook, and wondering, 'who did you go out with?' And that's how these text message fights begin. I am at home in my apartment alone, and I ask him who he is with, and he says a girl's name. I find her on Facebook, and oh look, a string of pictures with her. And then you start looking at these girls—is she skinnier than me? Is she prettier than me?…I would ask him what did you do this weekend? And I can go on his Facebook and I can see what his weekend looked like.

Facebook allowed Olivia to compare her boyfriend's answers with the "evidence" on Facebook. She was also very aware that he did not have his own cellphone camera. Because the pictures of him were pictures that other people put up of him, these photos served as more accidental (and thus, for her, more reliable) evidence of what he was doing. It seemed that he wasn't managing his Facebook profile, that his Facebook profile was being created for him by the traces of how friendly he was at parties. So Olivia asked and checked, and asked and checked. She describes how she found herself becoming paranoid, discovering a side of herself that she did not want to have. Finally, Olivia got so disgusted with the cycle she found herself in that she quit Facebook. After she quit Facebook,

she stopped this monitoring behavior entirely. Olivia and others often felt trapped into constantly monitoring their lovers. Readers may suspect that those I interviewed are probably jealous and anxious undergraduates in general, and that they would monitor their lovers anyway, even if they didn't have this technology. The people I interviewed clearly wrestled with this concern, and often, although not always, discovered that by quitting Facebook it was not just them. It was, as they put it, who they were when they used Facebook.

Conclusion

The more college students I interviewed, the more people I met who were convinced that Facebook was hazardous for romantic relationships. I have argued that singling out Facebook as a hazardous medium when one is an undergraduate is no accident. Facebook allows techniques for managing a neoliberal self to migrate into intimate relationships. In the process, people experience these US neoliberal techniques as difficult to live with. People begin to see unwelcome risk in the pressure to accumulate more and more unweighted alliances. They find the way Facebook allows information to circulate to be tantalizing and incomplete, leading to more and more compulsive and unsatisfying Facebook use. They found themselves surrounded by incompletely known relations that seemed risky and to potentially require action. Yet action would only clearly be warranted by more information, information they sought through a medium that never quite seemed to provide it.[26] When people's Facebook practices depended upon these and other US neoliberal techniques for managing selves and relationships, they began to feel that who they were on Facebook was changing in untenable and often destructive ways.

Not everyone I interviewed experienced being on Facebook in this way. Many more people were self-professed Facebook addicts than anxious or heartbroken former Facebook users. The trouble with Facebook that I have been describing is a recursive one, emerging from the interplay between what people understand Facebook does, how the site actually functions and how others in their social networks use it. Facebook offers new quandaries for its users to navigate, in part because it is a new medium without widely recognized etiquette. But Facebook also offers these quandaries because it provides insufficient information for people

to live comfortably and ethically only with the knowledge that Facebook circulates, and yet encourages people to stay within Facebook, as Lev Manovich (2002) argues such media tend to do in general. Not every user of Facebook experiences it as a neoliberal site, but those that do can learn that neoliberal techniques do not drift comfortably and without social cost into intimate walks of life. ■

ENDNOTES

[1]All names are pseudonyms chosen by those I interviewed.

[2]There is currently a popular Youtube video "Don't Let Facebook Mess Up Your Relationship, It's Just a Website" (accessed from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O67BwJ2hTQs on Aug 23, 2009).

[3]Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) have analyzed the links between Facebook and jealousy among college students from psychology's disciplinary vantage point. They ask whether the increased exposure to information on Facebook increases students' jealousy, with the not so surprising answer that it does.

[4]Journalists and bloggers call the act of deactivating Facebook accounts "Facebook suicide," but none of the people I interviewed had heard the term.

[5]Students would tell me that a rival site Myspace's "top ten friends" application had an equally destructive effect in high school, in this case on friendships. In this application, one lists one's top friends in order, the ranking and one's presence on the list can become the source of conflict among high school students. See boyd 2006 for a more detailed account of the effects of the top eight list on people's circle of friends.

[6]For an analysis of how Wikipedia is structured along neoliberal assumptions of knowledge circulation, see Philip Mirowki's afterword in *The Road to Mont Pelerin* (2009:418-428).

[7]See Dean 2009 for a similar critique of how information on the Internet circulates for circulation's sake without context, contributing to neoliberal hopes that communication can be political acts without effects.

[8]Other scholars have found that refusing to use communicative technologies is implicated with people's uneasy relationships to dominant forms of capitalism. For further discussion of non-users' resistance to corporations and capitalism, see Krcmar 2009, Kline 2005, Nye 1990, Umble 1996, and Wyatt 2005.

[9]Mol and De Laet (2000) wrote about how easily the Zimbabwe water pump travels, by contrast to many other development project technologies. Their giddy delight with the pump centers around the fact that its designed boundaries are fluid enough not to present such obstacles as it travels from location to location.

[10]Mark Zuckerberg was initially hired to create a college-based dating site. See Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs (2010) for how a market metaphor affects online dating practices.

[11]For a more detailed discussion of sharing passwords and other changing conceptions of public and intimate relationships, see Gershon (2010).

[12]In 2007-2008, Indiana University Bloomington had 30,394 undergraduates and 57 percent were in-state (IU Facebook 2008).

[13]When I wrote this article, students at Indiana University had not yet determined which variant to use, and will debate whether it is "detag" or "untag." Not even the fact that the Facebook interface labels the process "untag" convinces "detag" advocates.

[14]In Facebook's own Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, fake personas are discouraged (Facebook 2009).

[15]"Friend" has become a verb.

[16]This is in contrast to the liberal self, in which C. B Macpherson argues, the self is owned as though it was landed property (Macpherson 1962). I am providing a brief summary of a longer discussion of the neoliberal self found in my article "Neoliberal Agency" (Gershon 2011). This article also contains a more extensive engagement with the considerable literature on neoliberal subjectivities.

[17]People at Indiana University did not agree whether the appropriate term for removing a Facebook friend from one's profile was "defriend" or "unfriend."

[18]On Facebook, people can choose to declare their relationship status through a menu-driven option. One can choose from among six options: single, in a relationship, its complicated, in an open relationship, engaged, or married. When one declares one is in a form of a relationship, one can also select the name of someone on Facebook—you can be "in an open relationship with Frodo Baggins." Frodo Baggins has to agree for his name to appear, otherwise the relationship status will read "in an open relationship" without a link to another Facebook profile.

[19]Dean, however, is not concerned with the actions that form relationships, but rather the actions that form an effective democracy.

[20]On the other hand, to say "we are friends, but we are not Facebook friends" also indicates that this is not a good friend.

[21]In 2007-2008, Facebook had a wallpost count. This is not a feature of the current Facebook.

[22]My interviewees and I do not share this media ideology. I feel no pressure to change my Facebook profile picture and don't update my status often. I have only one friend who suggests that I update my status more frequently.

[23]For more on a neoliberal perspective on risk, see Gershon 2011, Maurer 1999, and O'Malley 1996.

[24]As Van Dijck points out, there is an irony in seeing these digital photos as reliable traces of who lovers are in other social contexts: "The digital collections on our desktops are brimming over with constant reminders of our former selves, but by the same means they provide the tools to help us shape our idealized image – a projection of who we want to be and how we want to be remembered…Memory has become an interesting amalgamation of preservation and creation" (Van Dijck 2007:173).

[25]There are several other ways in which people interpreted their lovers' Facebook profiles as a mixture of dialogue and dissemination. When their lovers deleted public messages that they had left on the lover's profile, they either suspected infidelity or that their lover was anxious about their friends' condemnation. When people argued, they might use their Facebook profile to send messages to their lovers, depending on Facebook as public address to underscore the seriousness of their message. Faced with acknowledging a break-up on Facebook, some people deactivated their accounts to avoid making such a public announcement. After a break-up, women who remained on Facebook would often change their profiles to perform joy in a newly found freedom. They would ask their male Facebook friends to write flirtatious public comments on their Facebook profiles, messages whose primary intended audience was their ex-boyfriend.

[26]Hayek 1988 argues that the market also circulates knowledge in tantalizing incomplete ways, that individuals can never fully grasp all the information they require to make fully informed decisions in the marketplace.

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