

"Facebook and the Question of Authentic Self-Identity," with Tamara Wandel. In *Facebook and Philosophy*, edited by Dylan Wittkower (Chicago: IL: Open Court), forthcoming.

Abstract

This paper addresses whether interaction with others on Facebook promotes or impedes the discovery of an authentic sense of self-identity. Perhaps more than other modes of communication, online social networking encourages defining oneself in relationship to (and before) others, and a variety of others at that. Most Facebook users have "friends" that extend across social and geographic boundaries. For many adult users, these boundaries may even be temporal, as people from one part of an individual's past are allowed to mix with people from another. In "real" time and "real" life, we interact with these constituencies differently, playing different roles with different people. But on Facebook all of this changes, since here these lines of compartmentalization are blurred. Traditional (Enlightenment) conceptions and some postmodern conceptions of privacy and self-identity find fault with this fact. But we wonder otherwise. Does the opportunity for self-disclosure in Facebook put us more in touch with ourselves, as we struggle between a representation of self that is something we ourselves can accept and that others will also accept? Is it possible that the opportunity for constructing a public self-portrait in front of multiple constituencies carries with it the necessity of accountability? And might authentic self-identity be established in the interactivity between persons and less so in any finished self-representation? To address these questions, we will react against the growing literature that is concerned with questions of honesty, the destruction of privacy, and the lack of accountability in computer-mediated relationships to argue that these analyses really miss the boat, not because they are flat out false, but because they fail to understand what is happening to us as individuals as a result of the interactivity of this new media environment.

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