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Between the Virtual and the Real: A Study of Relations

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Between the Virtual and the Real: A Study of Relations

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M.A., Emory University, 2013
B.A., Vanderbilt University, 2008

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Philosophy
2018

Abstract

Between the Virtual and the Real: A Study of Relations
By Stephanie Rodgers

The time has passed when an academic interrogation of social networking platforms like Facebook required justification—with the still-to-be-determined role of fake news in the 2016 presidential election, the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter, #metoo, and similar grassroots movements, and pervasive but inscrutable data mining practices, our virtual activities increasingly spill over into our concrete lives. However, relatively little work has been done within philosophy to explore the relationships between, and within, these two realms. In this dissertation, I attempt to lay the groundwork for exploring these and similar issues by investigating the nature of our online lives and interactions, specifically within Facebook.

In the first chapter, I provide context for the rise of Facebook by tracing its social media precursors, as well as draw upon empirical data to examine who uses the site and in order to do what. In the second chapter, using the work of John Dewey, Judith Butler, and Shannon Sullivan, I outline a concept of the self that can account for both its concrete and virtual instantiations, by arguing that the self is performative, habitual, and transactional. In fact, particular hallmarks of concrete selves can be and are meaningfully replicated in virtual space.

In the third chapter, working from the notion that communication is our fundamental tie to other beings, I take Miranda Fricker's characterization of epistemic injustice to highlight failures in communication, and in chapter 4, I show how these failures are reflected in our online transactions, as well. However, at the junction of the failures, I highlight the ways in which Facebook users employ the unique tools of virtual space to find new ways to express themselves, within a space that is meaning-generating and self-sustaining.

Ultimately, I argue that virtual space is a space unto itself, capable of fostering robust and deeply transactional relationships with other virtual selves. In this sense, the virtual world, as well as the selves and the relationships built within it, are analogues, rather than mere derivatives, of our concrete selves.

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Chapter 1

Facebook and Philosophy: Who Cares?

I. Introduction

By the time of completion of this dissertation, my personal Facebook page will have become a teenager of 13 years old. I have watched this social network site evolve from a system used to share inside (and sometimes inappropriate) jokes by myself and my college hallmates to a mechanism for posting social and political commentary to a place for my mother, grandmothers, and in-laws to keep up with my day-to-day life (less the articles airing my political views). Conscious of the fact that my virtual goings-on bleed into my concrete relationships with family, friends, and professional contacts, I have reflexively and consciously constructed my online identity. With each new "friend," a new pair of eyes will digest a scrolling narrative created over the course of my thirteen year Facebook membership, and though I have more than once pored over my earliest postings, searching for any hint of inappropriate or possibly inflammatory material, I am still seized by a feeling of vulnerability of being on display, at the thought of yet another person perusing so much of my life with a scroll of the mouse. This fear is only exacerbated when the new addition to my "friends" list possesses unknown beliefs and attitudes.[1] How much will they look at, and what impression will they form? Will

[1] Recently, in a fit of Thanksgiving gratitude, I sent a friend request to a firefighter I'd only met once, on an occasion of personal significance. As my husband and I watched our apartment burn down on February 2, 2014, we realized that we had taken our wedding rings off while doing dishes and other Sunday chores. As we stood outside the burning building, a firefighter approached asked us which apartment unit was ours. We pointed it out: it was on the top floor, across the hall from the apartment that caught fire. Because it was one of the units worst burned and was subsequently drenched with thousands of gallons of water, we were unsure if we would be able to retrieve our wedding rings, including the diamond that my deceased father had given my mother on their tenth anniversary. He asked if we could tell him exactly where the

they suddenly view me with disdain, just another bleeding-heart liberal spouting nonsense and elitism from her academic ivory tower, or will they see a compatriot? Does it matter, and why?

Facebook has not forgotten my 18-year-old self, giggling with her hallmates during freshman year of college, and no matter my own careful revisions, many of my contributions to the site remain scattered across various friends' timelines, immortalized by an Internet that never truly forgets. Having developed an awareness of the long-term implications of the content posted to my profile and timeline, I have begun to cultivate a sanitized and innocuous version of myself. The entire Internet adores cats, so I post pictures of my own.[2] I complain about the difficulty of folding a fitted sheet, observe that my car is old enough to drive itself, describe my encounter with a stink bug, and engage in some good-natured self-deprecating humor. "Ruffle no feathers," is probably my Facebook creed, if I'm honest with myself. I am, in truth, concerned about (and afraid of) the overwhelming breadth of my potential audience: ripples in the online pond travel

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rings would be, and we described it (in a small crystal dish on the corner of the kitchen countertop). Much to our surprise, he suited up, and walking into the still-smoldering building, and after a few tense minutes, he returned, his giant glove curled around our rings. The three of us did a quick interview on the news, my husband and I hugged him over his protests that he was sweaty and sooty, and then, he was back to work.

I found him on Facebook over six months later during Thanksgiving of 2014 and sent him a note of gratitude along with a friend request. It was only after he accepted that I realized I knew nothing about him, except that he was willing to walk into a burning building for complete strangers to retrieve some jewelry (though that speaks volumes). "How will this person, towards whom I feel immense fondness and gratitude, feel about me? Will he see that I posted his picture on Facebook that night? Would that be weird for him? Is he going to think I'm bonkers?" I wondered. As it turns out, he continues to be a gracious and charitable individual, and we exchanged pleasant messages. And every February 2, he sends a note to commemorate our "anniversary" and ask how my husband and I are doing.

[2] Whitney Philips, a scholar of Digital Culture and Folklore, investigated the forum considered to be "the epicenter of online trolling activity," 4chan/b/. In her analysis of the forum's performances of and commentaries upon gender and sexuality, she observed that even trolls happily honor "Caturday" by posting pictures of cuddly kittens. Some participants even call themselves, "catfags," employing a word generally used with disdain to refer to themselves. Whitney Philips, "'Cats and Penises All the Way Down: Performances of Gender and Sexuality on 4chan/b/'--ICA 2012 Presentation," *A Sandwich, with Words???* (blog), May 25, 2012, http://billions-and-billions.com/2012/05/25/cats-and-penises-all-the-way-down-performances-of-gender-and-sexuality-on-4chanb-ica-2012-presentation/.

farther, faster, and less predictably than those of the concrete world. Ought I risk alienating in-laws and possibly future employers, and are these acceptable reasons for avoiding discussion of subjects that inform who I am as a person (both concrete and virtual) and potentially impact the welfare of living, breathing individuals?

Many Facebook users braver than me have continued to express controversial opinions (generally political) and engage their contacts with conflicting worldviews in often heated discussion. Occasionally, I venture out of my self-imposed moratorium on debating contentious political and social ideas long enough to "like" their posts, and sometimes, in moments of extreme exasperation, post some of my own. However, when I am driven to create such a post or share an article, I make use of Facebook's "filters" to ensure that I won't be alienating the aunts and in-laws I face at holidays and family reunions.[3] In my own experience of participating in these lengthy comment threads that sometimes grow over the course of days or weeks, and in observing my reaction to viewpoints that run counter to my own, I have seen little change in an individual's actual opinion as they argue. Rather, the consequence of these displays seems to be producing evidence to support oneself while becoming further entrenched in those beliefs, and research has borne out this observation within some limited experimental parameters.[4]

Though there is certainly enough to say about my fraught relationship with my Facebook profile to fill a dissertation, I don't intend to dwell on it. These reflections and

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[3] It is sometimes as if Facebook aids and abets my attempts to stay within my comfort zone. Of course, when we are talking about a company that relies upon eyeball traffic to earn nearly $8 billion in advertising revenue, its developers are highly motivated to ensure that Facebook is and does what its users want, and avoid discomforting them. Jim Edwards, "Facebook Shares Surge on First Ever $1 Billion Mobile Ad Revenue Quarter," Business Insider | Tech, January 2, 2014, http://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-q4-2013-earnings-2014-1.

[4] Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, "When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions," *Political Behavior* 32, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 303–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2.

observations, however, have led me to consider the use of social media platforms as social and political tools. That they have been used to enable movements to organize and protesters[5] to gather is fact, but Facebook may provide other yet untapped resources for social transformation and progress. Locating these resources requires an exploration of many topics, some of which will be beyond the scope of this project, but before these issues are addressed, we must understand what it means to be a subject on the Internet and to be among other Internet subjects. Building this foundation is the subject of my dissertation.

My approach will consist of looking for common threads between our concrete selves and virtual selves, well as our concrete and virtual relationships, specifically in terms of patterns of behavior and engagements. By establishing that there are individuals and activities on the internet that meaningfully resemble their concrete counterparts, I hope to persuade the reader that our virtual goings-on are just as "real" as our concrete ones that the virtual realm deserves recognition as an analogue, rather than a mere shade, of the concrete world. However, to establish that the virtual world is such an analogue, a productive tension must be maintained: while similarities may be highlighted, so too much the *dis*similarities, lest the virtual be allowed to become subsumed under the heading of the concrete, and so one must also address the ways that social media offers something new and distinct from the concrete. Ultimately, then, through this argument regarding the relationship of concrete and virtual selves and relationships, which both meaningfully reflect and influence each other but also remain distinct, I hope to prove that virtual space represents an analogue, rather than a derivative, of concrete space.

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[5] "UPDATED: Metro Atlanta Protests Go Full Circle Thursday," accessed December 10, 2014, http://www.ajc.com/news/news/die-in-protests-in-atlanta-follow-new-york-ferguso/njLfB/.

This work also roots itself in a feminist pragmatist tradition, a school of thought initially advanced by Charlene Haddock Seigfried[6] and carried forward by Shannon Sullivan[7], one that recognizes the harmonious interplay of both pragmatist and feminist philosophical commitments. As summarized neatly by Haddock Seigfried, these commitments are, in brief:

> a penchant for indirect, metaphorical discourse rather than a deductive and reductively symbolic one, the concreteness of [their] methodology, philosophizing out of one's own experience and everyday problems, the priority of human relations and actual experiences over abstract conceptual distinctions, shared understanding and communal problem-solving rather than rationally forced conclusions as the goal of philosophical discourse, the valuing of inclusiveness and community over exaggerated claims of autonomy and detachment, and developmental rather than rule-governed ethics.[8]

Feminist pragmatism lends itself particularly well to philosophical analysis of Facebook, which in its current iteration encompasses a massive user base and a clamor of voices that may not previously have had such a platform to share their experiences and everyday problems with their wider communities. Paired with empirical data from scientific and sociological studies, feminist pragmatism's commitment to hearing these voices and engaging with affected individuals in exercises of communal problem-solving enables it to work with the tools offered by the platform and turn them in service of those communities, with a goal of greater shared understanding, inclusiveness, and harmonious democratic participation.

II. The Rise of Social Media

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[6] Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "Where Are All the Pragmatist Feminists?," *Hypatia* 6, no. 2 (July 1, 1991): 1–20.
[7] Shannon Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
[8] Seigfried, "Where Are All the Pragmatist Feminists?," 10.

Social media is not a new phenomenon. In 1997, the social network site (SNS) SixDegrees.com launched[9], and at its peak, boasted 3.5 million registered users[10]. Though the service failed to become a sustainable business and eventually closed its virtual doors in 2000, the site contained enough of the hallmark features of later SNSs (such as a profile pages and a friends list) to be reasonably considered a forerunner to such sites as Friendster, MySpace, Livejournal, LinkedIn, and Facebook[11]. The reason for its failure, suggests founder A. Weinreich, was that early adopters of the Internet rarely had extended networks of friends who were online, and most users were not interested in connecting with or meeting strangers.[12]

In 2002, the next major iteration of the SNSs launched: Friendster. Unfortunately for the company, Friendster became a victim of its own success[13]. As it gained popularity in niche population groups, it suddenly became the object of media coverage that attracted new users to its service in droves. With inadequate server and database resources, the site faltered under the burden of the influx of traffic. In addition, some users created "fake" profiles (aptly nicknamed "Fakesters") representing celebrities, concepts, or fictional characters, prompting the company to prohibit the practice and begin actively deleting these pages. Frustrated by its unreliable performance and angered by the service's profile deletion, many Friendster users in the United States abandoned the site

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[9] danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (October 2007): 212, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x.

[10] David Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect: The inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World*, 1st Simon & Schuster trade pbk. ed (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011), 67.

[11] Personal exchange with the authors, as described in boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites," 214.

[12] Personal exchange with the authors, as summarized in boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites," 214.

[13] Whether the fall of Friendster should be considered fortunate or unfortunate is a point of contention. Friendster has been called, "one of the biggest disappointments in Internet history." Max Chafkin, "How to Kill a Great Idea!," Inc.com, accessed November 14, 2014, http://www.inc.com/magazine/20070601/features-how-to-kill-a-great-idea.html.

entirely[14] (though the site rose rapidly in popularity in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore[15]). Currently, the site still functions in the US, though in a somewhat cruel twist of fate, it offers users the option of logging in using their Facebook credentials.[16]

Capitalizing on the disgruntlement of Friendster users, MySpace launched in 2003, and the site differentiated itself from other SNSs by adding features based on user demand (such as HTML-based profile customization). Though the site's management did not intend to especially attract bands, indie-rock musicians flocked to the service, and fans, excited by the prospect of directly connecting with their favorite bands, joined as well[17]. This symbiotic relationship between bands and their fans not only enabled the musicians to reach a broader audience, but also allowed fans to construct online identities based on affiliations and preferences. In 2004, when access to the Internet was more widely available[18], teenagers began to join in large numbers, bringing with them cadres of their own IRL friends. Finally, in 2005, News Corporation (run by Rupert Murdoch) bought Intermix Media, owner of MySpace, for $580 million.[19] This media coverage coupled with MySpace's policy of allowing minors to create profiles led to a number of sexual

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[14] danah m. boyd, "Friendster Lost Steam. Is MySpace Just a Fad?," *Apophenia Blog* (blog), 2006, http://www.danah.org/papers/#essays.
[15] Scott Goldberg, "Analysis: Friendster Is Doing Just Fine | Digital Media Wire | Connecting People & Knowledge," accessed November 27, 2014, http://www.dmwmedia.com/news/2007/05/13/analysis-friendster-is-doing-just-fine.
[16] "Friendster | Social Discovery | Free Online Gaming," Friendster, accessed November 26, 2014, http://www.friendster.com/.
[17] boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites," 217.
[18] Studies indicate that in 2005, 81.4% of American households had some form of Internet access, whether dial-up or broadband. (Because the survey was conducted by phone, however, a modest exclusion bias might have influenced the results. The study itself offers no such analysis; however, I believe it is relevant.) Aaron E. Carroll et al., "Household Computer and Internet Access: The Digital Divide in a Pediatric Clinic Population," *AMIA Annual Symposium Proceedings* 2005 (2005): 111–15.
[19] "News Corp in $580m Internet Buy," *BBC*, July 19, 2005, sec. Business, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4695495.stm.

interactions between adults and minors, generating even more headlines.[20] SNSs had broken into the mainstream, both in the US and abroad.

The large number of people attracted to social networking platforms spurred the development of SNSs dedicated to niche demographics, and Facebook was born as a college-specific social networking site in 2004. Initially open only to Harvard students, the service eventually expanded to other schools, requiring only that users register using an email address provided by their institution. The effect of such a restriction was that it "kept the site relatively closed and contributed to users' perceptions of the site as an intimate, private community."[21] In 2005, the site expanded to high school students, and then to anyone with a valid email address who is willing to claim that they are at least 13 years of age.[22] The community, though it lost its exclusivity, gained family members, professional contacts, and long-lost exes, all conveniently (if confusingly) lumped together under the term "friends."

III. Present Day: The Prevalence of Facebook[23]

In September of 2012, Facebook reached 1 billion registered users.[24] Two years later, in September of 2014, the site boasted 1.35 billion monthly active users, with 864

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[20] boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites." 217.
[21] boyd and Ellison, 218.
[22] "Help Center," Facebook, April 2014, https://www.facebook.com/help/157793540954833.
[23] Unsurprisingly given the complexity and breadth of Facebook's influence on our contemporary lives, academic work on the topic spans a variety of disciplines and employs diverse methodological approaches. Some of the earliest work on social network sites spans back to 2004, but as the platform itself evolves, so too must the scholarship. To date, the bulk of the analysis of social networking has focused on "impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, online/offline connections, and privacy issues." boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites," 219. To prevent opening multiple and unrelated cans of worms, I will review only work that pertains specifically to this dissertation. While issues of privacy and advertising pose important and compelling questions, they each require a more thorough treatment than this project would ever be able to give them.
[24] Geoffrey A. Fowler, "Facebook: One Billion and Counting," *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2012, sec. Tech, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10000872396390443635404578036164027386112.

million of them (on average) logging in each day.[25] Short of activities related to basic bodily maintenance, surely there are few things that 12% of the world's population (a population that includes young children, incarcerated individuals, and the very ill or incapacitated) all do on a daily basis. Of online adults in the United States, 71% are on Facebook, and these Facebook users are "highly engaged" with the platform, with fully 70% visiting the site every day, and 45% visiting multiple times per day.[26] In fact, an estimated 22% of time spent online in the United States is spent on social networking sites.[27]

But who is signing on, and what are they doing when they get there? In 2014, 77% of adult American women and 66% of adult American men had Facebook accounts.[28] Non-Hispanic white, black, and Latinx individuals were represented in approximately equal proportions, at 71%, 67%, and 73% of adult populations having accounts, respectively. College graduates (74%) were slightly more likely to have Facebook profiles than people with some college (71%) or high school education (70%). And as one might conjecture, the demographic factor most strongly correlated with Facebook usage was age: while only 56% of Internet users 65 or older had Facebook profiles, 87% of those aged 18-29 had Facebook profiles.[29] According to the Pew Media Social Media Update of 2014, 65% of Facebook users say they "frequently or

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[25] "Company Info," Facebook Newsroom, accessed November 26, 2014, https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/.
[26] Maeve Duggan et al., "Social Media Update 2014," *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project* (blog), accessed January 13, 2015, http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/social-media-update-2014/.
[27] "Social Networks and Blogs Now Account for One in Every Four and a Half Minutes Online," The Nielson Company, June 15, 2010, http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2010/social-media-accounts-for-22-percent-of-time-online.html.
[28] As with many of these studies, differences in terms of sexual orientation are not addressed, and the only gender categories available within most empirical studies cited are male and female.
[29] Duggan et al., "Social Media Update 2014."

sometimes" share, post, or comment on Facebook, rather than simply reading content.[30] The median number of Facebook "friends" is 155, though when asked how many of these were "actual" friends, the median number reported was 50.[31] But what exactly are they doing when they're on Facebook?

According to a study from 2012 by McAndrew et al, younger people tend to spend more time engaging with same-age individuals, while older people tend to spend proportionately more time looking at profiles of different-age people, especially family members. Overall, though, older people spent less time on Facebook and did less of all activities (such as looking at or posting photos, sending messages, and creating status updates) while there.[32] Women expended more hours on Facebook in a typical week than men did, seeking more direct interaction with and information about others, as well as engaging in more family-oriented Facebook activities. Women also devoted more time to photo-related activities, including impression management with respect to their own profile pictures.[33] Other studies investigating gender differences in Facebook usage reported similar results, and across these studies, the authors conclude that women, more than men, use Facebook for communication and relationship-building.[34] The Facebook activities analyzed in these studies ranged from posting to commenting to tagging (within

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[30] Duggan et al.
[31] Duggan et al.
[32] Francis T. McAndrew and Hye Sun Jeong, "Who Does What on Facebook? Age, Sex, and Relationship Status as Predictors of Facebook Use," *Computers in Human Behavior* 28, no. 6 (November 2012): 2359–65, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.07.007.
[33] Unfortunately, as with many scientific studies, this one did not address the Facebook usage habits of people who identified as genderqueer or transgender. It also fails to break down the data with respect to race, class, and sexual orientation.
[34] Reynol Junco, "Inequalities in Facebook Use," *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no. 6 (November 2013): 2328–36, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.05.005; Amanda M. Kimbrough et al., "Gender Differences in Mediated Communication: Women Connect More than Do Men," *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no. 3 (May 2013): 896–900, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.005.

status updates, photos, and videos), as well as messaging, providing rather robust evidence that the female participants interacted with the platform in a substantially different manner. In sum, according to McAndrew et al, the only measures in which men scored higher than women were the likelihood of having a serious facial expression in their profile picture and forgoing to have a profile picture of themselves at all (opting instead to have none, or using a cartoon or symbol in place of themselves).[35]

In addition to gendered differences, researchers suggest that inequalities also exist in Facebook usage along racial and socioeconomic lines (at least in the undergraduate populations studied), a phenomenon collectively called the "digital divide."[36] The precise nature of these differences remains a point of confusion. Citing a lack of corroborating data based differences between experimental parameters, the rapid evolution of SNSs, and a low sample size, as well as a dearth of studies on race and social media usage, researchers only venture to suggest that though African Americans spend as much time on Facebook as other racial groups, they were "less likely to check up on friends and tag photos."[37] Regarding socioeconomic status (which was gauged based on the parents' highest level of education), the researchers contend that those of lower socioeconomic status were "less likely to use Facebook for exactly the types of activities for which Facebook was created—communicating, connecting, and sharing with others."[38] Various causes of this discrepancy, such as unfamiliarity and lack of interest, have been postulated, and potential implications, like a failure to connect with the rest of the undergraduate population and a lower likelihood of employment, have also been

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[35] McAndrew and Jeong, "Who Does What on Facebook?"
[36] Junco, "Inequalities in Facebook Use."
[37] Junco, 2334.
[38] Junco, 2334.

discussed, but a consensus remains to be reached.

Social scientists have not only investigated the demographic breakdown in membership and use of Facebook, but they have also analyzed its users in terms of the Big Five personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. According to the Five Factor model, an individual's personality may be evaluated based on how they rank on these five bipolar continuums.[39] Ross et al summarize these traits neatly this way:

> The first trait, Neuroticism, reflects a person's tendency to experience psychological distress and high levels of the trait are associated with a sensitivity to threat. Extraversion, the second trait, reflects a person's tendency to be sociable and able to experience positive emotions. The third factor, Openness to Experience, represents an individual's willingness to consider alternative approaches, be intellectually curious and enjoy artistic pursuits. Agreeableness, as the fourth factor, is another aspect of interpersonal behavior, reflecting a tendency to be trusting, sympathetic and cooperative. The fifth dimension, Conscientiousness, reflects the degree to which an individual is organized, diligent and scrupulous.[40]

Several of these personality traits are believed to determine how individuals construct and maintain their social connections, and by extension, how they use SNSs and interact with their online friends. Indeed, some initial research has supported this theory: extraverted undergraduates generally have a higher number of Facebook friends[41], and they also tend to belong to more Facebook groups[42]. The findings make intuitive sense: individuals who

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[39] Robert R. McCrae and Oliver P. John, "An Introduction to the Five-Factor Model and Its Applications," *Journal of Personality* 60, no. 2 (June 1992): 175–215, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1992.tb00970.x. I am not here specifically endorsing this particular personality metric as the definitive method by which personalities can, or should, be mapped. However, I think the simplicity of the five factors lends the test well to some preliminary considerations of how Facebook use varies among people with different dispositions.

[40] Craig Ross et al., "Personality and Motivations Associated with Facebook Use," *Computers in Human Behavior* 25, no. 2 (March 2009): 579, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2008.12.024.

[41] Yair Amichai-Hamburger and Gideon Vinitzky, "Social Network Use and Personality," *Computers in Human Behavior* 26, no. 6 (November 2010): 1289–95, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.018.

[42] Ross et al., "Personality and Motivations Associated with Facebook Use."

thrive on social interaction would seek out more virtual connections that were experienced as "social" in some way. Those individuals who scored high on Neuroticism preferred the use of the Wall (now the Timeline), and those lower in Neuroticism tended to prefer photos.[43] Again, the findings seem to be aligned with what one might expect, as the more "neurotic" would prefer the fine-tuned control they have over their own words appearing on their wall or Timeline to the recalcitrant—and perhaps revealing—nature of the photograph. Greater sociability on Facebook correlated positively with higher levels of Openness to Experience (new frontiers for relationship building, one might infer), while Conscientiousness and Agreeableness did not seem to influence Facebook usage.[44]

With respect to personality factors not included in the Five Factor model but might potentially be of interest to sociologists or psychologists attempting to understand the social phenomenon that social media have become, undergraduates with high levels of narcissism[45] and those who are shy or socially anxious[46] tend to spend more time on Facebook. These findings might appear somewhat paradoxical, but again, reasonable explanations might be inferred. Individuals with narcissistic tendencies might find a new venue in which to craft and display a carefully-cultivated image of themselves inherently gratifying; by contrast, people who generally find concrete social interaction anxiety-inducing might appreciate the ability to lurk or be a Facebook "creeper,[47]" witness to interaction without being the subject of it, perhaps the digital equivalent of listening to a

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[43] Ross et al.
[44] Ross et al.
[45] Soraya Mehdizadeh, "Self-Presentation 2.0: Narcissism and Self-Esteem on Facebook," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 13, no. 4 (August 2010): 357–64, https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0257.
[46] Emily S. Orr et al., "The Influence of Shyness on the Use of Facebook in an Undergraduate Sample," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 12, no. 3 (June 2009): 337–40, https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.0214.
[47] Leslie Walker, "The Ins and Outs of Facebook Creeping," Life Wire, June 11, 2017, https://www.lifewire.com/what-does-creeping-mean-2655280.

conversation without the risk of suddenly finding oneself in the spotlight and expected to offer up an interesting reply.

Unfortunately, though not unexpectedly in a field of study still in its infancy, the data collected by various research teams do not always align. According to a different study on adult Australian Internet users, Facebook users tend to be less shy and less conscientious than nonusers of Facebook (though they did report stronger feelings of familial loneliness[48]). The more extroverted the user, the more they engaged with the communicative features of Facebook (messaging and chat). The more narcissistic the user, the more they posted photographs, and the more exhibitionistic (a subtype of narcissistic) the user, the more they posted status updates. The more neurotic the user, the more they preferred posting on the Wall (now the Timeline) of others, confirming research done by Ross et al. The more time spent per day on Facebook, the more neurotic and lonelier the user.[49] So, from this data, researchers draw the tentative conclusion that differences in personality correlate with different uses of Facebook, and though other teams may provide conflicting data, we may tentatively assume that there is some difference in how individuals use their Facebook accounts, whether it correlates with age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or personality. But these studies only touch on how Facebook is used based on identity markers or a personality battery; what motivations do the users themselves provide? Why do SNSs have such an allure?

A theory called Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) has been employed to understand why Facebook users engage with the platform in the specific way that they

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[48] For the purposes of this study, loneliness has been divided into three types: social, familial, and romantic.
[49] Tracii Ryan and Sophia Xenos, "Who Uses Facebook? An Investigation into the Relationship between the Big Five, Shyness, Narcissism, Loneliness, and Facebook Usage," *Computers in Human Behavior* 27, no. 5 (September 2011): 1658–64, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.02.004.

do. According to this theory, which emphasizes the agency of the individuals observed[50], users approach these sites with the intention of meeting certain needs, and these varied needs direct the specific context and manner of interaction.[51] Importantly, UGT also takes into account how the gratification of these needs reconstructs them.[52] Drawing upon this theory, communications researchers surveyed undergraduate SNS users and found nine distinct motivations for the use of SNSs: "expressive information sharing, habitual pass time, relaxing entertainment, cool and new trend, companionship, professional advancement, escape, social interaction, and new friendships."[53] Clunky though these phrases may be, each encompasses a constellation of related motivations for spending time on Facebook. Rating several individual items from each category on a Likert-type scale (rating an item from 1-5, with 1 corresponding to "strongly disagree" and 5 corresponding to "strongly agree"), aggregated subject data rated the categories as follows:

1. social interaction (keeping in touch with distant friends and family)- 4.14
2. habitual pass time (just a habit; a way to pass time when bored)- 3.61
3. expressive information sharing (providing information, related to my special interests, or things that might interest others)- 3.41
4. relaxing entertainment (for enjoyment or entertainment; to unwind)- 3.39
5. escapism (to get away from what I'm currently doing or forget about school, work, etc.)- 2.99
6. to meet new people (single item)- 2.99
7. cool and new trend (it is the cool thing to do; others are doing it)- 2.95

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[50] In addition to emphasizing the agency of individuals studied, the theory relies upon a degree of self-reflection and insight that might make its results suspect, or at least less robust. That is, many studies that employ this approach to human behavior assume that subjects can accurately pinpoint and report upon their motivations for their behavior. Whether this assumption is true or not may affect the veracity of the results of studies that reply upon

[51] Thomas E. Ruggiero, "Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century," *Mass Communication and Society* 3, no. 1 (February 2000): 3–37, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02.

[52] Andrew D. Smock et al., "Facebook as a Toolkit: A Uses and Gratification Approach to Unbundling Feature Use," *Computers in Human Behavior* 27, no. 6 (November 2011): 2322–29, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.07.011.

[53] Zizi Papacharissi and Andrew Mendelson, "Toward a New(Er) Sociability: Uses, Gratifications, and Social Capital on Facebook," in *Media Perspectives for the 21st Century*, ed. Papathanassopoulos (New York: Routledge, n.d.), 212–30.

8. companionship (so that I feel less lonely; there's no one else to talk with)—2.78
9. professional advancement (networking with professional contacts; posting my resume)- 2.57

Beyond simply examining user motivation for using the Facebook platform as a whole, however, researchers have investigated how needs drive preferential interaction with distinct features of the site, treating Facebook as a collection of tools rather than as a single monolithic website used uniformally by all members. Unsurprisingly, they discovered that users motivated by the desire to share information tended to use status updates, while those seeking social interaction and companionship (as well as relaxing entertainment) posted comments. Use of private messaging correlated with professional advancement and social interaction, while the chat feature was associated with social interaction only.[54]

One might also approach the study of Facebook usage by "profiling the non-users," as other social scientists have done.[55] Long prior to widespread Internet access, psychologists studied people in terms of their levels of sensation-seeking, defined as "the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences."[56] Among the four dimensions of a sensation-seeking predisposition (boredom susceptibility, experience seeking, disinhibition, and thrill seeking), users of Facebook proved to be more sensation-seeking than non-users in all dimensions except

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[54] Smock et al., "Facebook as a Toolkit."
[55] Pavica Sheldon, "Profiling the Non-Users: Examination of Life-Position Indicators, Sensation Seeking, Shyness, and Loneliness among Users and Non-Users of Social Network Sites," *Computers in Human Behavior* 28, no. 5 (September 2012): 1960–65, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.05.016.
[56] Marvin Zuckerman, *Behavioral Expressions and Biosocial Bases of Sensation Seeking* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27.

thrill seeking. The same study concluded that though non-users engaged in less social activity than Facebook users, they reported similar levels of life satisfaction and interpersonal satisfaction.[57]

Because a thorough critique of the scientific enterprise lies outside the scope of this work, these studies and data have been presented uncritically for the moment. However, because many philosophical claims made throughout this dissertation will be corroborated by empirical data insofar as it has been conducted and gathered, I would be remiss if I did not offer a few caveats regarding the methodology and analysis undergirding these studies. First, in many cases, only some of the individuals invited to participate in the research chose to respond, creating a self-selection bias, and in some cases, investigators offered a financial incentive (such as the chance to win a gift card in a drawing) for participation. Frequently, these studies were conducted through universities, so the participant pool consisted solely of undergraduates, who in some cases were required to participate for class credit, frequently in psychology courses.[58] Undergraduates certainly don't represent an accurate cross-section of the American population in multiple respects (by race, income level, education level, etc.), and the institutions supporting such studies (more likely to be research-oriented universities rather than community colleges or vocational schools) may not accurately reflect the institutions themselves. There are also the familiar issues with the relationship between correlation and causation that arise in the discussion section of many studies, leading to potentially flawed claims related to the data analyzed. In addition, many rely upon self-

[57] Sheldon, "Profiling the Non-Users."
[58] As one of my own psychology professors at Vanderbilt observed, "Undergraduates are the most-studied population on earth."

reporting, a measure that social media researchers themselves have discovered to be unreliable at times.[59] Finally, the need to quantify vast numbers of participant responses requires invoking identity categories and imposing numerical values on emotion, obscuring the nuance of experience and potentially valuable insights. In the succeeding chapters, it is not my intention to indict the scientific enterprise as a whole, but to temper the strength of its claims where necessary. It is my hope that such a theoretical treatment, coupled with a discussion of prevailing social dynamics arising within the virtual world, will provide a window into a virtual world often overlooked within philosophy.

IV. But Who Cares?

In response to the preceding pages, one might sincerely ask (as I think we always must), "So what?" Ubiquity alone does not justify a philosophical analysis of Facebook. However, I think that the case can be easily made that Facebook is a force shaping both individuals and communities. For some, the Internet and SNSs represent the coming of a new age of democratic participation and connection[60]; for others, the extent to which our social contact is mediated through text messaging and Facebook is a harbinger of the death of genuine intersubjectivity and a generation of socially-stunted, intellectually narrow-minded drones[61]. Given the shifting social landscape, one that more and more includes virtual spaces, a thorough philosophical analysis of Facebook is required to

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[59] Reynol Junco, "Comparing Actual and Self-Reported Measures of Facebook Use," *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no. 3 (May 2013): 626–31, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.11.007.
[60] Leticia Bode et al., "A New Space for Political Behavior: Political Social Networking and Its Democratic Consequences," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19, no. 3 (April 2014): 414–29, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12048.
[61] One of the most vocal proponents of the latter position is Sherry Turkle. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=684281.

assess its merits and demerits. The question of how to embark on such an enterprise is fraught and perhaps overwhelming, but I will begin by suggesting a few topics of philosophical interest.

Facebook currently offers an About section (formerly the profile page) in addition to a Timeline section. The former, which presumably remains more static, allows a user to list their workplace, education, hometown, current residence, political and religious affiliations, birthday, and relationships to other Facebook users. The aptly-named Timeline allows the user to construct and display a rolling narrative: status updates advertise who the user is socializing with that evening, photos show their pets doing something endearing, and linked news articles or blog posts indicate what they think about current events. "Friends" of that user may also share something with them on their Timeline. Should the user desire, however, they can easily view posts from the beginning of their Facebook days, and so long as they choose not to delete them, they can retrieve anything from the most mundane status update to the most personal exchanges, and if their privacy settings allow, so can all of their Facebook friends.

What is the importance of this visible narrative, and does it constitute a new social phenomenon? One might rightly observe that narratives are not limited to literal tellings of facts and events in semi-public forums: narratives exist on and through bodies. Miriam Thalos and many others have observed that scars, tattoos, wrinkles, piercings, and various adornments (such as clothing, jewelry, and hairstyle) are all steeped in social significance and communicate a narrative or an identity, whether intentionally or inadvertently[62]. No matter how a person may choose or choose not to inhabit their body,

[62] Mariam Thalos, "Why I Am Not a Friend," in *Facebook and Philosophy: What's on Your Mind?*, ed. D. E. Wittkower, Popular Culture and Philosophy, v. 50 (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), 75–88.

they will say something, even if that something is a deliberate attempt at ambiguity. Further, an individual's every action, word choice, and silence draw deeply on their personal history, because their unique experiences inform all aspects of their being in the world. From the way they move through space to the tone of their voice to their syntax, their past comes forward. As Iris Marion Young has argued, we are not born throwing like girls; we learn to.[63] The way we look and behave is a testament to our experiences. Can the same be said of the selves that appear online? If, in the case of both "real world" and Facebook interactions, narratives bleed through, can there be a significant difference between the "real" self and the virtual self? At an even more fundamental level, what is a "self"? How does that self cohere with its community, and if both self and community are virtual, what then? This dissertation will attempt to answer these questions, but in doing so, will touch upon many other adjacent issues. Is the construction of an online identity meaningfully distinct from the construction of our concrete identities? Is the process of cultivating and grooming a self-image intentional or inadvertent, or some of both? If the process is intentional, does that necessarily mean that it is "false" rather than "authentic"? Does the ever-present narrative of Facebook's structure affect the self, both online and offline? More specifically, is there some virtue in being able to forget the day-to-day exchanges of the past, denied to us by the permanence of the Timeline? Day-to-day events are not the only things that used to be forgotten by the passage of time. Old friendships, previously destined to fall by the wayside as life stages are completed, often persist in some form thanks to social networks. Do these older friendships crowd our attention, preventing us from forming new ones or drawing valuable time and

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[63] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a Girl" and Other Essays*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

emotional energy away from our current friendships? Can these online relationships even be considered friendships, in the rich sense of the term? What might Aristotle say?[64] Does our ability to choose our own "friends" (in the social network sense of the term) create for us a new audience, one of like-minded individuals? Are we reduced to speaking our thoughts in an echo chamber, or have we finally found a way to institute a true social democracy by connecting to individuals with whom we would not have otherwise connected? And finally, as we navigate this new social landscape, what does it mean to be constantly bombarded with advertisements in side panels, and to see our friends promoting products on their own profiles? Facebook offers users the opportunity to earn money by posting advertisements on their page. In what way is social capital becoming tied up with capital itself, on Facebook? Is this blending of the social and the commercial more of the same, or is it something new?

Few would claim that occurrences of the virtual world have no impact on the concrete world. Tales of teenagers committing suicide after being shamed, harassed, or ridiculed on social media sites feature prominently in the 24 hour news cycle[65], and "cyberbulling" has sparked a national conversation about censorship, civility, and responsibility on the Internet. College students, after having been sexually assaulted at parties, have discovered that cellphone pictures of the event were disseminated through social media

[64]Some discussion of these questions is available here: Chris Condella, "Why Can't We Be Virtual Friends?," in *Facebook and Philosophy: What's on Your Mind?*, ed. D. E. Wittkower, Popular Culture and Philosophy, v. 50 (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), 111–22.

[65] Jennifer Steinhauer, "Verdict in MySpace Suicide Case," *The New York Times*, November 27, 2008, sec. US, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/27/us/27myspace.html.

like Instagram[66], and while such images may aid in the prosecution of the perpetrators[67], they also expose the victim to additional humiliation by offering up a horrifying and invasive experience to an untold number of eyes[68]. And certainly, during the coverage of Gamergate, stories broke of female journalists and game-designers being "doxxed" (wherein the target's personal information, including but not limited to home addresses and social security numbers, is publicized) and threatened to the point of being driven from their homes for safety concerns[69]. In many of these cases, dynamics of the concrete world are being recapitulated. Can the virtual world push back? Is there a way to leverage SNSs and other virtual spaces to disrupt these toxic dynamics in the concrete world?

There is certainly value in having a space for those who may not otherwise be able to connect to do so—communities of support for those who are neuroatypical, for queer-identified teenagers, and for consenting adults with unusual or uncommon sexual inclinations (e.g., furries[70]) are an invaluable resource for social groups facing marginalization and discrimination. For socially stigmatized groups, having safe online gathering places may foster a sense of community and the solidarity and support that company it. But this increased ability to congregate has a darker side: white supremacists

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[66] Richard A. Oppel Jr, "2 Teenagers Found Guilty in Steubenville, Ohio, Rape," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/us/teenagers-found-guilty-in-rape-in-steubenville-ohio.html.
[67] The Associated Press, "2 Ex-Vanderbilt Students Convicted of Rape," *The New York Times*, January 27, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/28/us/2-ex-vanderbilt-students-convicted-of-rape.html.
[68] David Schaper, "Should Viewers Of Facebook Live Gang Rape Face Charges?," NPR.org, April 4, 2107, http://www.npr.org/2017/04/04/522574666/should-viewers-of-facebook-live-gang-rape-face-charges.
[69] Keith Stuart, "Brianna Wu and the Human Cost of Gamergate: 'Every Woman I Know in the Industry Is Scared,'" the Guardian, accessed March 6, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/oct/17/brianna-wu-gamergate-human-cost.
[70] "Who Are the Furries?," *BBC*, November 13, 2009, sec. Magazine, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8355287.stm.

are also able to mobilize[71] [72]. Misogynists can embark on campaigns of mass harassment[73], or just share images depicting violence against women[74]. Pedophiles swap photos of teenagers[75] and children[76]. Harmful propensities may be nurtured or normalized, with "real" world consequences for the targets of these mindsets.

On a less sinister note, SNSs have also been used by university instructors in an effort to enhance student learning and to reduce student attrition (especially among populations in which attrition rates are disproportionately high, such as first-generation college students). The results of these efforts have been mixed, seemingly very dependent upon the students using the technologies and what specific tools instructors employ. Previous research indicates that social integration increases learning outcomes and degree completions[77], but not all types of Facebook activity lead to social integration or positive academic outcomes.[78] For this reason, instructors attempting to use SNSs to facilitate student learning have had inconsistent results. In an era increasingly reliant upon technologies (from class blogs to Massive Open Online Courses) to meet academic objectives, these issues become all the more pressing.

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[71] "People of Stormfront: Meet Hate Webmaster Robert H. DePasquale," *Hatewatch* (blog), accessed November 13, 2014, http://www.splcenter.org/blog/2014/11/07/people-of-stormfront-meet-hate-webmaster-robert-h-depasquale/.
[72] Bridget Todd, "Does Anything Go? The Rise and Fall of a Racist Corner of Reddit," The Atlantic, July 16, 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/07/does-anything-go-the-rise-and-fall-of-a-racist-corner-of-reddit/277585/.
[73] Stuart, "Brianna Wu and the Human Cost of Gamergate."
[74] Fern, o Alfonso III on June 10, and 2014, "Reddit Bans Infamous Forum about Beating Women," The Daily Dot, accessed March 6, 2015, http://www.dailydot.com/news/reddit-beating-women-banned/.
[75] Morris Kevin, "Reddit Shuts down Teen Pics Section," The Daily Dot, October 11, 2011, http://www.dailydot.com/society/reddit-r-jailbait-shutdown-controversy/.
[76] Patrick Howell O'Neill, "8chan, the Central Hive of Gamergate, Is Also an Active Pedophile Network," The Daily Dot, November 17, 2014, http://www.dailydot.com/politics/8chan-pedophiles-child-porn-gamergate/.
[77] Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[78] Reynol Junco, "The Relationship between Frequency of Facebook Use, Participation in Facebook Activities, and Student Engagement," *Computers & Education* 58, no. 1 (January 2012): 162–71, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.08.004.

Finally, one might wonder about the role of advertising in this new social sphere. Services like Facebook, which assure us that they will always be free to users, run on advertising revenue. These advertisements are not limited to blocks of text and images lurking in the sidebar. Instead, companies create their own separate pages for their products, encouraging Facebook users "like" them and "share" them with friends. Our social lives become commercialized, and inversely, our commercial choices have been socialized. Products (or the public relations employees animating them) not only encourage consumer feedback, but stage dialogue between consumer and product.[79] Topics of discussion extend beyond the product, and the pages often share the latest viral video or comment on world events[80]. The products themselves develop personalities. Not all of the preceding examples involve Facebook, but all pertain to SNSs and raise pressing philosophical questions. I hope it is obvious that our online lives bleed into our concrete lives (and vice versa), and I believe that a robust understanding of the relationship of the virtual world to the concrete world must undergird the discussion of these myriad issues. In order for the complex dynamics of Internet behaviors to be understood, we must first interrogate the nature of the identities of the selves engaging in them. Philosophically as well as legally, a foundation must be established in order for us to tease out the even more complicated issues. What does it mean to be a self on the Internet? What is the nature of our virtual relationship to others? How do we assess the complicated boundary (or lack thereof) between the concrete and virtual realms? Does

[79] The amusing exception to this principle is Xfinity/Comcast's page, where the page moderator blithely posts cute animals videos and movie trailers while ignoring the deluge of posts from angry consumers going on frustrated tirades about their cable service.

[80]Tide, a household cleaning product, recently wished Leonard Nimoy a farewell on their product page after his death. "Tide," Facebook, accessed March 6, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/Tide.

the virtual realm offer a unique potential for social meaning-making, or does it represent a degeneration of our truly social being? These questions are at the foundation of this dissertation.

V. Defining Social Media

For the purposes of offering the most concrete analysis possible, I take Facebook as the quintessential example of social media.[81] Of course, even given this very concrete paradigm, I must cede the point that Facebook (much to its users' very vocal dismay[82]) evolves quite rapidly, and for this reason my analysis must come with the caveat that it can make few claims to eternal truth or relevance in perpetuity. However, in order to avoid this work becoming obsolete at the unveiling of Facebook's next "new look," I will offer a few general characteristics of the form of social media that I intend to interrogate. It is my hope that outlining these broad hallmarks will extend the life of my analysis. Though these criteria are not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive (as it is not my purpose here to strictly delineate what is or is not social media), they will provide a rough outline of the types of communities I wish to analyze.

For my purposes, then, social media will refer to a specific subset of Internet communities in which individuals construct personae (perhaps falsified, but to which users are committed by login credentials) or use personalities that reflect the user's "real life" persona. In either case, the individual creates an online identity to which they return or that they assume in their participation within that community. The community must

[81] Given that Facebook boasts more individual users and accounts than any other platform, in addition to its multigenerational participation and worldwide reach, it is a unique and ubiquitous virtual space for study.
[82] "Facebook Changes to Address User Complaints," CNET, accessed March 6, 2015, http://www.cnet.com/news/facebook-changes-to-address-user-complaints/.

require an account as the sole point of entry into the community; anonymous consumption of content and participation in discussions does not fall within the scope of my analysis. Further, the community must make this identity to accessible to other participants. Though privacy settings might permit restrictions being placed on the visibility of a user's information, a space must remain for that information to be notable in its absence. In other words, the social media to which I am referring must have a dedicated profile page for each user, and only through that profile may a user engage with the larger community.

The content of this community must also be primarily user-generated or user-amalgamated, rather than being produced by the website host. News websites, for example, often provide comments sections below articles, and users (some of whom may even have accounts and associated profiles) can engage in discussion with other users. However, the majority of the content of the page (i.e., the article) has been created by an employee of the website itself. Though I do not wish to imply that such forums are sociologically or philosophically irrelevant, I do wish to exclude such websites from my analysis. I will instead focus on those communities in which the majority of the content has been created or curated by the users themselves. This content might be photos, links, status updates, notes, or videos, but the users themselves must select the content to display.

These users must also be able to formalize their connections with each other, through "friending" (as on Facebook) or "connecting" (as on LinkedIn). Facebook has primarily served to connect people that are already acquainted in the concrete world, as opposed to primarily working to create new connections, as in the case of dating sites like

OkCupid or Match.com. For this reason, Facebook generally serves to supplement or provide an online complement to pre-existing friendships and communities, where other SNSs foster the development of entirely new personal networks. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, this distinction is immaterial, and I only wish to emphasize the requirement that users must be able to curate a network of other users for themselves, a visibly articulated web of connections.

Finally, and stemming from the previous criteria, the site must facilitate the interaction of users with one another. In other words, there must be dedicated space for users to comment upon or respond directly to the profiles or posts of others—the platform must be, in a word, "social." Without the ability for users to communicate directly with one another, either on each other's Timelines or on a post they both see, they are simply projecting themselves onto a website, with little incentive or ability to engage with one another. This final criterion establishes that the websites referred to in this analysis are, in at least some sense, communities that foster user interaction.

VI. Foundations

Every philosophical venture begins with some foundational principles. Though many will become evident over the coming chapters, I will mention two at the outset.

1. American pragmatist William James has lamented the paucity of language for describing relations.[83] The "with" and "about" and "between"—are all reduced to single terms, and yet, what the words themselves signify is robust and profound, because they

[83] William James, "The Thing and Its Relations," in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition, Including an Annotated Bibliography Updated through 1977*, ed. John J. McDermott, A Phoenix Book (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 214–26.

signify an experience. The words, as they are commonly used, describe a relationship between two experienced objects: the conversation is "between" us, while I am in this room "with" you. These conjunctions and prepositions, unassuming little grammatical particles tying two objects together, constitute an experience just as real as the two things being united. Following William James, I hold that relations are "as real as the terms united by them."[84] The "withness" between us is not simply a way that we are oriented toward each other, but it is itself a real thing.

In essence, this dissertation aims to elucidate relations in their variety and complexity. Some relation stands between the concrete world and the virtual world, but the nature of that in-between has rarely been thoroughly investigated from a philosophical perspective. Philosophical literature on Facebook is even more scarce: aside from a handful of articles addressing a disparate set of issues, little has been done. Working from the assumption that the relation between the concrete and virtual worlds has a substance, and that the most basic unit of the SNS is a digital self, I will attempt to create a foundation by which we may understand the relations between and among virtual selves.

2. For John Dewey, the greatest service philosophy can render this world is the betterment of real, individual lives. He writes:

> When it is acknowledged that under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with the precious values embedded in social traditions, that it has sprung from a clash of social ends and from a conflict of inherited institutions with incompatible contemporary tendencies, it will be seen that the task of future philosophy is to clarify [people]'s ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day. Its aim is to become so far as humanly possible an organ for dealing with these conflicts.[85]

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[84] James, 220.
[85] John Dewey, "Reconstruction in Philosophy," in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 12 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 94.

I take this assertion very seriously, and in taking it as a fundamental principle of this project, I hope to use my analysis of Facebook to suggest how it might be used in the service of social progress. While I do not anticipate stumbling upon absolute truths (which would be incompatible with the pragmatic approach anyway), one cannot discuss using SNSs to reify or disrupt problematic social norms of the concrete world (or, for that matter, in the virtual world) without first understanding just what those relationships are.

VII. On the "Real" and the Virtual

Those who write on the subject of Facebook and its effects on our social relations often fall somewhere along a continuum with two poles. The first pole (which I'll refer to as "the reactionary") reflects a deep suspicion of the medium's potential for fostering or supporting genuine, dynamic interpersonal relationships, while the second pole ("the technophile") tends to see such technologies as a forerunner of the great global village. Closer to the first pole are individuals like sociologist Sherry Turkle, who believe that electronic technologies are destroying our ability to relate to other individuals. The second pole reflects a more optimistic attitude, focusing on the potential that SNSs have to connect us to worlds we would not otherwise have access to. Though few individuals thorough-goingly espouse the most extreme poles of the continuum, I will call such positions the reactionary and the technophile, respectively.

I seek to undermine this continuum by upending the radical distinction between the "real" (or concrete) world and the virtual world. The purpose of dismantling this distinction is to enable us to understand our relationships (to our digital selves, to our concrete compatriots, and to our digital friends) more fluidly, to flesh out these relations in such a

way that we may honor their complexity and nuance. By clinging to the idea that the virtual spaces (and our virtual selves) are merely derivative shadows of our concrete lives, we ignore the possibility such spaces offer for playing with identity, for locating a safe space to connect with others like us, and to converse with individuals we may never have encountered in our concrete lives. Conversely, by lauding the coming "global village" as the pinnacle and ultimate end of human society, we ignore the troubling ways in which virtual spaces are used to recapitulate and reify existing inequalities, as well as the possibility that our interactions with others more resemble consumption than recognition.

Though undermining this dichotomy will not answer all the challenges from both poles of this debate, nor will a simple change of lingo dissolve their concerns, I think it will offer language for more productive conversations between the two sides. Both the reactionary and the technophile share a desire: to foster genuine relationships among individuals. By dissolving the dichotomy of the concrete and the virtual, we may more sensitively analyze the intersubjective moments within both worlds.

VIII. Chapters In Summary

Chapter Two: *Persons and Personas*

This chapter will focus on the relationship of our concrete selves to our selves in the virtual realm. Drawing upon the influential work of John Dewey and Judith Butler, I will develop a conception of self that can account for both its concrete and virtual instantiations.

John Dewey's self is transactional (to borrow Shannon Sullivan's term), so much so that the boundaries between self and environment blur. He explains, "There is nothing in nature that *belongs* absolutely and exclusively to anything else; belonging is always a matter of reference and distributive assignment, justified in any particular case as far as it works well."[86] This self, inextricably grounded in its environment and its experience, cannot be extracted, nor can it eschew its context and situation. It is, in a profound sense, a locus of relations. It irrevocably stands in a constant, reciprocally transformative relationship with its environment. As part of this co-constitutive transaction, the self develops habits to aid in using natural conditions as means to ends. Dewey also recognizes the social basis of many habits, and he worries that sedimented habits result in an intellectual, emotional, or physical ossification that may stunt growth or inhibit intelligent action[87]. With this ossification, oppressive social hierarchies may persist, to the detriment of a community. Because of the insidious and subtle nature of habits of opinion, the "toughest of all habits," Dewey particularly worries about their influence and the means by which such ossification may be counteracted.[88]

Judith Butler introduced the performative self in her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in 1988[89] and further developed it in her 1990 work, *Gender Trouble*. For Butler, aspects of identity

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[86] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Later Works: Volume 1 ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981 [1925]) 180.
[87] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, The Middle Works, 1899-1924, Volume 9: 1916 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).
[88] John Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," in *Essays, Reviews, Miscellany, and The Public and Its Problems*, ed. Bridget A Walsh, The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 2: 1925-1927 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois university press, 1984), 336.
[89] Katie Conboy et al., eds., "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, A Gender and Culture Reader (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 401–17.

(specifically, gender identity) are performative accomplishments compelled by social sanction and taboo. Acts both constitute meaning and perform meaning, to such an extent that the historical idea is taken for an essential fact. Though individuals performing their identities may believe their performances to be expressive of an essential nature, the performance may not be seamless, revealing the illusion of gender. In this disruption of the illusion, the reified status of gender may be contested. It is gender's status as a performance that provides the key to its undoing.

Using both Dewey and Butler, I will argue for a conception of a self that is both transactional and performative. I hope to demonstrate that their ideas represent completely compatible and even complementary approaches to the idea of the self, and that performing one's identity is simply what it means to be a self in a nuanced and complicated social milieu, at the center of a locus of relations to entities both sentient and inanimate. In a social context, habits are performances, many of which are compelled by sanction and taboo, or more colloquially, expectations and reactions.

Yet, a theoretical bridge must be constructed between the performances of the real self and the virtual self. When Butler speaks in the language of phenomenology and discusses performative acts, she calls forth visions of an embodied self that enacts and constitutes meaning. Internet personas do not have bodies in the traditional sense, however. We must ask, to what extent do they continue to perform their gender or other aspects of their identities? Drawing on Shannon Sullivan's work on concrete bodying, I will argue that individuals still perform their identities in multiple and recognizable ways, regardless of the physical presence of a body.[90] Rather than offering anonymity and

[90] To claim that the body is not present is controversial, and in the context of this dissertation, I will argue that it is, to some extent, still present in a virtual world. Images and avatars communicate particular styles

disembodiment, the Internet offers yet another social theater in which aspects of an identity may be performed.

Chapter Three: *Transaction and Communication in the Flesh*

As Butler notes, meanings are not performed by an individual in a vacuum: they are either socially sanctioned or punished in the process of crafting an identity. Her work in *Gender Trouble*, however, focuses on a single side of the equation, and we might ask to what extent these performances are expected, demanded, and detected. The Implicit Association Test (IAT), developed by Harvard psychologists Anthony Greenwald, Debbie McGee, and Jordan Schwartz, measures the strength of an automatic pairing of concepts in a subject's cognition[91]. This tool, through a variety of different permutations, reveals what feminist philosophers and philosophers of race have often argued: biases are often bolstered or sustained by subconscious but pernicious associations, measurable even in subjects who claim to have no explicit racist or sexist beliefs. For example, women tend to be more strongly associated with family while men are more strongly associated with careers[92], and black individuals are more readily associated with weapons

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of embodiment, and many habits of speech translate into habits of writing. Though the physical body may not be seen across virtual space, remnants of its stylistics of existence persist.

[91] Anthony G. Greenwald, Debbie E. McGhee, and Jordan L. K. Schwartz, "Measuring Individual Differences in Implicit Cognition: The Implicit Association Test.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 6 (1998): 1464–80, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1464. The IAT has been the subject of some controversy: for example, it has been observed that the test may only gauge the strength of the association of two concepts, and not the extent to which a subject actually endorses those associations. For my purposes, the most prominent objections to claims made using the IAT have been levied against its use in further interpretive claims that I do not make, and so I believe that I sidestep these debates.

[92] Brian A. Nosek et al., "Pervasiveness and Correlates of Implicit Attitudes and Stereotypes," *European Review of Social Psychology* 18, no. 1 (November 2007): 21–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/10463280701489053.

while white people are more readily associated with harmless objects[93] [94]. Other instances of the test confirm the existence of other biases: in general, people prefer thin over fat, light skin over dark skin, white over black, and youth over age. I believe that these habits of thought represent a portion of the sedimented habits of opinion that so concerned Dewey, and while they might not rise to the level of explicit or expressed attitudes, the influence of such subconscious pairings surely seeps out in into our day-to-day dealings with others that we encounter.

For Dewey, institutions are complexes of embodied habits of thought and feelings[95]. Systemic biases, then, are just such conglomerations of habits of opinion, as are (I will argue) social performances of identity. Miranda Fricker takes the suggestions a step further in her work on epistemic injustice: when testimonial, identity-based prejudices are allowed to deflate the credibility or trustworthiness of a speaker, a habit of thought about a class of individuals has been allowed to affect that the treatment of the individual in question (oftentimes compounding their inability to influence the meaning of the social category that leads to their exclusion)[96].

In this chapter, I draw upon Fricker's work to argue that our collective and individual wrangling with meaning-making is one of the most fundamental features of human interaction and transaction, and that the failures of our communicative undertakings are as important as its successes to our relationships with others. Because some social groups have greater access to our shared hermeneutical resources than others,

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[93] Nosek et al., 20.
[94] Such associations have only become more salient in recent political discourse, particularly in the wake of the 2016 presidential election and the momentum of #BlackLivesMatter.
[95] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, The Middle Works, 1899-1924, Volume 14: 1922 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 77.
[96] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

particular individuals are disproportionately affected; however, the key insight will be that a similar struggle may be witnessed in the interactions of digital selves on Facebook as they grapple with new tools to express themselves and cultivate their identities and relationships. The struggle to communicate and create meaning together within virtual space will become the centerpiece of the final chapter.

Chapter Four: *Interaction on the Internet: This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*

This chapter will establish that these systemic biases and performances of identity take a recognizable form in social media, and I will discuss just how they appear within a virtual world. Derailing, discrediting, and threats of identity-specific violence make up the experience of many already-marginalized individuals, as do epistemic and hermeneutical injustice[97]. Because interactions between users are often limited to verbal exchange via written word (without access to concrete vocal tone, bodily gestures, and facial cues), much of this chapter will attend to the politics of discourse.

This language targets specific features of another user's embodiment, often those physical features that lead to a marginalized status within the wider community. Whitney Phillips, in her work on Internet trolls, offers a number of useful examples of this practice: female posters on the forum Reddit are often called to post pictures of their breasts or leave the forum. Female bloggers and journalists, particularly those writing about controversial issues, regularly face threats of rape.[98] In both instances, female social media users experience verbal attacks on the sexualized parts of their bodies, which serve to remind them of their risk of being victimized qua women. Even in the absence of a

[97] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.
[98] Stuart, "Brianna Wu and the Human Cost of Gamergate."

physical confrontation, they are reminded of their vulnerable embodiment (which, not coincidentally, is an embodiment that lessens the importance of their contributions as it reminds them that they are the objects rather than subjects of a gaze).

As many philosophers like George Herbert Mead have observed, selves are multiple, dynamic, and transactive. A self cannot be fully exposed, even in the most extensive interactions and intimate settings; its different facets may only be glimpsed singly. Even within the "real" world, selves are mediated through various cultural cues, symbols, and performances. Though the virtual realm may offer one more social theater within which a self may perform and construct an identity, the process is not fundamentally distinct from performance and identities within other social theaters and meaning-making spaces. Identity comprises both conscious and unconscious cues, and these cues are read (or ignored or misunderstood) accordingly.

Dynamics of oppression and marginalization within the real world are recapitulated within the virtual world, leading to interactions and power relations that remarkably resemble their real-world counterparts. Identities are performed and disrupted within the virtual social sphere as they are in the real world. But most crucially, selves can be observed using the tools at their disposal to give voice to experience and create new meanings. Some Facebook interactions—the rickroll, advice animals, and other memes, which cannot retain their meaning if extracted from their virtual context—suggest that the virtual world is well and truly a space unto itself.

Afterword: *Death and Facebook: Where Do We Go From Here?*

To bookend this work with the personal experiences and reflections that gave rise to it, I ask what this analysis might suggest regarding the death of digital selves. While it might seem an almost ludicrous question to ask if and how a virtual self might die, concrete and virtual worlds do transact with one another. Death of a self in the concrete world poses tough enough questions, but even less is understood about death of a virtual self. I do not even hope to answer these questions, but I do wish to highlight the pressing need for a greater understanding of the nature of virtual selves and what sorts of ethical demands, from both the concrete and the digital realm, they might make of us.

Chapter 2

Persons and Personas

I. Introduction

I take the most basic unit of my analysis to be the self, and a robust theory of self must be able to account for both its concrete and virtual instantiations. Countless theories about the self—what it is, how it is formed, how it encounters other selves—have been advanced over the course of thousands of years of philosophical investigation, but I will here only discuss two: that of John Dewey and that of Judith Butler. Because I am not the first person to observe that Dewey and Butler might provide complementary accounts of the self and its engagement with its world, and because we share a similar approach to the philosophical enterprise as a whole, I will also be drawing on the work of Shannon Sullivan, who offers a feminist pragmatist perspective I find both persuasive and illuminative. Like Sullivan, I believe that Dewey's transactional self and Butler's performative self might be harmoniously interwoven to produce an even more robust theory, one that balances both the physical and social influences of the environment, as well as the transformative powers of both the actor and audience. But, before I begin delving into Dewey and Butler's accounts of the self specifically, I will provide a background against which their approaches may be situated, as this context will be increasingly important as this project advances.

II. John Dewey on the Self: Transaction and Habit

"Experience," in Deweyan terminology, connotes more than just an isolated encounter with an object or momentary interaction with another person. Located inextricably within a physical as well as cognitive context, every experience evokes, or even contains, a host of memories, emotions, and connotations. As Charlene Haddock-Seigfried observes, "Context includes both the temporal and spatial background which are not consciously attended to and selective interest. It includes the horizon of meaning and value that gives point to everything said."[99] The lamp seen in a doctor's office is a doctor's office lamp, and one the bears a relationship to previously experienced lamps, whether present in artwork or in a childhood bedroom. Experience, in other words, is "funded," and "[t]he relations and consequences of an object…can become the very meaning (both referential and immanent) of the thing itself."[100] Because experience is continuous and no individual point may be excised from the stream, past experiences provide context that informs current experience, providing it shape and definition. Given that the moment of birth inaugurates the infant into a world of pre-existing social meanings that permeate and inform the navigation of her world, the context of any experience is rife with social significance. Conceived as continuous, funded, contextual and social, experience must then be dynamic and changing, in every moment unique unto itself.

This formulation of experience leads to an important conclusion: no experience ought to be considered more "real" than another, and "things…are what they are

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[99] Seigfried, "Where Are All the Pragmatist Feminists?," 15.
[100] John J. Stuhr, "John Dewey: Introduction," in *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, ed. John J. Stuhr, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 440.

experienced as."[101] Should a zoologist and a jockey observe the same horse, neither account of the animal should be considered more real than the other; each experience is equally real. Further, Dewey offers this example: should a person sitting alone in a house hear a noise in the next room, and in her uncertainty as to what the noise was, deem it a "terrifying noise," then even walking into the next room and seeing that the noise was caused by a shutter banging against the house does not change the fact that the noise was terrifying. The noise as first experience, the "terrifying noise," continues to be a qualitatively different and distinct noise from the sounds heard after the listener discovered that they were only produced from a shutter banging against the house. The previous experience, that of noise-as-terrifying, may be less *true* than the following experience, noise-as-harmless, but neither can be said to be more real. Similarly, the occurrence of an illusion is not itself an illusion, but a genuine reality. Appearance does not stand in contrast with reality; though an illusion may be an illusion, the experience of that illusion is actual.[102]

Experience represents one side of a mutually transformative, co-constitutive relationship between individual and environment: the boundaries between self and environment, for Dewey, are both permeable and fluid. He writes, "There is nothing in nature that *belongs* absolutely and exclusively to anything else; belonging is always a matter of reference and distributive assignment, justified in any particular case as far as it works well."[103] The self exists in continuity with the environment, and the lines we mentally

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[101] This is Dewey's postulate of immediate empiricism, described in John Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," in *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, ed. John J. Stuhr, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 455–59.
[102] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 1: 1925 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2008), 27. Emphasis is Dewey's.
[103] Dewey, 180.

draw around it to distinguish it from its surroundings may serve a purpose, but are not thereby more real. He further explains, "Experience, a serial course of affairs with their own characteristic properties and relationships, occurs, happens, and is what it is. Among and within these occurrences, not outside of them nor underlying them, are those events which are denominated selves."[104] This self, inextricably grounded in its environment and its experience, cannot be extracted, nor can it eschew its context and situation in pursuit of the view from nowhere. Because each person is embodied, "a differential has to found in distinctive *ways* of experiencing natural objects; it is perceived that man [*sic*] is an emotional and imaginative as well as observing and reasoning creature, and that different manners of experiencing affect the status of subject-matter experienced."[105] Environment, by way of experience, profoundly impacts the development and trajectory of the self.

Influence, however, operates in both directions, and the self's experiences return to mold the environment that gave rise to them. In order to preserve the precision of Dewey's characterization, I quote him at length:

> That an individual, possessed of some mode and degree of organized unity, participates in the genesis of every experienced situation, whether it be an object or an activity, is evident. That the way in which it is engaged affects the quality of the situation experienced is evident. That the way in which it is engaged has consequences that modify not merely the environment but which react to modify the active agent; that every form of life in the higher organisms constantly conserves some consequences of its prior experiences, is also evident. The constancy and pervasiveness of the operative presence of the self as a determining factor in all situations is the chief reason why we give so little heed to it; it is more intimate and omnipresent in experience than the air we breathe.[106]

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[104] Dewey, 179.
[105] Dewey, 183. Emphasis is Dewey's.
[106] Dewey, 189.

The self, then, is irrevocably transactional, constantly engaged in a reciprocally transformative relationship with its environment. Dualisms such as subject and object, self and world, dissolve into continuities and gradients. As the self is shaped by the environment, so too does the self impress upon the environment, altering it in turn. Interactions with others are no exception, and selves shape other selves as they both alter their environment and encounter each other, be it through physical change or the use of language and meanings. Just as selves are delineated within their environments to the extent that it "works well," the same occurs with physical objects and their meanings. We have no word for "a book with a whiteboard marker taped to the cover" because such a concept is not useful except as a thought experiment to garner odd looks from classrooms of undergraduates. Though physically and conceptually plausible, the book/marker combination serves little purpose in human life, and so we do not name it.

III. The Tyranny of Habit

Dewey recognizes that human beings, starting from youth, develop habits, or, "ability to use natural conditions as means to ends," which includes both habits of action as well as thought.[107] In some cases, the habits prove useful, alleviating the immense cognitive or physical burden of navigating a complex social landscape, but when habits become fixed, they mark an end to plasticity, an end to open learning and intelligent behavior. Dewey recognizes the role of a social group in the formation of habit and customs, as well as the consequent rigidity of social strata. He describes habit, the "mainspring of human action," this way: "Habits bind us to orderly and established ways of action because they

[107] It is worth noting, however, that Dewey denies the thought/action and mind/body dualism. More on this in the next section. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 51.

generate ease, skill and interest in things to which we have grown used and because they instigate fear to walk in different ways, and because they leave us incapacitated for the trials of them."[108] Because of the remarkable persistence of habit, individuals will sometimes continue to behave and think in their accustomed manners, without regard for the demands of their developing historical situation, even beyond the point when those habits prove themselves detrimental to our capacity to effectively navigate our physical or conceptual environments. Due to advancements in technology and the invention of the Antilock Braking System, cadence braking has become a dangerous, rather than potentially life-saving, physical habit for most drivers of modern cars. However, habits may be more than just automatic physical responses or mental tics. Because of the insidious and subtle nature of habits of opinion, the "toughest of all habits," Dewey particularly worries about their influence and the means by which such ossification may be counteracted.

Ossification of habits, both physical and cognitive, represents an obstacle to democracy, a way of life that emphasizes the role of constant inquiry and communication in the achievement of social equality. Dewey recognizes a distinction between political democracy (a form of government) and democracy as a social form. Though the two are connected, "the idea [of democracy] remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships. Yet in discussion they must be distinguished. The idea of democracy is wider and fuller than can be exemplified in the state even at its best."[109] In pragmatic spirit, Dewey emphasizes democracy in its concrete instantiation—a relationship among individuals—rather than as an abstract political ideal. He defines

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[108] Dewey, "The Public and Its Problems," 335.
[109] Dewey, 323.

democracy this way: "From the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of the members of a group in harmony with the interested and goods which are common."[110] These associations, however, cannot be meaningfully maintained without the perfecting of the means and ways of communication "so that genuinely shared interested in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desires and effort and thereby direct action."[111] This is no starry-eyed idealism on Dewey's part; he recognizes that no such state of democracy as a way of life has existed, and he knows that a number of factors that prevent both effective inquiry and social change. Not only do pre-formed conceptions create cognitive roadblocks to new information, but also people who have an interest in maintaining the existing social structure might actively work to preserve it.

The key to overcoming these roadblocks may be found in earnest inquiry, open communication, and knowledge. He explains, "But in fact, knowledge is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned. Faculties of effectual observation, reflection and desire are habits acquired under the influence of the culture and institutions of society, not ready-made inherent powers."[112] For this reason, the distribution of knowledge, both scientific and social, is of utmost importance in a society that takes

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[110] Dewey, 328.
[111] Dewey, 332.
[112] Dewey, 334.

democracy as a way of life, and thus works for equality. Both freedom of inquiry and expression must be protected to ensure the distribution of this knowledge, and Dewey knows that simple legal freedom does not suffice to overcome subconscious biases and fears. Purity of knowledge is "wholly a moral matter, an affair of honesty, impartiality, and generous breadth of intent in search and communication. The adulteration of knowledge is due not to its use, but to vested bias and prejudice, to one-sidedness of outlook, to vanity, to conceit of possession and authority, to contempt or disregard of human concern in its use."[113] To realize purity of knowledge on Dewey's account, then, inquiry must be constant, thorough, and well-meaning, and its results communicated in the formation of public opinion. Public opinion formed without a constant feedback loop cannot be called opinion, nor can it have any but an injurious influence.

Dewey's concern with democracy as a way of life (rather than as a political system) reflects his concern with the concrete rather than the universal. In lieu of advocating a political system that dictates some overarching formal procedures to many disparate individuals, he advocates a manner of conducting personal interaction founded on inquiry and communication, a means of conducting everyday practices. He also sees this relationship as the only remedy for selves that are prone to forming habits that stunt social progress and prevent "a life of free and enriching community."[114] Somehow, human beings in association must find the balance between habits that expedite our dealings with our environment (such as motor skills like shoe tying or cognitive shortcuts like assuming the people sitting in our classrooms are students) and those that potentially hinder those dealings (like pumping rather than pressing the brakes in a car with an

[113] Dewey, 345.
[114] Dewey, 350.

antilock breaking system, or making biased implicit associations about the folks we encounter in our daily lives[115]).

IV. Judith Butler's Self: Gender as a Style of Being

The 1970s saw the emergence (or more visible continuance) of a number of social movements, including women's rights, civil rights, gay and lesbian liberation, and environmental politics.[116] But, "[d]uring the 1980s, those [movements] based on identity (particularly the women's movement and the gay and lesbian movement) soon began to experience certain difficulties in speaking of and for their constituencies."[117] To claim some unified or essentialized identity risked further marginalizing members of groups advocating fervently for recognition, undermining the very purpose of the movement; to deny a common identity seemed to jeopardize the feeling of solidarity that united them. First published in 1990, Butler's groundbreaking work, *Gender Trouble,* is framed in terms of this debate and opens by taking up questions concerning this issue of identity. For Butler, drawing on Foucault's idea of juridical systems of power, "the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation," and that political system then conceals these troublesome origins to promote some naturalized conception of the subjects created.[118] The resulting political assumption, "an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally," may be used to strengthen the feminist conception of a universal patriarchy and common

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[115] Anthony G. Greenwald and Linda Hamilton Krieger, "Implicit Bias: Scientific Foundations," *California Law Review* 94, no. 4 (July 1, 2006): 945, https://doi.org/10.2307/20439056.
[116] Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 2.
[117] Lloyd, 2.
[118] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

subjugated experience, but for Butler, the category ultimately reifies the exclusivity of the power structure it seeks to escape.

As Butler notes, we unfortunately cannot simply refuse representational politics, but she proposes that we instead adopt a radical feminist stance freed from "the necessity of having to construct a single or abiding ground which is invariably contested by those identity positions or anti-identity politics that it invariably excludes."[119] Her hope is that by removing the need for an identity of the feminist subject as a foundation for feminist politics, representation will become possible for feminism. Her proposal is this: "Without the presupposition or goal of 'unity,' which is, in either case, always instituted at the conceptual level, provisional unities might emerge in the context of concrete actions that have purposes other than the articulation of identity."[120] Rather than naming some static, all-encompassing, atemporal essence of woman, these provisional unities are instituted "on a contingent basis in order to accomplish whatever aims are in view."[121] But then, what does "identity" mean? And to what extent do the regulatory practices of gender constitute identity and create the status of personhood? Butler describes what she terms the "matrix of intelligibility," the delineation of gender norms enforced by a culture, creating and constraining the only genders (two of them, masculine and feminine) that can be understood within that culture's conceptual framework. These intelligible genders enforce the "heterosexualization of desire," excluding as unintelligible the actors that do not conform to those masculine and feminine heterosexual norms. However, the very failure of gender identities to consistently

[119] Butler, 7.
[120] Butler, 21.
[121] Butler, 22.

conform to heterosexualized desire provides "critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility, and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder."[122]

To summarize, she writes:

> In this sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be… There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender: that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.[123]

This sexuality is a cultural construct, formed within power relations, and there cannot be a "normative sexuality" that is outside, before, or after culture and power, opening the possibility of subversive performances that undermine the hegemony of heterosexuality from within the framework itself. For Butler, the presence of heterosexual conventions within gay contexts (as well as vice versa) is clear evidence for this possibility, and the consequent "gender confusion" operates as a site for "intervention, exposure, and displacement of these reifications."[124]

Gender for Butler is, then, a "style of being," a "stylistics of existence," a way of being-in-the-world. It is "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment that the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief."[125] To deviate from the acts sanctioned for one's gender

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[122] Butler, 24.
[123] Butler, 34.
[124] Butler, 43.
[125] Conboy et al., "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," 402.

warrants social punishment, and thus the term "strategy" best suggests "the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs."[126] The goal of this strategy is cultural survival, because without a recognizable gender one risks falling outside of the matrix of intelligibility, becoming dehumanized and ostracized. "The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self."[127] The breach of gender norms reveals the illusion.

Butler posits drag, cross-dressing, and butch/femme stylization as all subversive of the cultural gender norms, opposing feminist theorists who would object to such presentations as demeaning or reifying. For Butler, such critiques indicate a discomfort that stems from the perception of such presentations as "imitation," but fail to recognize the subversive ways in which that performance highlights the discontinuities among anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*."[128] By showing the interplay of sex, identity, and performance, the normative structure and "natural" linkage is revealed as illusory. And because these three facets are not "naturally" linked, drag does not stand in relation to gender norms as an imitation does to an original. In fact, no "original" exists, and drag stands as an imitation of an imitation, or a parody of a parody.

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[126] Conboy et al., 405.
[127] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.
[128] Butler, 197., italicization is Butler's.

V. The Self as Transactional and Performative: A Mash-Up

I am not the first to observe that Dewey's social, transactional, habit-formed self and Butler's performative self might productively inform each other to generate an even more powerful account of the self. Shannon Sullivan, writing forty-eight years after Dewey's death and ten years after the publication of *Gender Trouble*, has delved into this comparison at length, arguing that, "Dewey's notion of habit can help us understand gendered existence and, particularly when brought in conjunction with Judith Butler's concept of performativity, can provide a valuable account of how gendered existence might be reconfigured."[129] Ultimately, just as gender might be understood as a "stylistics of existence," a "stylistics of existence" might be understood as habit, those "acquired predispositions to *ways* or modes of response,... special sensitiveness or accessibility of certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions."[130]

As Sullivan points out, both Dewey and Butler believe that habit (or gendered patterns of behavior and ways of being, for Butler) is not merely a repressive "domain of constraints"; it also provides generative guidelines or prescriptions for action[131]. Dewey employs the metaphor of a house to illustrate, writing, "A house has a structure; in comparison with the disintegration and collapse that would occur without its presence, this structure is fixed… Structure is what makes construction possible and cannot be discovered or defined except in some realized construction, construction being, of course, an evident order of changes."[132] The rigid bones of the house do not simply impose

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[129] Shannon Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," *Hypatia* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 24.
[130] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 32. Emphasis is Dewey's.
[131] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 26.
[132] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 65. I follow Sullivan in quoting this passage.

limitations; they also open avenues of possibility, "allow[ing] it to effectively be what it is."[133] So, too, do our habits form the selves we are, and the cultural constructs that inform our action structure our way of being in the world. In a similar vein, Butler suggests that, "constraint can be rethought as the very condition of performativity… Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity."[134] Constraints are generative as well as repressive.

These structures and constraints not only delimit ways of being for subjects: they constitute the subjects themselves. Sullivan explains of Dewey, "[T]he cultural constructs that structure us *are* us… [Gender] is one of the ways in and through which we arrange (and are arranged as) selves that we are. Relatively, but not absolutely fixed, one's gender constitutes a (but not the only) key arrangement of the changing events that are one's self."[135] The array of habits that, taken together, constitute a gendered existence are not merely overlaid upon selves: as the walls, corridors, and rooms of the house *are* the house, so our gendered habits are us. As Dewey explains, "All habits are demands for a certain kind of activity; and they constitute the self."[136] Making a very similar point, Butler writes, "And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject."[137] And further, "The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional

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[133] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 26.
[134] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 59-60.
[135] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 26.
[136] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 21.
[137] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 60.

*dis*continuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground.'"[138] Implicit in both Dewey and Butler's positions is the understanding that the self does not preexist culture, but is created by it. However, even though both Dewey and Butler acknowledge that these patterns of activity are socially constructed and enforced, "construction is, after all, not the same as an artifice."[139] Though these patterns may not be "natural" or biologically bestowed according to a particular anatomical arrangement, and they do not "reveal" a subject, but they are no less a part of the subject. Dewey states with uncharacteristic succinctness, "we are the habit."[140]

For both Butler and Dewey, these possibilities of existence are essentially and profoundly realized through bodies. Sullivan observes that, "human existence is fundamentally bodily existence, and bodily existence is composed of and structured by habit."[141] Patterns of engagement with the world, or put differently, ways of inhabiting space, are constituted by habits. Butler's use of "performance" implies just that: she evokes the idea of gender being "instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*."[142] The "self" does not abide within a mind, which is then housed in a body; it is, rather, continuous with the body and its actions within the world. Dewey, arguing against the dualism of mind and body, describes their relationship this way:

> In the hyphenated phrase body-mind, "body" designates the continued and conserved, the registered and cumulative operation of factors continuous with the rest of nature, inanimate as well as animate; while "mind" designates the characters and consequences which are differential, indicative of features which emerge when "body" is engaged in a wider, more complex and interdependent situation.[143]

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[138] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 192.
[139] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 59. I follow Sullivan in using this quotation of Butler's. Emphasis is Butler's.
[140] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 21.
[141] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 26.
[142] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.
[143] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 217.

In other words, for Dewey, the distinction between mind and body (as well as the distinction between thought and action) misleads us. "Mind" refers to the accumulation of consequences and meanings resulting from an organism's physical transactions with the world; "body" refers to the organic element that persists throughout this engagement, even as the acquisition of meanings transforms its activities. And, just as meanings influence activities, activities transform meanings.[144]

In fact, Sullivan suggests that we would better understand the relationship of bodies, activity, and habits if we used the noun "body" as a verb instead, employing the gerund "bodying" as a term for the activity of going about daily life.[145] This assertion echoes a passage in *Gender Trouble*, where Butler writes, "[G]ender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who may be said to preexist the deed."[146] And later, in *Bodies that Matter*, she suggests that gender ("girl") reads less as an assignment and more as a command ("girl!"), highlighting the compulsory nature of gendered performance. For both Butler and Sullivan, the verbing of nouns emphasizes the extent to which our activities constitute us, which in turn, serves to point out that we do not preexist our activities and identities. Self is not an object, but a doing. Gender is a way of [in]habiting the body.

If we take Dewey and Butler seriously, we might expect to find evidence of the relationship between self and habit exteriorized through the body, particularly in terms of social categories like gender. Iris Marion Young provides an excellent characterization of typically feminine comportment in her famous essay "Throwing Like a Girl,"

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[144] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 28.
[145] Sullivan, 30.
[146] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

observing, for example, that women tend to occupy proportionally much less space than men, folding into themselves and tucking in their limbs, even when the environment does not necessitate it.[147] (Young works from an explicitly existentialist phenomenological stance, and I cite her here not to delve into her causal explanation for this style of comportment, but rather to rely on her extremely apt description of it.) The practice of sitting with one's legs crossed at the knee, especially with arms similarly folded, could be recognized as a particularly feminine habit, perhaps arising from the social directive that women be unobtrusive (and possibly from the sense of bodily vulnerability shared by many women).[148] Though not all women sit in such a way, and though some men also cross their legs at the knee while folding their arms across their bodies, the position serves as an example of a gendered self externalized, a self that is continuous with its body and its action.

Sullivan notes that to acquire a new habit, be it a new skill or a new way of comporting oneself, is to acquire new way of engaging with the world, and it provides us with new knowledge of our environment and new efficacy within it. As she explains, it "opens up the meaning of one's world and provides one with expanded powers in one's world in a new way."[149] However, unless the connection between body-mind and external world functions rather seamlessly, one cannot be said to have acquired the habit. To illustrate, Sullivan offers the example of learning to drive a standard transmission vehicle: one can only be said to know how to drive that car when one no longer calculates

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[147] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, 32.
[148] This causal explanation would likely not satisfy Iris Marion Young, as I approach the question from a feminist pragmatist standpoint, rather than from existential phenomenology, but unfortunately delving further into this difference lies outside the scope of this project.
[149] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 27.

each shift of the gears and depression of the clutch, but rather, smoothly drives according to knowledge that has become sedimented into one's body. Similarly, a person cannot be said to know how to wear high heels until they do not teeter as they walk or scrabble for a handrail when taking the stairs. (One might note, of course, that the knowledge of how to remain upright in a pair of heeled shoes would more likely be found in one gender than the other. Gender, then, influences the sort of knowledge about the world we possess.)

VI. Embodying Together

Dewey's understanding of habit and Butler's conception of performativity emphasize the embodied, habituated nature of the self, but we have yet to interrogate the relation of these selves to their wider community. Human beings are born into a sociocultural milieu that preexists them, one that delimits acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and manners of being, punishing its members for violations and rewarding them for adherence, essentially recapitulating itself at the level of individual habits. Sullivan explains that, "in many cases our world 'instructs' us on 'proper' habit formation in its response to our engagement with it. The constructs that prevail within the culture(s) in which I am anchored will inform that habits that I develop—that is, the person that I become."[150] In other words, our specific embodiment in a world of pre-existing cultural constructs calls up specific expectations for our behavior, cultivating our habits and forming our identities.

The instructions provided by our world are socially acquired, gleaned from a commerce of concepts and symbols in and through which we structure our identities. That is, I learn

[150] Sullivan, 28.

to be a self in communicative transaction with other selves.[151] In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey explains that, "The activities of the group are already there, and some assimilation of [a person's] own acts to their pattern is a prerequisite of a share therein, and hence of having any part in what is going on."[152] To participate meaningfully in the community in which one finds oneself, then, one must behave and communicate in accordance with established conventions, at least to a certain extent. Or, to put it another

[151] Working within the pragmatist tradition, one cannot talk about the genesis of the social self, particularly in the young, without mentioning George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Here, Mead describes the development of the social self in terms of a game of baseball. To become an effective baseball player on a team, as to become a member of society, an individual must acquire the rules of the game, such that they know how all other members of the team will respond to a situation and so that they may formulate their own responses in context of the stimulus and their position on the team. The attitudes of these other players become organized into a single "other," which is an organization of the attitudes of those involved in the same process." In similar fashion, "[t]he organized community or social group which gives the individual [their] unity of self may be called 'the generalized other.' The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community." (154) But further, the individual must not only understand the generalized other's response to them, but must also understand the generalized other's attitude toward the various social activities in which they and other community members participate. Only that this point can they be said to have a fully developed self: "This getting of the broad activities of any given social whole or organized society as such within the experiential field of any one of the individuals involved or included in that whole is, in other words, the essential basis and prerequisite of the fullest development of that individual's self: only in so far as [she] takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which [she] belongs toward the organized, cooperative social activity or set of such activities in which that group as such is engaged, does [she] develop a complete self or possess the sort of complete self [she] has developed." For Mead, the most fully developed self is the one that best understands their community's attitudes toward them, others, and their undertakings. Through the generalized other, the community "exercises control over the conduct of its individual members." (155) George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, ed. Charles W. Morris, Works of George Herbert Mead, George Herbert Mead; Vol. 1 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 149–64.
Unfortunately, a thorough dissection of this theory lies outside the scope of this dissertation, and so I mention Mead only to set him aside. Briefly, however, I will offer this objection: Mead overlooks the situation of those individuals who, by their very embodiment, are denied full personhood by their larger communities. Women treated as sexual objects, people of color likened to animals, and people with disabilities who are considered incompletely-formed persons—these individuals must contend with a generalized other that denigrates their being. To imply that the most fully developed person is the one who best assumes the attitudes of the generalized other is to imply that women, people of color, and people with disabilities cannot become fully developed selves without adopting the belief that they are subhuman. To be charitable to Mead, I am giving much weight to the normative implications of "fully developed self" and the precise meaning of "assuming" or "taking up" the attitudes of the generalized other. However, I feel that this objection is important to mention, especially given the subject at hand.
[152] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 43.

way, a community functions qua community by virtue of what it has in common: language, concepts, knowledge, beliefs, values, and aspirations.

The community initiates its young into the system by education, both formally and informally, explicitly and implicitly, overtly and subtly.[153] Part of this education involves elucidating for its initiates the salient social categories, including categories pertaining to identity such as gender, race, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, class, regional identity, education level, nationality. Concomitant with these features are the traits that characterize them, and so as a young girl learns what "women" are, and that her biological sex means she "is" a woman, she learns what she should do to participate in her community as a woman. The responses of her community, which often entail praising those girls who are "good" at being women and reprimanding those who aren't, further impress the category into her identity and make clear the risks of rejecting it. Dewey describes the process as follows:

> At first, as was said, others characterize an act with favorable or condign qualities which they impute to an agent's character. They react in this fashion in order to encourage [her] in future acts of the same sort, or in order to dissuade [her]—in short, to build or destroy a habit. This characterization is part of the technique of influencing the development of character and conduct. It is a refinement of the ordinary reactions of praise and blame. After a time and to some extent, a person teaches [herself] to think of the results of acting in this way or that before [she] acts… This [she] learns to influence [her] own conduct.[154]

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[153] I do not mean to here suggest that there is only one community, or that a person cannot participate meaningfully in more than one community. In fact, there are many communities, overlapping and sharing members and conventions; the extent to which one is a member of a particular community depends upon the extent to which one shares in its system of knowledge, beliefs, values, etc. I also do not mean to suggest that a person can necessarily be fully initiated into a community: as Miranda Fricker argues in her book *Epistemic Injustice: The Power and Ethics of Knowing*, some marginalized persons have experiences incapable of being expressed in a given conceptual framework ("hermeneutical injustice"). This point will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

[154] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 85.

The actual process of acquiring and responding to social expectations may differ in Butler's thought, but for my purposes, I believe her conclusion is similar enough: by conjuring up the expectations of the social audience, including anticipating their approving or disapproving response, one learns the socially "appropriate" way to be in the world.[155]

As Sullivan notes, one does not find oneself in this world as a "generic person", the universal "man" (code for whatever is "neutral"): I am here as a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman without disabilities.[156] Based on my actions in the world and its responses to me, I have learned to navigate it and comport myself in a particular fashion based on my social identities. As such, I engage with the world around me in a manner different from a man, a person of color, someone with a lower income, or a person with a disability might. I am able to walk in heels, I have little reason to fear being the victim of police violence, I make purchases without checking my bank balance first, and I do not have to be concerned about whether establishments I wish to patronize will have the accommodations for me to comfortably do so. All these things I do or do not do without thinking—they are not an act I am choosing to put on. My knowledge of how to comport myself in these ways, in fact, makes me the very particular combination of social identities I am.

Complicating that matter of identity is the fact that these categories are not simply additive: I am not merely white and also a woman, but rather, I am a white woman.

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[155] The scare quotes function here to indicate that I do not necessarily agree that this way to be in the world is "appropriate" or right, but simply that it is the widely-accepted social norm.
[156] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 28.

Treating any of these identity markers[157] as a monolith or as mere layers to be added on top of each other ignores that way that race, gender, sexuality, disability, and class interpenetrate and inform each other. The result of this "ampersand problem," as it has been formulated by Elizabeth Spelman[158], is that focus on one facet of a person—their womanhood, their Blackness, their disability status—erases the intersection of those identities, and consequently, that person. In other words, to bemoan the treatment of women and people of color without attention to the intersection of these categories implies that an individual may be a woman, or an individual may be a person of color, but not both; it thereby risks denying that there are lives, ways of bodying, and issues that are specific to women of color. For Sullivan, these observations call attention to the need for a transactional account of the self: the way to understand the intertwining of gender and race is transaction, wherein "gender and race should not be understood as existing substantively prior to or independent of each other… [O]ne's gender helps constitute one's race, and vice versa, in a dynamic relationship."[159]

While Dewey himself does not make such explicit claims, his writing suggests that he would be amenable to Spelman's work on the ampersand problem. He writes, "If each habit existed in an insulated compartment and operated without affecting or being affected by others, character would not exist. That is, conduct would lack unity being only a juxtaposition of disconnected reactions to separated situations… A [person] may

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[157] I use the term "marker" specifically to highlight that categories of particular social salience, like race, gender, nationality, etc. call out certain treatment from one's social milieu. For example, a 6-year-old girl in a dress is more likely to receive compliments on how pretty her dress is than to receive questions about her favorite physical activity or subject in school.

[158] Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 114–15. I follow Sullivan in drawing upon Spelman here. Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 20.

[159] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 21.

give [themselves] away in a look or a gesture. Character can be read through the medium of individual acts."[160] In other words, these identities cannot be likened to hats that I'm able to take off or put on to suit the situation as I prefer—these identities, or habits, are in some way unified and collectively called for in my individual actions. He further observes, "Were it not for the continued operation of habits in every act, no such thing as character would exist. There would be simply a bundle, an untied bundle at that, of isolated acts. Character is the interpenetration of habit."[161] I cannot discard my race in favor of acting in terms of my gender, nor set aside my gender to behave in accord with my race, whatever these things might mean. Taken together, my collection of habits, socially learned through the world's response to my identity hallmarks, form my character, which "can be read through the medium of individual acts."[162] The whole of my experience, with all of its nuance and complexity, informs my every action and my unique way of inhabiting space. Dewey agrees, explaining, "In actuality each habit operates all of the time of waking life; though like a member of a crew taking his turn at the wheel, its operation becomes the dominantly characteristic trait of an act only occasionally or rarely."[163] Habits unify the subject; they enable individuals to have a definable character and identity.

VII. Please Excuse My Resting Bitch Face

This underlying character, however, does not guarantee the same response to every situation, but rather indicates a propensity for certain attitudes or behaviors.

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[160] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 29–30.
[161] Dewey, 29.
[162] Dewey, 30.
[163] Dewey, 29.

Dewey explains, "The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving. Habits means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrence of specific acts. It means will."[164] Collectively, these predispositions to ways or modes of response compose what Sullivan refers to as a "bodily style," which "emerges from and appears as/in the gestures that I make."[165] Introducing a personal example, Sullivan discusses her own tendency to smile often when she converses with others, a habit shared by many women.[166] Though this facial gesture may not be conscious (and as a habitual smiler myself, I can corroborate this), it serves to smooth social interaction by evincing a non-threatening, accommodating attitude. In fact, this habit has become so thoroughly sedimented into my particular bodily comportment that doing otherwise feels uncomfortable and false, highlighting the extent to which smiling characterizes my bodily style and my character.

To cast this particular gendered habit in relief, I draw upon contemporary discussions of a tendency playfully (or admonishingly) termed, "resting bitch face" (sometimes also referred to as "bitchy resting face," "chronic bitch face," or "resting bitch face syndrome"). Writing for the *New York Times*, Jessica Bennett reflects upon seeing her resting face as she appeared in a short television segment: "My mouth curled slightly downward, my brows were furrowed, my lips were a little pursed. My eyes aimed forward in a deadpan stare. I looked simultaneously bored, mad and skeptical. I was

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[164] Dewey, 32. Emphasis is Dewey's.
[165] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 28.
[166] Nancy M. Henley, *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication*, 1st Touchstone ed, A Touchstone Book (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 176.

basically saying to the newscaster: *Die*."[167] She realized, much to her surprise, that she had "resting bitch face," which she defines as "a face that, when at ease, is perceived as angry, irritated or simply … expressionless."[168] The existence of the phrase itself betrays the anomalous nature of its definiendum: the phenomenon required a definition to distinguish it from the "normal" resting face.[169] The Internet, on social media sites like Facebook[170] and Reddit[171] and in news outlets like *The New York Times*[172] and *Huffington Post*[173], has seized upon the term to describe the facial expressions of (primarily) women with resting faces like Bennett's, offering as example (primarily female) celebrities like Kristen Stewart, Anna Paquin, and Victoria Beckham[174] [175] [176].

As the term indicates, it usually refers to the resting expressions of women rather than men ("bitch" being generally reserved for women, referring men only when they demonstrate characteristics typically associated with femininity, such as weakness, sensitivity, or cowardice[177]). In essence, "resting bitch face" indicates a discomfort with

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[167] Jessica Bennett, "I'm Not Mad. That's Just My RBF.," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/02/fashion/im-not-mad-thats-just-my-resting-b-face.html.
[168] Bennett.
[169] Here, I employ the term "normal" to invoke both its statistical and normative connotations. In other words, "normal resting face" means "the resting face that is common among women" and "the resting face that is desired of women."
[170] "Resting Bitchface Syndrome - RBS," Facebook, accessed August 14, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/restingbf.
[171] "Bitch Face without Trying • /r/RestingBitchFace," reddit, accessed August 14, 2015, https://www.reddit.com/r/RestingBitchFace/.
[172] Bennett, "I'm Not Mad. That's Just My RBF."
[173] "Anna Paquin Suffers From 'Bitchy Resting Face,'" The Huffington Post, June 21, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/21/anna-paquin-bitchy-resting-face-video_n_3477410.html.
[174] Amanda Dobbins, "Bitchy Resting Face: The Celebrity Edition," Vulture, July 9, 2013, http://www.vulture.com/2013/07/bitchy-resting-face-9-celebrities.html.
[175] "Anna Paquin Suffers From 'Bitchy Resting Face.'"
[176] "Is Victoria Beckham the Queen of Bitchy Resting Face? The A-List Stars Who Look Thoughtfully Sad or Angry for No Reason," Mail Online, July 11, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2360591/Is-Victoria-Beckham-queen-Bitchy-Resting-Face-The-A-list-stars-look-thoughtfully-sad-angry-reason.html.
[177] "Bitch," in my experience, most often refers to a woman overstepping her socially-permissible boundaries, as by being overly assertive or by voicing dissent, or behaving in a way generally thought to be

women who fail to deliver pleasing or accommodating facial expressions in social contexts when it is expected (that is to say, almost always). This discomfort, in turn, frequently becomes internalized: while many "sufferers" wear their resting bitch face proudly as a protest again a sexist system that chides women who do not appear perpetually friendly and receptive[178], others lament their unconscious facial expressions, attempting to "cure" the syndrome by training themselves to smile when they aren't thinking about it.[179] For some, the anxiety associated with appearing "bitchy" while at rest runs so deep that they turn to surgical options: Anthony Youn, a plastic surgeon based in Michigan, estimates that per year, he performs approximately 20 "grin lift" surgeries and 100 Botox injections to lift the corners of the mouth, giving the appearance of a smile.[180] So, while it may seem that "resting bitch face" is a humorous identifier of a common phenomenon, by the ascription of the term, we learn its power: it signifies the abnormal. Other cosmetic surgeries, like face-lifts, liposuction, and breast augmentations, reflect a desire to meet a physical feminine ideal of youth and thinness. Surgeries that give the impression that one is perpetually smiling, on the other hand, reflect a desire to align oneself with the prescribed attitude for women. The light, pleasant smile at rest indicates that the ideals of femininity have been truly internalized.

VIII. The Self as a Nexus of Relations

"uppity." If used to refer to a man (e.g., "He's being such a bitch about this"), someone generally implies that he is evincing traits associated with femininity, such as cowardice, indecision, or weakness.

[178] Kristine Gutierrez, "Why I Love My Bitchy Resting Face," Jezebel, July 21, 2013, http://jezebel.com/why-i-love-my-bitchy-resting-face-514067148.

[179] Bennett, "I'm Not Mad. That's Just My RBF."

[180] "Plastic Surgeons Cash In on Witchy 'Resting Face,'" accessed August 14, 2015, http://www.cnbc.com/id/100852094.

Sullivan argues that, "the boundaries that delimit individual entities are permeable, not fixed, which means that organisms and their various environments—social, cultural, and political, as well as physical—are constituted by their mutual influence and impact on each other."[181] Here we come to understand the full force of Sullivan's argument: "'transaction' designates a process of mutual constitution that entails mutual transformation, including the possibility of significant change."[182] By understanding bodies as transactional, we also "construe [them] as *patterns of behavior* or action that occur *across and by means of* or trans- various environments, continually constituting and being constituted, remaking and being remade by them."[183] These dynamic patterns of activity that emerge form the organism's habits, which might be bundled and parsed according to the organism's situational context or our descriptive needs, but taken all together, these habits *are* the organism. Ultimately, I contend, the self is a nexus of relations, a point where many habits converge and radiate outward as an expression of a particular relationship to their environment.

I bring together Butler and Dewey to provide balance that seems to be lacking from both accounts. Dewey, for his part, understates the extent to which the self forms on a social stage in view of others with the goal of pleasing them or assimilating with them, overlooking the oftentimes coercive nature of the audience's demands. Habit formation cannot always be directed at the efficient navigation of an environment rich in tools and opportunities; habits sometimes form to protect an actor from social ostracism

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[181] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 1.
[182] Sullivan, 1.
[183] Sullivan, 3. Emphasis is Sullivan's.

or possibly physical violence[184], as an appeasement or an attempt at camouflage. Though I am sure Dewey would agree that such a thing occurs, the term "transaction" might obscure this dynamic, while "performance" specifically provides more nuance to the relationship of one human being to other human beings. In many ways and in many cases, we act and behave *for others*, exquisitely and painfully conscious of the social stakes involved. Butler, on the other hand, seems to underestimate the ability of the social actor to push back on the audience, as well as the audience's willingness to sometimes shrug and look elsewhere. Though waves of backlash have certainly accompanied recent advances, gender norms are being increasingly challenged by those unhappy with their cultural constraints. Dewey may be able to provide additional means by which individuals may subvert—or at least begin to change—hegemonic gender practices.

For some, the strictures of the cultural demands upon our identities, as well as the identities themselves, feel restrictive and oppressive. Given that both Dewey and Butler argue that our style of being does not express some innate or "natural" essence, but rather arises from our engagement with our physical and cultural environment, we could ask if we might we simply cast aside our habits to become individuals of radically free will. For these thinkers, such a strategy is neither possible nor desirable. Practically, such a strategy is difficult given that our individual habits subsist within a social and cultural environment that continually reinvigorates or reinstantiates them even as we attempt to shake them loose. Further, only through our habits do we have agency and efficacy in

[184] The plight of young transwomen of color, who are being murdered at alarming rates, speaks to the risks of not performing gender as is considered socially acceptable. Katy Steinmetz, "Why Transgender Americans Are Being Murdered," *Time*, August 17, 2015, http://time.com/3999348/transgender-murders-2015/.

our world. Dewey suggests that habits "*are* will,"[185] and for Butler, "the 'activity' of gendering…is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition."[186] Habits direct not only our attitudes and behaviors, but also shape our desires and our capacities. In other words, they enable us to navigate our world with purpose and coherence, indicating that freedom *to* is just as important as freedom *from*. Therefore, though habits have been constructed through negotiation with our social environment, they cannot be simply discharged or jettisoned on a whim.

For Butler, a crucial step toward subverting hegemonic gender practices and reconfiguring our culture is revealing the illusory nature of an abiding gendered self. Conveniently, gender norms, which claim to express innate dispositions of biological bodies based on anatomical arrangement, contain within themselves the key to their undoing. By purporting to be an inherent property rooted in one's sex, the norm cannot tolerate flaws in the façade: it depends upon reiteration for its legitimacy (and hence, the air of anxiety surrounding the proper performance of gender). Butler explains, "The resignification of norms is thus a function of their *inefficacy*, and so the question of subversion, *of working the weakness in the norm*, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation."[187] Drag functions as an allegory that works through hyperbole, revealing in its pantomime the way in which gender performance is taken for granted. In effect, the very components employed in the performance of gender serve as

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[185] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 21. Emphasis is Dewey's.
[186] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 7. I follow Sullivan in using this passage from Butler.
[187] Butler, 237. Italicization is Butler's.

the tools by which we might begin to dismantle it[188] (Butler's use of the metaphor of tools is, as Sullivan observes, very pragmatist-sounding[189]).

The solution to rigid, maladaptive habits, for Dewey, is to leverage the plasticity of the self to replace problematic old habits with new ones that are more flexible and responsive.[190] Here, Sullivan argues, we might bring Butler's concept of performativity (understood as habit) and the iterability of gender to bear on Dewey's claim that we can loosen up our habits in spite of the mandates of our culture and environment, holding open the possibility that we might do things differently. In fact, regardless of how we embody our gender and other habits, "[w]e alter, however slightly, the grooves engrained in our selves when we re-trace and re-groove them through our habitual action."[191] Dewey himself places his hope in the education of the young, whose habits are more fluid and yet to be fixed, who might more easily be educated to form habits that are "more intelligent, more sensitively percipient, more informed with foresight, more aware of what they are about, more direct and sincere, more flexibly responsive than those now current."[192] He does yet hold out hope for adults, however, suggesting that the rigidity and intractability of one domain of habits may be pitted against a different, but equally rigid and intractable, set of habits, allowing them to erode or refashion each other.[193] Sullivan offers a helpful example of how this process might develop, using the

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[188] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 199.
[189] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 33.
[190] Maladaptive or bad habits, for Dewey, would be those that are no longer intelligent ("enslave[d] to old ruts"). Conversely, "[t]he genuine heart of reasonableness (and of goodness in conduct) lies in effective mastery of the conditions which *now* enter into action." Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 48. Emphasis is Dewey's.
[191] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 33.
[192] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 90.
[193] Ibid.

particularly relevant (and, perhaps, evocative) example of a woman working in the field of philosophy.

She observes that proper womanhood in Western culture typically entails that a woman comport herself "in a generally deferential, nonconfrontational, and passive manner: smiling, 'containing' one's bodying so that it occupies minimal physical space, and so on."[194] Conversely, to be a "real" philosopher requires comporting oneself more like a man: "in a relatively confrontational, aggressive, and active manner, with a bodily style that declares the right to occupy physical space and that does not seek to minimize conflict."[195] By attempting to inhabit the identity of both "woman" and "philosopher", an individual brings both sets of habits into contact with each other, introducing friction between them virtually any time she transacts with others. As she negotiates her engagement with her environment, the habits "combine and recombine," which "wears on the rigidity of both habits and demands a reconfiguration of them that can alter, to a degree, what it means for a woman philosopher to be both a woman and a philosopher."[196] Identities themselves, in fact, transact with each other. The result may be a scholar who is more likely to listen to and collaborate with her peers, a bus passenger who accommodates fewer intrusions from strangers, or a person who alternates her behavior depending on the situation. Regardless of the specific way she inhabits this potentially conflicted identity, she disrupts sedimented habits of gender, ultimately reworking the meanings of those identities.

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[194] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 105.
[195] Sullivan, 105–6.
[196] Sullivan, 106.

Now, one might reasonably question Sullivan's account for several reasons. First, the habits of "womanhood" typically confront developing individuals long prior to their encounters with the profession of philosophy and its concomitant etiquette. If that's the case, one might ask if it is even possible for a woman to later adopt a set of habits so contrary to her socialization, and indeed, substantial empirical evidence suggests that many women, faced with the option of continuing their philosophical education and employment, decline to do so. We must ask, might one set of habits preclude the adoption of another? Roughly 38% of undergraduates in introductory philosophy courses are female, while only 34% of philosophy majors are. Of the 30% women completing graduate degrees, only some of them go on to obtain academic employment positions, resulting in 26% of philosophy faculty being women.[197]

Certainly, a number of diverse factors have been proffered to explain this disparity, including underrepresentation of female philosophers on course syllabi, lack of female professors available for role-modeling and mentoring, classroom dynamics that are hostile and foreign to women's typical communicative style, and harassment or ostracism by male peers. Wouldn't these statistics and explanations indicate that habits were coming into conflict, and women were opting out of the contest due to an inability to reconcile the two diametric sets of behaviors? The situation here may be too complicated to lend itself to a satisfactory answer: though being both a woman and philosopher may indeed lead to some cacophonous clash between sets of habits and expectations, there are also structural considerations pertaining to female graduate

[197] Molly Paxton, Carrie Figdor, and Valerie Tiberius, "Quantifying the Gender Gap: An Empirical Study of the Underrepresentation of Women in Philosophy," *Hypatia* 27, no. 4 (November 2012): 952, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2012.01306.x.

students who are attempting to simultaneously raise families, the assumption that a male partner's professional aspirations supercede a female partner's, and other social pressures that limit a woman's career both inside and outside of the classroom and academia.

Finally, both Sullivan and Dewey note that in contemporary discussion, the role of society in the tastes and habits of the individual often overshadows the ability of the individual to reform prevailing cultural attitudes. But the self does not receive a lone stamp from its society at its inception, a single impression that it then mirrors without alteration. Rather, in its transactions with its environment, the self is being formed and reformed, even if these changes appear subtle and slow. A child learns, through repeated directives from adults, to put on a seatbelt, to the degree that entering a car triggers an automatic reach over the shoulder and grasping for the belt. Adults learn, after receiving startled looks or direct corrections, not to use words considered discriminatory or insensitive (at the time of the writing, "lame" is one of these embattled words).

The transformative force of the relationship between self and society, however, does not act in a single direction: it is reciprocal. A slowly re-forming self reflects these changes in its dealings with its surroundings, renegotiating their relationship. Sullivan explains, "In the disruption and remaking of the current self by its environment lies the self's power to remake its culture: the self's ongoing plasticity means the ongoing transformation of the self, and thus the culture of which it is a part."[198] In other words, the self constitutes a part of the environment for other selves and other beings, and as it accumulates changes and renegotiates its being, it remakes others. By this account, we do not have to be concerned that the same cultural parcels could simply be shuffled

[198] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 31.

through society and individuals indefinitely and without change. For Sullivan (and Dewey), the plasticity of the individual self allows that the relationship to its broader culture that may more closely resemble a "changing spiral" than a "repetitive circle."[199] This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

IX. **The Digital Self**

I contend that this account of self also illuminates the nature of the digital selves inhabiting the virtual world of Facebook, and to support this claim, I will argue that digital selves recapitulate hallmarks of concrete selves, using a model of the self as both performative and transactional.[200] Though much of the early scholarly literature examining digital selves focuses on identity construction in anonymous virtual environments, concluding that these domains serve as spaces for a more playful and creative exploration of identity, studies of nonymous[201] virtual communities indicate that virtual relationships anchored in current or potential offline relationships reveal a little or no gap between the selves we present online and the selves we present in face-to-face interactions.[202]

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[199] Sullivan, 31.

[200] This chapter will emphasize the performative element of the self; the transactional element will become more prominent in Chapter 3.

[201] "Nonymous" is a neologism-cum-term of art describing an online environment in which virtual identities are anchored in concrete identities, such that an individual's concrete identity may be known. In online communities like Facebook, the identities claimed by users are often corroborated by institutions via email address, . Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck, and Jason Martin, "Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships," *Computers in Human Behavior* 24, no. 5 (September 2008): 1816–36, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2008.02.012.

[202] Tamsin C. Marriott and Tom Buchanan, "The True Self Online: Personality Correlates of Preference for Self-Expression Online, and Observer Ratings of Personality Online and Offline," *Computers in Human Behavior* 32 (March 2014): 171–77, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.11.014.

In contrast to many of its social networking predecessors, Facebook maintains a "real name" policy for users[203]—that is, users are required to provide their "real name," as it would be listed on a credit card, driver's license, or student ID. The website contends that with "authentic identities … you always know who you're connecting with. This helps keep the community safe."[204] Amid the flurry of Facebook's initial public offering in the summer of 2012, statistics emerged suggesting that more than 83 million, or 8.7%, of Facebook profiles might be fake (and run by "bots"[205]), leading to a plummet in the site's share price[206], and consequently, the sudden and vigorous enforcement of its real name policy. A number of users, thought to be in violation of the policy, found their accounts deactivated, and affected individuals included drag queens using their stage names[207], Native Americans[208], and transgendered individuals (including a trans woman employed by Facebook who pioneered the site's custom gender feature[209]). Critics of the policy have also pointed out that for some members of the Facebook community, the "real name" policy actually might make them more vulnerable (e.g., to stalkers, abusive

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[203] "Facebook Real-Name Policy Controversy," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, October 24, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Facebook_real-name_policy_controversy&oldid=687320039.
[204] "What Names Are Allowed on Facebook?," Facebook Help Center, accessed November 2, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/help/112146705538576.
[205] "Bots" is a general term for a class of software applications designed to perform automated tasks. Bots can perform tasks from mimicking user behavior (by "clicking" on advertisements) or produce spam posts.
[206] Dominic Rushe, "Facebook Share Price Slumps below $20 amid Fake Account Flap," *The Guardian*, August 3, 2012, sec. Technology, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/aug/02/facebook-share-price-slumps-20-dollars.
[207] Amanda and Holpuch, "Facebook Still Freezing Accounts despite Apology to Drag Queens over 'Real Names,'" *The Guardian*, October 17, 2014, sec. Technology, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/oct/17/facebook-still-freezing-accounts-despite-apology-drag-queens-real-names.
[208] Amanda and Holpuch, "Facebook Still Suspending Native Americans over 'real Name' Policy," *The Guardian*, February 16, 2015, sec. Technology, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/16/facebook-real-name-policy-suspends-native-americans.
[209] Zip, "My Name Is Only Real Enough to Work at Facebook, Not to Use on the Site," Medium, June 27, 2015, https://medium.com/@zip/my-name-is-only-real-enough-to-work-at-facebook-not-to-use-on-the-site-c37daf3f4b03.

exes, or governments that do not condone free speech) and that the policy disproportionately affects the LGBTQ community.[210] The company has issued an apology, but the policy continues to be the subject of controversy.[211] In recent days, Facebook reports that it will be implementing a new approach, wherein individuals who are not using their names may provide contextual details to moderators to justify their identity, and Facebook users attempting to report non-authentic names will have to provide additional information as to why they are reporting the account (thereby preventing abuse of the report feature). However, the website continues to defend its "real name" policy on the grounds that it makes the community safe,[212] and exactly how this modified approach will work remains to be seen. Undoubtedly, however, the enforcement of, as well as the environment created by, the "real name" policy has shaped the identities and behaviors of Facebook's users, creating a unique virtual space tied a little more obviously to the concrete world.

At the time of this writing, Facebook users may employ a variety of tools to construct their digital profile. Fields currently required for registration with Facebook include first and last name, email address or telephone number, birthday, gender[213], and password, but

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[210] "Facebook's 'Real Name' Policy Can Cause Real-World Harm for the LGBTQ Community," Electronic Frontier Foundation, accessed November 2, 2015, https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2014/09/facebooks-real-name-policy-can-cause-real-world-harm-lgbtq-community.

[211] Amanda and Holpuch, "Native American Activist to Sue Facebook over Site's 'real Name' Policy," *The Guardian*, February 19, 2015, sec. Technology, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/19/native-american-activist-facebook-lawsuit-real-name.

[212] James Titcomb, "Facebook to Alter Controversial 'real Name' Policy," November 1, 2015, sec. Technology, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/11968497/Facebook-to-alter-controversial-real-name-policy.html.

[213] Currently, gender options are male, female, and "custom." For the "custom" gender, the user manually types in the gender identity of choice, and then selects preferred pronouns from among male, female, or "neutral." "Neutral," in this case, is the singular they/them/their. Notably, if an individual uses the "custom" gender option, that person may use advanced privacy controls to decide who may see their gender, choosing to make it public, private, visible to all friends, or visible only to the friends of their choosing (as of September 3, 2017).

once the account has been generated, a host of further options become available. In the "About" section, a Facebook user may add their basic information like workplaces, education, professional skills, hometown, current city, political views, religious beliefs, family members, nicknames, favorite quotes, and life events. They may add photos to digital albums and connect with other users by asking them to be "friends." Facebook encourages them to upload a profile picture to allow other users to better identify them, as well as a cover photo to serve as a header for their profile page. They can visit businesses, television shows, music bands, brands, news stations, magazines, and other organizations on their own "Pages," and even "like" them to have them show up on their profile as a curated list of interests and consumption habits. Using a feature called "Lists," they may create groupings of their Facebook friends, and choose to share individual sections of their profile with specific people, entire lists, no one but themselves, or the whole of Facebook.

Perhaps most central to the day-to-day activities of Facebook, however, are the user's Timeline and News Feed. A user's Timeline comprises posts of various sorts— their own status updates, photos, videos, links, life events, and any of these added by the user's friends, all listed in chronological order from most recent to oldest. As with profile information, each post may be shared completely publicly (visible to anyone on Facebook) or completely privately (visible only to her), or they may opt to share with as few or as many of their friends as they choose. If the user would like to "share" something with a specific friend, they can either simply post the content directly to the friend's Timeline, or "tag" the friend, causing their post to appear on their friend's Timeline, as well as their own. The activity of the user's friends on their own Timelines,

as well as the posts of Pages previously "liked" by the user, are compiled into the user's News Feed in a rolling stream of media, and each post offers the opportunity for the user to comment, reply to the comments of others, or simply click the "Like" button to give it a digital thumbs-up. Interspersed are posts and pages recommended for the user by Facebook itself, based on their demographic information, behavior on Facebook, and any other data the user granted Facebook permission to gather.

Roughly, then, a user's Facebook profile may be divided into two portions: the basic information (relatively static information like education and religious beliefs, plus profile picture and cover photo) and the Timeline (a narrative of posts arranged chronologically). It is through this presence that a person connects to the wider Facebook community. The basic information serves as a sort of home base for the user's virtual presence, an anchor for an otherwise active and evolving conglomeration of posts, and one that is completely under the profile owner's own control. The Timeline, on the other hand, changes more readily with the daily activity of the user, and may serve as a site of communication with other members of Facebook, who can post on it.

A Facebook profile is not a body in the typical sense of the word: it is merely a collection of digital fragments produced or curated by an actually embodied human being staring at a computer screen, possibly thousands of miles away from the servers that house their profile data[214]. What's more, some of those fragments, like links to news articles and embedded YouTube videos, aren't even housed on the Facebook servers with the rest of the user's profile: they're merely windows into yet another server array, dispersed across

[214] James Vincent, "Mark Zuckerberg Shares Pictures from Facebook's Cold, Cold Data Center," The Verge, September 29, 2016, https://www.theverge.com/2016/9/29/13103982/facebook-arctic-data-center-sweden-photos.

the globe. Calling up an individual Facebook page may involve assembling packets of data from dozens of physical servers in just as many states or nations. How can this digital presence even remotely approximate a concrete, embodied identity, when it has no more physical integrity than an ocean current or a constellation of stars? Might there be a way to think of this scattered and amorphous data beast as a unified identity?

I believe that Sullivan, Butler, and Dewey, with their understanding of selves as activities or habits, provide us with the tools to better understand the nature of the virtual self and perhaps think of the Facebook profile as a virtual embodiment. Sullivan, following Dewey, explains that the physical body serves as an access point to the concrete world, but "physical" does not exhaust the potential of "body." Instead, she writes, "A body is not so much a thing, as it is an act—an act made possible, to be sure, by the physicality of the organism performing it, but not identical or reducible to the organism's physicality…As an activity, bodily life is better designated with the gerund 'bodying' and with 'body' used as a verb instead of a noun."[215] In fact, she argues that the physical and the bodily do not neatly correspond, as the body is more than mere static matter. A body is characterized by its service as a vehicle that allows us to engage with our world. To illustrate, she provides the example of the activity of walking: though walking is made possible by the existence of legs, walking is not the same thing as, nor can it be reduced to, those legs. Walking is a purposeful, directed engagement with an environment, a manipulation of both bodily resources and external conditions in service of motility. Purposeful, directed engagement with the environment, and skillful manipulation of

[215] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 29–30.

bodily resources and external conditions in the service of a goal, define our concrete bodily life. "Body" is a verb rather than a noun.

In similar fashion, the Facebook profile, with both its static and dynamic elements, functions as our vehicle in that digital world. "Facebooking," much like "bodying," implies an activity, but in this case we refer to an activity that takes place within virtual space. The basic information section of the profile, a fairly inert mass of personal, social, and institutional affiliations, might be akin to the physical body, the foundation and enabling condition of activity. Both physical body and basic information section serve as a sort of anchor for the self's engagement with its environment, as a central core at the intersection their various and multiple identities. In concrete life, a body offers a wealth of insight into an individual's life and experiences: gender presentation, skin color, clothing choice, accessories, body modifications, scars, accent, and comportment are steeped in social influence and relevance, which in turn may provide insights into an individual's experiences, attitudes, and inclinations. These markers indicate affiliations (that may be more or less explicit) of various sorts—participation in certain subcultures, income level, region of origin, etc. Similarly, the basic information section of the profile conveys this sort of information, signaling various social ties and frameworks. These affiliations may be further expanded by the Pages that a user has "liked," whether they be politicians, products, entertainment, locations, activities, or food preferences.

In contrast to the relative stability of the basic information section of the Facebook profile, the Timeline holds the day-to-day postings of the user, displaying her daily activities and engagement with the platform. They use the tools available to

them—photos, videos, status updates, and links—to communicate with their virtual social sphere. The transactions here are apparent: the user "likes" items passing through their News Feed from others' Timeline, while friends "like" their posts in return. The Facebooker engages in a conversation underneath a photo or video, sharing a memory of college days, or they upload their own pictures, tagging their friends or family members. To tailor the audience viewing any particular post, a savvy user can alter its privacy settings, choosing how to present themselves to whom. They can even suggest friends to their other friends, a virtual introduction of people who might get along. These Facebook profiles transact with each other through a complex exchange of virtual postings, as well as the various groups, pages, and applications that populate Facebook's margins.[216]

I have previously discussed Dewey's contention that, "There is nothing in nature that *belongs* absolutely and exclusively to anything else; belonging is always a matter of reference and distributive assignment, justified in any particular case as far as it works well."[217] In concrete life, parts of the physical world are casually considered to be part of my body, based on what "works well." If a friend places a hand on my shoulder, I say that she has a hand on my shoulder, not that she has a hand on my shirt that is in turn touching me. My shirt, for the purposes of most conversations, is part of my "self" so long as I wear it. In digital counterpart, a photo I post on my own Timeline may include that friend, whom I tag, allowing the photograph to display on both of our Timelines. To

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[216] I anticipate that here, the astute reader will pause and wonder how exactly this form of virtual transaction can be analogous to concrete transaction. After all, when we are concretely "bodying," it is the body-mind that engages in transaction, rather than simply the body. The Facebook profile seems to have no such analogue: while the profile may allow us to engage in Facebooking, it has no mind component behind it like the concrete body does. This question will be addressed at length in Chapter 4, but for now I will say that the more important than the "mind" that stands behind the bodying activity is the independent network of meanings that hang together and guide the bodying.

[217] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Later Works: Volume 1 ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981 [1925]) 180.

whose digital self does that photograph then belong? I argue that it belongs, really, to both—viewed in the context of my Timeline, it belongs to my digital self; on her Timeline, it is a part of her digital self. The photograph belongs by reference and distributive assignment to either or both of us, as it works well.

The concretely embodied self is best understood as both physical body and activity (which together constitute "bodying"), and the self's virtual counterpart on Facebook is the profile, with the basic information serving as the physical component and the Timeline functioning as the activity. In each case, the self (whether concretely or virtually embodied) carries with it—and displays— a history. For the concrete self, all of its experiences are contained within that person's body-mind and bodying: wrinkles, scars, comportment, tone of voice, and habits all show how each moment is irrevocably informed by those prior. In the world of Facebook, the personal narrative is a bit more explicit, and with just a few clicks, any Facebook friend with the appropriate permissions (granted by the profile's owner) can call up a user's profile information and past posts for viewing. But do the identities and behaviors of virtual selves correlate with those of concrete selves? Do individuals still enact traits of their concrete bodying, or does the virtual world present an irresistible opportunity to break free of corporeal limitations and present a different or idealized self?

Critics of Facebook often assert that the selves we present online do not reflect our "authentic" or "genuine" selves, claiming that Facebook users are prone to constructing false personas to look better to their digital cohort, projecting an idealized self rather than an actual self. Perhaps a user only posts the most flattering photos of herself, giving the impression that she has gotten in shape or has a fantastically active social life. She tosses

out excited status updates about her promotion, but does not mention her credit card debt, and while she claims that she loves Beethoven, she can't tell *Für Elise* from *Ode to Joy* because she really jams to Ke$ha. These critics assert, in short, that Facebook users engage in disingenuous performances in an attempt to dupe their audience into thinking that they and their lives are better than they are. Largely, the concern of these critics seems to be that this alleged practice reflects a deep and thoroughgoing narcissism that prevents social media users from establishing meaningful relationships based on genuine communication and reciprocity. Miriam Thalos, representative of this type of thought, explains, "[Facebook] does not provide credible means of self-presentation, which is a precondition for bonding."[218] While tackling this statement as a whole is the purpose of this dissertation, in this chapter I restrict my investigation to the precondition: the virtual self-presentation[219].

People can certainly exaggerate their successes or outright lie about their concrete identity online, and many early Internet forums (Multi-User Domains, or MUDs, in particular) were dedicated to role-playing and character exploration, encouraging members to explore identities dissimilar to their own. However, in the specific context of

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[218] Thalos, "Why I Am Not a Friend," 86.

[219] The assumption that this criticism would deal such a blow to the "authenticity" of our online selves assumes, erroneously I think, that there is some "authentic" concrete self that should be reflected in our digital self-presentation. Even in the concrete world, we selectively self-present to the extent permitted to us: I wear makeup, smile even if I don't feel like it, and tailor my behavior to my audience (e.g., I make jokes with my friends that I would not make around my work colleagues). First and foremost, then, I do not believe there is an "authentic" concrete self getting short shrift.

Even granted this supposition, there is the further and related assumption that in order to be "authentic," my digital self must accurately reflect my concrete self, whatever that would mean in the translation across mediums. I also object to this assumption: one-to-one mapping between selves does not make them more or less "authentic," just more or less similar. I have a self that is a daughter to my mother, a self that is a wife to my husband, a different self for every friend I spend time with, and a different coworker for each one of the people I work with. I also have a Facebook self and a Twitter self. None of these are more or less "authentic," because I am all of these, to be found somewhere at the nexus of all of my relationships. I leave this particular argument aside, however, to be addressed more thoroughly later.

Facebook, do users generally project an idealized self rather than their "actual" self? According to some psychology researchers, user profiles tended to reflect their offline personalities. Subjects took a battery of tests to measure their scores on the Big Five personality traits described earlier, and then interviews with four well-acquainted friends were used to corroborate the users' self-reports. Nine observers (undergraduate research assistants) were then employed to peruse the subject's Facebook profile and rate their personality using the Big Five scale. In all traits but one, observer ratings reflected the subjects' measured personalities with statistical significance[220] (neuroticism has been previously shown to be very difficult to detect without any face to face interaction[221]). These results have been replicated by another group[222], casting doubt on the assumption that individuals on Facebook regularly present idealized versions of themselves. Taken together, these studies may offer support for the "extended real-life hypothesis," which suggests that SNSs "may constitute an extended social context in which to express one's actual personality characteristics, thus fostering accurate interpersonal perceptions."[223] Other studies have focused on the visual elements of the Facebook, analyzing the correlations between photograph-related behavior on Facebook and the Big Five personality traits. Eftekhar et al. found that extraversion predicted a higher total number of friends and a higher total number of photographs, while Facebook users scoring higher in agreeableness had a higher average number of comments and likes per profile picture.

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[220] Researchers used an additional metric to gauge and control for the subjects' self-idealization. Their results indicated that subjects were not engaging in self-idealization on their Facebook profiles, but for the sake of brevity, I will not go into their methods here. M. D. Back et al., "Facebook Profiles Reflect Actual Personality, Not Self-Idealization," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 3 (March 1, 2010): 372–74, https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797609360756.

[221] David Kenny, *Interpersonal Perception: A Social Relations Analysis*, 1 edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994).

[222] Marriott and Buchanan, "The True Self Online."

[223] Back et al., "Facebook Profiles Reflect Actual Personality, Not Self-Idealization," 372.

Conscientious individuals, who tend to be more organized in offline contexts, more often generated their own albums for pictures, rather than rely on Facebook's defaults. Neuroticism, like extraversion, correlated with a higher total number of photographs, which (the authors theorize) reflects their need to control their self-presentation. The fifth trait, openness, predicted no particular photo-related behavior, likely because openness itself predicts that users will seek out new experiences and engage in a wide variety of behaviors rather than emphasize just one.[224] Finally, "Facebook experience" (how long, in years, a person had maintained a profile on the site) generally correlated with more total photo-related activity of every type, suggesting that impression management is an ongoing process. From their own study and some prior studies, the authors conclude that personality influences a user's "visual contribution" to Facebook.[225] This claim may seem obvious or facile; however, the differences in Facebook behavior highlighted demonstrate that offline personalities influence engagement with the medium, laying groundwork for the claim that particular aspects of identity (such as race and gender) are also performed in the virtual world. Not only do personality traits predict different uses of Facebook, but the manner in which those personality traits are expressed makes, once again, a fair amount of intuitive sense.

Some gender differences in Facebook use have already been mentioned in Chapter 1: McAndrew and Jeong found that women spent more time on Facebook than men typically did, sought more direct contact with and information about others, engaged in

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[224] Azar Eftekhar, Chris Fullwood, and Neil Morris, "Capturing Personality from Facebook Photos and Photo-Related Activities: How Much Exposure Do You Need?," *Computers in Human Behavior* 37 (August 2014): 166–68, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.04.048. An important note on this study, however: 85% of the participants were undergraduates, for whom identity construction might be particularly relevant to their Facebook use.

[225] Eftekhar, Fullwood, and Morris, 169.

more family-oriented activities, and invested more time in photo-related behaviors, particularly those associated with impression management.[226] The resulting conclusion of this and other studies is that women, more than men, use Facebook for communication and relationship building.[227] Offline, women are typically more connected to family life, more often employed in jobs that entail emotional labor, and socialized to be more attuned to both the physical and emotional needs of others. In this case, then, it appears that virtual behaviors bear a resemblance to concrete behaviors, in terms of women typically being more other-oriented.

But what of other performances of identity? Focusing on profile photos used by men and women, Tifferet et al. postulate that the images chosen by users to serve as the visual representation of the profile's owner would reflect certain gendered differences, and to test their theory, the researchers rely on public profile images from a randomized and international sample of Facebook accounts.[228] Three independent coders identified relevant components of profile pictures and collaborated to compile a 38-item checklist of different traits of the photos. Using the checklist provided by the researchers but without knowing the nature of the study or the hypotheses contained therein, a "rater" then coded the 500 profile pictures. The researchers found that profile photos of female users twice as often include family members[229], which they compare to studies demonstrating that "women tend to be more active maintaining family relations"

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[226] McAndrew and Jeong, "Who Does What on Facebook?"
[227] Junco, "Inequalities in Facebook Use."
[228] Sigal Tifferet and Iris Vilnai-Yavetz, "Gender Differences in Facebook Self-Presentation: An International Randomized Study," *Computers in Human Behavior* 35 (June 2014): 388–99, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.016.
[229] Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 393.

offline[230]. This finding also corroborates the finding that women tend to spend more time engaging with family members through Facebook and other digital platforms.

In addition, women were found to exhibit more facial expression in their profile pictures, including by making more eye contact and smiling more frequently. (Men, as previously noted, were more likely to use serious facial expressions in their profile photos.[231]) The authors postulate that eye contact "signal[s] agreeableness in women, while signaling vulnerability in men,"[232] a suggestion that echoes Sullivan's discussion of women's tendency to smile as a way of appearing non-threatening and "smoothing over any difficulties" between interlocutors."[233] For women, who are expected to be accommodating and attentive to the (social, emotional, and physical) needs of others, eye contact and smiling communicate recognition and receptiveness to those around them, and thereby compliance with their gender role. For men, being attentive to others may suggest a feminine deference, a trait certainly associated with weakness and proscribed for men wishing to command the respect of their peers. The masculine man does not serve; he leads. He also does not smile; he sets his jaw, narrows his eyes, and focuses his gaze on the horizon, intent on pursuing his best interest via rugged individualism. In contrast, women set others at ease with smiles, and use eye contact to acknowledge the subjecthood of those around them. In this differential use of both eye contact and smiling in profile pictures, we find gendered bodily comportment recapitulated in online photographs selected by the users themselves as their representative image.

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[230] Catherine A. Salmon and Martin Daly, "On the Importance of Kin Relations to Canadian Women and Men," *Ethology and Sociobiology* 17, no. 5 (September 1996): 289–97, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0162-3095(96)00046-5.
[231] McAndrew and Jeong, "Who Does What on Facebook?"
[232] Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, "Gender Differences in Facebook Self-Presentation," 391.
[233] Sullivan, "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change," 29.

In comparison with women, men include more objects[234] in their profile pictures and more often wore formal attire, leading the authors to postulate that they attempt to convey social status through markers of financial success in their profile pictures.[235] Unfortunately, these data are too vague to lend themselves to a fine-grained analysis (as the nature of the particular objects seems quite important); however, some broad conclusions might be drawn. Acquisition and display of costly consumer goods function as a claim to elevated social status for both men and women, but the preponderance of objects in the profile pictures of men suggests that they are of particular importance to men. Culturally, we have not yet completely shaken the idea that men serve as primary breadwinners and earners, as those who attain the means to goods. We still grapple with an egregious pay gap, the careers of men tend to be prioritized over those of their female spouses, and men still occupy the lion's share of upper level positions in the corporate sphere. Having material resources or the means to them implies independence and mastery over the external environment, qualities associated with masculinity. So in the concrete world, possession or ownership of objects (including women) forms an integral part of masculine gender performance, and to display these objects in the profile picture demonstrates that identity.

Of course, not all objects function as status symbols, but it seems plausible that the objects themselves may also serve to represent activity or engagement with the world. They are, after all, props to facilitate a "doing" of some sort, pieces of the physical environment brought into range of the camera's lens. A guitar, even innocuously

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[234] "Objects," for the purposes of the study, refers to almost any non-human or –animal item, including sports equipment, vehicles, instruments, or electronics.
[235] Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, "Gender Differences in Facebook Self-Presentation," 393.

propped in a stand in the background, suggests the playing of music (presumably by the profile picture's owner), an activity and production. Objects stretch identity beyond the boundaries of the photograph; they suggest that the subject of the photograph exists and interacts with a world beyond, resisting the immanence of the static image and realizing his (and I use "his" deliberately) transcendence elsewhere. In both suggesting activity and in expanding the identity of the photograph's subject beyond the picture itself, objects supplement the subject's masculinity.

In a similar vein, men were also more likely to depict themselves outdoors[236] (an observation corroborated by the finding given that men generally find the natural world less threatening and more fascinating than women do[237]). It is little surprise, given that women are taught from an early age that their bodies are weak and vulnerable, a fleshliness that inherently solicits harm from the surrounding environ and social actors. Iris Marion Young observes that "a woman frequently does not trust the capacity of her body to engage itself in physical relation to things. Consequently, she often lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along and at the same time protected."[238] These bodies may feel more like a liability than a source of agency, because being in the world (and on the Internet) as a woman is a risky business. I do not think it a stretch to claim that a woman's comfort with her physical surroundings, including spaces, things, and other people, is typically more tenuous than a man's. If that is the case, it may not be surprising to discover that men take and share more profile pictures of

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[236] Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 393.
[237] Agnes E. van den Berg and Marlien ter Heijne, "Fear versus Fascination: An Exploration of Emotional Responses to Natural Threats," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 25, no. 3 (September 2005): 261–72, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2005.08.004.
[238] Young, *On Female Body Experience*, 36.

themselves outdoors, which often imply risk and unpredictability.[239] (It is worth noting that 75% of deaths related to selfie-attempts were men, and the leading cause of selfie-related fatalities were falls from great heights[240].)

Beyond the composition of the profile photo, language use on Facebook differed between men and women in salient ways. Schwartz et al. analyzed 15 million status updates to identify broad trends in language use on Facebook, and then filtered them according to demographic data.[241] To briefly describe the use of a very complex statistical model, the researcher runs the text (in this case, status updates) through an application that employs an algorithm to identify "recurring patterns of co-occurring words."[242] For example, the words "leash," "walk," "dog," "vet," "bark," "treat," "lick," and "sit" may often be used near each other within a text, when people discuss the overall topic of "dogs." Topics, these clusters of words that usually appear together in the analyzed text, may then be correlated to gender, age, or any other variable for which there is data on the corpus of text. Schwartz et al. set out to use this method to determine if Facebook users of different gender, age, and personality type posted about different topics, and the results were striking.[243]

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[239] Alternatively, natural settings and the dirtiness they entail might suggest that a woman is unladylike or a tomboy. Neither is in line with more conventional notions of femininity, though they are not as taboo as they once might have been.

[240] Michael Zhang, "The Numbers Behind Selfie Deaths Around the World," PetaPixel, February 9, 2016, https://petapixel.com/2016/02/09/numbers-behind-selfie-deaths-around-world/.

[241] H. Andrew Schwartz et al., "Personality, Gender, and Age in the Language of Social Media: The Open-Vocabulary Approach," ed. Tobias Preis, *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 9 (September 25, 2013): e73791, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0073791.

[242] Megan R. Brett, "Topic Modeling: A Basic Introduction," Journal of Digital Humanities, April 8, 2013, http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/2-1/topic-modeling-a-basic-introduction-by-megan-r-brett/.

[243] For anyone interested in this method of text mining or language use generally, I highly recommend taking a gander at the full study. The word clouds showing language use as a function of personality type were very interesting.

I include at the conclusion of this chapter an image of word/phrase and topic use as correlated with gender (adjusted for age). The central word cloud indicates the frequency with which women and men used individual words and phrases, while the clusters around the edge are the topics themselves. Word size is scaled "according to the strength of the correlation of the word with the demographic or personality measure of interest," while color is used "to represent frequency over all subjects; that is, larger words indicate stronger correlations, and darker colors indicate more frequently used words."[244] In the central word cloud, then, the larger a word is, the more strongly it correlates with the target gender, whereas color indicates frequency of use. As an example, "wishes_he" is quite large, as men are far more likely to use the phrase than women, but it is gray because that phrase is not used as often as the word "fuck," which is red.[245] At the periphery of the central word cloud, we see topics most strongly correlated with the target gender. The inclusion of the topics allows us to see what subjects were most exclusively the domain of women and which were most exclusively the domain of men.

Beginning at the top and moving clockwise, topics most correlated with female-identified[246] individuals are: generalized excitement/enthusiasm, cuteness (of babies and puppies, specifically), birthday/holiday wishes, peer relationships (i.e., friends and boyfriends), gratitude (particularly for family), and love. Men, on the other hand, were more likely than women to post about (again starting at the top and moving clockwise):

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[244] Schwartz et al., "Personality, Gender, and Age in the Language of Social Media," 6.
[245] These word clouds do contain some relics of previous iterations of Facebook. When Facebook launched, the status included a prompt with the user's name and "is," such that a completed status was formulated as, "Stephanie is tired." Later, the verb was removed, leaving only the name before the blank, but still guiding the user into 3rd person pronoun usage and grammatical structure. For this reason, I take phrases like "wishes_he" to be referring to the author of the post rather than another individual.
[246] I will note here that sex and gender are used interchangeably in this paper.

sports (particularly football), fighting, videogaming, government (focusing on the economy), generalized swearing/hostility, and government (focusing on rights and freedom).[247] Because the inclusion of topics in this graphic indicates correlation with gender rather than frequency of post, we cannot suppose that men and women's Facebook posts primarily reflected the topics indicated here; if a topic was the subject of frequent posts, but equally so between both genders, it would not have been presented. Unfortunately, data concerning the most frequent topics for both genders has not been included in the study, and further, the raw correlation data (which would indicate just how much more one gender posted about a topic than the other) is absent.

[247] Schwartz et al., "Personality, Gender, and Age in the Language of Social Media," 8.

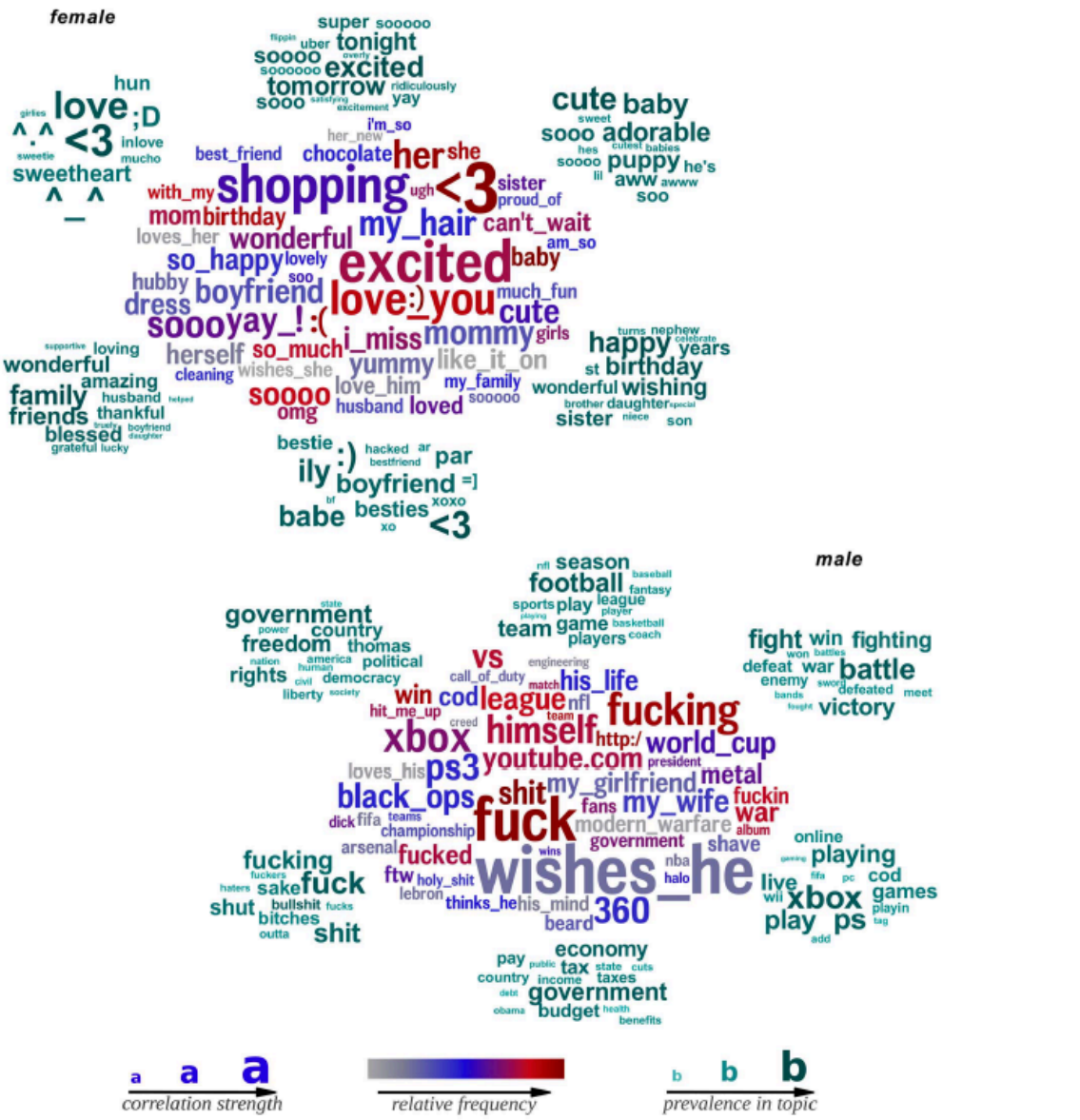

Figure 3. Words, phrases, and topics most highly distinguishing females and males. Female language features are shown on top while males below. Size of the word indicates the strength of the correlation; color indicates relative frequency of usage. Underscores (_) connect words of multiword phrases. *Words and phrases* are in the center; *topics*, represented as the 15 most prevalent words, surround. ($N = 74,859$: 46,412 females and 28,247 males; correlations adjusted for age; Bonferroni-corrected $p < 0.001$).
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0073791.g003

[248]

Still, I do not think it would be outrageous to draw a few conclusions from the limited data provided. At least three of the topics (love, family/gratitude, and boyfriend/besties) among those listed for women are other-oriented and specifically

[248] Schwartz et al., "Personality, Gender, and Age in the Language of Social Media."

highlight the positive emotions related to those relationships. In fact, each of these clouds mentions a variant of "love," even if via acronym ("ily" stands for, "I love you"). A fourth topic appears to be primarily birthday wishes to family members, and a fifth consists of appreciating the cuteness of baby humans and animals, which again are sociable topics with a congenial sentiment. The final topic, that of generalized excitement, has no discernable object, but the tenor is decidedly cheerful ("yay"/ "satisfying"). On the whole, then, the topics primarily associated with female language use on Facebook convey a cheerful tone and a social orientation, akin to the smiles that predominate women's physical comportment and profile pictures. Conspicuously, in the collection of word clouds generated by women's Facebook posts, the only word with a negative valence is the mild—and oftentimes playful—"ugh."

In contrast, within the men's topics, at least two express overt hostility: the topic composed almost entirely of curse words (including several variants of "fuck") and the topic referencing an unspecified battle/fight/war/enemy. (Of note, men have a monopoly on swearing; no fewer than seven swear words appear in the topics correlated with male-identified Facebook users, while none appear to be primarily associated with female identification.) Two more topics, those concerned with videogames and with sports, directly involve competition (and sometimes violence), though they are not as plainly aggressive. I don't think I have to argue, rather I'll just point out, that aggression and competition more often characterize masculinity in the concrete world, just as they evidently do here in the virtual world. Sports, videogames, and war historically have been (and still are) the domain of men, so it is unsurprising that discussion of these topics on social media holds special interest for men.

Politics (the subject of the two remaining topics correlated with men) presents more of a problem, from an interpretive standpoint. I will admit that I find the results at odds with my own experience, as I have many female-identified Facebook friends who are quite politically active and openly discuss their perspectives. However, the discrepancy between the study's results and my own observations may be attributed to a sampling bias: the large majority of my Facebook friends, particularly those I engage with and so whose posts Facebook decides to present in my Timeline, are at least college-educated, and many are pursuing (or have earned) post-graduate degrees. Though I am unable to find data on the relationship between education level and willingness to engage in political discussion, I would not be surprised to learn that more education enabled women to feel more comfortable participating in political discussion. In addition, political discussions, more than other types of discussion, seem likely to turn contentious quickly, which may lead women to feel more reluctant to comment or join, particularly given the risks associated with speaking up on the Internet as a woman.

Finally, as the authors point out, the study brings one specific insight that merits special attention. In referring to their heterosexual partners, men precede the noun (be it "wife" or "girlfriend") with the possessive pronoun "my," much more often than women did for "husband" or "boyfriend."[249] The nature of the study unfortunately prohibits a thorough investigation of this tendency, as the specific context of these phrases has been stripped away. Perhaps women tend to speak of significant others in general terms more often ("Boyfriends who give flowers on Valentine's Day are the best!"), while men more frequently use concrete terms ("My girlfriend got me flowers for Valentine's Day!"). Or,

[249] Schwartz et al., 9.

women might have been more likely to insert an adjective between "my" and "significant other" (e.g., "my amazing boyfriend"); if that adjective varied, then the modeling program would not have detected the pattern. There is, finally, the more sinister (but not unlikely) explanation: that men simply think and refer to their female significant others in more possessive terms than woman do about their male significant others. The majority of women who marry men still adopt their husband's last name rather than keep their maiden name (which is, incidentally, generally the surname of their father), suggesting that a certain cultural attitude may quietly persist though women are no longer the property of men in a legal sense.[250] Despite the difficulty of providing a well-supported explanation for this discrepancy, it would seem imprudent to let such a suggestive linguistic habit pass without note.

Undergirding many of these observations is a tendency directly investigated by Zhao et al.: Facebook users prefer to show, rather than tell, who they are and what they are like.[251] In a study seeking to determine what methods Facebook users employ to "claim" their identities, the researchers devised a continuum along which identity claims might be placed, ranging from the most implicit to the most explicit. The most implicit claims were "visual," portraying the "self as social actor" through Wall Posts and Pictures.[252] The most explicit claims were "narrative," showing the "first person self" through the profile's "About Me" section, where users composed blurbs about themselves. In the middle, the "enumerative" identity claims, which depict the "self as consumer" or

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[250] Claire Cain Miller and Derek Willis, "Maiden Names, on the Rise Again," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/upshot/maiden-names-on-the-rise-again.html.
[251] Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin, "Identity Construction on Facebook."
[252] The Facebook "Wall" is the predecessor of the Timeline. As this study was conducted in 2008, its terminology is slightly out of date.

"cultural self," via lists of interests, hobbies, favorite music, quotations, etc. In the context of this paper, then, the researchers postulate that Facebook users tend to engage in implicit impression management by "showing" rather than "telling" (i.e., posting photos of themselves playing soccer rather than declaring that they enjoy it).[253] Their results indicate that 91% and 95% of Facebook users made implicit claims using profile pictures and wall posts, respectively, while many fewer made explicit claims using the "About Me" section (approximately 66% made use of the section in some way, but only 22% wrote more than one or two short sentences). Somewhere in the middle were the enumerative claims made through lists of interests and consumer preferences. From this data, the authors conclude that Facebook users, like social agents in the "real" world, perform their identities rather than personally narrate them. In fact, they suggest that their findings "challenge the distinction between 'real selves' and 'virtual selves' or 'true selves' and 'false selves.'"[254]

Setting the data aside, however, I question the notion that there even is a "genuine," "true," or "authentic" self waiting to be revealed. Dewey writes of character, the "interpenetration of habit" that serves to provide some unity of the self,[255] but character does not guarantee a self or an identity that is fixed and unchanging. Rather, character (and the habits that compose it) designates a set of predispositions jockeying for dominance, and only context can determine which come to the fore. I have a self that is instructor to my students, one a daughter to my mother, and another a friend to other graduate students, all of which entail different manners and comportment, but none of

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[253] Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin, "Identity Construction on Facebook."
[254] Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin, 1832.
[255] Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, 29.

these is more my "self" than another. As circumstance suggests a role, I respond. My self is multiple, fluid, and adaptive; to imply that one facet must be primary is to truncate the complexity of a social being in relation to others. I have a Facebook self and a Twitter self: these virtual selves have been crafted in similar fashion to my concrete selves. The closest I can come to a single "self" is the point where all of these identities come together, which is point where a multiplicity of external relationships intersect. But this self is potential rather than actual, a set of predispositions and habits informed by history and waiting to be activated by circumstance. The particular concoction of self that will actualize under given conditions—and just what exactly it will look like and how it will respond to stimuli—remains to be seen.

X. Conclusion

The purpose of showing the continuities between our concrete selves and our virtual selves has not been in support of some "authentic" identity that may be found both in the "real" world and online, and certainly not to argue that a virtual self is reducible to—or a derivative of—a concrete self. Rather, I have attempted to demonstrate that recognizable structures and patterns of activity may be located in both realms. Gender, in the examples presented within this chapter, carries with it identifiable hallmarks and tendencies that have been practiced through performance and sedimented into habit, but within a new world, its expression relies upon a different set of tools, behaviors, and styles of bodying.

A piece of the puzzle is missing, however. Our selves do not spring forth fully formed from Zeus's skull, but are in fact learned through social relationships, physical

environments, and hermeneutical resources. These relationships and the transactions that characterize them are the subject of Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3

Transaction and Communication In the Flesh

"The catching up of human individuals into association is thus no new and unprecedented fact; it is a manifestation of a commonplace of existence. Significance resides not in the bare fact of association, therefore, but in the consequences that flow from the distinctive patterns of human association…The significant consideration is that assemblage of organic human beings transforms sequence and coexistence into participation."

-John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*[256]

I. Introduction

Mark Zuckerberg writes that Facebook's mission is to make the world more "open and connected."[257] Its landing page beckons visitors to, "Connect with your friends and the world around you on Facebook."[258] This quotation might be read in both charitable and cynical ways. To read it charitably, Facebook, as a website, serves as a thoroughfare, a point of access to the human beings and physical places on the other side of a "series of tubes."[259] It brings friends and foreign locales through the screen to the user (or vice versa), providing an experience and connection otherwise unattainable for reasons of

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[256] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 138.
[257] "Mark Zuckerberg - I'm Excited to Announce That We've Agreed To...," accessed May 4, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10101319050523971.
[258] "Facebook - Log In or Sign Up," Facebook, accessed March 17, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/.
[259] "Series of Tubes," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, January 29, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Series_of_tubes&oldid=702202140.

limited means, time, or convenience.[260] Read more cynically, Facebook, as a corporation, merely portrays itself as a "thoroughfare," while in reality duping members into experiential complacency and thereby functioning as a final and virtual resting place for its users, all the while gorging on the revenue of omnipresent advertisements.[261] The social connections made there are mere shades of their concrete counterparts, with profiles serving as the ultimate indulgence for both the narcissist and the voyeur, and the news feed a veritable informational hall of mirrors.

These charitable and cynical readings echo the positions of the archetypes mentioned in Chapter 1: technophile and the reactionary, respectively. For the technophile, the Internet offers the opportunity for genuine relationships with other individuals through virtual space and unprecedented potential for connection; for the reactionary, those relationships are mere facsimiles of their concrete counterparts. At the core of the dispute is the nature of the virtual world, and what its relationship is to the concrete world. To adequately address the philosophical implications of Facebook's stated mission, we must determine exactly what sorts of relationships we are having online, and whether or not they adequately approximate the relationships and interactions we have in the flesh.

II. **Relationships in the Flesh: Communication and Interpersonal Dynamics**

Humans exist within a rich physical environment of computers, xylophones, pillows, rocks, guitars, cars, and an infinite number of other things that we encounter in our daily

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[260] The question of whether the user is transported to another place, or if the other place is brought to the user, or neither or both of these, will be the business of Chapter 4.
[261] "Facebook Revenue Breakdown by Segment - Business Insider," accessed March 17, 2016, http://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-revenue-breakdown-by-segment-2015-11.

ongoings. Also occupying our physical landscape, however, are entities that refuse to be mere objects—they call out to us as something more, make demands upon us, hinder or help us, coax us to abandon solipsism in favor of community, coexistence, communion. We grant them varying degrees of subjecthood based on a wide (and unsettlingly fluid) range of factors, from problem-solving abilities to mirror tests to language skills to simple familiarity. And as inanimate objects like my computer keyboard[262] train my body into particular patterns of behavior and habits, so too do our interactions with others inform our comportment and our transactions with the world. However, unlike inanimate objects, to which "intent" and "attitude" cannot be ascribed, our transactions with other sentient beings are characterized by communication, an intentional or unintentional transmission of meaning through the corporeal environment. The question for this chapter is, what are the patterns of interaction between subjects[263] like in concrete life? And later, in Chapter 4, how are these patterns replicated (or possibly distorted) in our online interactions?

I take communication to be the most fundamental feature of our relationships with other creatures, whether it is through spoken language, the comportment of body, or manipulation of our environment, and the first step in analyzing the communication

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[262] The example of the computer keyboard is originally Shannon Sullivan's, but I find it particularly apt. Though built to accommodate the physiology of the human hand, the keyboard still trains the hands and fingers into particular patterns of bodily interaction with it. As my typing speed approaches the speed at which my thoughts flow, the closer the keyboard becomes to being an extension of my mind, and the gap between my environment and my body becomes more seamless. Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 67.

[263] I use the term "subject" with some hesitation: while I do not wish to invoke the dualism of subject and object, I do want to place some boundaries on the type of interaction I will be discussing. Levels of sentience may vary among different organisms, and similarly so may the type or complexity of communication. To avoid a veritable warren's worth of rabbit holes, I confine my discussion to the intraspecies communication of humans, as currently only human beings may open or maintain Facebook accounts. In addition, given the current state of scientific inquiry into animal behavior and communication, at this point it is our communication with other human beings that is surely the richest and most complex that most of us experience in our lifetimes.

patterns of human beings is establishing how, and to what extent, communication is possible. An existentialist might approach communication through a theory of intersubjectivity or recognition[264], when the gaze of the other forces us to acknowledge them as subject, and a more strictly phenomenological approach might work through an understanding of the reversibility of hands that are both touching each other and being touched simultaneously[265]. In fact, an existential or phenomenological approach might seem especially conducive to discussions of discrimination or objectification (a pervasive feature of human interaction), wherein a fully-fledged subject is denied their full subjecthood and reduced to a mere object or caricature, particularly where the discussion is leading up to an analysis of Facebook. However, existentialist approaches have been criticized as introducing an inherent hostility toward intersubjective relationships, leaving no room for genuine recognition and reciprocity. It is not my concern here to argue us out of solipsism or prove the subjecthood of other human beings I encounter; my intention, rather, is to explore the role of intraspecies communication in the lived experience of human beings. A robust theory of communication must be able to account for understanding and misunderstanding, as well as communicability and intractable incommunicability.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty might seem a natural ally for developing an account of human communication in a shared world through a pragmatist lens. As Shannon Sullivan points out, his phenomenological account of human existence shares many characteristics with both feminism and pragmatism: "the primacy given to bodily existence; the attention

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[264] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2012), 350.
[265] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 133–34.

paid to the nonreflective aspects of human life; the importance of situation for understanding human engagement with and in the world; the crucial role that habit plays in corporeal existence; and the emphasis placed on lived experience."[266] Unfortunately, Sullivan points out, by relying in his early work like *The Phenomenology of Perception* on the concept of a prepersonal anonymous body to establish a framework for reciprocity and communication, he neglects the deep importance of a body's social, cultural, and historical context for its experiences, creating "a relationship of domination."[267] In the (admittedly incomplete) *The Visible and the Invisible*[268], he abandons reciprocity in favor of a new approach, suggesting reversibility as the means by which connection between persons may be made. Here, as Sullivan suggests, "the concept of reversibility…seems to entail the substitutability and interchangeability of bodily beings, which risks denying the particularities of corporeal existence."[269] In both cases, his attempt to bridge the communicatory gulf results in "a domineering erasure of others in its projective 'communication' with them.[270]

In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes the "normal" subject in relationship with the objective world as a sort of interpenetration: the subject "penetrates the object through perception and assimilates its structure," while "the object directly regulates his movements through his body."[271] Subject and object "are in a

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[266] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 65.
[267] Sullivan, 82.
[268] Merleau-Ponty died prior to the completion of the work. A hand-written manuscript was found and published posthumously, 7 years after his death. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Editorial Note," in *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Northwestern University Press, 1968), xxxiv.
[269] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 85.
[270] Sullivan, 66.
[271] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 134.

metaphorical dialogue in that each contributes something to the exchange between them that helps constitute what they are."[272] By virtue of my repeated engagements with the keyboard[273] and the extensive time that I have spent typing, I have sedimented knowledge and habits regarding its use, employing it to create words on a screen without a thought. I have imbued it with meaning and given it a place in my intentional horizon as a tool ready to be taken up as a means to my ends, while at the same time shaping my comportment around its use and allowing it to regulate my actions. To rest my fingers comfortably upon it, I orient my hands, my wrists, my forearms, my upper arms, my shoulders, my back, my neck, and then finally, my whole body in response to its construction. In other words, "things in the world are the objectified intentionality of a subject."[274] The keyboard has a meaning that I not only impose on it, but that is reflected in my handling of it.

For Merleau-Ponty, the objects I perceive in the world are not simply objects subject to my own patterns of behavior, but are subject also to the patterns of behavior of an entity similar to myself: "My gaze falls upon a living body performing an action and the objects that surround it immediately receive a new layer of significance: they are no longer merely what I could do with them, they are also what this behavior is about to do with them."[275] The other pattern of behavior indicates to me that there exists a "place of a certain elaboration and somehow a certain 'view' of the world."[276] The entity that makes use of my objects in a recognizable way, manipulating things hitherto mine, is another

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[272] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 67.
[273] I follow both Merleau-Ponty and Sullivan in using the example of the typing keyboard.
[274] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 69.
[275] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 369.
[276] Merleau-Ponty, 369.

self. Just as I experience my own body as a certain way of grasping and behaving in the world, I may discover in another body "a miraculous extension of [my] own intentions, a familiar manner of handling the world."[277] In this way, I recognize that my self and the other self constitute "two sides of a single phenomenon."[278]

But still, that the other living being is a fully-realized person has not been established, and the final ingredient in intersubjective recognition is language. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> In the experience of dialogue, a common ground is constituted between me and another; my thought and his form a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of discussion and are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. Here there is a being-shared-by-two… We are, for each other, collaborators in perfect reciprocity: our perspectives slip into each other, we coexist through a single world. I am freed of myself in the present dialogue, even though the other's thoughts are certainly his own, since I do not form them, I nonetheless grasp them as soon as they are born or I even anticipate them.[279]

Language, then, draws together our two separate historicities and allows for the exchange of meaning and an intertwining of our existences in a common world. In this momentary unity, we recognize another subjectivity by not merely understanding the potentiality of the other human consciousness for the having of a world, but by sharing in a concrete, content-rich, nearly tangible perspective-sharing of that world. Language, for Merleau-Ponty, pushes recognition from theoretical to actual by facilitating a coincidence of perspectives. I do not wish to understate the force behind his claim: we do not merely share an understanding, but instead, I am freed of myself and overlap with another in a moment of perfect world-having. Even a refusal to communicate serves as a form of

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[277] Merleau-Ponty, 370.
[278] Merleau-Ponty, 370.
[279] Merleau-Ponty, 370.

communication: no matter how another might turn away from me, their dismissal conveys their intent, and "there is the domain I believed was inaccessible."[280]

An enabling condition of this communication for Merleau-Ponty, Sullivan observes, is the "anonymous existence, of which my body is continuously the trace, henceforth inhabit[ing] these two bodies simultaneously."[281] This anonymous existence, grounded in our realization that our own perspectival views are not independent of each other, but slip into each other and gather together to produce our view of a thing, extends beyond my single self when I also realize that perspectival views are limitless, and it is only with the perspectival views of others that they are "gathered together in a single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception."[282] The other completes the world, bringing wholeness to a formerly incomplete system. The wholeness inheres in a "level of existence in which there is commonality between and a quasi-indifferentiation from other bodies. The wholeness that accompanies individuation, particularity, and distinctiveness is the link that provides the possibility of communication between you and me."[283] For Merleau-Ponty, then, underlying our existence as human beings is a pre- or impersonal structure, perhaps differentiated by the nuances of our bodies and our lives, but one that is fundamentally shared among us as embodied, world-inhabiting subjects. It is this structure that allows us to observe the bodies of others and recognize them not only as living creatures or other consciousnesses, but also as subjects. The anonymous body provides the bridge between individuals, safeguarding the possibility of profound world-sharing, recognition, and intersubjectivity.

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[280] Merleau-Ponty, 378.
[281] Merleau-Ponty, 370.
[282] Merleau-Ponty, 369.
[283] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 69.

The anonymity of the body (even with the acknowledgement of the particularities and differentiation of it), however, poses a problem. While it may be true that similarities of bodily comportment sometimes clue us in to the internal processes and experiences of another lived subject, the appeal to a pre- or impersonal body as a foundation of that understanding is troublesome. Certainly there are commonalities among human bodies, even if not every member of the species possesses every single typical train, like two eyes, opposable thumbs, or a particularly wrinkly cerebral cortex. Sullivan observes, "That the structure of human bodies sometimes can provide a shared meaning to the world does not mean, however, that all or even many aspects of the world are had in common. Abstracted from the various contexts in which human bodying takes place, similarities between humans are not significant or 'weighty' enough to serve as an automatic or certain foundation for an easy understanding across their differences."[284] In other words, despite our best intentions and efforts, the corporeal habits we have acquired over a lifetime of cultural transactions are sometimes imbued with different meanings and may be interpreted or understood in different ways both intra- and interculturally. Similarities across the bodily apparatus are simply insufficient to overcome this sedimentation of experiences and meanings.

Sullivan offers an example of a student from China, who tended to tilt her head down deferentially and avert her eyes so that she would not make eye contact, a posture that Sullivan and her fellow professors interpreted to indicate inattentiveness and disrespect. However, after interacting with the student, it became apparent to Sullivan that the student intended to convey her respect for authority as she was taught within her

[284] Sullivan, 71.

native culture (and she in fact found the comparatively "loose and uncontained" comportment of Americans to be rude and disrespectful).[285] Those who teach at universities with large populations of international students, otherwise engage with diverse groups, or really, exist in anything but the most insular of communities, likely have similar stories.

In my own experience, miscommunications of this sort can also happen between individuals raised in the same culture with much more similar backgrounds. If I were to project my own intentions onto my mother based on her more decisive and firm manner of speaking, I would mistakenly believe that she was angry, rather than that she is the product of thirty-six years of being the only female engineer at a chemical plant. And as discussed at length in Chapter 2, men and women are encouraged to assume very different bodily styles: while men are permitted to occupy more space both physically and verbally, women are generally encouraged to be more contained and accommodating. Behaviors proscribed for woman are prescribed for men (and vice versa). Were my close male friend to assume from his own complicated relationship to crying that crying functioned for me as it does for him[286], he would be deeply concerned about my emotional well-being, because after thirty years of being counseled implicitly and explicitly to "man up," he does not cry. Further examples of these translational failures abound and are likely familiar to anyone who has been well-meaningly engaged with another person but misunderstood their intent. In short, "The ambiguity of bodily

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[285] Sullivan, 72–73.

[286] In this way I reflect my gendered upbringing: having been permitted to cry more freely than my male peers, it serves as a form of catharsis, erupting when I am happy, sad, angry, frustrated, or tired. On the other hand, in the 25 years I have known my friend, I've only seen him cry once, and then over the death of his childhood dog.

behavior in these instances only strengthens [the] point… that one cannot merely assume that one has understood another's bodily activities and habits correctly by projecting one's own intentionality onto them."[287]

Sullivan notes that Merleau-Ponty searches for "the essential 'core' in humans that underlies all of their cultural and other differences," ultimately landing on the claim that "individual bodies have a universally shared commonality that is then overlaid by the differences that their particularities give them."[288] Unfortunately, in emphasizing how human beings might find community in the face of seemingly stark differences, Merleau-Ponty has neglected the importance of those differences to our bodily life. Particularities constitute human beings; they are not merely overlaid onto a pre-given structure. Suggesting that I may understand another person by ignoring our differences denies her the particularities that constitute her, resulting in a relationship of domination rather than communication and reciprocity. Rather than taking into account her unique approach and contributions to meanings in the world, she has been erased, serving merely to reflect me back to myself in a phenomenon Elizabeth Spelman calls, "boomerang perception."[289]

For Sullivan, preserving the differences (an essential step to successful communication) requires taking common ground as a goal, rather than as a starting point. She explains, "Commonality is an active achievement. Similarities among people are something that must be created, cultivated, and nurtured so that a nondomineering form of coexistence is possible, not something to assume as a transcendental condition for the

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[287] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 73.
[288] Sullivan, 73.
[289] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 12.

possibility of communication."[290] Striking the balance between alterity and sameness proves difficult, but within the context of this work and its pragmatist bent, we must ask if Dewey manages the feat.

He writes that, "Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful," and "the fruit of communication should be participation, sharing…"[291] Communication, which entails participation in a community of shared meanings, also fosters "shared experience," "the greatest of human goods."[292] Based on this understanding of the role of communication in Dewey's philosophy (as a requisite step on the path to shared experience, and hence, to democracy as a way of life), it is impossible to overstate its importance. Unfortunately, as Sullivan points out, Dewey also tends to rely heavily on the notion that we can "put ourselves in the place of others…see things from the standpoint of their purposes and values."[293] While he does exhort that we "humble, contrariwise, our own pretensions and claims till they reach the level they would assume in the eye of an impartial sympathetic observer,"[294] he too appears to "imply a substitutability of you and your interests for me and mine, a substitution that would erase any differences between us."[295] Within the larger context of his work, these implications are mitigated somewhat by Dewey's emphasis on context and particularities[296], but for the

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[290] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 74. Here, regarding the suggestion that we start with our differences rather than our common ground, I note that Sullivan suggests Elizabeth Spelman's *Inessential Woman* for further reading, especially page 13.
[291] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 132.
[292] Dewey, 157.
[293] John Dewey, *Ethics*, ed. Barbara Levine, Abraham Edel, and Elizabeth Flower, The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7: 1932 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1989), 270.
[294] Dewey, 270. I do also wish to note that Dewey here invokes the idea of an "impartial observer," which adds another layer of interest to this quotation.
[295] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 79.
[296] As noted by Sullivan. Sullivan, 80.

moment, I wish to interrogate the idea that even with the most sympathetic and well-informed of listeners, all experiences could even be voiced.

III. Epistemic Injustice, or "What we've got here is failure to communicate."[297]

The expression, "A picture is worth a thousand words," is a cliché that contains a profound insight: some parts of immediate experience evade verbal capture, no matter the number of words or gestures expended attempting to corral them. However, for certain populations whose access to and influence over their community's epistemic norms is inhibited, the problem multiplies exponentially. In Miranda Fricker's insightful work, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*, she explores the concept of epistemic injustice, arguing that unequal participation in the epistemic practices and norms of one's community constitutes a serious ethical issue in need of attention, renegotiating the (traditional, historical) border between epistemology and ethics. She investigates what it means to be—and to not be—both the subject and object of social knowledge, as well as the impact these relative positions have on an individual's ability to lead a full and fully articulable social life. While she and I part ways in the formulation of a solution (as she approaches from the perspective of a virtue ethicist and I from the perspective of a pragmatist), I find her characterization of the problem both compelling and apt. It also seems to me that where epistemic injustice, as Fricker conceptualizes it, exists, true communication is an impossibility.

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[297] "What We've Got Here Is Failure to Communicate," *Wikipedia*, June 20, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=What_we%27ve_got_here_is_failure_to_communicate&oldid=786631779.

The first sort of epistemic injustice Fricker addresses is testimonial injustice. Identity prejudices, or prejudices rooted in the identity of the speaker, function to unduly inflate or deflate a speaker's level of credibility, "and sometimes this will be sufficient to cross the threshold for belief or acceptance so that the hearer's prejudice causes him to miss out on a piece of knowledge."[298] Of note, the deflation of a speaker's credibility may not always be disadvantageous (as when a person deemed mentally incompetent to stand trial receives a lighter prison sentence than they otherwise would), and the inflation of a speaker's credibility needn't always be advantageous (for example, if a presenter submits a conference paper for peer review to a colleague, who gives them the benefit of the doubt and allows them to proceed to a conference with an error in the paper, the presenter is then disadvantaged). However, Fricker writes, "In general…we shall see that credibility is a good that one needs to get enough of for all manner of well-functioning, and accordingly we should think of its deficit as generally disadvantageous."[299] Not receiving due credibility results in an "injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower,*"[300] because it amounts to withholding a proper respect for the speaker as a subject of experiences and knowledge. On the other hand, giving someone excess credibility does not undermine or insult them, so while it may constitute an error in judgment, it does not result in an injustice.

For Fricker, the central case of testimonial injustice is the systematic, identity-prejudicial credibility deficit. She writes, "Prejudice can insinuate itself in a number of ways, but I shall pursue the idea that its main point of entry is via stereotypes that we

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[298] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 17.
[299] Fricker, 19.
[300] Fricker, 20. Emphasis is Fricker's.

make use of as heuristics in our credibility judgments."[301] (She adopts the following definition of stereotypes: "widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes."[302] This definition is suitably neutral in terms of reliability, allows that the cognitive commitments may be more subtle than explicit belief, and may have a positive or neutral valence.) Further, "if stereotypes are widely held associations between a group and an attribute, then stereotyping entails a cognitive commitment to some empirical generalization about a given social group."[303] Importantly, for Fricker, these associations are assumptions about trustworthiness (rooted the speaker's perceived sincerity, competence, or both[304]), and are thus a "pre-judgment," operating on an unreflective level without proper regard for the evidence,[305] "*distort[ing] the hearer's perception of the speaker*."[306] Perhaps even inconsistent with the subject's actual beliefs, these "stealthier, residual prejudices" may still influence how we evaluate other speakers (as well as ourselves) and our social perceptions.[307] This type of prejudicial evaluation, she notes, is non-trivial: not only are the damages suffered profound, but they are also often compounded by other forms of marginalization, discrimination, or disadvantage. In addition, "[t]o be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value."[308]

Harms to an individual resulting from testimonial injustice may be practical or they may be epistemic, and sometimes they may be both. If a woman of color submits a

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[301] Fricker, 31.
[302] Fricker, 30.
[303] Fricker, 31.
[304] Fricker, 45.
[305] Fricker, 33.
[306] Fricker, 36. Emphasis is Fricker's.
[307] Fricker, 36.
[308] Fricker, 44. If I were writing this sentence myself, I might substitute "experiencer" for "knower." However, I do not believe it would change the core sentiment, but would simply broaden it.

job application in an industry where women and people of color are chronically underrepresented (such as the tech industry), and if her name "sounds" black, she will be less likely to be called in for an interview.[309] If the hiring manager allows the sound of her name to drive her résumé from the interview pile to the trash can, they commit a testimonial injustice, likely resulting in both practical and epistemic harms to the applicant. First, and practically, she has lost an opportunity for a job and the benefits that accompany it (income, health insurance, stability, etc.), but in addition, she has received yet another rejection from her chosen industry, potentially leading her to question her aptitude, her competence, and her ability to succeed in field. In short, she is harmed epistemically when she faces self-doubt that is unwarranted by her actual abilities or education, hindering her intellectual development.[310]

But, most importantly for Fricker, undermining an individual's status as a knower based on their identity is detrimental to essential parts of their self. It is through discourse with others that we recognize our affiliations, thereby forming our social identities in their rich particularity. But, "[n]ot only does [testimonial injustice] undermine [a person] in a capacity (the capacity for knowledge) that is essential to [their] value as a human being, it does so on grounds that discriminate against [them] in respect of some essential feature of [them] as a social being."[311] [312] While not every slight may

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[309] Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination" (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2003), http://www.nber.org/papers/w9873.pdf.
[310] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 48.
[311] Fricker, 54.
[312] I interpret Fricker's use of "knower" and "knowledge" here very broadly: while "knowledge" may imply a sort of scholastic or academic grasping of factual information, I take it to mean something more like "the haver of experiences" or "the having of experiences." To take "knowledge" on the former definition seems to introduce a very problematic implication that those with less knowledge are somehow less human.

have such a profound effect, identity-based prejudices will likely recur and compound, and they will likely affect all members of the community who share in that identity. Consequently, the community may find itself lacking the resources and solidarity required for effective resistance; denying a social group credibility generates a self-fulfilling prophecy that makes it difficult to even get an initial footing and begin to assert itself as a community of knowers.

Finally, "the prejudice operating against the speaker may have a self-fulfilling power, so that the subject of the injustice is socially *constituted* just as the stereotype depicts her (that's what she counts as socially), and/or she may actually be *caused* to resemble the prejudicial stereotype working against her (that's what she comes in some measure to be)."[313] And, "thus the construction of gender; thus identity power's ability to shape the people it cramps," Fricker notes.[314] She explains that stereotypes make themselves felt in the form of expectations, which can then have a "powerful effect on people's performances," in language that almost evokes Judith Butler.[315] I recall the look of horror on my high school teacher's face when she realized that her daughter had (somehow acquired and then) shown up to school wearing a t-shirt that read, "Too Pretty to Do Math." There are, in fact, numerous permutations of this garment[316], encouraging young women to physically wear the stereotypes of their gender.

Interestingly, and unfortunately, wearing this shirt may have led to worse performance during math class for both my teacher's daughter and her female classmates,

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[313] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 55. Emphasis is Fricker's.
[314] Fricker, 56.
[315] Fricker, 56.
[316] Jessica Misener, ""Don't Feel Bad If You Failed Math," Caption For Women's T-Shirt Says (PHOTO, POLL)," The Huffington Post, 51:05 400AD, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/20/newest-anti-math-tee_n_1021429.html.

due to the phenomenon known as "stereotype threat." Encapsulating Fricker's current concern regarding epistemic injustice, stereotype threat manifests when an individual presented with a negative stereotype about her identity becomes more likely, through that reminder, to fulfill it.[317] In that case, the stereotype exerts a causal force and foreshadows a self-fulfilling prophecy. As a result, "the primary harm of the injustice is grimly augmented—the epistemic insult is also a moment in a process of social construction that constrains who the person can be."[318] Testimonial injustice not only damages the subject's self-conception, but it also threatens their willingness or trust in themselves to make knowledge claims in the future.

The second form of injustice Fricker identifies is hermeneutical injustice. While testimonial injustices impugn the "who" that speaks, hermeneutical injustice comprises failures of the "what" (the content) and the "how" (the form) of speaking. The concept is grounded in the idea that "relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible."[319] In other words, the voices of the powerful have dominated the

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[317] The opposite of a stereotype threat, wherein a negative stereotype evokes poor performance, is the stereotype boost, in which the reminder of a positive stereotype about an individual's identity drives an improvement in performance. For example, when Asian-American women were reminded prior to a math test of their identities as women, they performed more poorly than without that reminder (due to stereotype threat, because women are stereotypically bad at math). Conversely, if the group of Asian-American women were reminded of their Asian identity before a math test, they tended to do better (owing to a stereotype boost driven by the idea that Asian people are good at math). M. Shih, T. L. Pittinsky, and N. Ambady, "Stereotype Susceptibility: Identity Salience and Shifts in Quantitative Performance," *Psychological Science* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 80–83, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00111.
[318] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 58.
[319] Fricker, 128.

development of language and communicatory conventions, and so words and practices have developed around meeting the hermeneutical needs and desires of a small but influential subset of speakers. With a limited ability to contribute to the dominant discourse (often compounded by social isolation, lack of access to education, depleted emotional resources, or precious little time to spend trying to explain it), the experiences of the less powerful have remained "obscure, even unspeakable."[320] As with testimonial injustice, the problem extends beyond the inability to adequately convey what is on one's mind: without the proper vocabulary, individuals may lack the cognitive tools to understand their lives and often, in the case of damaging experiences, prevent their future occurrence.

To illustrate the content-type variety of hermeneutical injustice, Fricker turns to Susan Brownmiller's memoir *In Our Time*, citing her description of the process of naming and defining "sexual harassment." Prior to the consciousness-raising sessions of the 1970s, countless women experienced in their workplaces situations for which they had no word: the unwanted and persistent sexual attentions of (usually male) employers and coworkers. In isolation, and lacking the right vocabulary to seek help, they had trouble making sense of the experiences, articulating its harms, and seeking legal redress. But as women gathered together in these sessions and discussed their lives with one another, they realized what they shared and set about to name it, eventually "discovering" the term "sexual harassment." Coining the phrase allowed women to delineate and refine a concept previously murky, to isolate an experience otherwise prone to blending into the broader tapestry of their working lives. As I am sure I do not have to argue, naming

[320] Fricker, 148.

lends power; to give the problem a name enabled women to rally around it and identify it as a shared experience.[321]

Not all instances of hermeneutical injustice arise from conceptual lacunae, and the remaining types may fall under the heading "form-type" hermeneutical injustice, wherein "the characteristic expressive style of a given social group may be rendered … an unfair hindrance to their communicative efforts."[322] Women, for example, tend to (or are perceived to) communicate with more emotion, that pesky quality considered to be antithetical to reason and therefore to objectivity and credibility. A more emotive communication style, then, may result in a speaker's statements being dismissed or undermined as irrational (or "hysterical," perhaps), preventing her from fully participating in the construction of hermeneutical practices or contributing to the hermeneutical resources of her social sphere. She is considered not only less intelligible, but she also is denied the opportunity to rework the very practices that exclude her. Similarly, a speaker of African American Vernacular English[323] (or one of the rural dialects of the Southeastern United States) may be perceived as linguistically ignorant or lazy[324], despite the fact that the dialect displays "consistent internal logic and grammatical

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[321] I do not mean to suggest that all cases of sexual harassment are the same, or that any experience can be perfectly "shared" among different individuals. I mean to suggest that the concept denotes a sort of familial similarity running through individual cases of harassment.
[322] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 160.
[323] "African American Vernacular English," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 25, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=African_American_Vernacular_English&oldid=731494309. The references regarding the following discussion of AAVE were located with the assistance of this page.
[324] Lisa J. Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 221.

complexity."[325] [326] The result is an unfair exclusion from the process of constructing a society's hermeneutical resources.

Recently, attention has been focused on another gendered communicative practice: vocal fry. Vocal fry, "also known as glottalization, pulse phonation, or 'creaky voice,' refers to a quality of voice characterized by intermittent irregular vibrations of the vocal folds (i.e., vocal cords) in the larynx (i.e., voice box)."[327] The phenomenon generally occurs when the speaker drops her voice into the lowest register she can[328], producing a sort of vocal crackling, most often at the end of her utterances. The discussion of vocal fry has followed patterns similar to other discussions of female speech, such as upspeak[329] and the use of qualifying phrases like "I feel that" or "it seems like." Use of these gendered communicative styles, particularly within scholastic or professional settings, affect perceptions of the speaker's competence and confidence, and young women are frequently cautioned to avoid employing them[330] (ignoring, of course, that speaking firmly and without qualifiers may lead to a woman being perceived as overly pushy, strident, or bossy, and generally unlikeable[331]). Studies of perceptions of

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[325] "African American Vernacular English."
[326] Green, *African American English*, 217. She is here citing Robbins Burling, *English in Black and White* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).
[327] Rindy C. Anderson et al., "Vocal Fry May Undermine the Success of Young Women in the Labor Market," ed. Joel Snyder, *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 5 (May 28, 2014): 1, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0097506.
[328] Lower-pitched voices are associated with increased perceptions of dominance in both sexes, suggesting a good reason to adopt this tendency in professional settings. Benedict C. Jones et al., "A Domain-Specific Opposite-Sex Bias in Human Preferences for Manipulated Voice Pitch," *Animal Behaviour* 79, no. 1 (January 2010): 57–62, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2009.10.003.
[329] Upspeak, more technically termed "high rising terminal," "is a feature of some variants of English where declarative sentence clauses end with a rising-pitch intonation, until the end of the sentence where a falling-pitch is applied." It is associated with so-called "Valley Girl Speech." "High Rising Terminal," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, May 30, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=High_rising_terminal&oldid=722856235.
[330] Lydia Dallett, "How Uptalk Could Cost You A Promotion - Business Insider," accessed August 6, 2016, http://www.businessinsider.com/how-uptalk-could-cost-you-a-promotion-2014-1.
[331] Kathleen L. McGinn and Nicole Tempest, "Hiedi Roizen," *Harvard Business Case Collection* 800, no. 228 (January 2000).

women speaking with vocal fry show a similar trend: both male and female listeners judged women's voices without vocal fry as significantly more trustworthy, competent, educated, attractive, and hirable than those with vocal fry.[332] Ultimately, then, it seems that women are caught in a catch-22: the vocal fry that accompanies artificial deepening of the voice (which should increase perceptions of dominance, as it does for men) instead undermines their credibility.

It is no surprise that these different injustices compound one another. Women who speak using vocal fry, for example, suffer significantly greater reduction in perceptions of their trustworthiness, competence, education, attractiveness, and employability than do men who speak with vocal fry.[333] In this case, an identity-based testimonial injustice compounds a form-type hermeneutical injustice, because the presence of vocal fry hurts perceptions of women, who are already less likely to be seen as career-oriented or professionally qualified, more than it harms perceptions of men. Similarly, for people for whom identity-based prejudices undermine their credibility, their accounts of their experiences are less likely to be admitted into the dominant communicative paradigm, allowing hermeneutical lacunae to persist. (In some cases, communities experiencing marginalization may even develop alternative methods of expression in reaction to their exclusion from the dominant discourse; though the results may be unintelligible within the dominant discourse, the results from within may be richer communication within that group as a harm is named. Solidarity may push it out into the broader communicative realm, forcing a refiguring of a society's hermeneutical framework. A particular example—#BlackLivesMatter—will be discussed later.)

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[332] Anderson et al., "Vocal Fry May Undermine the Success of Young Women in the Labor Market," 3.
[333] Anderson et al., 6.

How might this conglomerate of harms play out in a single situation, where epistemic injustices compound each other? Let us take a familiar headlining court case and its frequent conclusion: a so-called "he said/she said" rape case, wherein insufficient evidence has been provided to lead to a conviction of the accused rapist. I hope it is not a stretch to assert that women, in the contemporary United States, are more likely to be perceived as (i.e., be conceptually associated with) sex objects than men are. Women are, more often, expected to be attractive, pleasing decorations, and to accommodate the sexual attentions of men. As a result, women's lives frequently consist of negotiating a fine line between conforming to expectations just enough to avoid having strangers say, "Smile!" on the street and not being "appealing" enough to "invite" harassment or even rape. Suppose, then, that at the conclusion of their third date, a heterosexual woman invites her male companion into her apartment for a nightcap, and after several drinks, sexual intercourse occurs. The next day, she contacts the police. In her statement, she claims that she was far too inebriated to consent and had made her wishes regarding their sexual relationship clear at the beginning of their outing (those wishes being that she did not wish to have sex that evening). He responds that she had not resisted and that he was not aware that she was as drunk as she now claims to be. This is the most "gray"[334] example of rape that I can construct, and while I am not going to address the issue of actual guilt or innocence in this particular case, I would like to use Fricker's account of testimonial injustice to explain the events that often follow such an encounter.[335]

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[334] I use the term controversial "gray rape" here deliberately but carefully, to invoke a cultural conception that I do not necessarily wish the support or perpetuate, because it captures a particular understanding of the nature of the events that unfolded. "Sexual Violence Myths: Grey Rape - ConsentEd," accessed July 11, 2016, http://www.consented.ca/myths/grey-rape/.

[335] Fricker herself offers an example from Harper Lee's fictional work *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I find her use of the court case particularly illustrative not only because it requires that hearers overtly declare their

In the absence of physical evidence of force, the decision of the jury hinges upon the credibility of the two people whose accounts conflict (and indeed, their accounts of the events themselves may not even differ, but may rest instead on whether the accused party could have reasonably assumed consent was given). In this scenario, suppose the jury does not believe the victim's testimony: the narrative they accept instead is that she simply had "morning after regrets," and to avoid being called a "slut," she concocted a rape story (women, after all, are both more passive aggressive and vindictive than men, and so more likely to use indirect but punitive methods, like court proceedings, to enact their emotions, while men are more likely to be aggressive and direct—stereotypically). But in addition to this untrustworthiness, or lack of credibility in matters such as this, she invokes attributes at odds with her identity as a woman[336]: she claims her will was ignored, her bodily integrity violated. By our cultural understanding of women, she was not terribly entitled to either a will or bodily integrity to begin with, because one of her functions, as a woman, is being an object of the male gaze and a passive recipient of male sexual advances (particularly if they went on a date, and even more particularly if he paid[337]). Her story, then, is doubly dubious: she cannot be trusted to be direct and honest, and she attempts to assume traits that do not befit her social identity (i.e., a fully self-determining subject).

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belief or disbelief in one or more speakers, but also because of the serious ramifications for the parties involved. In my example, however, the element of race, though certainly still relevant, has been deferred.

[336] In a brief discussion of Catharine MacKinnon's work on the failure of men to take "no" for an answer, Fricker elaborates on how women's status as sexual objects creates a radical form of testimonial injustice. Based on her writings there, I believe she would be amenable to this example as I have presented it. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 138–42.

[337] For data on the extent to which paying for a female date's dinner affects how entitled men feel to sexual access, see: S. A. Basow and A. Minieri, "'You Owe Me': Effects of Date Cost, Who Pays, Participant Gender, and Rape Myth Beliefs on Perceptions of Rape," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26, no. 3 (February 1, 2011): 479–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260510363421.

In addition to this identity-based testimonial injustice, she may experience both types of hermeneutical injustice during the course of her testimony and the trial. If she were noticeably emotional, would her story seem more believable or less to those witnessing her testimony? If she were upset, the trauma of a rape would seem more credible, but with too much emotion, she might not be trusted to think straight, since emotion is held to be antithetical to "rational" thought, dispassionate objectivity, and perhaps even sanity. On the other hand, if she were not visibly upset, observers might doubt that anything traumatic had occurred. To fail to strike the balance in comportment, then, opens the door to form-type hermeneutical injustice: exhibiting the "correct" valence and amount of emotion to be understood by members of the courtroom would be incredibly difficult, if it was even possible at all.

There is, further, the difficulty in articulating the experience of rape, particularly given the myriad ways that it intersects with gender, race, culture, disability, age, and relationship to the perpetrator. As many feminist theorists have observed,[338] those with social or legal capital have a vested interest in maintaining their position and upholding the status quo. When it comes to rape narratives presented within a courtroom, where the judicial standard rests upon consent as perceived by a "reasonable" person (noting that

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[338] I think here of Catharine MacKinnon specifically. Though I recognize that she is an especially controversial figure, I believe she adeptly articulates the crux of this particular issue: "Rape, like many other crimes, requires that the accused possess a criminal mind (*mens rea*) for his acts to be criminal. The man's mental state refers to what he actually understood at the time or to what a reasonable man should have understood under the circumstances. The problem is that the injury of rape lies in the meaning of the act to its victim, but the standard for its criminality lies in the meaning of the act to the assailant…The crime of rape is defined and adjudicated from the male standpoint…But women are also violated every day by men who have no idea of the meaning of their acts to the women. To them it is sex. Therefore, to the law it is sex…But men are systematically conditioned not even to notice what women want…In this context, to measure the genuineness of consent from the individual assailant's point of view is to adopt as law the point of view which creates the problem." Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Rape: On Coercion and Consent," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, A Gender and Culture Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 50–51.

this "reasonable" person is generally a male-identified individual being accused of a sexual assault), there is much incentive to delegitimate, pathologize, or squelch the narrative of the victim. Consequently, the language available to effectively articulate the victim's particular experience of rape may not exist, at least in part due to women's historical exclusion from the construction of epistemological norms (particularly within the legal realm) and a resulting lack of nuance in the terms used to describe sexual assault. The victim, then, faces a content-type hermeneutical injustice in the form of a conceptual gap. She might be able to communicate her experience by explaining at length: "He did not explicitly threaten me, but he made his expectations for the remainder of the evening quite clear. He had bought me several nice dinners, and he seemed like he felt entitled to a return on his investment. When I suggested he leave, there was a menacing undertone that communicated that he had no intention of leaving and he was gradually getting pushier. He is larger than me, and I was worried that if I said no, he would use physical force. While he didn't say he would hurt me, it was already clear that my wishes were irrelevant. We'd both been drinking, and I just wanted him to go, so I didn't stop him. Resisting would have only made it worse, and sex was already inevitable. So I gave up, because it was better than being physically forced." However, as far as I am aware, there is no term for this sort of encounter, around which women might rally and legitimate their experiences. When the women of Brownmiller's memoirs came together around a common experience, identified it, and then named it, they located and filled in a conceptual lacuna; but in our discussions of rape, and even still in our discussions of sexual harassment in the workplace, there remain linguistic obstacles to participation in the construction of epistemological norms. In this scenario I

have constructed, all three types of hermeneutical injustice intertwine, each helping to prevent the others from being rectified.

I delve into Fricker's account to highlight failures of communication that not only plague our concrete interactions with others, but will return to muddy our virtual exchanges, as well. For Dewey, as well as for Sullivan, communication is an "active achievement," a goal to be aspired to, rather than a given to be taken for granted[339]. (I follow Sullivan in quoting Dewey here: "Something is literally made common in at least two different centres of behavior."[340]) Fricker offers a useful schema through which to understand how we fall short: where communication fails, injustice finds a foothold. But these failures of communication, and commensurate injustices, root themselves in failures of understanding. Failures of understanding, in the account offered by Sullivan, arise from perversions of genuine transaction. Sullivan never makes such a claim directly, so I will venture to show that Sullivan and Fricker's accounts are not only compatible but complementary.

IV. **Making It Work**

Early in her work, to explain the concept of transaction, Sullivan writes, "Understanding things as transactional is to understand them neither as completely different and separate nor as completely the same and merged into one another. Rather, it is to understand them as formed through a constitutive 'back and forth' between each other."[341] The "back and forth" requires two distinct entities to occur, but reflects a

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[339] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 74.
[340] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 141.
[341] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 14.

"constitutive permeability" rather than atomism. Following Sullivan's analogy, humans in transaction with their environment and other human beings more properly resemble a stew than a melting pot (in which all the ingredients meld into a homogeneous mixture) or a tossed salad (in which the ingredients merely bump up against each other with little effect). Just as the flavors of the potato and onion seep into the gravy, so by virtue of that permeability do they each alter the flavor of the other. The potato is no longer a mere potato but an onion-y potato; the onion is a potato-y onion.

Sullivan observes, "One must realize that the habitual, nonreflective ways in which one understands another person may be contributing to a misunderstanding of her. In attending to bodies that are different from my own, communication with another becomes possible because acknowledging the ways in a person's bodying, including its gestures, comportment, and style as well as appearance, is different from mine disturbs my assumption that I already understand its meaning." Nonreflective habits of perception reinforce a resistance to recognizing the other as a fully knowing and experiencing subject, and so they also undergird the forms of injustice theorized by Fricker.

These habits of perception, then, constitute an attempted refusal to transact and to deny the way in which the other permeates oneself.[342] They function as a means by which we try to resist acknowledging how limited the scope of our understanding of others truly is (and will be, without considerable patience and effort). The onion-y potato does not want to be onion-y and attempts to refuse to be permeated. To acknowledge that the

[342] I leave off questions of the perceiver's motivation here. Though surely a multiplicity of reasons exists to attempt to deny the full subjecthood of another, I cannot delve into them here. Ignorance, fear, and pure self-interest surely rank in the top several reasons, but for my purposes, the strategy remains the same: do not share a world. Allow the worldviews to remain incommensurate and unreconciled and unshared.

other human—who in a single utterance may proffer a perspective informed by a lifetime of experiences completely and irrevocably inaccessible to us—represents a mystery and a threat to our own precariously intertwined web of beliefs and experiences. Truly intersubjective exchanges and communications with others risk our worldview by putting it on par with another's, giving both equal legitimacy and so opening oneself to fallibility and epistemic discomfort.

The schema offered by Fricker provides a framework for considering how our social prejudices generate self-reinforcing failures of communication, thereby hampering a harmonious and open transaction among human beings. Transaction still occurs, but between confused, misguided, or resentful potatoes and onions. Communication still occurs, though not of the original or intended message. Through identity prejudice or conceptual lacunae, communication does not function as it is meant to, and something in the space between the interlocuters goes awry. What is given from one to the other (in a reciprocal exchange) arrives altered, the victim of a hegemonic signifying economy through which not every utterance or gesture may pass intact.

For Sullivan, the solution revolves around recognizing one's own ignorance and reconfiguring one's "nonreflective habits of engaging with others so that they are open to, rather than close off, the particularities and distinctiveness of others."[343] This process she calls "hypothetical construction" to emphasize the provisional nature of the meanings of transactions with others, which are offered as a fallible hypothesis, a "protomeaning that requests and is nondogmatically open to suggestions and modifications of others…A hypothesis is offered as an invitation to others to participate in and thus make possible a

[343] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 75.

mutually configured construction of meaning."[344] This approach to communication, then, attempts to undercut the perceptual habits that lead one to project meanings onto the communications of others, allowing "one to broaden the meanings of the world and, if desired, change the habitual way one bodily transacts with others." Sullivan recognizes that a sheer act of will cannot overcome a lifelong habit of unreflective perception and communication patterns, but she wishes to acknowledge "the plasticity of habit as well as the interconstituency of body and mind, the subconscious and the conscious, and the automatic and the willed."[345] The approach, as is pragmatism's wont, relies upon a dissolution of philosophy's traditional dualisms.

Hypothetical construction also highlights another fundamental tenet of the pragmatist approach: no individual—not even the one from whom the utterance or gesture originates—has a monopoly on the meaning of that gesture or utterance. Instead, one comes to recognize that, "By consciously thinking of my bodily comportment as a hypothesis, I can become consciously aware of the meaning that I offer others. I can come to recognize that my bodily habits and self-understanding are achieved by means of others."[346] In other words, my resting bitch face during a meeting does not reflect, on my end, that I am impatient or angry with the speaker, but instead that I am focusing more on listening than on keeping my face arranged in a pleasing way. Against a cultural backdrop that values women more when they are (and actively encourages them to be) accommodating and pleasant, though, my face indicates an attitude that verges on grumpy, at best, and perhaps even openly hostile. However, "for that reason, the

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[344] Sullivan, 76.
[345] Sullivan, 77.
[346] Sullivan, 77.

plurality of meaning and the ambiguity of bodying needs to be taken into account by all parties involved when trying to communicate with one another."[347] Bodily activity, as well as speech, are subject to this ambiguity, as so must be addressed when negotiating through the hypothetical construction of meaning. As Sullivan explains, "Our initial understandings of the meaning of bodily habits needs to be thought as 'working truths' about the meaning of bodying, 'truths' that are subject to revision based on the contribution of meaning made by one another."[348]

Sullivan suggests that awareness of the perception of others might compel a person to change their comportment in relation to the world, and that with time and practice, bodily habits and style will begin to incorporate this change, creating a sort of "new normal." The new manner of comporting oneself, crafted through a gradual change of habit, reflects a new relationship to the environment and to others, and this in turn influences the manner that others respond to us. But where to begin, and how to break into a problematic transactional circle between oneself and the environment? "As is the case with all transactional circles, there is no proper starting place to prescribe. One must find a way to jump into the circle, making a small change at one point on it; this has the potential to change the entire circle itself, making it nonvicious and similar to a spiral."[349] In other words, reciprocal transaction functions as a force for social change as individual shifts in behavior call out different responses from the environment and the people that one interacts with.

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[347] Sullivan, 77.
[348] Sullivan, 77.
[349] Sullivan, 78.

I imagine that the suggestion a person renegotiate their relationship to their environment and others in order to be better understood like this elicits (very justified) concern: this position seems to place the burden of improving relationships on the *mis*understood, which would typically be those individuals with less access to influence, power, or social capital in our linguistic economy. In other words, it sounds as though Sullivan suggests that the marginalized are ultimately responsible for appeasing or explaining themselves to those who control the dominant narrative, for contorting their experiences to fit the prevailing hermeneutical frame. Rather than allow my resting bitch face to surface, perhaps I should focus on promoting a more harmonious interaction with my coworkers by perfecting my light, peaceful smile, communicating in the manner that has been prescribed to me as a woman.

However, what Sullivan posits does not take as its ultimate end a frictionless interaction with one's surroundings and others (though this may be the happy consequence). In actuality, she targets better understanding, which does not necessarily entail either capitulation to the hegemonic linguistic economy or the erasure of all difference in communicative style. She explains, "[t]he point of hypothetical construction is that not all differences are smoothed out in the process of constructing the communal meaning of bodies and their encounters. Rather, it is to negotiate meaning in bodily and verbal ways that acknowledges and respects the different protomeanings that individuals bring to one another."[350] For Sullivan, this modification in behavior can represent respect for another person's different way of being in the world: it is to

[350] Sullivan, 78–79.

welcome another person's experiences into one's own bodying, allowing them to transform us.

Sullivan observes that at times, Dewey[351] (and many other philosophers) offers an account of communication in which success is defined by the extent to which we can "put ourselves in someone else's shoes," or "see the world through someone else's eyes."[352] For Sullivan, as well as other feminist philosophers and philosophers of race, "[t]his understanding of communication is troubling because it can imply a substitutability of you and your interests for me and mine, a substitution that would erase any differences between us."[353] In essence, human beings become fungible, at best. At worst, this characterization of communication portrays understanding as an act during which one forces meaning upon another, in an act of experiential colonization or violence. Preservation of difference—and perhaps even holding a space open for irreconcilable, irrevocable *mis*understanding—gains new importance: it prevents erasure, particularly of the individual who stands outside of the mainstream meaning-making enterprise.

In place of this problematic conception of communication, Sullivan points instead to the account of "world-traveling" developed by María Lugones. To combat the "arrogant perception" that characterizes some human interactions, Lugones suggests that we adopt a method of playful world-traveling when we are trying to understand or know another. Contra "agonistic" world-traveling (which is in fact an attempt at domination and conquest of another world), "the playful attitude involves openness to surprise,

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[351] Sullivan is careful to note that Dewey, in other parts of his work, hints at an understanding of communication that is less problematic. Sullivan, 80. Sullivan is drawing upon Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925 - 1953. Vol. 7*, 270.
[352] Noted by Sullivan at Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 79. Observation from Dewey at Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925 - 1953. Vol. 7*, 270.
[353] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 79.

openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the 'worlds' we inhabit playfully."[354] It offers flexibility, potentially even adopting a perspective that flouts the established rules and expectations. In this exercise, by attempting to explore the world created by another, one reflects upon possibilities: of oneself, of relations to others, and of the others themselves. She expounds, "The reason why I think that travelling to someone's 'world' is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their 'world' we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other."[355] The knowing can be accomplished at greater or lesser depth, with more or less understanding, but inherent in the notion of the "playful" is an active, transactional negotiation that fosters full intersubjective recognition. Sullivan adds, "[b]y world-traveling, one allows for a pluralistic world and a complex picture of how common meaning is forged out of, but does not necessarily eliminate, different perspectives and interests."[356]

But these "worlds" do not exist in isolation, each within a parallel universe occasionally visited by an intrepid human traveler. By virtue of the humans traveling between them, the worlds offer the same permeability as the stew, blending and influencing and transacting with one another, not collapsing into one another like the melting pot or remaining unaffected like the tossed salad. Truly traveling playfully between worlds produces change in both the world and the traveler, while yet fleshing out the surroundings that populate an interlocuter's world and bringing more clarity to

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[354] María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 16.
[355] Lugones, 17. Emphasis is in original.
[356] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 79.

their respective position in space and society. "Understanding world-travel as a stew means that coming to see myself and another from her world has a constitutive effect on what and who my world and I are, as has her seeing herself and me from my world for her and her world."[357] In fact, as one reimagines and refigures her perspective to make this move from her home space into a playfully shared neighboring world, she may begin to note not just the features present but also glimpse the hermeneutical gaps. She may grow to not just perceive gaps, but feel acutely the lacunae and other epistemic injustices.

No amount of world-traveling and no amount of transaction can render fully complete the experiences of another[358], and nor is such a result desirable, I do not think. Were I fortunate enough to spend every day for the rest of my life with my best friend, with knowledge of everything she could think to tell me about herself, I could not claim to know with absolute certainty her experience of something even as simple as the color blue. Through time, play, and transaction I might approach that perfect understanding asypmptotically, getting infinitely closer, but without hope of every reaching it. Nor would I want to: complete overlap of our experiences, such that I could perfectly "see the world from her eyes," amounts to the erasure of my friend and an end to the differences that I find so compelling. Though world-traveling offers an opportunity for an increasingly vivid depiction of what the world looks like from the shoes of another person, the picture cannot ever be complete—there will always be a little something lacking, something incommunicable that can only be felt by the individual who has lived

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[357] Sullivan, 80.

[358] In order to fully and perfectly understand another, one would have to be able to remove oneself from the exercise and *be* another. However, we always understand another *through* our own world and experiences, and while with time and practice we may allow the life of someone else to take the fore as we try to understand them, one's self cannot ever be fully set aside. In other words, while we may take a foray into the world of another, we cannot live there.

that particular life, as that particular minded body or embodied mind. Our historicities cannot absolutely coincide by virtue of history itself.

On the other end of the congeniality spectrum, one can try to refuse the transaction. To be open to traveling to another person's world, a foreign place where one's identity or core beliefs about oneself may be challenged, could feel threatening to the integrity of one's being. To grant that another has such a rich life, separate from and as real and valuable as one's own, may smuggle in a new and unwelcome sense of moral obligation. Refusal offers protection from such unpleasantness by preserving the meanings one makes as the sole meanings in the world. However, a person can attempt to resist, but just as it is impossible to avoid communication (as the act of avoidance does, in fact, communicate its intention), it is impossible to refuse to transact, as the refusal still affects both self and others as a form of transaction. It certainly changes the nature of the transactions: rather than symbolizing a playful and open approach to the world of another (or even an attempt to colonize it), refusal becomes an attempt to deny that another person deserves a place at the meaning-making table. Attempted refusal, whether motivated by self-protection, ignorance, or actual malice, communicates that one would prefer not to have the preeminence of their world challenged by the troubling presence of other selves. It represents (an attempt at) a solipsistic or narcissistic way of being in the world.

World-traveling is, ultimately, a "transactional conception of meaning."[359] To take the life and experiences of another as equally real world is to assert that meaning-making is a shared enterprise in which multiple parties participate. My resting bitch face

[359] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 80.

may be off-putting or grumpy-looking to another person, whereas to me that particular expression merely reflects a focused interest in something. By Sullivan's[360] (and Dewey's[361]) lights, I *am* off-putting and grumpy-looking to a person who reads my face that way, while I *am* simultaneously focused and interested in the topic at hand. Sullivan explains, "My understanding of each of us contributes to the meaning of our behavior and situation as much as [another person's] understanding does."[362] In order to improve our communication, then, Sullivan recommends that we try to change our comportment in an act of consideration for those we are communicating with (and that they should try to modify theirs out of consideration for us), understanding that somewhere between us meanings transform and are not being received as they are intended. By carefully considering how our behavior appears from another's world, we can break into the transactional circle and move toward better conveying and receiving meaning. She writes, "Hypothetical construction, which makes bodily communication explicit, is crucial to prevent the assumption of the familiar in another and thus the misunderstanding of him or her."[363]

I will note that here, Sullivan and I part ways. Though I may not intend my resting face to communicate bitchiness, I do not believe that the onus is on me to change how my resting face looks in order to try to convey less of it. The issue here lies on the receiving end of this communication that interprets my neutral face as hostile, a sexist assumption predicated upon very particular ideas of how women should inhabit in public

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[360] Sullivan, 80.
[361] From, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" in John Dewey, *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).
[362] Sullivan, *Living across and through Skins*, 81.
[363] Sullivan, 82.

spaces. By my understanding of Sullivan, her suggestion implies that the burden of miscommunication is equally distributed across all individuals, which ignores the fact that some people (and groups of people) have more access to the meaning-making economy, and so are less likely to be misunderstood or have their behavior mischaracterized. Here, I think Fricker offers some much-needed clarity: hermeneutical injustice is an actual injustice wherein those with less influence over the linguistic (and bodily) communicative norms are more likely to lack tools to make themselves understood. In these cases, the greater weight is, and should be, placed upon the person with better access to these resources to travel into the world of the person with less access.

In other words, individuals on the margins of the communicative enterprise are more likely to be misunderstood by, but better able to themselves understand, those who are comfortably within its bounds. The lives and problems of men, of white people, of the able-bodied, of the straight and cissexual, are depicted and discussed at length in news media, entertainment, and academia. Far more resources exist to describe and understand their experiences. For those without such prevalent portrayals to give voice to both the mundane and the extraordinary moments of the existence, experiences are more alien to mainstream exchange, more difficult to represent and communicate. As Fricker explains, "relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-

fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible."[364] Some worlds are far more difficult to travel into than others. And while it may be considerably more difficult to understand the lives and experiences of those who may not have words or concepts for significant events, emotions, or situations, that makes the journey ever more important. (What I am not suggesting is that a person with more access to hermeneutical resources should attempt to speak for, or in place of, a person at the margins of the meaning-making enterprise. What I am more suggesting that the burden is on the person with greater access to try to understand, and make space for the voices of, those with less access.)

V. **Conclusion**

To mitigate hermeneutical (and testimonial) injustices, work is required from both those at the center and those at the margins of the communicative enterprise. My unsettling resting bitch face requires no apology, as its only mistake is existing in a social hierarchy that permits men to walk down the street without having strangers tell them to smile, that simultaneously expects women to be perennially pleasing and accommodating. Fortunately for me, I at least have a term to describe this condition, popularized in 2013 and a draft addition to the Oxford English Dictionary as of September 2016[365]. With its name and its definition, I have something to point to: an entry in a dictionary that validates it and explains it, that indicates it a common enough experience to warrant a name and that a particular hermeneutical lacuna has been filled.

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[364] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 148.
[365] "Bitch, n.1," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2016), http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/19524.

Beyond offering explanation or pointing out the term, however, I do not think I have an obligation to someone who finds my resting face displeasing to change my comportment. Rather, I think the burden of work lies with the individual who perceives it as displeasing, to investigate the beliefs that undergird their assumption that a woman who is not actively smiling is angry, aggressive, or bitchy.

Transactions among human beings are riddled with misfires and epistemic injustices that render communication less than successful at times. Though meaning-making is a joint venture, wherein both (or all) sides have an equal right to contribute to the creation of meaning, disparate access to hermeneutical resources weights the scales unequally. One person's interpretation may outweigh another person's intention (and vice versa); and though both people's experiences and worlds are equally real, one gets to contribute more to a communication's meaning in the hermeneutical resource pool. Ideally, communication entails playful world-traveling where interlocuters attempt to truly understand one another; in reality, sometimes parties try to refuse to be affected by one another, to refuse transaction or simply suffer a shortage of hermeneutical resources. Transaction still occurs as the interaction affects both parties, but communication may be less than successful when meanings are different on the giving and receiving ends. As we will see, digital selves push the boundaries of expression on the Internet just as they negotiate their concrete transactions, always in a quest to be better understood.

Chapter 4

Interaction on the Internet

"After all, although it is not possible to prove definitively that all anons are biologically male, the ethos of [4chan]/b/ is unquestionably androcentric. In addition to reveling in sexist tropes and deriding posters who come forward as female (the standard response being "tits or gtfo"), /b/ is home to a seemingly endless supply of pornographic material, all of which is filtered through an explicitly male gaze. But not necessarily a heterosexual male gaze; a large percentage of porn on /b/ is gay, and trolls devote a great deal of energy to ostensibly homosocial (if not outright homosexual) behavior, including frequent 'rate my cawk' threads, in which anons post and rate pictures of each other's penises."

– Whitney Phillips, *"Cats and Penises All the Way Down: Performances of Gender and Sexuality on 4chan/b/"*[366]

I. Introduction

The full gamut of human relations find a place on the Internet: from supportive, activity-centered communities like Ravelry[367] to the inflammatory, troll-ridden boards of 8chan[368] to the carefully-moderated, ostensibly-thoughtful discussion threads of NPR[369] [370], people behave toward each other on the Internet in the broadest spectrum possible.

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[366] Philips, "'Cats and Penises All the Way Down: Performances of Gender and Sexuality on 4chan/b/'--ICA 2012 Presentation."
[367] "Ravelry: About Our Site," accessed July 10, 2016, http://www.ravelry.com/about.
[368] "8chan," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, July 5, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=8chan&oldid=728434346.
[369] "NPR: Terms of Use," NPR.org, June 29, 2015, http://www.npr.org/about-npr/179876898/terms-of-use.
[370] Since the time of writing, NPR's website has discontinued its comment functionality. Because the comments were posted by a very small number of users, and amidst complaints about overzealous

Once again, I confine my analysis to Facebook, not only because addressing the entirety of social media platforms is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but because the user's online identity is usually tied, at least nominally, to the person's concrete identity, and virtual identity hallmarks often track with those that might be apparent, and salient, in a concrete interaction.[371]

Most people (I both hope and assume) would agree that sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, transphobia, and their ilk find outlets on the Internet. Fewer people might agree just what form those discriminations take or what exactly constitutes prejudicial behavior within digital space. Some situations are more obvious: when one Facebook user calls another a "stupid cunt," we see a relatively transparent and recognizable instance of misogyny. On the other hand, when Donald Trump takes to Twitter to galvanize his millions of followers to share and reshare questionable (if not outright false) factual information, the sentiment behind which is an amorphous but aggressive xenophobia, what sort of action is that? Does the simple act of "sharing," which within the confines of Facebook may be limited to a typewritten musing visible only to oneself or a pronouncement to the whole of the Facebook-capable Internet[372], constitute a transaction?

"censorship" by outside moderators and harassment of some commenters by others, NPR determined that the commenting system was costing too much for serving such a small slice of its readership. The decision was met with a fair amount of both criticism and praise. Dick Meyer, "NPR Website To Get Rid Of Comments," NPR.org, accessed October 17, 2016, http://www.npr.org/sections/ombudsman/2016/08/17/489516952/npr-website-to-get-rid-of-comments.

[371] In other words, profile photos often reveal facets of an individual's concrete identity that contain a particular social significance. Those features, in turn, influence the manner in which others relate to that individual, resulting in very particular patterns of transactions.

[372] "Censorship of Facebook," *Wikipedia*, January 17, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Censorship_of_Facebook&oldid=760461199. The blocking of Facebook by countries for reasons mentioned on this Wikipedia page prompts numerous fascinating questions. If hate speech is written on Facebook, where did the crime occur? Was the crime committed in the location where the post was written by its author, on the remote web server that holds the post, or in the physical place of those injured by it? What is the role of Facebook in protest movements? Is censorship of the Internet, even of those swaths riddled with noxious hate speech, an ethical means to an end? These

Are true transactions between digital selves even possible? Can we locate recognizable patterns of interaction (especially prejudice) on Facebook?

I will attempt to work toward these questions by starting with one more elementary: does Facebook satisfy any sort of social need for its user? In other words, do Facebook users feel a social connection through the platform? Empirical research into whether relationships on Facebook can satisfy social needs is in its infancy and so its results should be taken with a grain of the proverbial salt. However, one preliminary investigation has attempted to determine whether Facebook is able to satisfy the same social needs as offline social networks, by measuring its effects on an individual's feelings of connection and disconnection. The conclusion of this study is a rather perplexing one: Facebook use was correlated with both relatedness need-satisfaction and relatedness need-*dis*satisfaction, or as the authors put another way, "greater Facebook use was positively correlated with both positively worded indicators of relatedness need-satisfaction (which we call *connection*) and negatively worded indicators of relatedness need-satisfaction (which we call *disconnection*.)"[373] But how can Facebook provide both connection and disconnection, or need-satisfaction and need-*dis*satisfaction, at the same time?

Prior work conducted by one of the authors divides the human desire for social connectedness into two components: motivation and outcome. Dissatisfaction (when the need was not met) motivated action to achieve a particular outcome (satisfaction, when

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questions are no doubt being asked and answered in other work, but are outside the scope of this dissertation.

[373] Kennon M. Sheldon, Neetu Abad, and Christian Hinsch, "A Two-Process View of Facebook Use and Relatedness Need-Satisfaction: Disconnection Drives Use, and Connection Rewards It.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100, no. 4 (2011): 766, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022407.

the need was met).[374] However, satisfaction could not motivate action in the same way: if the need for social connection was met, individuals would not seek more. In the present study, they posit that "satisfaction *results* from successful motive-related behavior,"[375] and test the hypothesis by examining both the causes and consequences of Facebook use. Presenting participants with six inventory items pertaining to social connectedness and grading them on a Likert scale, the researchers gathered data from nearly a thousand people and determined that greater Facebook use was correlated with greater feelings of both connection and disconnection. [376] To muddy the waters further, connection and disconnection themselves were negatively correlated. For the researchers, "[t]hese results raise the important question of causality: Is Facebook use perhaps causing states of both connection and disconnection, providing mixed benefits, or is Facebook use caused by both states of connection and states of disconnection, as a motivated response to these states? Or, is one of the two feelings a cause of high Facebook use and the other an effect, or neither?"[377]

To attempt to make sense of this quandary, the researchers broke the question into two individual questions: "Does dissatisfaction drive Facebook use as a coping mechanism?" (a question of motivation) and, "Does Facebook use produce satisfaction as a reward?" (a question of outcome). By controlling for each of the questions separately, they were able to analyze their data set, isolate the correlations, and determine that the answer to each question was, "most likely," although further investigation was required to determine the

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[374] Kennon M. Sheldon and Alexander Gunz, "Psychological Needs as Basic Motives, Not Just Experiential Requirements," *Journal of Personality* 77, no. 5 (October 2009): 1467–92, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00589.x.
[375] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, "A Two-Process View of Facebook Use and Relatedness Need-Satisfaction," 768. Emphasis is theirs.
[376] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 768.
[377] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 768.

nature of the causal relationship. In other words, they had only affirmed a correlation to both satisfaction and dissatisfaction individually, without yet determining if Facebook use was motivated in advance to produce an outcome, or if it caused both satisfaction and dissatisfaction as a result of usage.[378]

To delve into the question of causality, they asked the same study participants to cease Facebook usage for preset amounts of time, to then measured levels of connection and disconnection during the deprivation period and a subsequent free-use period. (Because they used the same group, of participants the subjects were able to serve as their own control group via the prior data set.) In summary, the group "found that 'going cold turkey' for 48 hours caused a reduction in connection but not in disconnection during this period, and that becoming more disconnected (but not less connected) during this period caused increased use of Facebook during a subsequent free period. This further supports the two-process interpretation[379], as depriving participants of the activity led to reductions of the associated reward (connection), and becoming more dissatisfied with relatedness during this period (for whatever reason) led to extra motivation to go back to Facebook."[380] In other words, during the deprivation period, subjects who had previously felt connected became less connected, and those that felt increased disconnection during the deprivation period compensated by increased Facebook usage (as compared to their prior reported usage) in the free period. They conclude, then, that greater Facebook usage can increase connectedness, but that disconnectedness also drives greater Facebook usage.

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[378] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 770.
[379] The two process interpretation refers to the idea that needs, such as social connectedness, both motivate action and produce outcomes. Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 766–67.
[380] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 772.

The authors do provide an important caveat, however: "Disconnection is not decreased by Facebook use. Thus, it is possible that a lonely person may gain transient positive feelings while using Facebook but may not solve underlying real-life social problems that gave rise to feelings of loneliness or disconnection; ultimately, those problems may even get worse (Kim et al., 2009). The portrait that arises is of a person who is addicted to a coping device that does not approach problem-resolution directly but, rather, approaches a pleasant distraction from problems."[381] They further observe that Internet use has joined the list of obsessive, potentially self-destructive addictive behaviors like gambling, drug and alcohol abuse, and excessive risk-taking as means to experience relief or temporarily escape from negative feelings or environments.[382] For those feeling social disconnection, then, Facebook may only serve as a temporary respite but not "cure" the underlying issue.[383] The authors also observe that this social network use does not appear to increase social disconnectedness, either.[384] (This suggestion is the subject of some contention, particularly to critics of the platform.[385]) Further work may shed some light on this matter.[386]

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[381] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 773. They are drawing upon Junghyun Kim, Robert LaRose, and Wei Peng, "Loneliness as the Cause and the Effect of Problematic Internet Use: The Relationship between Internet Use and Psychological Well-Being," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 12, no. 4 (August 2009): 451–55, https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.0327.

[382] G.-J. Meerkerk et al., "The Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS): Some Psychometric Properties," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 12, no. 1 (February 2009): 1–6, https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.0181.

[383] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, "A Two-Process View of Facebook Use and Relatedness Need-Satisfaction," 773.

[384] Sheldon, Abad, and Hinsch, 773.

[385] Irena Stepanikova, Norman H. Nie, and Xiaobin He, "Time on the Internet at Home, Loneliness, and Life Satisfaction: Evidence from Panel Time-Diary Data," *Computers in Human Behavior* 26, no. 3 (May 2010): 329–38, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2009.11.002.

[386] It is worth noting that the effects of Facebook on a person's wellbeing and social connectedness is almost certainly dependent upon how they are using it. After the 2016 election cycle, my anecdotal evidence suggests that politically-engaged individuals probably found themselves in some very heated, unpleasant debates with friends and family that did not lead to increased connectedness, just increased blood pressure. Some of my own Facebook friends temporarily deactivated their accounts to remove the temptation to compulsively hate-read and get into Facebook fights with people on the other side of the political spectrum. And some of them, feeling that the general atmosphere of Facebook has shifted away

Grieve et al. have attempted to determine whether face-to-face social networks and the Facebook social network are indeed two different constructs (i.e., different kinds of social connectedness, or if they are the same type of connection providing similar benefits). They base their work on the earlier work on belongingness theory[387], which claims that "individuals are driven to develop and continue positive social relationships in order to experience a sense of belongingness."[388] From the theory of belongingness arose the social connectedness construct, which suggests that integration into traditional (non-virtual) social networks is negatively correlated with anxiety and depression but positively correlated with self-esteem.[389] [390] These findings make intuitive sense: individuals with support systems and close connections to others have better social support and so experience fewer mental health issues than those who do not. Ostracism and feelings of isolation rarely lead to happiness and wellbeing.

However, online social networks are a relatively new phenomenon, and how they function in relation to tradition social networks remains unclear. Grieve et al. attempt to "explore whether social connectedness can be derived from the use of Facebook, and, if so, to examine the psychological correlates of social connectedness derived from

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from a friendly place to share photos and toward something like a toxic battlefield, have not returned. On the other hand, if one does not care to engage in political debates on Facebook, "hides" or "unfollows" friends who are prone to inflammatory posting, and shares photos of a new babies with relatives and friends who live far away, the Facebook experience will be quite different.

[387] R. M. Lee and S. B. Robbins, "Measuring Belongingness: The Social Connectedness and Social Assurance Scales.," *Journal of Counselling Psychology* 42 (1995): 232–41.

[388] Rachel Grieve et al., "Face-to-Face or Facebook: Can Social Connectedness Be Derived Online?," *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no. 3 (May 2013): 604, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.11.017.

[389] Lee and Robbins, "Measuring Belongingness: The Social Connectedness and Social Assurance Scales."

[390] Wendell David Cockshaw and Ian Shochet, "The Link between Belongingness and Depressive Symptoms: An Exploration in the Workplace Interpersonal Context," *Australian Psychologist* 45, no. 4 (December 2010): 283–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/00050061003752418.

Facebook."[391] Using an adaptation of the traditional Social Connectedness Scale[392], which "measures an individual's perception of self in relation to the social environment,"[393] the team deployed a survey[394] of twenty statements to be answered on a Likert scale. By comparing results of those taking the inventory based on their offline social connectedness to the results of those taking the inventory based on their Facebook social connectedness, they conclude that offline social connectedness and Facebook social connectedness are two distinct but related constructs (that is, participant answers about social connectedness in both realms differed), while disconnectedness "comprises feelings of distance and isolation that pervade both online and offline domains."[395] In other words, "although face-to-face connectedness and Facebook connectedness are distinct, disconnectedness appears to be a complex and ubiquitous construct that may incorporate both online and offline relationships."[396] So while Facebook users tend to conceive of the online and offline social connections in different ways, their experience of disconnection appears very similar in both realms.

In the same study, Grieve et al. investigated possible correlations between Facebook use, subjective wellbeing, anxiety, and depression. They conclude that "Facebook social connectedness was associated with positive psychological outcomes: lower depression, lower anxiety, and greater subjective wellbeing."[397] They stop short of claiming a causal

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[391] Grieve et al., "Face-to-Face or Facebook," 605.
[392] Richard M. Lee, Matthew Draper, and Sujin Lee, "Social Connectedness, Dysfunctional Interpersonal Behaviors, and Psychological Distress: Testing a Mediator Model.," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 48, no. 3 (2001): 310–18, https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-0167.48.3.310.
[393] Grieve et al., "Face-to-Face or Facebook," 605.
[394] The participants were recruited via a University email listserv and a Facebook page, which referred them through a questionnaire administered online. The procedure here causes me some concern, given the convenience sampling and the self-reporting. Grieve et al., "Face-to-Face or Facebook."
[395] Grieve et al., 606.
[396] Grieve et al., 607.
[397] Grieve et al., 608.

relationship, but they do observe that these findings are consistent with research on offline social connectedness. Regardless of the differences between the offline and Facebook constructs of social connectedness, feelings of connectedness are associated with similar benefits to mental health and wellbeing. Finally, they suggest:

> [G]iven the emergence of Facebook connectedness as a factor distinct from offline connectedness, it seems that Facebook use might provide an alternative form of social connection to the connection experienced in offline environments. If so, the utility of Facebook connectedness may have specific implications for the social bonding of those individuals who are either unable, or unwilling, to connect with others in traditional environments. For example, for individuals who experience debilitating social anxiety in face-to-face interactions, Facebook may serve as a valuable source of social connection and support.[398]

The connections we make on Facebook, though different than those formed in face-to-face settings, are real, and for those with different social needs, Facebook might provide an avenue for social engagement previously unavailable to them.

Taken together, these two studies might be interpreted to provide a cautiously optimistic conclusion: greater Facebook use produces greater feelings of connection within the platform, and while the Facebook social connectedness construct may be different from the offline construct, it still appears to be correlated with benefits to mental health and wellbeing. Disconnection, on the other hand, appears to be a similar construct both online and offline, but feelings of disconnection on Facebook cannot be mitigated with more Facebook use, and so it seems unlikely that Facebook use could serve as the sole remedy to offline feelings of disconnection. From a psychological perspective, then, social connections made through Facebook satisfy a need, but they do so differently. This makes a degree of sense: the Internet is a very different space from the physical world, and so the way that we relate to and connect with others must be somewhat

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[398] Grieve et al., 608.

different. But in order to successfully make connections, some things must remain the same—something must translate and we must have at least semi-recognizable social patterns to follow in order to communicate with one another at all. What familiar patterns emerge in our online lives between our digital selves as we make these connections? Might drivers of disconnection, such as discrimination and injustice, manifest in recognizable ways, if the social construct is the same in both online and offline settings?

II. This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things[399]

The habits of our concrete selves do not simply dissipate when we log into Facebook. And in this case, I think that the types of epistemic injustice Fricker describes as characteristic of our concrete interactions and world may help highlight the similarities of our digital interactions. We do not merely shed our prejudices and step into a tabula rasa of virtual space, where without our physical bodies we can interact (or transact) without discrimination. Instead, as we import our old conceptual framework into a world of novel communicative tools, we see some old and some new ways to express the same sentiments. That familiar group of –isms (sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, cissexualism) returns with new tricks up its sleeve.

One might argue that identity-based testimonial injustices must be mitigated to some extent on forums in which the body is not physically present to become the target of

[399] The Cute Master :3 and spazzyg64, "This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things," Know Your Meme, 2010, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/this-is-why-we-cant-have-nice-things.

identity-based prejudices. (On the Internet, after all, "nobody knows you're a dog."[400]) Facebook, however, discourages anonymity and, in fact, employs a controversial real-name policy that requires that everyone use "the name they go by in real life."[401] This policy has already been discussed at length previously, so I will refrain from going into detail again here. Despite the policy, though, one still encounters plenty of strangers on the Internet, either through the posts of other Facebook friends or in comment threads of pages, widely-shared image macros, and news stories. From a safe and seemingly-distant vantage point across virtual space, a stranger—even if not anonymous, strictly speaking—is willing to engage in some very uncivil behavior. And when approximately 84% of profile photos[402] show at least one human, a stranger may infer a lot about a person's identity based simply on the image and the name attached to that digital identity.

In the concrete world, where there is generally access to information like a person's gender and race, there is ample opportunity for identity-based testimonial injustice. With a photo and a name, there's a good chance that a stranger would still be able work out the gender and race of another Facebook user (possibly along with other socially salient identity hallmarks). The question then becomes, how are prejudices against these identities being enacted? Many of the more subtle options available in concrete situations (pay gaps, discrepancies in promotions, following someone either to get a date or to make sure they don't shoplift, physical intimidation) are not available in

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[400] "On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Dog," *Wikipedia*, August 8, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=On_the_Internet,_nobody_knows_you%27re_a_dog&oldid=733573871.

[401] "Facebook Help Center," accessed July 3, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/help/112146705538576?helpref=related.

[402] In this study, of the 500 profile photos examined, 420 contained at least one human. Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, "Gender Differences in Facebook Self-Presentation," 392.

an online environment, but Facebook users can still replicate some of the concrete discriminatory acts fairly directly and get creative to approximate the ones they can't.

Many discriminatory behaviors (particularly, those that rely on words for their efficacy) translate in a fairly straightforward manner: name-calling, off-color "jokes," exhortations to "go back to" wherever one belongs (be it the kitchen or another country), image macros with prejudicial remarks, posts or pages with a central discriminatory theme, and run-of-the-mill, general stereotyping are all easily identifiable and prevalent enough that one need only perform a quick Google Image search to find screencaptures of the offensive remarks. All of these are based in identity prejudice, targeting the credibility of the speaker or speaker(s), and the harm lies in undermining their status as a knower and contributor to online conversations. Some of manifestations of testimonial injustice may be directed at a specific individual, where others may be more general proclamations (posts or image macros) about a marginalized group, but all serve to exclude others from equal participation in the online.

As a company, Facebook has found itself embroiled in a number of controversies surrounding the content (posts, comments, images, and pages) that it will allow and what it will not allow.[403] For example, images of mothers breastfeeding their children have been repeatedly removed after being reported as violating Facebook's nudity and pornography standards. After several waves of protests, policy changes, policy reversions, and more backlash, Facebook has tentatively permitted photos of

[403] Note that while these statements reflect Facebook's policies at the time of writing, they (like the platform itself) are subject to frequent change, updates, and alterations.

breastfeeding, provided that the nipple of the person breastfeeding is not visible.[404] Currently, Facebook's Help Center states, "Does Facebook allow photos of mothers breastfeeding? Yes. We agree that breastfeeding is natural and beautiful and we're glad to know that it's important for mothers to share their experiences with others on Facebook. The vast majority of these photos are compliant with our policies. Please note that the photos we review are almost exclusively brought to our attention by other Facebook members who complain about them being shared on Facebook."[405] Though the policy, in theory, allows photos of breastfeeding mothers, the final caveat offers the company a good deal of leeway: if someone finds the photograph offensive, it may be reported and removed, according to the tastes or mores of the observer. Though this reporting may not appear to represent a direct attack on the epistemic standing of mothers, the nudity policy exists to prohibit obscenity, which runs directly counter to the experience most women have of breastfeeding their children, as an act of nurturance and expression of bond between a mother and her child. The policy instead embodies and enforces the cultural belief that breasts are primarily objects of sexual desire, and only secondarily a biological mechanism for the nourishment of offspring. The nipple has become the site of contention, serving as the threshold by which "nudity" can be declared.

The final (almost sinister) sentence of the policy emphasizes the nature of the transgression: "Please note that the photos we review are almost exclusively brought to

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[404] Rachel Moss, "Breastfeeding Photos Allowed On Facebook, As Long As You Can't See Any Nipples," HuffPost UK, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/03/16/breastfeeding-facebook-nudity-policy_n_6877208.html.

[405] "Facebook Help Center," Does Facebook allow photos of mothers breastfeeding?, accessed July 4, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/help/340974655932193?helpref=uf_permalink.

our attention by other Facebook members who complain about them being shared on Facebook." By my lights, the sentence informs breastfeeding women that it is their communities—people that they have added as friends or accepted a friend request from—that object to seeing their photos and report them for removal from Facebook. Facebook, it reminds visitors to the Help Center, only serves as a vehicle for the mores of its user community; to much of that community, breastfeeding ought to be done behind closed doors, in private. In some cases, the way that the user community drives Facebook policy has served it well (after a group of Facebook users convinced major advertisers to withdraw their advertisements from Facebook, putting a dent in its revenue stream,[406] Facebook shut down a series of "pro-rape pages"[407]). In some ways, it reifies more problematic social trends and beliefs (that women's bodies are, first and foremost, objects of sexual desire). In either case, it endeavors through its policies to reflect the concrete world from which it was generated, to retain the approval and attention of both users and advertisers.

Microaggressions[408], a form of casual identity-based degradation, also find a natural home in Facebook interactions, and its three forms (as defined and described by Wing Sue et al. 2007)--microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation--can all be conveyed through

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[406] "Facebook Gives Way to Campaign against Hate Speech on Its Pages | Technology | The Guardian," accessed July 7, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/may/29/facebook-campaign-violence-against-women?CMP=EMCNEWEML6619I2.

[407] Sara C. Nelson and The Huffington Post UK, "#FBrape: Will Facebook Heed Open Letter Protesting 'Endorsement Of Rape & Domestic Violence'?," HuffPost UK, 22:45 100AD, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/05/28/fbrape-will-facebook-heed-open-letter-protesting-endorsement-rape-domestic-violence_n_3346520.html.

[408] Microaggressions are defined as "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights or insults to the target person or group." As defined by Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2010), 5. Drawing upon Derald Wing Sue et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice.," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (2007): 271–86, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271.

written text. Microassaults, which encompass the more obvious name-calling and verbal attacks, can be immediately located in almost any open comment thread on the Internet, including Facebook. They often take a more obvious form in heated conversations (through slurs or blatant stereotyping[409]) and are often deliberate. Microinsults, taking the form of subtler insensitivity or rudeness that demean a person's identity, are also fairly common. Implying that affirmative action explains a minority individual's success in their professional lives, or praising a person of color for being articulate or speaking English well, may not be intended to wound or undermine someone from the perspective of the speaker (who may in fact believe that they are giving another person a compliment), but smuggle in prejudicial assumptions about a person's intelligence or abilities based on their identity. Microinvalidations, those "communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a [marginalized or minority] person,"[410] often masquerade under a guise of politeness, or at least a veneer of civility. They may arise in statements like, "All lives matter," or "I don't see race," both of which erase the particularities and nuance of the experiences of people of color.[411] Also underlying the ostensibly innocuous questioning of someone's experience lurks gaslighting,[412] which can cause people of minority groups to doubt their own experiences, perception, and belief system. Each of these, operating on the identity of a speaker to undermine their credibility in an online forum, function as a vehicle for epistemic injustice and virtual prejudice.

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[409] Kimberly J. Mitchell, Michele L. Ybarra, and Josephine D. Korchmaros, "Sexual Harassment among Adolescents of Different Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 38, no. 2 (February 2014): 280–95, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2013.09.008.
[410] Sue et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," 274.
[411] Sue et al., 278.
[412] "Gaslighting," *Wikipedia*, June 30, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gaslighting&oldid=788341175.

Derailing, a family of related strategies for shifting the focus of a conversation to something more palatable, also finds full expression on Facebook, particularly in the comment threads of news articles on topics that hold particular significance for minority groups. Though this set of behaviors may not inherently target these groups, its exercise certainly arises more often in context of issues that are relevant to these populations, wherein the group under discussion may more actively participate in the comments and be called upon to validate or justify a certain experience, reaction, or policy position. Derailing, as characterized on the tongue-in-cheek site Derailing for Dummies[413], essentially relies upon diversion tactics (for example, asking why issue X is under discussion when clearly issue Y is a much bigger and more important problem).

Interestingly, derailing tactics may rely on any sort of epistemic injustice to silence someone. A person of a marginalized group may be exhorted to produce "factual evidence" of their experience, which itself alone cannot be trusted. Alternatively, a derailer can accuse a person of a minority group of not being objective because of their identity or of having an "agenda" (all instances of identity-based testimonial injustice). Or, in the face of anger or other emotions, one could accuse someone of not being objective or rational, maybe even of being hysterical or prone to overreaction ("tone policing", a form-type hermeneutical injustice). By declaring that someone ought—or perhaps has a responsibility— to "educate" the person of privilege on the issues at hand, they may lean on content-type hermeneutical injustice, where no tidy, prepackaged concepts exist to make an experience comprehensible to someone who has not had it and

[413] "A Guide to Derailing Conversations," *Derailing For Dummies* (blog), accessed July 4, 2017, http://www.derailingfordummies.com/.

cannot understand it, placing an impossible burden on the person called upon to do the explaining.

Several other types of derailing tactic also crop up in both concrete and online settings, though they may not fit neatly into Fricker's categories. Distraction techniques directly shift the course of the conversation in a different direction: for example, the #notallmen and "All Lives Matter" approaches used to divert discussion away from women's experience of sexual harassment and black people's particular vulnerability to police violence, respectively, and instead focus on perceived overgeneralizations or exclusions by the groups whose experiences were originally under discussion. A derailer may also claim to be playing devil's advocate or merely giving voice to what most people think, rather than what they themselves think. Those who have studied informal fallacies are not strangers to the myriad ways that an argument can veer off course, whether it's being conducted in person or online.

As Fricker points out, hermeneutical injustices tend to be structural[414], rather than perpetrated by individuals against other individuals. A dearth of hermeneutical resources is the enabling condition operating in the background, only present when a person finds themselves lacking the tools to express an experience. One might suspect that in the absence of embodied selves, form-type hermeneutical injustice is irrelevant (with only a keyboard, how could the manner of expression vary enough to become an issue?) and that content-type hermeneutical injustice remains unchanged between the concrete world and the world of Facebook (we either have words or concepts for experiences, or we

[414] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 159.

don't). Both types, as they appear online, provide interesting examples of the creativity behind digital self-expression.

In the concrete world, form-type hermeneutical injustice comes into play when the speaker employs an expressive style that renders her unintelligible (or less intelligible) to her community. As example, Fricker offers the more emotional expressive style traditionally associated with women, one that "cannot be heard as fully rational."[415] It might seem like expressive styles become rather limited on Facebook—after all, without posting a video, one cannot use tone or tempo of voice, eye contact, body language, gestures, facial expression, or meaningful pauses to provide context to the verbiage. And yet, Facebook users armed only with letters, punctuation, emoticons or emoji[416], and recently, gifs[417], can get remarkably creative and express their thoughts in a wide range of ways, adopting different individual styles. Consider the differences among these five ways of making the same statement:

1. "This is not ok."
2. "This. Is. Not. Ok."
3. "THIS IS NOT OK."
4. "This is not ok!!"
5. "This is not ok…"

To my mind[418], these are five quite different ways to emphasize the same combination of words. The first indicates a moderate volume with a moderate tempo, while the second

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[415] Fricker, 161.
[416] "Emoji," *Wikipedia*, July 3, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emoji&oldid=788829229.
[417] "Facebook Starts Supporting Animated GIFs," accessed July 4, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2015/06/01/facebook-starts-supporting-animated-gifs/#4eb6cf6f6955.
[418] Unfortunately, there is not very much (or any, that I can find) empirical data on how different writing styles are used and perceived on Facebook.

suggests a moderate volume with a staccato tempo, placing emphasis on each syllable. The third, loud volume but moderate tempo, and the fourth, moderate but escalating volume, spoken quickly. Finally, the fifth produces a pause that is pregnant with meaning, with the ellipsis doing heavy legwork in hinting that there is more to be said that is currently left unsaid. The capitalization of the letters guides my perception of the volume, where the punctuation dictates pacing. In combination with a profile picture, the resulting expression, as I hear it in my head, has a fair amount of nuance, even if it does not reach the levels of richness of face-to-face, spoken language. Endless permutations abound; emoji and emoticons do not replace facial expressions, but can add a particular (if somewhat crude) emotional valence. So while Facebook users may not be able to replicate every detail of in-person conversation, flexibility with the rules of grammar does provide them more possibilities of self-expression and personal style than might have been apparent at first blush.

Where there are different styles of online expression, there will be a hierarchy among them, one that at least initially tracks with the privileges of the concrete social system. Adherence to the rules of spelling and grammar of American English likely lend more credence to the digital self posting it (as they lend a speaker more credibility in face to face conversation), especially if the text appears alongside a profile picture that displays features that give a person more credibility in face-to-face interactions. Indicators of Southern American English ("y'all", "ain't"), African American Vernacular English ("finna," "aight"), English as a second language (dropped articles like "the"), or less-formally-educated English ("your" rather than "you're") generally count against perceptions of a speaker's intelligence, and therefore, credibility.

There may be some characteristic styles of communication that are replicated and further develop in the online environment.[419] Use of emoji, exclamation points, and qualifiers like "I think" and "I feel," appear to be more often used by women (anecdotally, in the comment threads of news outlets I frequent and among my own Facebook friends), which is perhaps a way that the typically more emotive and less assertive comportment style of women manifests online. Rather than "throwing like a girl,"[420] one may "type like a girl." Of course, career coaches discourage the use of all of these things in professional emails, citing them as too "informal."[421] [422] [423] I imagine that similar perceptions carry over onto Facebook, and as such, form-type hermeneutical injustices similar to the ones found in concrete life may be perpetuated in an online environment. Certainly, expressions of emotion and less confident-sounding word choice are perceived as antithetical to the cool, rational cadence of well-reasoned civil discourse. (After all, to have "the feels" on Facebook is to have "emotions that shouldn't be taken seriously because they are false or opportunistic or unreasonable or inconsequential."[424])

Finally, to follow Fricker's lead, we must ask about the role of content-type hermeneutical injustice. For Fricker, this type of injustice generally takes the form of conceptual lacunae, places where we lack the words for the experiences of those who do

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[419] Again, there is unfortunately very little empirical data on this subject, and so my conjectures, which I think are relatively well-founded and not contentious, will have to await confirmation from those who may study it in the future.
[420] Young, *On Female Body Experience*.
[421] "How to Write a Formal Email," wikiHow, accessed July 5, 2017, http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Formal-Email.
[422] "Stop Using Exclamation Points At Work! - Business Insider," accessed July 5, 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/stop-using-exclamation-points-at-work-2015-1.
[423] Bonnie Marcus, "Do You Sabotage Yourself by Using Weak Language?," Forbes, accessed July 5, 2017, http://www.forbes.com/sites/bonniemarcus/2011/12/09/do-you-sabotage-yourself-by-using-weak-language/.
[424] Katy Waldman and John H. McWhorter, "Not Feeling It," *Slate*, January 29, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2015/01/29/all_of_the_feels_how_we_distance_ourselves_from_emotion_on_the_internet.html.

not have equitable access to the meaning-making resources. When we consider these conceptual gaps in the form of words and phrases, the problems of concrete discourse translate rather tidily into the virtual medium: without words in our face-to-face interactions, we lack words in our online interactions. But for me, some of the most interesting products of a widely accessible Internet are the result of Facebook users (and members of other SNSs, like Twitter) collectively working to fill these gaps.

III. Making Meaning on Facebook: Rickrolls, Hamster Dances, and Gifs

For those with access to it, the Internet offers the possibility for types of connection unavailable in to them in concrete life. A queer or trans kid in a small town, uncertain whether it would be safe to come out to their friends and family, might find safe harbor in a private Facebook group, allowing them to make contact with others like them or, at least virtually, explore their identity. How many such groups exist on Facebook is unknown—there are few ways to count them, and with the privacy settings available to shield them from prying eyes, even fewer ways to determine which are defunct or track membership in those that are not. Within these groups, however, linguistic conventions can be defied, words reappropriated, and experiences recounted in a safe haven to individuals who have likely shared in them.

For both good and ill, individuals find that they are not the only ones with their beliefs, their identities, or their preferences. Survivor groups provide support for those who have suffered assault or other trauma, but Neo-nazis and other ideologues are also able to gather and coordinate to mount frightening attacks, assaults that include both web-based and concrete world campaigns of mass harassment against individuals perceived to

be enemies of the movement or of free speech. The purpose of this caveat is to remind readers that the positive examples that follow are almost certainly counterbalanced by the actions of some of the seedier corners of the Internet.

The Black Lives Matter movement itself began on Facebook. The July 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin had just been announced, and the news tore through social networking and news websites alike. Members of Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity (BOLD) looked to leaders of the group for direction, and Alicia Garza, a domestic rights worker based in Oakland, CA, penned a Facebook post titled, "A Love Note to Black People," concluding that "Our Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter."[425] Patrisse Cullors, an anti-police violence organizer in Los Angeles, responded with, "#BlackLivesMatter."[426] Historian Herbert Ruffin notes that the way the group leveraged social media platforms to rally supporters allowed it to create "a movement unlike most black freedom campaigns that preceded them."[427] Rather than take its direction from the top down, the movement tapped into a diffuse network of participants from across the United States through Facebook and Twitter, fostering the development of an unprecedented grassroots organization that "incorporated those on the margins of traditional black freedom movements, including women, the working poor, the disabled, undocumented immigrants, atheists and agnostics, and those who identify as

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[425] Herbert Ruffin, "Black Lives Matter: The Growth of a New Social Justice Movement | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed," accessed July 8, 2017, http://www.blackpast.org/perspectives/black-lives-matter-growth-new-social-justice-movement.

[426] Hashtagging is a practice that has more often been associated with the social media platform Twitter where it originated, but was integrated into Facebook in 2013 to allow it to compete with Twitter's more real-time, participatory virtual exchanges. Josh Constine, "Facebook Launches Related Hashtags And #Mobile Site Support," *TechCrunch* (blog), accessed July 8, 2017, http://social.techcrunch.com/2013/06/27/facebook-related-hashtags/.

[427] Ruffin, "Black Lives Matter."

queer and transgender."[428] A simple hashtag on Facebook spurred hundreds of "real world" protests with thousands of participants, forcing a conversation about police brutality against the African American community onto the national stage, with such visibility that presidential candidate nominees of both parties were called upon to address it.[429]

The sentiment itself may not seem novel, because, "Of course," any well-intentioned person would say, "black lives matter." However, the pushback against Black Lives Matter activists, in the form of #AllLivesMatter, demonstrates that black lives (specifically) mattering is the subject of some contention. When an individual responds to #BlackLivesMatter with #AllLivesMatter, they betray ignorance of a fundamental feature of the experience of being a black person in the United States: that law enforcement may kill you without reason and without fear of punishment, even if you are unarmed[430], compliant[431], very young[432], or seeking help[433]. Much like the feminist consciousness-raising sessions of Brownmiller's recollection that led to the coinage and spread of the term "sexual harassment," the resonance of #BlackLivesMatter and the power that it now holds reflects how desperately a phrase was needed to name this aspect of African American life. Unlike "sexual harassment," however, #BlackLivesMatter not

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[428] Ruffin.
[429] Nia-Malika Henderson, "How Black Lives Matter Activists Are Influencing 2016 Race," CNN, accessed July 8, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/18/politics/black-lives-matter-2016-presidential-race/index.html.
[430] Al Baker, J. David Goodman, and Benjamin Mueller, "Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner's Death," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2015, sec. N.Y. / Region, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html.
[431] Mitch Smith, "Minnesota Officer Acquitted in Killing of Philando Castile," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2017, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/police-shooting-trial-philando-castile.html.
[432] Shaila Dewan and Richard A. Jr, "In Tamir Rice Case, Many Errors by Cleveland Police, Then a Fatal One," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2015, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/23/us/in-tamir-rice-shooting-in-cleveland-many-errors-by-police-then-a-fatal-one.html.
[433] Michael Harriot, "Audio Released of Pregnant Woman Killed After Calling Police," The Root, accessed July 8, 2017, http://www.theroot.com/pregnant-seattle-woman-calls-police-ends-up-dead-1796214185.

only points to the problem itself (that, judicially and to the state, black lives really do not matter as much as white lives), but also provides the counterargument that black lives *do* matter. It simultaneously names the problem and issues a call for change. Maltreatment of black individuals by the justice system and its agents is no new discovery, as the entire history of the United States shows, but I am unaware of another single term or phrase that has generated so much awareness or galvanized so many people, and become such a rallying cry for both people of color and their allies.

The Internet, and Facebook in particular, has generated more than its share of neologisms and turns of phrase. Not all speak directly to the experiences of those without equitable access to the collective hermeneutical resources, like #BlackLivesMatter, and some simply name the amusing but mundane idiosyncrasies of human interactions. For example, the "humblebrag," defined as "a seemingly modest, self-critical, or casual statement or reference that is meant to draw attention to one's admirable or impressive qualities or achievements,"[434] was first coined on Twitter by comedian Harris Wittels.[435] There is also the "rage quit"[436] (which likely does not require definition), "headdesk" (to hit one's head on the computer desk out of frustration, a sentiment similar to the "facepalm"), and "derp" (a noise indicating that one has been dense or otherwise slow to get up to speed).[437] A litany of similar expressions wax and wane as social media users hunt for ways to express the complex array of human emotion through text and limited images.

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[434] "Definition of HUMBLEBRAG," accessed July 8, 2017, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humblebrag.
[435] "Humblebrag - Grammarist," accessed July 8, 2017, http://grammarist.com/usage/humblebrag/.
[436] Chi Luu, "More on Internet Neologisms: Rage Quitting Is a Thing," *JSTOR Daily* (blog), March 31, 2015, https://daily.jstor.org/more-on-internet-neologisms-rage-quitting-is-a-thing/.
[437] B. Zimmer and C. E. Carson, "Among the New Words," *American Speech* 86, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 456, https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-1587259.

One of the most fascinating developments comes from the meanings that only make sense within Internet space. What happens on the Internet certainly does not necessarily stay on the Internet, as we have seen with #BlackLivesMatter. However—and crucially—certain constructions on the Internet only make sense within the context of virtual space. Not only do users of Facebook generate meaning that cannot be ripped out of its context, but these digital selves also engage in actions and exchanges that can only make sense and be sustained online. Rickrolling[438], advice animals[439], hampster dance[440], face-swapping[441], image macros[442], leet speak[443], neologisms, gifs[444], emoji, and all manner of other quirky products of the Internet will not make the transition that #BlackLivesMatter did—they are permanent residents of the virtual medium, serving the enrich the transactions between our digital selves and creating not just replications of our concrete dealings, but entirely novel ways of relating to one another. Like our digital selves, these digital methods of communicating derive their meaning from their context and how they are situated in relation to their environment, which in this case, is a virtual one.

John Dewey writes that during discourse, "[e]vents turn into objects, things with a meaning. They may be referred to when they do not exist, and thus be operative among things distant in space and time, through vicarious presence in a new medium."[445]

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[438] "Rickroll - Wiktionary," accessed July 9, 2017, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rickroll.
[439] "Advice Animals | Know Your Meme," accessed July 9, 2017, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/advice-animals.
[440] "Hampster Dance | Know Your Meme," accessed July 9, 2017, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/hampster-dance.
[441] "Face Swap," Know Your Meme, accessed July 9, 2017, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/face-swap.
[442] "Image Macro," *Wikipedia*, June 27, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Image_macro&oldid=787808628.
[443] "Leet," *Wikipedia*, June 7, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Leet&oldid=784259836.
[444] "GIF," *Wikipedia*, July 8, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=GIF&oldid=789614787.
[445] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 132.

Meanings give brute events an almost ethereal new existence: "liberated" from their specific context, "events when once they are named lead an independent and double life."[446] In their new form, they may be combined and recombined, enabling thought, creativity, and experimentation. Meanings, however, make sense only in relation to each other, to their environment, and to the individuals that employ them. Writing decades before the Internet was invented, Dewey likely did not foresee a time when an entirely new space—a virtual space—could make its own meanings and become, at times, self-referential. This self-referential nature of the Internet produces an interesting consequence: some things just don't make sense outside of the Internet. The Internet is, in fact, an independent meaning-making space.

Much attention has been paid to what parts of concrete life cannot be replicated on the Internet or on Facebook (generally leading to them being found wanting or the conclusion that virtual space is a mere shade of "real life"). Less attention has been paid to what parts of virtual life cannot be replicated in the corporeal world. I can explain in a face-to-face interaction, or written word, what rickrolling is: to "rickroll" is to trick a person into clicking a hyperlink to the music video of Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up," or otherwise inflicting the song or its lyrics upon an unsuspecting Internet user. However, a rickroll can only be performed by my digital self, on another digital self, and it can only be truly understood in the virtual sphere. Rickrolling cannot be extracted from its context and retain its meaning, because there is no concrete equivalent or approximation. I cannot understand rickrolling through my concrete self, but only through my virtual self.

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[446] Dewey, 132.

It seems, then, that many of our recognizable, concrete patterns of interaction appear on Facebook, particularly in our failures to understand one another. However, part of the benefit of this virtual space is that we happen upon other people and new tools through which we can leverage to communicate. Sometimes the results may be exported to the concrete world and used for social change, and sometimes, the meanings we make remain where they are, on Facebook. But just as being around my mother draws out the part of myself that is her daughter, so too my computer, and Facebook's website, call out my Facebook self. As William James observes, "Properly speaking, a [person] has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize [them] and carry an image of [them] in their mind."[447] There is no single or "true" self, but merely a nexus of many different relationships. I am with my mother qua daughter, calling forth the particular set of meanings and behaviors that constitute our relationship.

In fact, Dewey observes that, "Meaning…is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects."[448] The meaning of being a daughter resides in what I am with her, in the activity of daughter-ing. But I do not merely perform activity in a concrete world, and in fact, I am an actor in many other spaces. However, the virtual realm offers its own set of tools: my Facebook self does different things and forges different meanings, in the presence and with the participation of other Facebook selves. The meaning of rickrolling does not reside in the YouTube video of the singer performing the song; it resides in a transaction between two digital selves. Meanings are relations and relationships, and the measure of any social connection is the extent to which we can playfully travel between worlds and share in these meanings.

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[447] William James, *The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1* (New York: Dover, 1995), 294.
[448] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 141.

Parts of this work may appear to conflate broad discrimination or prejudice with epistemic injustice (wherein "*someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*"[449]) as conceptualized by Fricker, but in the context of Facebook, where the purpose of the space is to "connect" with people and to converse with them, it seems to me that discrimination and epistemic injustice create a nearly perfectly overlapping Venn diagram. I suggest this because, through this medium, our only contact with most individuals is limited to text- or image-based exchanges, during which we mutually engage in the meaning-making (or meaning-breaking) enterprise. Meaning-making, whether based around "factual" information or the sharing of experiences or opinions, hinges upon respecting one another's status as a knower or experiencer, and prejudicial attempts to exclude another participant from this process almost always take the form of undermining their credibility, and thereby their subjecthood. To maintain the integrity of the existing hermeneutical resources (and associated conceptual framework, including those pieces that allow us to safely understand ourselves through tidy, unchallenged categories) involves policing the boundaries, and ejecting those whose contributions might upend or complicate the current system. For this reason, I think nearly all of the –isms, as they manifest on Facebook, constitute epistemic injustices.

We circle back to the central question of this chapter: does transaction occur between digital selves? My answer is yes. Every tagged photo, post, and comment generated by one Facebook user and added to another's Timeline literally changes the other's profile, leaving a lasting imprint on both digital selves. Each comment made on a news article external to the Timeline is logged in the user's private Activity Log, and though the

[449] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 20. Emphasis is Fricker's.

user's Facebook friends may not see that comment, the exchange is akin to a passing conversation with a stranger on the street. Digital selves engage with and change one another; they replicate some offline behaviors rather well and get creative where they can't. They sometimes perform gender in recognizable patterns, and they often replicate concrete communicative behaviors or experience epistemic injustices. But just as importantly, they engage as a community in meaning-making, taking their new space and new tools to create something novel, that cannot be brought out into the concrete world for dissection and analysis.

IV. Internet Space: A New Frontier

Dewey writes that, "To understand is to anticipate together, it is to make a cross-reference which, when acted upon, brings about a partaking in a common, inclusive, undertaking."[450] In the virtual world, freshly-created profiles become selves in the digital theater of Facebook, importing some meanings (like gender or race) while simultaneously adapting them, and sometimes, crafting for themselves entirely new scripts. These selves engage in a meaning-making enterprise together as they transact with gifs, emojis, image macros, and just plain old text. They playfully create meanings that cannot be extracted from their context and brought out into the concrete world, and these meanings, which are relations and relationships, root the digital self in the digital realm. It cannot be a mere shade of a concrete self by virtue of these meanings: with activity and a conceptual web unique unto itself, it retains its integrity as an independent—if somewhat clumsy—entity in the rapidly evolving environment that is the Internet.

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[450] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 141.

This dissertation roots itself in a central tenet: that social media, and the selves that inhabit it, represent something fundamentally and profoundly different than what has come before. After all, it is no ground-breaking insight that selves mutate, adapt, fragment, split, and contort themselves into a variety of permutations based on relationships to their environment and others; they are multiple and fluid. It is also no great insight that selves were engaged in robust, meaning-rich communication over distances prior to the Internet, through letters, telephones, skywriting, Hallmark cards, and all manner of symbolic gifts. One may (very fairly) ask, then, what makes a virtual self and its relationships so radical as to warrant its own scrutiny. And from a pragmatic standpoint, is a potentially problematic dualism being introduced?

In interrogating my own intuition (and conviction) that my Facebook self is well and truly an analogue—not a derivative—of my concrete self[451], I consider my experience of the medium. When I am engaged with the site (rather than mindlessly scrolling while waiting for a bus), I feel that I am truly inhabiting another world. The experience is not of me sitting at my desk, hand poised on the mouse, moving the cursor and tracking its movement; rather, there is a seamlessness to the connection between my intent and the events occurring on the screen, wherein the sense of my physical body has receded, and my selective attention brings a different world to the fore. The links I click are known paths to other places situated in relation to each other, structured and ordered in a predictable and navigable map. The places I land may be familiar or strange, depending on what the architect of that virtual space has chosen to do with it; I may be an invited

[451] Jumping from the claim that the virtual self represents a profoundly different type of self than the concrete self to the claim that it is an analogue, rather than derivative, of it, is missing a few steps that I hope will be illuminated shortly.

visitor (as on a friend or our HOA's Facebook page), an eavesdropper (a Flat Earth Society page[452]), or a guest of ambiguous status. I may listen in on conversations being had around me, attending to them as they interest me, and I speak a language of letters, emojis, gifs, and memes (though the idiosyncrasies of the language vary from site to site, much how dialects vary among regions). Regardless of my activity, I am grounded in a virtual world, in a space with doors and thoroughfares to other places with other selves to meet. I am inhabiting it.

Similar experiences may be had when one reads a particularly enthralling book: rich literary or visual creations are said to "transport" a person to another world where fantastical creatures exist or the rules of physics differ. The concrete body is left to its own homeostatic devices, while our thoughts are led to explore realities created for us to experience entirely new worlds. The hours lost in the pages of a good novel, for instance, almost suggest a sort of experiential wormhole. The book offers a tunnel to a different time and place, a creation of the author for the reader that is playful and imaginative. The same too may be said of art, cinema, meditation, or even a particularly lively conversation, all of which may allow for the diminishing of the concrete body and world in favor of a mental visit to a difference space. When a person is so engaged, they inhabit a different place where the conceptual webs have shifted, communicative tools have been refigured, and social landscapes must be pioneered anew. Selves are not necessarily alone in this new arena; they co-exist with other inhabitants in various corporeal states.

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[452] "The Flat Earth Society - Home," accessed December 30, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/FlatEarthToday/.

Unlike a book or work of art, however, social media offers a space the sole purpose of which is sociability and interaction with others[453]. The far-off lands of a novel were certainly created by another person, whose experience and life were brought to bear on its construction, and so the words were laid to page steeped in personal and social significance. In addition, this land of the novel almost certainly contains other fixtures of social significance like people or historical events brought to light by machinations of the creator—the work is shot through with social significance, symbolism, and communication informed by an individual historicity. However, unlike the virtual space of Facebook, the pages of the book rarely offer any opportunity for a reciprocal social relationship, with either author or characters contributing a side of a true conversation. The contributions of the author have been deposited onto book pages or canvas and left inert; the elements that would alter the social significance to the viewer or reader must be brought from without. Though further insight to the work may be offered through interviews, biographies, or documentaries that overlay the original construct, these communications occur outside of the original work in question; they are not laced through it. The forming and reforming virtual spaces and selves, however, are able to engage in dialogue that changes their very makeup. The creation of space and self is a collaborative and ongoing venture.

Of course, other forms of media have been utilized for the sole purpose of connecting and communicating ("transacting") with others, such as the telephone and the letter. In this case, the difference between the virtual space of social media and the social space created

[453] This claim, though seemingly bold, is limited: I do not intend to ascribe motivations to the company itself, whose purposes are almost certainly economic. Instead, I am making a more limited claim about the desire of individual users to engage with the virtual space.

between the reader and writer of the letter is one of sheer scale: while one may use Facebook's messenger feature to send a private missive, most postings by individual users are shared with more than one person, and potentially the whole of the Internet. Facebook becomes the agora writ large: billions of users generating trillions of statuses, comments, and other content, bumping into strangers with whom they may bond (as in the #MeToo campaign[454]) or duke it out (as in the comment thread of just about any article a news outlet posts). The ease of encountering strangers from different backgrounds with different perspectives and experiences is unprecedented, and reading the news has gone from a solitary activity done with a paper at the breakfast table to an opportunity to watch thousands of other Facebook users from every corner of the United States debate presidential policy. Our epistemic and moral commitments are brought into sharp relief as we see just how differently other people think and how they express it. The perhaps obvious tension here is that in order to argue that the virtual space is an analogue rather than derivative of concrete space, I must demonstrate that they are both similar and different. The two spaces must share some hallmarks and structures recognizable enough to support selves and relationships (i.e., they must be conceivably analogous); but the virtual space must hold itself apart, a realm robust enough in its own right to avoid its inhabitants being viewed as a pale imitation of the "real" world (i.e., it must move beyond a state of mere reflection of the concrete world). I believe that our sociability as human beings leads us to behave in these recognizable ways regardless of

[454] Sandra E. Garcia, "The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2017, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html.

the space we are inhabiting; however, given different tools, we explore and make our way a bit more clumsily, even as we refigure a radically distinct space.

Critics of social media sense a shift in social dynamics: where previously they saw "real" conversations happening out in the "real" world, they see buses or restaurants full of people staring down intently at the glowing screen in their laps, oblivious to the people they share their physical space with. For this critic, the concrete body is primary, both temporally and theoretically. That is, our concrete selves and relationships exist prior in both time and metaphysics to our virtual selves; the virtual depends upon the existence of the concrete. Consequently, the virtual realm cannot ever be more than a mere shade, second fiddle, or even parasite upon our "real" selves and relationships. As an individual who worries constantly about undervaluing the importance of the body, particularly its role in establishing and maintaining meaningful social relationships, I find this objection to be the most compelling. The answer, I believe, lies in expanding our ideas of space and so expanding our ideas of the selves that can occupy them.

With their premises—that the virtual world of sites like Facebook depends upon the concrete existence of servers and physical human bodies to support it—I cannot disagree. The concern that I believe undergirds such objections is that virtual space is not robust enough to sustain relationships with others as we do in the concrete world, and the way we transact through the medium does not look exactly like it does in the physical world. It is certainly true enough that the virtual world does not currently offer the same array of tools available in the concrete world—a spoken message may be recorded and shared on Facebook, but not without effort that includes recording, hosting (perhaps on another site), and then posting to Facebook. The resulting communication would be shared based

on the user's privacy settings and intended audience, which is rarely a single recipient. As a result, the post looks more like an announcement on the Internet bullhorn rather than a targeted and intimate message to a friend. There are additional concerns that this breadth of audience encourages the projection of an idealized self or life, as a false façade—rarely are social media used for one-on-one communication. However, the virtual self's activities needn't exactly mirror those of the concrete self in order to for the virtual self to engage in earnest and reciprocal transactions with other virtual selves. The key lies, I believe, in expanding our understanding of both the technologies in play and what constitutes a substantive interaction with another human being. Foundationally, this entails embracing a wider spectrum of tools and behaviors that selves (both virtual and concrete) may engage in to transact with other selves. Technologies themselves, like Facebook, evolve so rapidly that pinning down a particular behavior and declaring it to be a "true" transaction will likely be impossible. From the inception of this dissertation to its completion, the platform has undergone so many changes that I found myself racing it to its next release, to try to hammer something out that could be discussed while the medium remained steady. Needless to say, the task was impossible, and I have accepted that I cannot follow it through every facelift and new feature. The motives of Facebook, as a corporation that turns profits, will always be suspect, but the company's decision makers understand something: eyeballs on the page generate money for stakeholders. That is not to say that folks wary of the ubiquity and tractor beam pull of the smartphone and social media aren't onto something—they are. (I myself rarely walk into a different room of my own house without my phone in hand, and I have noticed that sometimes I manage to start up my phone and open Facebook without ever having consciously willed

it—the act has sedimented in my minded body to the level of a motor habit.) When my concrete surroundings either bore or overwhelm me, I can pick up the device constantly tethered to my person, and with a few taps, escape to somewhere else entirely. Whether I choose this route or remain in place, always with me, there exists a portal to countless other places, that allows me to forgo awkward silences and uncomfortable or unfamiliar social spaces.

The concern that drives those who are wary of social media—that it drags people (and particularly the young, whose in-the-flesh social skills may still be in development and especially sensitive or susceptible to the influence of alternative avenues for social connection, or lack thereof) away from the "reality" of their surroundings—may be exactly what excites those who see hope for more truly democratic communication and participation in the Internet. For both technophobe and technophile, it is the potential of virtual space to ensnare and to hold its inhabitants that makes it such a powerful force. The technophobe fears that this electronic siren will abscond with an entire generation of digital natives[455], leaving them with only stunted in-person social capabilities and limited language to express themselves without gifs and emojis, only literate in the language of text messages and memes. For the technophile, on the other hand, the draw indicates not a siren call but the captivating richness of the world to be found on the other side of the screen; Facebook and its ilk offer vast worlds and experiences that cannot be had in concrete space. In other words, it is the "realness" of the virtual world that makes it both menacing and invigorating. If this is the case, the question becomes, what effect does

[455] Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," in *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking*, ed. Mark Bauerlein (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2011), 12.

access to virtual worlds have on the self? Or, more specifically, what impact does Facebook have on our concrete selves, and how has it impacted our social being? (And ultimately, is this impact "good" or "bad"?[456])

Social media have changed both our online and offline social networks. When students graduate high school, they may physically scatter—to find work, to attend college, to make fresh starts. If the individual is a social media user, Facebook makes this transition more ambiguous than it was prior to ubiquitous access to the Internet: the student who has made "friends" with their classmates on social networking sites may not lose touch with them in the ways that previous generations have. In fact, they not only can keep track another classmate's life milestones (vacations, graduations, marriages, birth announcements), but they take the rest of their friends along for the ride through their own lives as well, by providing this sort of update in return. Though the clusters and cliques of high school may no longer concretely congregate, and the individuals may have moved many miles away from the venue where they received their diplomas, their Facebook selves remain "friends," in a relationship that is (at least nominally) relatively unchanged.[457] Transitions between the stages of concrete life do not bring about a natural pruning or attrition of friendships as time for in-person leisure and socializing become

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[456] In the spirit of the pragmatist, I use both "good" and "bad" carefully—both words ought always to be accompanied by prepositional phrases: "good for X" and "bad for X" are more appropriate ways to articulate goodness and badness. One must define "X" before determining whether a thing is good or bad for it.

[457] Facebook's algorithms that determine what posts by one's Facebook friends are curated into the news feed, a subject shrouded in mystery and controversy, may actually allow a concrete event like a high school graduation to have an effect on the nature of the virtual friendship. In other words, if Facebook detects a decrease in interest in the posts of a high school friend—however that is measured—it may show fewer of that friend's posts in one's newsfeed, both reflecting and amplifying a concrete dynamic. However, given that rapidly changing nature of these algorithms, a deep dive into this subject remains outside the scope of this dissertation. Jonah Engel Bromwich and Matthew Haag, "Facebook Is Changing. What Does That Mean for Your News Feed?," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2018, sec. Technology, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/technology/facebook-news-feed-changes.html.

scarce; instead, these connections remain preserved in some form on Facebook. Indeed, sometimes these connections are so prolonged beyond their concrete instantiations that we don't even recognize Facebook friends that we almost certainly met; out of curiousity and with very little research, I found at least two of my own Facebook friends that I don't even recall meeting or interacting with when we were (apparently) in college together. More than that, Facebook and other social media sites can offer oddly intimate windows into one another's lives; depending on the Facebook friend, by noon I may have not only viewed a photograph of her spouse or children asleep in bed, seen a check-in to a restaurant where she ate one of her meals, and read a complaint about a particularly obnoxious coworker, I may also have read essay-length defenses of her political leanings. In truth, this is more information than I have (or may want) about my closest of friends and family members, and all this about a person I have not concretely seen in years. It is certainly more than I would have known about her through a strictly concrete friendship, and so in a sense, Facebook has facilitated uniquely intimate knowledge of her routine and her habits. Snaps of meals eaten and RunKeeper[458] posts about how many miles jogged in the morning hours may seem like superficial or trivial details of a person's life, but there is a sense in which these tidbits reveal intimate facts that we may not know about the coworkers we interact with each day at the coffee machine. In the banal and the everyday routines, rather than the extraordinary events, lies the person; the bundle of virtual habits form the virtual self.

These seemingly mundane bits of information about a concrete self, rendered virtual by the quick-draw camera of a smartphone, fuse in the Facebook Timeline to be a

[458] "Runkeeper," *Wikipedia*, July 18, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Runkeeper&oldid=791094155.

virtual self. This self, through Instagram[459] filters and edits of all sorts, and whether an idealization or not, becomes an independent, identifiable entity. The Facebook self itself has not eaten those meals and gone on those runs, but neither is the Facebook self a mere window into another, concrete life. The Timeline is an organic entity marked by time and activity; it accumulates memories and transactions with other selves that inform its existence and future behavior. The components and activities it engages in differ, because the virtual realm has different tools on offer for the selves communicating and miscommunicating there. It establishes some habits (posting pictures of meals, resharing memes, soliciting prayers for a loved one in need) while eschewing others (getting into fights in comment threads, interacting with advertisements). It engages preferentially with its social circle, and it cultivates its own image to carefully communicate who it is. It self-censures, reflects on its behavior, crafts a persona, and caters to its audience; it is, in short, a self driven by its social milieu, which happens to be virtual.

How does the Facebook self feed back into concrete self? What are its effects? There are no hard boundaries between concrete selves: my (concrete) student self transacts with my (concrete) daughter self, and vice versa. I talk to my mother about philosophy; I write philosophically about my mother. The same truth holds for my virtual selves (and there are many)—my Twitter self feeds into my Facebook self, and both of these seep into concrete space and inform my behavior as I am my various concrete selves. I might not be able to rick roll someone in person, and I might not be able to display the 30 Rock gif that perfectly encapsulates my sentiments in a particular moment, but I can (and sometimes do) say things like, "El oh el," and make mental note to share a hilarious joke

[459] "Instagram," *Wikipedia*, January 20, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Instagram&oldid=821479448.

I just made. Activities in my concrete life are driven by my virtual life: pictures taken to be shared, the phone required to be that virtual person constantly in sight, and a sense that I am always one tap away from being able to interact with someone, whether on the Internet or through text.[460] I am impatient for information and confounded when I cannot learn what I want to know through a quick internet search, including how a high school acquaintance I haven't thought of in literally years is doing. I know that I am different when I am near my phone and sometimes anxious when I cannot locate it, like something that is a part of me is missing. And there are certainly studies to document such experiences, which are surprisingly common, but their conclusions still contradict each other in many cases and oftentimes cannot be replicated.

V. Conclusion

So, let us circle back to the question that ties these concerns together: is Facebook good or bad? Again, we must specify, "good for what"? The larger ramifications of a philosophically-loaded word like "good" will be set aside for this work, and here, "good" will simply mean something like, "capable of fostering a sense of social connection with others." In other words, as one scrolls through a news feed looking the posts of one's Facebook friends, or visits a friend's Timeline to write a birthday message or see what that person has been doing with their time recently, does this activity promote feelings of familiarity and closeness? The answer to the question lies beyond the scope of this

[460] A term has even been coined for the anxiety related to being separated from one's mobile phone: "nomophobia". Aatif Sulleyman, "Smartphone Separation Anxiety: Scientists Explain Why You Feel Bad without Your Phone | The Independent," The Independent, August 16, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/smartphone-separation-anxiety-nomophobia-why-feel-bad-no-phone-personalised-technology-a7896591.html.

dissertation; it will vary from user to user and from transaction to transaction. We might be able to set some very vague parameters: mindless scrolling through a news feed is unlikely to yield robust social connections among virtual selves, while engaging in a thoughtful discussion of a photo or a status message may cultivate a sense of intimacy—one that just happens to occur within virtual space rather than concrete space. What we can be certain of is that transactions among virtual selves surely occur, and at the locus of these activities and relationships is a self.

Afterword

Death and Facebook: Where Do We Go From Here?

I. Introduction

While I was writing the third chapter of this dissertation, my grandmother passed away at the age of 82 on September 30, 2016. She had joined Facebook in November of 2014, accessing the Internet for the first time through a laptop so old that she had to prop up its screen with a stack of books, a sad piece of technology bequeathed by another grandchild who hadn't had time to explain to her the terrain of this ever-evolving digital frontier. By the time I had traveled back to my hometown for Thanksgiving and could sit down with her to provide a crash course in Internet safety, the computer, already hindered by its age, was so encumbered with malware and extraneous toolbars and other parasitic software that it barely functioned. I had been working at the Emory Center for Digital Scholarship and helping faculty with their devices for years, but explaining the Internet from scratch to an 80-year-old on that decrepit, minimally responsive laptop was a new challenge. Over the course of a several hour visit, we set some ground rules about not sharing personal or financial information, not clicking links to unfamiliar sites, and not downloading or installing things. She was nothing if not an intrepid explorer, giddy at the prospect of being freed from the schedules of her televised news programs and directing her own reading and research. Armed with an extensive list of bookmarks we curated together, she was then able to wade safely through news outlets, reference websites, and social media.

Her favorite website by far, however, was Facebook. Both of her sons (my father included) had passed away over a decade ago, leaving only her daughter; her five grandchildren (four of whom joined the military and the fifth, myself, moved away for graduate school) had scattered across the globe. Her physical mobility was limited, and her left-leaning political beliefs put her at odds with other members of her senior living community, so she felt isolated. With access to Facebook, though, she could view and comment on the hundreds of pictures and statuses that her grandchildren and their spouses had posted. She violated the implicit rules of netiquette[461] with wild (and endearing) abandon, "tagging" herself in photos in which she was not pictured, "checking in" to places she wasn't (she has never been to Jakarta), and writing comments on the wrong posts in amusing (and confusing) non sequiturs. She reshared YouTube videos when I'm fairly certain she didn't mean to[462] and sent friend requests to people she'd never met. But in addition, she was also able to send messages to her grandkids, see photos of their pets, and read anecdotes and musings about their lives.

She was also able to virtually needle me in a way only she could. When I shared an article about the benefits of less-frequent showering that contained a splashimage of Emma Stone from the shoulders up in the shower[463] (a glimpse into my own use of the medium), she commented that it was an excellent picture of me. When I rather incredulously pointed out that I would not allow myself to be photographed while I was

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[461] Jo Bryant, "10 Facebook Etiquette Rules | Huffington Post," The Huffington Post, March 11, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jo-bryant/10-facebook-etiquette-rul_b_9425740.html.
[462] It's possible she did intend to share a home video of part of Britney Spears' (You Drive Me) Crazy Tour from 2000. I didn't ask, because regardless of how differently our generations use Facebook, she seemed to be enjoying herself.
[463] Rachel Wilkerson Miller, "How Often You Really Need To Shower (According To Science)," BuzzFeed, accessed May 16, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/rachelwmiller/how-often-you-really-need-to-shower.

showering and certainly wouldn't allow that picture to wind up on Facebook, she pointedly suggested that she had forgotten what I looked like because it had been so long since I had been to see her. She also occasionally wrote on my Timeline that I ought to call her, a form of public shaming that was remarkably effective. (Who wants to be outed to 550 people as the grandchild that neglects their lonely grandparent?)

After her death, I found myself staring at her eerily static Facebook page. At the time of this writing (three weeks later on October 20, 2016), she has 26 Facebook friends, mostly family members, their spouses, and whichever of their friends were brave enough to accept a friend request from a stranger. My cousins and I participate in chat message together, and we decided that it was time to deal with her Facebook page. It seemed like a necessary part of the disposition of her digital estate and the tying up of loose ends, and little did we know (though we should have guessed), Facebook already had several procedures and features in place to handle this situation. By reporting the death of a profile owner to Facebook, the decedent's loved ones can have the page "memorialized,"[464] wherein the word "remembering" is placed in front of the person's name and the account is locked. Friends of that person may still post on their timeline, but unless the profile owner has indicated a "legacy contact"[465] in advance, the remainder of the page remains as-is. If the profile owner has chosen a legacy contact, then that individual may choose to change the profile picture or cover photo, as well as approve incoming friend requests or delete the profile altogether.

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[464] "Help Center | Memorialized Accounts," Facebook, accessed October 20, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/help/1506822589577997/.

[465] Vanessa Callison-Burch, Jasmine Probst, and Mark Govea, "Adding a Legacy Contact | Facebook Newsroom," accessed October 20, 2016, http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2015/02/adding-a-legacy-contact/.

The cousins agreed that memorializing my grandmother's account seemed like the best idea. Guessing correctly that she had likely not designated a legacy contact, and being in possession of her login information (to do the occasional remote tech support for her), I signed into her account and set myself as her legacy contact, to ensure that a family member would continue to have control of her account and data even if we could not log into it. The next step of the memorialization process was to prove to Facebook that she was indeed deceased. Simply reporting it was not sufficient, and because she did not have an online obituary, I was required to submit a photo of her death certificate. Once I had passed along the documentation, "Riley" from Facebook Community Operations completed to process within 24 hours, the model of efficiency. Facebook had managed to rather seamlessly fold itself into the procedures to follow the death of a loved one, and much like a gravestone serves as a final physical resting place and a site around which mourners might congregate, my grandmother's Facebook profile acts as an anchor for the virtual life she lived. Even in the wake of the news, the page remains depressingly devoid of activity, a solemn reminder of the reason that her sole surviving child chose to forgo services for her mother.

Different deaths elicit different reactions on Facebook. My high-school-through-college boyfriend was killed by a drunk driver in June of 2007 in our hometown, just following his graduation from Vanderbilt and the conclusion of my junior year there. He was applying to medical schools and bioengineering graduate programs, while I still had my senior year ahead of me, and we were trying to figure out the future of our four and a half year relationship. On Facebook, we had changed our relationship status from "in a relationship" to "it's complicated." A few days later, the driver's side door of his car was

t-boned by a drunk 18-year-old rocketing down a main road at 75 miles per hour, and he was killed instantly. Following his death, our profiles remained linked through our relationship: prominently displayed under his profile picture, it said, "It's complicated with Stephanie Rodgers." For nearly two months, I was paralyzed and unsure what to do, grieving and mulling over the implications of being in a Facebook-official[466] relationship with someone who was no longer alive. Changing my relationship status back to "single" felt too final and somehow inappropriate, even disloyal to the person with whom I had spent over four years and with whose family members I was Facebook friends. "Single" wasn't the right word for it, anyway: we were not together any longer, but we also had not chosen to end our relationship. I was not prepared to assume the independence implied by "single," as I was still acutely feeling his absence and working through the directionless longing that his death left with me. My relationship, like so many relationships, transcended the bounds of the dropdown list of relationship options presented to me by a social media site. It was complicated, surely, but I doubt the developers at Facebook were thinking about just how complicated it would be.

To this day, his relationship status still says, "It's complicated," right under the last profile picture he chose for himself. The page has now been memorialized, meaning that no one can log into his account, and because he died before Facebook allowed users to designate legacy contacts[467], his profile is permanently frozen. For as long as his Facebook page exists, his relationship status will declare, "it's complicated." It sits there, frozen in time, and every time I visit his page, I know that I was that person with whom a

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[466] Cynthia McKelvey, "What Being 'Facebook Official' Says about Your Relationship," The Daily Dot, December 17, 2015, http://www.dailydot.com/irl/facebook-official-relationship-status-commitment/.
[467] Callison-Burch, Probst, and Govea, "Adding a Legacy Contact | Facebook Newsroom."

relationship had become complicated. The relationship cannot become uncomplicated, and it cannot end. It can only be one-sided and open-ended. "It's complicated," on his end, forever. The permanence is perhaps fitting. I have since moved on, to other relationships with other people, and now I am married to someone else, Facebook officially. But my old boyfriend's profile page functions as an odd time capsule, an organically developing representation of a life that fossilized in the moment when the only person with the password died. Some of his closest friends still post messages to his Timeline on his birthday or on the anniversary of his death, but his own contributions have ceased. He is being remembered but he is not remembering or creating his own new memories. His parents, who joined Facebook a few years ago, cannot be his Facebook friends.

The fate of my grandmother's Facebook profile and my old boyfriend's Facebook profile could not have been more different. Memorialization for my grandmother was complete within two days of my request and three weeks of her death; in contrast, in 2007, Facebook had not even implemented procedures for handling the death of its users, and it would be two years before my then-boyfriend's page looked different from any other profile or stopped sending birthday reminders to his friends on his birthday. My grandmother, with few remaining family members or friends, did not have funerary services, and her page now resembles a virtual mausoleum. My old boyfriend, a gregarious, charming college graduate, still garners posts and photo tags from close friends even 10 years after his passing.

II. Grief Tourism and Virtual Rubbernecking

When I finally mustered the energy to change my Facebook relationship status to single in late August of 2007, I was not able to do so without drawing attention. I had accepted a number of friend requests from my boyfriend's Facebook friends following his death—rejecting them would have seemed ungracious or uncouth to other people who were also grieving—and one of those people immediately responded to my altered status by posting on my Facebook Wall. She wrote, "I see you took your relationships status down. How are you doing w/ [him] being gone? I know it's a stupid question.." And I replied to her on her own Wall, "I'm doing as well as can be expected, I suppose. I finally took it down because... I guess I had to eventually. It was hard, but I think I'm doing ok."[468] We are no longer Facebook friends; in fact, even looking at public photos of her, I don't recognize her in the slightest.[469] I also do not recall who unfriended whom, but whoever she was, she publicly called attention to a stage of my grieving and asked me to discuss it in front of the entirety of my (or her) Facebook friends.[470] An intimate question from a veritable stranger on a public stage.[471]

Read charitably, she was a stranger who was sincerely concerned about my mental health and how I was coping with my grief, and I am inclined to believe that she made her inquiry without malice. Read more cynically, though, she might represent a part of a phenomenon recently dubbed "grief tourism," a sort of virtual rubbernecking

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[468] For privacy reasons, I decline to cite her page or mention her by name. Though anyone with a Facebook account and sufficient energy could find my response on her Timeline (as she keeps her Timeline public), I prefer to keep the names of the Facebook users I am discussing out of this work.
[469] I do know from her public posts in the Facebook group created in memory of my boyfriend that she had only met him once, and I'm quite sure she and I had not ever met in person.
[470] Find reference for when Facebook switched to the new privacy settings.
[471] Reflecting on the exchange, I find it odd that I even answered her. The thought of a similar question now horrifies me. Rather than having expanded my understanding of privacy with the growth in users and intrusiveness of Facebook over the years, I have defensively retracted, aggressively removing and hiding my posts and ensuring that the ones that remain are completely benign and sanitized.

made all the more possible by confusing privacy settings, 24-hour news cycles, and instant gratification made possible by one-click access to an unlimited supply of tragic tales and horrifying incidents. Rather than checking up on a person in mourning or participating in a sincere and necessary grieving process, grief tourists consume the mourning as a spectacle, catharsis, or entertainment. I watched posts appearing in my deceased boyfriend's remembrance group that seemed more aimed at competing for who could be the saddest or most deeply affected (usually by people who had met him only couple of times or had one class with him) rather than showing sincere desire for commiseration, an attempt to offer condolences to his family and friends, or a personal reflection on the individual who had died. At first I found them vaguely irritating, and then extremely nauseating: why did these people seem so keen on aligning themselves with tragedy? Did them simply wish to grovel in sadness for a little while, and then congratulate themselves on how badly they could feel for someone they hardly knew? Did they seek the virtual equivalent of an "I was there when" story to later recount to their acquaintances? The timbre of the posts verged on either saccharine or histrionic, but with false notes. They resonated as intensely voyeuristic and exploitive, and I felt like my grief, and the grief of my boyfriend's close friends and family members, had become the object of virtual rubbernecking.

One might be tempted to point to these crocodile tears as a particularly noxious symptom of the Internet age: with news websites that earn their revenue from ads lining the edges of every page like so much lace, and the competition for clicks and page views so fierce, it's no wonder that gut- and heart-wrenching headlines make rapid rounds through social media. And who hasn't encountered salacious click-bait title and failed to

resist it, or found themselves wandering down a macabre Wikipedia hole, reading and clicking through articles that stir a deep, dark part of our psyche usually tamped down by years of well-rehearsed mental gymnastics? The Internet has very effectively commodified and nurtured this particular propensity, offering endless reading materials and images in which to indulge.

But as historians point out, grief tourism began not on social media, but out in the concrete world, long before the Internet existed to aid and abet it. Predating the term "grief tourism" is the term "dark tourism," and predating that term (only coined in 1996[472]) is a little-studied practice of visiting places (or events) associated with death and tragedy. Public executions were a common practice for millennia,[473] and journeys to places associated with tragedy date back as far as the gladiatorial games. Currently, dark tourism manifests in the form of Holocaust tourism and tours of Ground Zero[474]. Whether such practices are educational or exploitive doubtlessly depends on the nature of the visit and the attitude of the visitor, but what is clear is that being transfixed by spectacle of grief and death, to the point of seeking it out, is not new to the Internet age. Virtual rubbernecking just happens to be extraordinarily easy.

III. Death of the (Digital) Self

Technology evolves rapidly, and there's no guarantee that Facebook will still exist in forty years, when the first crop of college kids who joined in 2004 begins to pass away in

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[472] Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon, "JFK and Dark Tourism: A Fascination with Assassination," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (December 1, 1996): 198–211, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527259608722175.
[473] Michael H. Reggio, "Readings - History Of The Death Penalty | The Execution | FRONTLINE | PBS," accessed July 7, 2017, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/execution/readings/history.html.
[474] "9/11 Memorial: Ground Zero as Dark Tourist Site," Pacific Standard, accessed July 7, 2017, https://psmag.com/social-justice/9-11-memorial-ground-zero-as-dark-tourist-site-34277.

increasing numbers and cede their profiles to legacy contacts. It's an odd situation to consider: what happens to these rhizomatic networks of profiles as the bulk of their concrete counterparts cease to exist? If the website itself stays up and running in a form even remotely resembling what it is now, with even some semblance of the number of living members as it currently supports, the dead will at some point outnumber the living. Will Facebook then just be a virtual mausoleum? What even *are* these profiles, and how could a digital self be dead? How would we even define "death" in this situation—stagnation, deletion, absence of virtual traffic? Does a digital self die when its profile ceases to produce new activity, or does it die when members of its virtual community cease to engage with it? Must the profile be deleted entirely for the digital self to be considered well and truly "dead"? If I delete my Facebook profile, have I killed someone, or just a part of myself?

IV. More Questions, Few Answers

The Internet puts much at our fingertips: endless videos of red pandas playing in the snow[475], legal online gambling[476], and the largest encyclopedia ever compiled.[477] The possibilities presented by the medium makes the need to study it ever more urgent. Different segments of our digital lives bleed together as companies buy each other up to glut on data and discover the next new way to monetize it, and our digital lives escape their confines into our concrete lives. Augmented realities, extended minds, and artificial

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[475] "雪で遊ぶレッサーパンダ～Red Panda Playing in the Snow," YouTube, accessed July 7, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6GaPkkGZGw.
[476] "Gamble Online USA - Best Legal US Online Gambling Sites 2016," accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.gambleonline.co/usa/.
[477] "Wikipedia:Size Comparisons," *Wikipedia*, October 23, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Size_comparisons&oldid=745843286.

intelligence blur the boundaries, but to understand the implications of these technologies, we must understand how we ourselves inhabit our virtual spaces and what it means to be there with one another.

Ultimately, my fear is that virtual space will continue to be thought of as a derivative of physical space, parasitic rather than a freestanding space in its own right. Failure to give Facebook, and the Internet, the care and attention they deserve will surely do all of us a disservice. Railing against it will no more stop its use than pointing a pedestal fan at an approaching typhoon, but dropping our guard entirely will surely lead to us being swept away unprepared. Our digital lives and relationships, as expansive and nuanced and protean as they are, demand philosophical reflection and consideration. I hope that this work has offered a beginning, even if only as a clumsy fumbling in the dark of teh interweb[478].

[478] "Interweb - Wiktionary," accessed July 7, 2017, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/interweb.

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