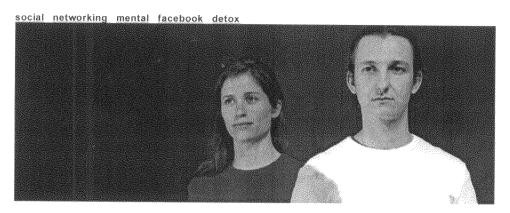# ADBUSTERS

The Freedom From Want
#80
ESSAY

Quit Facebook

The decision to destroy my carefully built-up virtual image came as a result of
wanting to enhance my profile.

Carmen Joy King | 03 Oct 2008 | 114 comments

social networking mental facebook detox

I n march, at the peak of Facebook popularity, I quit. with four swift clicks of the mouse, I canceled my
account. Gone was the entire online persona I had created for myself – profile pictures, interests and
activities, work history, friends acquired – all carefully thought out to showcase to the world the very best
version of me, all now deleted.

Ironically, the decision to destroy my carefully built-up virtual image came as a result of wanting to enhance my profile. All that particular week I'd been hungry for
new quotes on my page, something to reflect the week I'd been having: something introspective. I perused a quotes website and found this one attributed
to Aristotle:

"We are what we repeatedly do."

I became despondent. What, then, was I? If my time was spent changing my profile picture on Facebook, thinking of a clever status update for Facebook,
checking my profile again to see if anyone had commented on my page, Is this what I am? A person who re-visits her own thoughts and images for hours each
day? And so what do I amount to? An egotist? A voyeur?

Whatever the label, I was unhappy and feeling empty. The amount of time I spent on Facebook had pushed me into an existential crisis. It wasn't the time-wasting,
per se, that bothered me. It was the nature of the obsession – namely self-obsession. Enough was enough. I left Facebook.

In the past, my feelings toward Facebook and similar social networking sites had swung between a genuine sense of connection and community to the
uncomfortable awareness that what all of our blogs, online journals and personal profiles really amounted to was serious narcissism. As my feelings of
over-exposure continued to mount, the obvious solution would have been to set limits on my Facebook time – yet I still found myself sucked in for longer periods
every time I visited. In part, it was the hundreds of little links to and hints about other people's lives that kept me coming back. But even more addicting were the
never-ending possibilities to introduce, enhance and reveal more of myself.

The baby-boomers were at one time thought to be the most self-absorbed generation in American history and carried the label of the Me Generation. In recent
years this title has been appropriated, twisted and reassigned to the babies of those same boomers – born in the 80s and 90s – now called Generation Me or the
Look at Me Generation. Author Jean Twenge, an Associate Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University and herself a member of Generation Me –
spent ten years doing research on this group's sense of entitlement and self-absorption. She attributed it to the radical individualism that was engendered by
baby-boomer parents and educators focused on instilling self-esteem in children beginning in the 1970s. American and Canadian youth were raised on aphorisms
such as "express yourself" and "just be yourself."

To further illustrate her point, Twenge also found a large increase in self-reference words like "I," "me," "mine" and "myself" in news stories published in the 80s and 90s. These words replaced collective words such as "we," "us," "humanity," "country" or "crowd" found in the stories of a similar nature in the 50s and 60s. This generation might be the least thoughtful, community-oriented and conscientious one in North American history.

In the end, what does all this online, arms-length self-promotion ultimately provide? Perhaps it's merely one component of the pursuit to alleviate some of the blackness encountered in the existential vacuum of modern life. As Schopenhauer once projected, modern humans may be doomed to eternally vacillate between distress and boredom. For the vast majority of people experiencing the fragmented, fast-paced modern world of 2008, a Sunday pause at the end of a hectic week may cause them to become all too aware of the lack of content in their lives. So we update our online profiles and tell ourselves that we are reaching out.

And yet, the time we waste on Facebook only makes our search for comfort and community more elusive. Online networking sites are marketed as facilitators of community-orientation but when I think about the millions of people – myself included – who spend large portions of their waking lives feeding off an exchange of thousands of computerized, fragmented images, it doesn't add up to community-engagement. These images have no meaning beyond "I look pretty from this angle" or "I'm wasted" or "look who my new boyfriend is." And as we continue to chase even harder – accessing Facebook at work, uploading images from our cell phones – we spend our money on constantly upgraded electronic gadgets marketed to our tendency to self-obsess and present particularly uninteresting and repetitive images of ourselves. There's got to be more than this.

And so I quit...

After I left Facebook, I wondered what all my friends, family and acquaintances were going to think when they noticed I'd disappeared off the Facebook earth. So some of my Facebook narcissism – am I being noticed, am I being missed – remains. But I'm also asking myself some new questions. How do I find balance between my online life and my "real" life? How much exposure is healthy? How do I act responsibly for myself and engage with those I love? These are still "me" thoughts but they feel different than before. As I sit here, keyboard under palm, eyes on screen, I try to remind myself that my hands and eyes need to venture out into the community and look and touch the truly tangible that lies just beyond that other big screen: my window.

COMMENTS

Oct 16
Submitted by HtD on
Thu, 10/16/2008 -
10:00.

Wow. That was a really boring, uninteresting article. I imagine your profile was exactly the same. Perhaps next time stop writing and keep the facebook profile?

Oct 16
Submitted by
Anonymous on Thu,
10/16/2008 - 09:27.

Here the same, except it's called Orkut. You can see everyone's life updates. Some people will claim that it's just a way of communication but it's not the intention of the FaceOrkutMyspaces as you have more efficient things you can use to communicate with friends (msn, cell phone?). You se 80% showing smiling avatars and good momments, if it's not massive self-promotion I don't know how it's to be called.

Oct 16
Submitted by
rednaxela111 on
Wed, 10/15/2008 -
21:56.

Facebook is awesome. When I post things that other people see, I'm usually cracking jokes (to entertain people i suppose). I want my sister or my uncle to look at my holiday photos so they can see what I'm getting so excited about when I recall my experience.
I've gotten in touch with many old friends whose emails I lost. Facebook is cool. It seems to be causing distress in your soul. Good thing you quit. I intend to stay.

Oct 15
Submitted by Mark
Zuckerberg
(http://en.wikipedia.org
/wiki/Mark_Zuckerberg)
on Wed, 10/15/2008
- 10:17.

Facebook rocks! Thanks for your support!!!

Oct 15
Submitted by
Anonymous on Tue,
10/14/2008 - 21:21.

I also recently quit Facebook.
Imagine how the world would be if people stopped selling themselves to a computer screen to communicate, and rather, picked up a bloody phone or knocked on a friend's door.

In other words: I liked this article a lot - thanks for writing it.

PS. Is it just me, or is it absurdly ironic that the "share this article" section includes the option of sharing it on Facebook?

i'm tired of facebook being vilified. it's a tool like any other tool, one that thankfully makes interpersonal communication easier. yes, of course it can be used by narcissists to make a virtual altar to themselves and demand that people pray at its stoop. use it within reasonable means (whatever that means to you) and accept it - and your own - limitations. if you feel the need to cut it out of your life altogether, by all means do so. but frame it as a manifestation of you overcoming your own personal weakness (and holy crap do we each have our share of those) - not as some noble act that makes you less narcissistic than everyone who did not do the same and some sort of visionary. if facebook is pushing you towards inflated feelings of self-importance then maybe it's a good thing you signed up and found out you were prone to having those.

i'm happy you're happy with your decision.

also, what in bejeezus is wrong with us being individualistic? am i supposed to always think in the collective because somehow it's more virtuous? there are plenty of examples of collective concern/identities leading to groupthink leading to harmful exclusivity - and worse. this article is prime example of an interesting personal study warped into a statement re: our society - no, break it down to the individual please, it may be more accurate. more examples: think subjugation of woman 'for the family', think of pressure on males to be 'breadwinners' and 'real men', think of ethnically based prejudice, and, yes, think of genocide. maybe a sense of self-worth is positive, especially when grounded in a solid foundation of human rights and a respect for each person's individuality.

sorry. rant. and i could keep going. too much caffeine probably.

and i meant it that i'm happy you're happier. just sounded uber-sarcastic in the context.

Nice rant!

Wow. What a bunch of faggy bullshit. How the fuck do you get out of bed in the morning? Jesus Christ, "existential crisis" is a phrase I use to take the piss out of pissweak wankers who complain that life is too hard, and here you are, using it like it has meaning!

What a fucking pussy.

I agree with your sentiments. OP should STFU seriously.

Yes, Facebook does foster and nourish narcissism beyond all understanding. The countless "tags", "pokes" and friend requests people encounter on a daily basis makes one feel a sense of pride every time they log in. But what caused all of this? I know that I didn't sign up to Facebook to fill that void. I signed up to keep in touch, write blogs, and find long lost friends from years past. But somewhere in between I was sucked in and my pathetic need for self-gratification took over. The time I used to spend searching for old friends, writing blogs, or "keeping in touch" was gone. Most of my time was spent "creeping" through friends pictures, seeing who poked me, or wondering when the pictures from last night were going to go up.

We have to admit, although Facebook is the creepiest social networking site next to MySpace, people can't separate themselves from it.

I feel that this is a very well written essay, however, it really just shows outside to the facebook, yes in a way it does do everything that was stated, but it all depends on how much you become a part of facebook, and it seems like a lot of people get sucked into it, where as others totally don't. i think the main problem with face book, is that it uses what you write on it, as ways to sell you things, if your single it gives you websites to "find love" it is no longer a website to keep intouch with friends, but a way to sell you things, and to make money. and facebook is proud of how it can have ads that are directly for "you" but it is wicked creepy, and a way for them to make even more money, at our behalf. I think facebook is evil, but the way this person wrote this essay it has more to do with ones personality than just facebook.

While I agree that facebook, with all of it's features does promote narcissitic usage of the site, where one is urged to contantly update and tag and add, I feel that most people resist this and thus the author's article is not