

# Facebook Killed the Reunion Star: How Facebook is Changing Who We Are and What We Do

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## Introduction

Ever since I saw the movie Romy and Michele's High School Reunion, I have waited in anticipation for my first high school reunion. In the movie, Romy and Michele were the quintessential geeks in high school, and, when they receive the invitation for their first reunion, they are excited to go back and brag about their fabulous new life as single women in the city. While the movie takes some different twists, the "ugly duckling morphing into a beautiful swan" concept is a major driving force for high school reunions. Is it not every band geek's dream to return to his/her high school ten years post graduation looking like an underwear model driving a bright red sports car? Aside from the superficial appearance aspect, people also wonder where everyone ended up. Did the person voted "Most Likely to Succeed" really achieve great success? Who got married to whom? Who has children? Who is divorced – and how many times?

These were all the questions that were running through my mind when I received the invitation for my first high school reunion, along with the expected - "Has it really been ten years?" Or, at least, these were the questions that should have been running through my mind; however, they had all already been answered - those questions and a lot more. Facebook ruined my high school reunion.

Our ten-year high school reunion was graciously organized by one of my best friends from high school – who now lives in Switzerland. It definitely says something about the times when a girl can organize the high school reunion for a small Texas town all the way from Switzerland! All of the information was posted on a website; however, all of the action happened on Facebook. The discussions went back and forth about who was coming and who was not and why. In the reminiscing spirit, more and more Facebook friend requests were sent out, and I am now practically Facebook friends with everyone from my high school class. With each new friend, I was able to scour their Facebook page for the usual information: marital status, current residence, current workplace, education information; it was like I had an instant resume for each of my classmates. Then, I moved on to their pictures. I was able to see, live and in color, what they all had been doing for the past ten years. I saw one of my best friend's wedding pictures, photos of my ex-boyfriend's new baby, and pictures from college graduations and beach vacations; it was all right there at my fingertips just a click away. And, it was not only the past, but also the present. As I am catching up on the past ten years, my Facebook newsfeed is sending me real-time status updates so I know exactly what everyone is doing at this exact moment. Somebody had cold pizza for breakfast while another friend is headed off to a job interview; with every refresh, I am hit with a stream of the latest information.

So, like any other day, the morning of my high school reunion, I logged in to my Facebook account for my daily fix. Everyone was posting about being back in town and looking forward to seeing each other that evening. When evening came, and I opened the door at the VFW hall where the reunion was held, it was a surreal moment. Everyone was sitting at tables, similar to those from our cafeteria days, talking to each other, just like back in high school. It was

as if no time had passed, and I guess in some ways it had not.

Now, don't get me wrong, I enjoy Facebook as much as the next 20 (almost 30)-something. It is a guilty pleasure to log-on and see what all my "friends" are doing these days. I enjoy the convenience of being able to post quick replies to status updates and the ability to maintain contact with so many people from all avenues of my life. I have reconnected with past co-workers and childhood friends; I can stay in touch with my cousins from all over the country and even send messages to the girl next door. This ability to share so much information, so quickly, and so easily has squelched my curiosity, though. Instead of walking in trying to guess who was who, I had just seen all of their smiling faces on Facebook. I knew who had cut their long hair short and who had dyed their brown hair blonde. There was absolutely no element of surprise. It seemed almost ridiculous when I asked how someone was doing because their status update told me that exact information moments before I joined the party. No one really had anything to say to each other because it had all already been said on Facebook. The only people of interest were those who were not on Facebook, and the only question they were asked was why they were not on Facebook. In fact, a classmate with an iPhone immediately signed up a non-Facebook member to Facebook during the reunion! And then, everyone immediately sent him friend requests from their phones!

All in all, I do have to admit that it was good to see everyone face-to-face. A couple of my dearest friends from high school and I had a really great time actually talking to each other instead of sending messages. However, the overall experience was not at all what I had imagined, and I blame Facebook for the shift. Since now one out of every 13 people on the planet is a member of Facebook, I believe that it is safe to say that Facebook has the ability to change the way our world works – and that it is doing just that (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-10720270>, May 16, 2011).

## **Oversharing**

I now know more about the people I went to high school with than I ever knew about them when I spent most all of my waking hours with them. In high school, it seemed that everyone wanted to keep all of their personal information a secret; everyone made a strong effort to separate home life and school life. At school, people projected the version of themselves that they wanted their peers to see, only opening up and sharing their vulnerabilities with a small, tight circle of friends (if anyone). None of us would have ever dreamed to share all of the information that is readily available on Facebook; it would have been one of our biggest nightmares to have all of that personal information visible to our classmates. You did not want anyone to know that the reason you missed math class was because you had an appointment with your dermatologist about that big zit on your forehead, which you had spent an hour expertly covering with concealer; now, on Facebook, people describe in great detail their reasons for visiting doctors, the medication prescribed, and the side effects experienced. And, it is not just medical information that is shared; political views, relationship issues, religious views, and family issues are all up for discussion – nothing is off-limits. It seems that people think nothing of posting any and all of the details of their lives on their Facebook status; the private has gone public.

In her 2008 New York Times article, "Exposed", Emily Gould coined the term "oversharing" to describe how people express the most personal aspects of their lives on the internet. Gould writes, "In real life, we wouldn't invite any passing stranger into these situations, but the remove of the Internet makes it seem OK" (Gould 2008). She is exactly right. I could log-on to Facebook right now and provide countless examples of oversharing. I even had a friend who recently posted about his bowel movements; if that is not the very definition of oversharing, I do not know what is! Sitting in front of a monitor instead of sitting in front of a real live, breathing person relieves all of the consequences of sharing TMI (text speak for "too much information"). One can type a status update and hit enter before ever even processing what information is being broadcast for all of the world to read; the "I have a thought and I think that I want to share my thought" process happens simultaneously and without the filter that reminds us what details are appropriate for sharing to what audiences.

Sometimes, however, oversharing can happen without one even realizing it. On Facebook, if I post a comment about a certain friend's status update, all of my friends and all of my friend's friends can read, and comment on, my comment. People who I do not know at all and whom I have never met can read my thoughts and comments on any number of subjects. If my friend takes a stand about a political subject on his/her Facebook and I make a comment agreeing or disagreeing, a significant number of strangers will now have personal information about who I am. I may

not have intended for my comment to be read by all of those people, and they may not understand and interpret my comment the way that I meant it because my comment was for my friend, who I know and who knows me. They may not know the history behind the comment and thus may totally miss my point. Instantly, people will have thoughts and opinions and will begin to share them, as well. I have seen many seemingly innocent Facebook posts turn into all-out wars featuring heated comments volleyed back and forth – and the person who posted the original status update is not even involved!

Oversharing does not just happen via status posts and comments. The photos section of Facebook features another quintessential example of oversharing. I remember wanting to sanitize all of the pictures my parents took of me during my childhood; I did not want anyone to see that picture of me before I learned to tame my frizzy hair. I would have been mortified if my mother had put it in the yearbook, the closest thing to Facebook at the time. Now, though, people can take pictures from their iPhones and immediately upload them to Facebook. I have seen everything from pictures posted directly from the hospital when a friend had her first baby to a picture of a male friend dressed in a rather revealing swimsuit as part of his Halloween “Borat” costume (how I wish I could erase that from my memory!). One no longer has to wait for film to be developed at the pharmacy; pictures can be immediately shared via Facebook from a camera or cell phone. People post pictures of their recent haircuts and even pictures of what they are having for dinner. One can watch people’s entire lives play out like a movie just by clicking on their Facebook photo albums. Also, you do not even have to overshare photos of yourself; if you do not feel like your friend is sharing enough, you can post a picture of him/her and “tag” them on Facebook. The picture is then added to the tagged friend’s Facebook page. This feature was used frequently before my reunion. People dug up various pictures from high school and posted them on Facebook tagging their fellow classmates. Just when you thought that you had successfully buried those pictures from your awkward years, now they are rearing their ugly heads for everyone to see. Those who did undergo a positive transformation in the years since high school cannot get away from who they were then, thanks to Facebook. The tagging feature allows others to overshare for you.

I believe that it is the photo feature that had the greatest impact on my reunion experience. Honestly, what are reunions all about? We want to see who gained weight, who lost weight, who got hot, who is not, and who looks nothing like their high school self. During the months before my reunion, as I added Facebook friends, I immediately scoured their pictures. I was able to see my friends, their spouses or significant others, their children, their homes, and anything else that they had posted. As I previously mentioned, when I opened the door at my reunion, that initial shock of seeing my friends ten years later was non-existent; I had just spent the past few months viewing photo albums containing all of the details of their lives, significant or mundane.

Just the fact that we have a term to describe people’s desire to share personal information is proof enough that oversharing plays a significant role in our society. I no longer wonder if people overshare, but rather wonder why people overshare. Why do people find it necessary to post the private details of their lives for hundreds of their friends and hundreds more of their friend’s friends to read, comment on, and judge? A lot of people’s Facebook pages read almost like a diary, and anyone on the World Wide Web, with access to their Facebook page, can read all about them and their life. Something that used to be kept locked and hidden away under the mattress is now as easily accessible as the local paper. It seems that people must want to overshare if they make such an effort to do so and make no effort to keep this information private.

Perhaps people do not feel that they are oversharing; perhaps they choose to share all of the minute details of their life on purpose. Marx describes the alienation of labor as “first, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased” ([1884] 1972:73). This same feeling of alienation is now applicable to life outside of work; people feel disconnected from their private lives, as well. With the hurried pace of life at home, home is now like work; therefore, the feelings of alienation once tied to labor are now being felt in our private lives. People feel disconnected from life, in general. Instead of enjoying true leisure activities, people are worried about accruing social capital or are simply too exhausted from their labor to even consider leisure. Marx goes on to describe how man “feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions – eating, drinking, and procreating” ([1884] 1972:74). These “animal functions” are no longer free, however. Parents treat children like little workers, involving them in all sorts of activities from soccer to ballet, and all of these activities are structures and competitive. The days of free, unstructured play are over. Eating and drinking are also no longer free activities. Instead of lingering over a meal or eating as a family at the dinner table to discuss the day’s events, people get their meals from a window and devour them in the car on the way to the next structured activity.

If people's lives are not filled with structured activities, they are not free from feelings of alienation. Instead of going out and living life, reality television fills the void; people watch other people living life instead of living their own life, and Facebook is like a real-time reality television program.

Technology is adding to alienation in an entirely new way, and Facebook is a part of this new alienation. Farmville is a popular application on Facebook that allows people to virtually manage a virtual farm; users grow virtual fruits and virtual vegetables and can share them with their Facebook friends. Like Marx's description of alienation in the workplace in which the worker is "related to the product of his labor as to an alien object" ([1884] 1972: 71), Farmville users are related to their farm in the same manner. There are no real tomatoes and no one gets their hands dirty. Now, people are not only alien to the product, they are also alien to the process. Gardening, once considered a leisure activity which could reduce feelings of alienation, has been construed so that it increases feelings of alienation. Farmville is not the only application of this sort, either. There is Pet Society which is "all about... decorating your virtual house and petting your virtual pet" and a host of other applications available (<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2548175922&topic=9548>, May 16, 2011).

Facebook is smart, though. While applications like Farmville and Pet Society may increase feelings of alienation, Facebook itself offers a platform to ease feelings of alienation. Facebook creates an issue and solves the same issue thus ensuring its enduring necessity. By oversharing, Facebook users can ease feelings of alienation.

On Facebook, the mundane has top billing. People feel alienated by the banality of their existence, and Facebook provides a forum that makes the everyday newsworthy; in fact, Facebook labels such information the "News Feed" (<http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=408>, May 16, 2011). The News Feed is constantly updated with posts from Facebook friends. Whether it be an announcement of a major life-event like a pregnancy or a simple statement concerning the weather, all status updates are given the same priority on Facebook. I receive notification of the day of the week from one Facebook friend and at the same time I receive notification that another is being shipped off to war in Afghanistan. Facebook allows everyone to feel important and provides everyone their "15 minutes of fame."

If we accept that people overshare and can rationalize why they might choose to overshare, then, the next logical thought is, "What do people gain by oversharing on Facebook?"

## Relationships

Not to oversimplify or sound redundant, but people gain friends by oversharing on Facebook. Oversharing, and having your "overshared" thoughts validated, creates a sense of reassurance and acceptance. If a Facebook user posts a status update about a terrible work-day and five people respond with their condolences, the person who had the terrible day is validated and vindicated. Facebook friendships also develop a sense of community; our Facebook friends make up our virtual neighborhood. When you get a new friend request on Facebook, it is the 21st century equivalent of a new neighbor bringing you a basket of muffins to welcome you to the street. Like the muffins, a friend request makes us feel accepted; we feel like we belong. As Durkheim points out in his theory of social integration, having a network of people with whom to interact and connect promotes mental well-being (Durkheim 1897). Simply stated, Facebook makes us feel good.

In less than ten minutes a day, I can stay current with all of my 158 Facebook friends and know what is going on in their lives. How long would that take without Facebook? It would be practically impossible to successfully maintain 158 friendships at one time, let alone in just ten minutes each day. Our mobile society allows people to end up far from the place they may have called home as child; families are spread all over the nation and world. My own family, which started in a very small Texas town, now stretches from West Virginia to Colorado. Facebook provides any easy way for me to stay in touch with everyone. I have relationships with my cousins that, most likely, I would not have without Facebook.

While I do have quite a few family members as friends on Facebook, a majority of my Facebook friends are people from high school. Interestingly, a lot of those same people would not have claimed me, nor I them, as friends while we went to school together. It is not like I had a bunch of enemies while I was in school; it is just that I had a small, select group of people that I would have deemed friends. The others were more like acquaintances. It seems that Facebook friendships are different than traditional friendships.

To me, a friend is someone you can rely on when you need help, someone you can talk to about your problems, someone who will stand by you in your time of need; a friend is someone you care about deeply and someone who

cares about you. Honestly, most of my Facebook friends do not fall under those categories. Sure, I care about these people because I grew up with them, and I care about them as fellow human beings; however, were I to experience some tragedy in my life, most of the people on my friends list would not be the people to whom I would turn. Outside of the reunion, I have not had a face-to-face, or even a telephone, conversation with the vast majority of my Facebook friends in the past ten years, and I believe that my high school reunion illustrated that fact that although we may all be friends on Facebook, we do not necessarily carry those same friendships over into our “real” lives.

By the middle of the evening, everyone who attended my high school reunion had segregated themselves into their roles from high school. The popular kids were all together, around the bar, reminiscing about football games and parties that they attended. The brainy kids who were in band circled their chairs and started quiet, deep discussions. The kids who were in theatre were out on the dance floor making a scene. It did not take long for the cliques to emerge even after ten years and despite new-found Facebook friendships. Even though I could now count the cheerleaders and quarterback as friends on-line, I still had a sense of discomfort when I considered joining them at the bar; I felt more comfortable with my old friends out on the dance floor. Everyone gravitated to the relationships that they cultivated in high school, the traditional friendships. Even though we may have shared a few sentences on Facebook, I still did not feel like I belonged to the popular crowd.

Facebook friendship creates a false sense of having a relationship. Gould states that, “Depending on how you looked at it, I either had no life and I barely talked to anyone, or I spoke to thousands of people constantly” (Gould 2008). Again, Gould has it exactly right. Depending on how you looked at it, my high school class had overcome the clique atmosphere that dominates adolescence or it was still alive and well. On Facebook, everyone was friends with everyone, but in a real-life social setting, the cliques reemerged. Just because you have an on-line relationship with someone does not mean that you can have that same relationship off-line.

Gould continued to address the impact blogging, and technology like Facebook, has had on relationships. She described how when she first started her job blogging, she felt the need to go in to the office each day; she said that “it seemed important to see Alex, my co-editor, in person” (Gould 2008). However, as time went on, Gould said that she and her co-editor communicated most often by instant message, even though they were sitting next to each other (2008). Gould states, “Soon it stopped seeming weird to me when one of us would type a joke and the other one would type ‘Hahahahaha’ in lieu of actually laughing” (2008). This is a prime example of the manner in which our current society communicates and fosters relationships: text messaging, Twitter, and Facebook have taken over telephone calls and face-to-face chats over coffee. Friendships no longer have to be maintained by frequent lunch dates or girl’s/guy’s night out; a quick “LOL” reply to a Facebook status can keep a connection alive. In fact, no contact at all is actually required to maintain a Facebook friendship; once I accept your friend request, we are friends “til death (or at least the death of my Facebook account) do us part.”

By using the term “friend” to describe those people to whom you are linked on Facebook, Facebook is somewhat changing the definition of friend. First, the term friend is now not only limited to those with whom you have a close relationship. I have Facebook friends that I have never met or even spoken to on the phone. Also, friend is now a verb. How often have we heard the request, “friend me”? In fact, in the movie about the creation of Facebook, *The Social Network*, the creators of Facebook know that they have hit it big when someone tells them to “friend me!”. Finally, friends are commodities. Having a large number of Facebook friends is like having an entourage; it means that you are popular and important. The more Facebook friends you have, the higher your status.

Friendships are not the only relationships affected by Facebook, either. Romantic relationships are greatly impacted. Facebook currently offers 11 relationship statuses to define romantic relationships: “Single, In a relationship, Engaged, Married, It’s complicated, In an open relationship, Widowed, Separated, Divorced, In a civil union, and in a domestic partnership” (<https://www.facebook.com> (personal profile), May 16, 2011). I can follow my friends’ love lives as their relationship status goes from “Single” to “In a Relationship” to “It’s Complicated” to “Single”. A friend recently broke-up with her boyfriend, and within minutes of updating her status to “Single”, interested suitors started sending her messages. Facebook understands that one’s status in a romantic relationship is a defining factor in one’s life and thus decided to include relationship status as a profile option along with gender and birthday.

On the fairy-tale side, Facebook allows long-lost lovers to reunite and provides a forum for couples to profess their love. Just this morning, I read a post proclaiming that someone was so lucky to have an “angel” in his life – in reference to his significant other. Wedding pictures and pictures of engagement rings abound on Facebook; even I have my wedding pictures posted on Facebook. On Facebook’s darker side, I have seen posts from an angry spouse about last night’s fight, and recently, I have heard of Facebook being used in divorce cases. Seemingly innocent flirtations with an ex via wall posts can cause major issues if your current love interest reads them. Facebook also

provides a forum for pseudo-stalkers to track their objects of desire. When I received that dreaded friend request from a boyfriend from my past (who, honestly, I had hoped to never hear from or speak to again), I was worried. I immediately checked all of my privacy settings to make sure that he did not have access to any of my information, even though I am very careful about what information I post to Facebook. Of course, at the same time, I did not want to hurt his feelings, or ignite any past anger, by rejecting his friend request so I happily took the passive-aggressive option – I clicked the “Ignore” button. Thank you, Mark Zuckerberg, for supporting my passive-aggressive nature!

As a happily married person, I have never thoughtfully considered the role Facebook plays in the dating game; however, if I imagine way back to my single days, I can see how Facebook would change the playing field. First, since so many people have a Facebook page, are blind dates on their way to extinction? If I were being set-up on a blind date, the very first thing that I would do would be to check to see if my date had a Facebook. If so (and it would be highly likely given the number of Facebook users), I would be able to see all sorts of information about my date including pictures, religious views, political affiliation, likes, and anything else he chose to post on Facebook. The awkwardness of wondering what he might be like would be greatly diminished. Facebook, however, would not necessarily take all of the surprises out of dating. Like with any dating website, there is no guarantee that the person you see in the pictures on-line is the same person who will be at your door. Facebook allows people to create their own identity and to monitor the “self” that they choose to project.

## Self and Identity

But do they? Do people create or mediate the identity that they display on Facebook? Of course, at some level, they must; you have to decide what to post on Facebook and what not to post. However, I wonder just how much true thought goes into this decision process. Before posting a picture on Facebook, do people really think about the effect the picture will have on their identity? Also, I believe that our society is moving towards a more “take me as I am” mentality, and if that is the case, can we really argue that a Facebook identity is drastically different than one’s true self?

We live in a world that allows us to construct our identity in a variety of ways – on-line via Facebook posts and statuses, by the clothes we wear, the color of our hair, even the size of our breasts. So, the question begs, are we changing our identity by dyeing our hair or are we only becoming a truer version of the person we believe we really are? Is our constructed identity our true reality? I am not convinced that people really try to construct the best possible identity, rather than their true identity, on-line anymore; I think more and more people are putting their flawed selves out there. A quick perusal through my Facebook newsfeed and the recent picture postings by my friends supports this theory. As aforementioned, people overshare; if they were trying to construct a picture-perfect version of themselves, would they really post less-than-flattering pictures of themselves or discuss a battle with acne via a public wall post?

People no longer really worry about privacy (see oversharing section) so I would argue that the self they create on-line is a true representation of identity. People have the ability to be more “real” on-line than off; the shield of the keyboard and computer monitor provides a sense of security, protection from judgment. Shy people, like me, find it easier to share via email and on Facebook than face-to-face. Facebook allows us to be ourselves.

Jean Baudrillard suggests that reality has been replaced with signs and symbols that are only simulations of reality; “it is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1983:472). He also describes a third order of simulacra in which there is no distinction between reality and representation; he associates this third order of simulacra with postmodernity (1994). I am not entirely sure what Baudrillard would say about Facebook were he still with us, but I think he would be very interested. I dare speculate that he might use Facebook to further his theory that reality has been replaced and that Facebook has further blurred the lines between reality and representation; Facebook is thrusting us into the postmodern (if you do not think we are already there).

I am not so sure, though; perhaps, the sign is not a copy, as Baudrillard suggests, but rather, the sign is a part of the original. My Facebook profile is not just a copy of who I am; my Facebook profile shapes my identity. Now, I realize that taken out of context that concept may seem rather shallow, allowing Facebook to shape who I am; however, with the proliferation of Facebook in our society, it is not hard to believe that Facebook could play a role in establishing identity. Categories of relationship status, political status, religion, etc. make people think about these labels and assign themselves an identity. Young people who may have not considered their political affiliation as part

of their identity are now faced with a dilemma – who am I? And, what does it mean? Of course, you can opt not to provide this information on Facebook, but not providing certain information can speak louder to your identity than just providing the information in the first place.

Facebook is not only involved in creating identity; it plays a major role by displaying your identity to others. Before Facebook, we may not have known as much about our friends as we do now. We have all been told to steer clear of two topics with friends, family, and company – religion and politics; however, Facebook puts these topics front and center. When I accept a Facebook friend, he/she can go to my Info page and obtain far more information about me than I might normally provide (and I am rather cautious about the information I offer on Facebook). I do not have anything on my Facebook profile that I think is private, sensitive information, but, at the same time, most people would not come up to me and ask me what religion or political party to which I belong. I am not ashamed of either, and was I asked, I would answer honestly, but the fact of the matter is, before Facebook, it is not likely that I would have been asked.

I can also go to my friends' Facebook pages and learn a lot about their identities. I never really considered my high school friends' religion or political affiliation, but now that I have that information at my fingertips, I find myself very interested in what they have to say. It is not only friends that are interested in their peers Facebook profiles and the information provided there. Employers look at Facebook to determine the “real” person instead of the best-foot-forward, rehearsed identity that people use during an interview. Recently, there have been several news stories about people being reprimanded, and even facing termination, for Facebook posts. This brings up all kinds of first amendment and privacy issues, and I am not going to get into that here; however, it does make me think about identity. People will say and do things on Facebook that they would not do in their daily life, and that makes me think that people are more true to themselves on Facebook – thus creating a real identity, not a simulation. They are more willing to portray their flaws on Facebook, and our flaws make us who we are.

Facebook's identity machine reaches far beyond relationship status, politics, and religion. A person can spend as much time and effort as he/she wants to depict the most complete identity picture possible. There is a never-ending supply of people, places, and things to “like” (Facebook terminology meaning that you click a button stating that you like something and that information is relayed on your Facebook profile page). I have lists of music, books, movies, television shows, and hobbies that I like. There are also groups to join and causes to adopt. All of these things help create an identity. Again, these choices bring up topics and ideas that may have never come up before. Most people may have considered what music they enjoy but may have not spent as much time thinking about global warming, second amendment rights, animal cruelty, or the children's orchestra society – all causes one may join via Facebook. The groups and causes to which one belongs provide insight about their identity, and people may not have really thought about this part of their identity until they receive a Facebook request to join a particular cause.

As I mentioned before, because of Facebook, the people at my high school reunion now know more about one another than they did when we spent five days a week together in school. We not only know the superficial snippets of daily status updates or wall posts, we also know about each other's core beliefs. Facebook, while making it easier to be physically apart, has in many ways brought us closer together. We all have our selves out there for the Facebook world to see – the good, the bad, and the ugly (yes, someone finally posted a picture of my frizzy hair!), and because we are all vulnerable and exposed, there is a comfort and feeling of security. When I read about one of my friend's having different religious or political beliefs than I do, I do not pass judgment or think ill of him/her; rather, I appreciate the knowledge that I now have and appreciate the person that he/she is. Facebook urges us to share with another and to be open and accepting individuals. Of course, there is conflict on Facebook; it is not a utopia. However, I still believe (call me an idealist) that the good is greater than the bad.

Facebook is not merely a reflection of an identity that is already established; Facebook is taking part in the establishment of identity. From his Harvard dorm room, Mark Zuckerberg created a phenomenon that not only changes that way we act, it is changing who we are.

## Conclusion

Facebook is a significant social force. There is so much information available to sociologists that it is overwhelming. Jokingly, I told my professor that Facebook ruined my high school reunion. I thought that I did not mean it literally, but I did; Facebook really did ruin my high school reunion. But, in ruining my high school reunion, Facebook may

have improved my daily life. I have more friends now that I have ever had in my entire life! And, I know more about them, and myself, than ever before. I am certain that a plethora of research concerning Facebook is in the works as I type, and I look forward to it. These are interesting times and I am excited to be a part of it.

Chances are I will not see any of my high school friends until our next reunion (in ten years). That may seem sad, but really, why do I need to see them? I have Facebook to keep me company.

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