Facebook's Status

By Zachary Ash

With the stealth of a fully-fledged ninja, a man creeps silently through the underbrush. He peers cautiously over the field, and suddenly he realizes his precarious position. Only feet away, another man, haplessly unaware of the other's presence, walks carelessly into danger without a qualm. Both of these men are maneuvering through a treacherous minefield, in which one false step could imperil and destroy both of them. Through the ignorance of the one, the other lies in just as great of a risk. Similarly, Facebook endangers all of its users who are not aware of the dangers that lurk within it. Those who are not aware of the potential for harm can cripple not only themselves, but their peers as well. Facebook may seem useful for strengthening your social standing at first, but appearances are wily masters of disguise. Deceptively hiding its hazards, Facebook poses many dangers to users, to companies, and to societies, dangers by which the naive networker and his companions could be thrown into a cauldron of troubles.

Firstly, Facebook poses many threats to the oblivious individual. It can become an obsession, set up bullying opportunities, cause depression, and compromise personal information. Facebook can be addicting. In a survey conducted last year by MTVU, a branch of MTV Networks, more than half of college students questioned spent two to six hours online, one third spent more than six hours online, and a large quantity of texts were sent by these students as well ("Social" Para. 8). The survey's discovery: "College students are perpetually connected via technology" ("Social" Para. 8). Teenagers have been convinced they constantly need to update their status, and additionally Facebook games devour time like a famished glutton (Clark

164). Assuming that school or work takes a minimum of eight hours (including transportation), that homework averages two hours, and that a student gets eight hours for a decent night's sleep, then six hours are left per day. Subtract one hour for meals and two hours for entertainment and possibly music practice, and teens have three hours left in the day. To achieve their six hours of networking, this means teens must either sacrifice homework, tune-out school lessons, or chisel away at their precious sleep. Any one of these sacrifices can only hurt them, resulting in lower grades, and in the end they have no time for physical interaction outside of school.

Unfortunately, it's not only teens that have trouble with the addictive nature of Facebook. With new mobile devices for accessing Facebook, hundreds of thousands of people are spending their time each day posting pictures, adding statuses, and commenting on other posts. This phenomenon is rapidly spreading worldwide. Today, one in every nine people actively uses Facebook. The number of users has skyrocketed from one million in December of 2008 to eight hundred million today ("Timeline"). Collectively, seven hundred billion minutes are spent on Facebook every month (Sweeney Para. 2). If all that time was used to socialize with friends physically, true friendships would be much stronger.

All the "friendships" and connections on Facebook can overwhelm a user. Referred to as the Dunbar number, the most close friendships a typical human can maintain is 150 (Rosofsky Para. 3). If someone tries to maintain more than 150 strong relationships, the overwhelming abundance of requisite communication would overpower him, forcing him to slowly drop "friends" until he has about 150 again (Rosofsky Para. 11). It is extremely difficult to exceed that many stable relations. The time that would be required to maintain all the chatting and messaging via Facebook would engulf all free, relaxation time.

Beyond demanding excessive amounts of time, Facebook also provides an environment where schoolyard bullies can prowl, haunting their victims night and day. These oppressors shadow their prey everywhere. No longer bound to school, they reign with an indefatigable grip. Not even the "safety" of home can provide sanctuary from bullying any more. Half of teenagers aged twelve to seventeen use at least one social networking site (Sweeney Para. 4). This sets up a broad range of targets for bullies to harass online. Cyberbullying is an increasing problem today. Bullies take advantage of the anonymous, impersonal, and not physically-present characteristics of Facebook to put a veil between themselves and their victims (Sweeney Para. 4). Targets can be terrorized confidentially and around the clock. Some children have been terrorized by strangers who threatened the children if they would not meet in person (Clark 164). Only harm could be intended in these situations. Tormentors lurk in every hidden corner of Facebook. According to Rebecca Sweeney, "It's emotional and psychological effects are devastating and can often lead to suicide and depression" (Para. 4). An astounding twenty percent of college students said they had friends who talked of suicide, and nine percent thought about killing themselves ("Social" Para. 4). Suicide due to depression or bullying is a growing concern today. Often victims of bullies feel like they do not deserve to live and should end their lives (Sweeney Para. 4). The feeling of connection without any real interaction can cause depression, whether bullied or not. Any "contact" is negligible and distant, as is seen by a poll in which a fourth of respondents declared Facebook had not improved their social lives at all (Carr Para. 8). Users are never safe from this "omnipresent" intimidators and depression skulking on Facebook.

In addition to bullying, Facebook is also a breeding ground for crime. Facebook poses a threat to your personal information. Many people place private and invaluable information about themselves on their profiles for the whole world to see. Ironically, many of these people would

never give this confidential information to anyone in any other situation. It is not uncommon for criminals to prowl on Facebook. They hunt for information that can be used to create a false ID or profile for themselves. As an added benefit for the "bad guys," users liberally post pictures of themselves on their profile and wall, so the villains can see exactly what the users look like. Interests, abilities, friends, and favorite books and movies can also be found on Facebook, giving criminals a perfect opportunity to discover much about a user's character.

Another crime-related abuse of Facebook is robbery. With the "convenient" addition of being able to tag your current location on Facebook, burglars can monitor where you are and seize advantage of your absence to "borrow" your stuff permanently. All information that is posted on Facebook is available for all to see and abuse, if a user's settings are not manually changed. Messages, realistic-looking sites, and other tricks are employed to get vulnerable users to willingly give up their crucial, private information such as credit card numbers, Social Security numbers, and passwords. This information can then be used to steal money, impersonate a person, or cause trouble on someone's account.

Dangers to the computer also swarm in the dark recesses of Facebook. Viruses and other malware also are contained on Facebook. Some third party apps, links to apparently normal sites, and "harmless" messages are utilized to get unaware users to download damaging content onto their computer. The end result: lost information, hacked accounts, spam; the list is endless. Let those who use Facebook beware of frauds!

Secondly, Facebook can be very damaging and costly to a company or workplace. Most common, and often most costly overall, is squandering time during work hours on Facebook. The fiscal costs of Facebook are tremendous. Assuming the average time spent on Facebook during work is a half of an hour and the average wage for employees is $22 per hour, 13,000

hours and $286,000 are lost every year to Facebook in a hundred-strong workforce. This does not even account for the money that would be earned by using the wasted time productively! Use of Facebook also can result in a company morale drop. If other employees have to work hard to make up for the slacker, and the Facebook user is not caught and apprehended, then co-workers feel abused (Kelleher 1). Moreover, Facebook can hinder other workers, costing the company even more money. Loading videos and other large online files can slow down Internet browsing speed. This can severely delay people who must browse the Internet continuously, resulting in more lost money for the company. Even if Facebook is not used during working hours, it can severely damage a company. An employee who carelessly comments about how they have to work to fix a product or some "harmless" status can publish a blemish in a product without the worker realizing it (Kelleher 2). Also, a company's reputation can be jeopardized by a quick post (Sweeney Para. 9). If an employee is viewing questionable things through Facebook, the employer could be in legal trouble for not protecting the employee from those questionable things (Kelleher 2). Good names and reputations can be thrown into question by the public simply based on a few Facebook posts (Sweeney Para. 8).

Other than harmed reputations, Facebook can also cost an employee his job, or keep a prospective applicant from ever getting hired. Employees can be fired for statuses that give away information, deride the company, or bad-mouth their boss (Kelleher 2). Often employers will skim the Facebook pages of job applicants to search for a possible negative aspect (Kelleher 2). Any information posted can be accessed by the managers, and things that "seemed funny back then" might not seem so funny to an employer. Managers are likely to pass by those who are arrogant or meddlesome. Forty-five percent of employers use social networks for screening potential workers (Sweeney Para. 8). A worker may lose his chance and tarnish his reputation

through his statuses and pictures (Kelleher 2). Overall, Facebook proves to be the burial ground of many hopeful applicants. Beware what you post. A general rule: when in doubt, do not post it.

Finally, aside from harming individual people and companies, Facebook has undermined the very fabric of society. A strong community requires one thing more than anything else: strong friendships built on traditional face-to-face communication. Shane Hipps, author of *Flickering Pixels*, found that, although it was "inefficient" to find his coworkers in person rather than via email, he got quicker, in-person responses, and even got what he needed before others who sent emails (116-117). His relation with coworkers was stronger because he met them face-to-face rather than communicating only electronically (Hipps 117). Austin Carr states that ninety percent of those who sign up for Facebook joined to deepen or strengthen companionship; very few feel it has accomplished that (Para. 3). Of those polled, forty percent add friends because it is easy, but their commitments are also easy to make and break (Carr Para. 5)! Facebook has made "friendship" cheap: a click of a button on each end. Friends are easier to get than candy at a parade. While Facebook may strengthen ties with distant acquaintances, it weakens stronger ties with close friends. Social media does NOT make us better at socializing. Instead of having stronger friends, we only establish a wider circle of acquaintances. "Just as a calculator does not make us better at math, Twitter doesn't make it anymore possible to have more than 150 social contacts" (Rosofsky Para. 12). Notice that 150 is the Dunbar number again, and "social contacts" means real friends. Hipps records the growing tradition of valuing communicating via device instead of in person: almost everyone will put a conversation on hold to answer their phone, and then they are "deported electronically" somewhere else (107). For many people, social networking has made physical relations less valuable than virtual relations.

Facebook distracts people from relations and isolates them in front of a computer. People become less interactive, more isolated, and more depressed ("Online" Para. 4). Lives can become focused on online interaction, and loneliness stalks some people when they are not connected with their "friends" ("Online" Para. 9). As Sweeney declares, "The term 'social networking' misleads people into believing they are being social" (Para. 4). Contact is no longer intimate. Instead of finding or calling their friends, people just look at their posts, pictures, and other updates on life (Sweeney Para. 7). As Hipps writes:

> Virtual community is infinitely more virtual than it is communal. It's a bit like cotton candy: It goes down easy and satiates our immediate hunger, but it doesn't provide much in the way of sustainable nutrition. Not only that, but our appetite is spoiled. We no longer feel the need to participate in authentic community (114).

Social networking only seems to gratify our voracious desire for connection, but it neglects our need for physical interaction. Networking is not wholesome. Rather, the aftermath is that it will impair our ability to interact. The poll by MTVU reports that one in seven social networkers feels isolated ("Social" Para. 1). The percent of people who appear to have no strong ties has grown from ten percent in 1984 to twenty-five percent in 2004 (Sweeney Para. 7). According to reporter Melissa Simas, fifty-seven percent of Facebook users socialize online more than they talk with their friends (Simas Para. 1). Society is fragmenting as people reach out and interact less (Simas Para. 5). The human race is slowly "cocooning," losing its aptitude for face-to-face interaction. Facebook users go for long times between personal contact because they feel "connected" and keep tabs on friends (Sweeney Para. 7). Of those polled, many users saw someone who posted what was apparently an emotional cry for help, and although the majority would support them via social networking, more than half did not personally visit the person

("Social" Para. 2). When humans become a set of data on the web, they are reduced to non-humanity (Lehrer Para. 2). They lose friendship, language, character, individuality, and everything else that makes people uniquely human (Lehrer Para. 2). Personal contact is what makes people human. Interaction is needed to discover or develop character.

This danger becomes especially strong once a person leaves high school. While a person is in school, they meet friends face-to-face during the week. Upon leaving school, that bond is severed. Contact drops to a minimum. As Hipps found, his two friends, who were best friends, physically met with each other very little even though they lived only a few blocks apart (106). They talked every day on their cell phones, but they hadn't seen each other in two months (Hipps 106)! When contact in society becomes mainly virtual, people are no longer individuals; they are reduced to a binary scribble of code (Lehrer Para. 2). Four in ten college students polled have 500 or more friends on Facebook ("Social" Para. 1). As that greatly exceeds the Dunbar number, 350 of those friends are probably only acquaintances. This implies that friends are "easy," therefore people can afford to get rid of them. If friendship becomes cheap like that, then society's foundation of strong friendships is quickly eroding.

Besides losing intimacy with friends, many Facebook users are no longer adept at personal interaction and cannot easily interpret the actions of others. In a survey, forty-eight percent of those asked said they were often unsure if a message's sender was joking or not ("Social" Para. 3). Many people have withdrawn to arguing online only. Facebook, other networking sites, and email are no way to argue. Misunderstanding, offense, and chaos can result from e-conflict. Hipps writes that one of his friends received an angry, all-capitals email, and his friend sent a cool, but cutting email in return (117-118). When he met his adversary, he found that the email had only confused his aggressor, and the original email was not intended to be

negatively received (Hipps 118-119). Arguments should never be resolved electronically, but amazingly seventy percent of college students polled had an argument without personal contact even though the vast majority believed that face-to-face contact is much better for resolving conflict ("Social" Para. 3). To resolve a conflict, physical contact, meaning face-to-face, not fist-to-face, is needed. If society loses its base in personal interaction, then our social structure is imperiled. Time spent interacting personally has drastically fallen with the rise of electronic media ("Online" Para. 2). Being together geographically affects a body in a way that is non-existent with electronic communication ("Online" 2). For example, Hipps states that if humans learn about tragedy via media, they cannot withstand the fullness of the suffering; they feel numb and exhausted, which eventually undermines the ability to show compassion to others and leads to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness (109). Contrastingly, personally sympathizing with someone renews commitment to help however possible (Hipps 109). Showing compassion via networking only makes people feel helpless. Face-to-face commiserating is the way to successfully condole a grieving person. If society no longer meets face-to-face, people are losing the ability to empathize that can only be attained through interaction.

Facebook does not only inhibit empathizing, but it also can hamper man's interactive skills. Using electronic media undermines social skills and the ability to interpret body language well ("Online" 2). Humans are slowly losing their adeptness at reading gestures and other body language. In two decades, the number of people who do not have someone they can discuss important matters with has tripled ("Online" Para. 2). With this decline in interpreting body language, maintaining intimate friends, and strengthening social skills, the human race is slowly losing its ability to communicate deeply one with one another.

Facebook users face an onslaught of dangers. Hazards lurk in the murky depths, ready to strike at anything, be it a person, a company, or even a community in general. Costly crimes, lost money, squandered time, damaged reputations, and weakened friendships are some of the many harms Facebook causes. There are preventive measures, however. A user can restrict access to his profile. We should tread cautiously on its deceptive pages. Beware of apps and suspicious links and do not give away information. Most importantly, just THINK! Act like a sage. Whenever we post something, imagine if you would like your parents, relatives, boss (or future employer), and teachers to read it. If it would cause you embarrassment, do not post it. Everything you do can come back to haunt you. We are called to "redeem the time" (KJV Ephesians 5:16). I will resist the urgent beckoning of Facebook to be constantly "connected." If you become addicted, you can whittle away all your precious time until you have none left. Refrain from accessing Facebook during work hours, and avoid posting anything that is degrading. Posts that are slanderous can be very detrimental for careers. Although Facebook has several practical purposes, be smart. The careless are doomed to fall into trouble. Replace Facebook with REAL "face-book." Face-to-face conversation is the Biblically recommended method of communication. St. John records in II John 12, "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full" (KJV). John provides of an example of communicating via the current method, therefore we are allowed to use the modern means of interaction. However, he could not completely enjoy communicating unless he was physically present with the community. John only wrote when he was away from the congregation. Both forms of communication are real, but only face-to-face can give fullness of joy. Although Facebook is real contact, in the overwhelming "connection" we lose face-to-face communication. We should not abandon

Facebook, but use it to contact those we cannot physically meet. Facebook should never be a replacement for personal interaction. Facebook - consider all you do carefully. Facebook - do not let it take over your life. Facebook - use all your time productively. Facebook - be aware.

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