Socialization and Intimacy in Digital Environments

Motivations to use Facebook

- Desire for sociality in itself
- Desire to sustain connections with close ties
- Desire to overcome the loss of distant and estranged ties
- Desire to make some friendships more tangible
- Desire to increase or enhance self-esteem and popularity
- Desire to express or explore identities
- Desire to overcome a negative offline identity by re-creating oneself online

Ref. Lambert, 2013
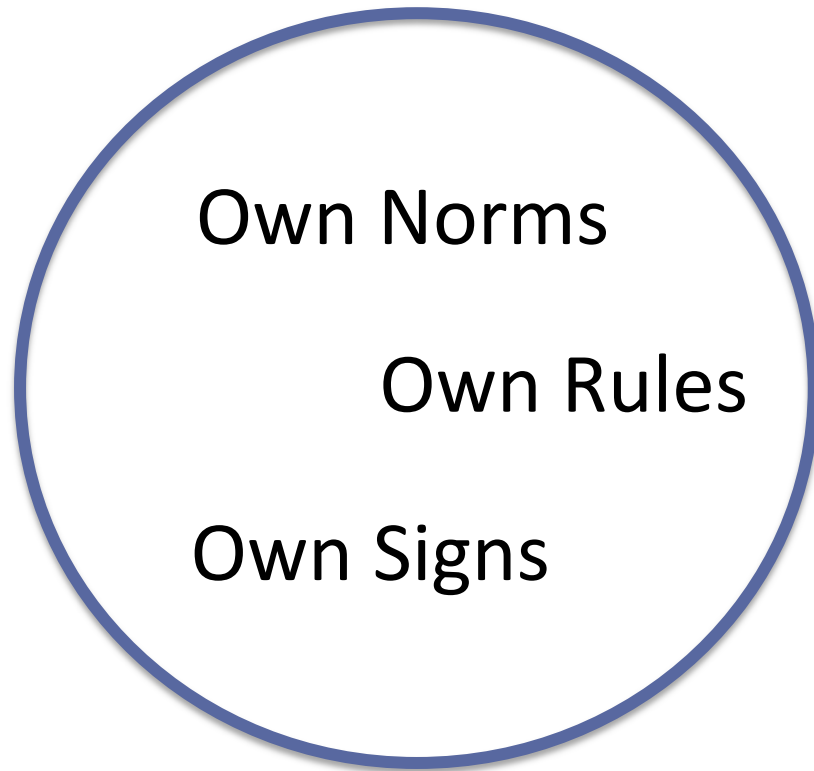
Motivations to use Facebook

- Desire to find a framework of belonging
- Desire to conform
- Desire to express pride or to get self-gratification
- Desire to materialize memories
- Desire to bridge and bond social capital
- Desire for easy means of communication
- Desire to be surprised, reminded or informed
- Desire to spread information

Ref. Lambert, 2013
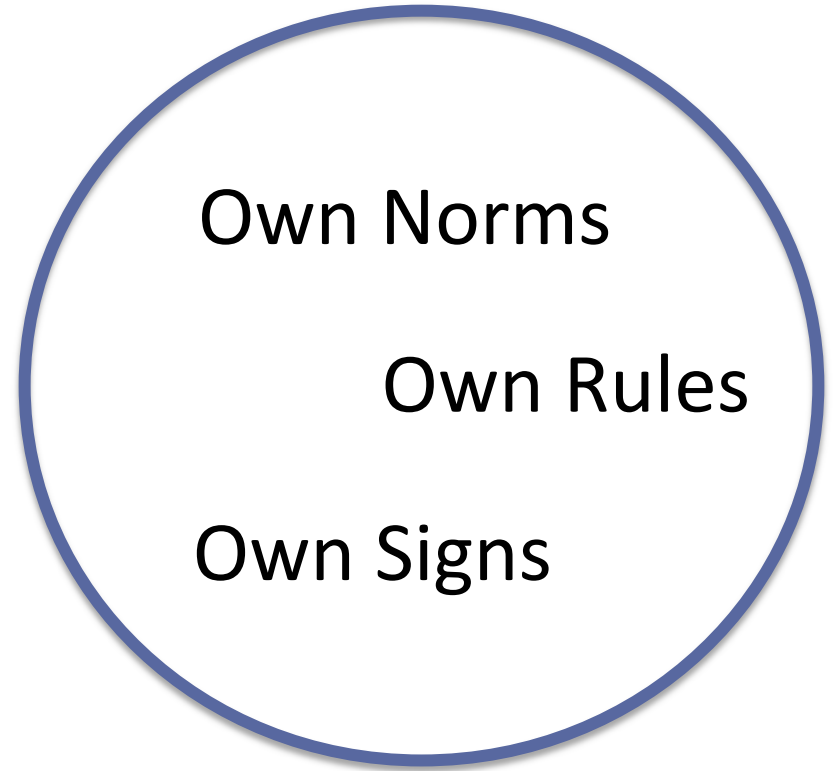
Criticisms of Facebook

1. Facebook encourages and normalizes a pathological form of narcissism

2. Facebook isolates people from meaningful relations and true friendships

3. Facebook is an inauthentic space where people do not reveal their true selves

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 18-23

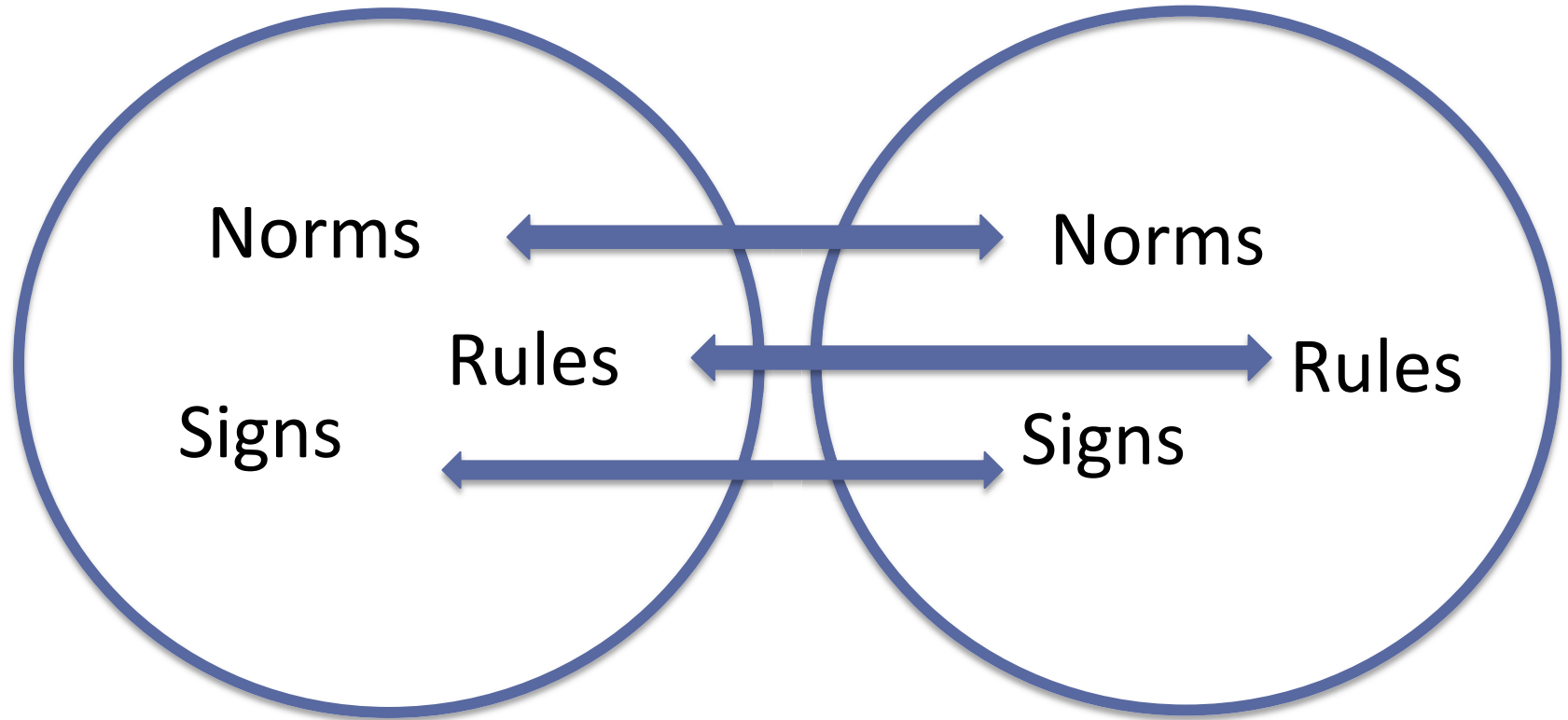# **Misconception**

'Virtual' World   'Real' World

Own Norms

Own Rules

Own Signs

Own Norms

Own Rules

Own Signs

My Conception

'Virtual' World

'Real' World

Norms ← → Norms

Rules ← → Rules

Signs ← → Signs

Friendship

Authors who criticize Facebook tend to evaluate online friendship on the basis of traditional criteria:

- Shared interests
- Mutual trust
- Revelation of intimate details
- Physical proximity

Friendship

Criterion #3: Revelation of intimate details

Friendship is a private emotionally expressive bound that is precious in the context of globalization (Giddens, 1991).

Friendship is a relation constructed around intimate disclosure and a safe haven against competitiveness in our urban and industrialized societies (Jamieson,1998).

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 19-23

Friendship
Criterion #3: Revelation of intimate details

- In the context of social networks, friendship should be redefined outside of its bound to privacy

- Friendship has not always been bound to privacy throughout history

- For Aristotle, friendship is public and political, because it cements civic order and society

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 26-28

Friendship
Criterion #3: Revelation of intimate details

- The opposition between intimacy and public life is a false dichotomy
- The existence of social networks proves the possibility of public intimacy

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 26-28

Friendship

Criterion #3: Revelation of intimate details

- In MMORPGs, sharing personal information is not a condition to establish a friendship, but the possible consequence of a friendship

Ref. Bonenfant, 2011: 220

Friendship
Criterion #4: Physical Proximity

- Physical presence and non-verbal communication are replaced by chat, emotes, avatar gestures that signal online presence and communicate feelings

- Online interactions are as "real" as physical interactions since they generate tangible emotions

- In MMORPGs, physical proximity is not a condition to establish a friendship, but the possible consequence of online friendship

Ref. Bonenfant, 2011: 207-214

Socialization

Social networks are not leading to social deskilling, but forcing people to develop new social skills, such as:

- bureaucratisation of social ties

- Interpreting signs provided by the online context

- presenting themselves and performing their social role online

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 12, 65

Socialization

Social Performance: individuals who present themselves to others "tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society." (Goffman, 1959: 35)

Different social contexts require that we perform different roles (Front regions = decorum / Back regions = step out of character) (Goffman, 1959)

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 37-39

Socialization

Facebook generates a new mode of "narrative performance" that differs from Goffman's conception of social performances in many ways:

- Users can see their own performance mirror back at them and edit it
- Performances are subjected to an open-ended process of resignification
- Some people may only observe performances without reciprocating

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 40-45

Socialization

Also…

- Romantic relationship status signifies that two persons are in a relationship, while inside jokes and tags signify a friendship
- People have to present themselves in front of multiple audiences at the same time
- People are not in total control of their self-performance

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 42, 69, 74

Socialization

Facebook platform regulates the relationship between users by controlling:

- how people give news (through status)
- how people keep in touch (reading timelines)
- how people give their approbation (with likes)

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 127-130

Narcissism

Scholars identify online behaviors with typical traits of narcissisms, defined by psychologists as the:

> "highly inflated, positive but unrealistic self-concept, a lack of interest in forming strong interpersonal relationships, and an engagement in self-regulatory strategies to affirm […] positive self-views" (Ong and al. in Lambert, 2013: 25)

Narcissism

They tend to ignore that:

- Many users are annoyed by trivial or overly emotional posts

- Norms of self-disclosure are more permissive on Facebook.

- What is culturally appropriated in terms of public self-disclosure keeps changing

- Users are constantly negotiating this evolving social contract by controlling the flow of information

Ref. Lambert, 2013

Narcissism

They also tend to ignore that:

- Different Facebook users are negotiating disclosure of information differently
- In social networks, participation requires constant self-presentation
- Contemporary American culture blurred the boundaries between private and public life before the advent of social networks (with reality shows, talk shows, TV doctors)

Ref. Lambert, 2013

Socialization

They finally tend to ignore that:

- Not all users willingly accept the gaze of invisible Facebook users
- Failure to capture the attention of a Facebook audience can be felt as a lack of social recognition
- In our capitalist societies, the boundaries between subjects and objects are already blurred (self-branding)

Ref. Lambert, 2013

Privacy and Surveillance

Privacy is defined in the legal domain as:

- the right to protect our "domestic sphere from the state and the media intrusion", as well as the right to control access to our personal information (Lambert, 2013: 29)

The perception of what is private and public depends of the cultural context:

- "Something considered public in relation to one realm may be private in relation to another" depending on the "norms of appropriateness" (Nissenbaum in Lambert, 2013: 36)

Privacy and Surveillance

Behaviors that would be considered as stalking or as pathological voyeurism in the offline world are socially accepted on Facebook.

Skimming profiles and scrolling timelines became routinized behavior that only become more self-conscious when curiosity drives us to "spy" on weak ties.

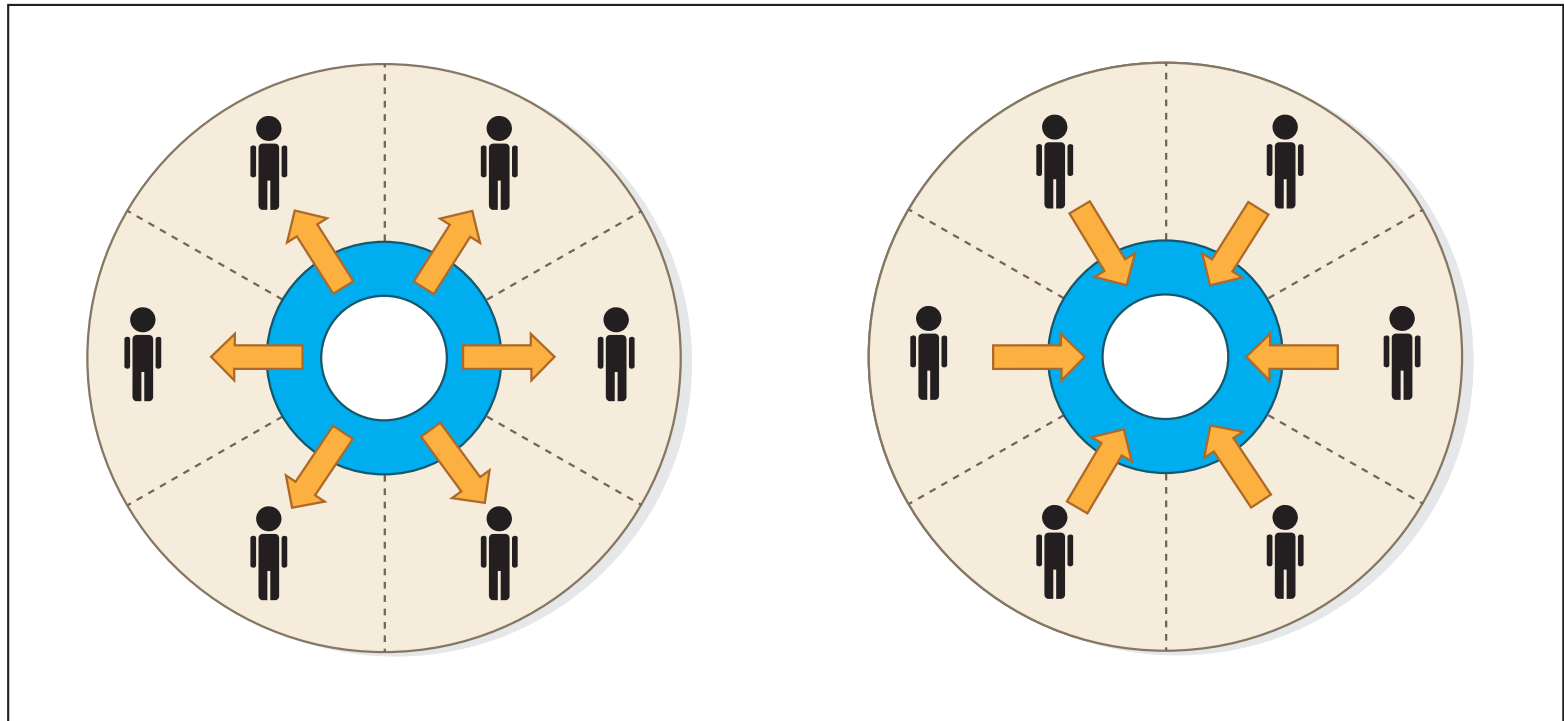Ref. Lambert, 2013: 95-102

Privacy and Surveillance

Image by MIT OpenCourseWare.

Traditional
Panopticon

Facebook
"Participatory Panopticon"

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 17

Privacy and Surveillance

Facebook users are increasingly aware of privacy risks, but are not concerned

VS

Facebook users are aware, concerned and active to counteract privacy risks

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 30-31

Privacy and Surveillance

Facebook users get used to privacy
risks after a while

VS

Facebook users become more sensitive to
privacy issues over time

Ref. Lambert, 2013: 33-36

Embodiment

Widespread conception: offline world experiences are embodied while online world experiences are disembodied.

Taylor's conception: avatars and users' profiles serve as the 'material' through which online embodiment occurs. (2006: 40-41)

Embodiment

Online embodiment is however different than face-to-face embodiment:

- While the presence of a physical body is experienced as constant, presence on Facebook must be continually reaffirmed (Lambert, 2013)

- Avatars' presence is more unstable than offline presence because of glitches and "ghost state" (Taylor, 2002: 41)

Identity

Traditional definition: set of characteristics which allows the sameness, coherence and continuity of a person over time (static)

Poststructuralist definition: social construction that constantly evolves over the course of new life experiences and under the influence of social norms that people interiorize and negotiate (fluid)

Identity

Early studies on social networks: focus on people's profiles and "about me" sections.

Lambert's studies on Facebook: focuses on how identity emerges from social interactions: "people who exist within and through connections." (2013: 60)

Identity

Early studies on MMORPGs conceive avatars mostly as representations of the player in the game environment.

Gee conceives customized avatar as a "projective identity": the type of person that the player wants his avatar to become. (in Waggoner, 2009: 15)

Trépanier believes that the avatar is performative: it constructs the identity of the player that it is supposed to represent. (2012: 150)

Taylor believes that avatars alter our phenomenal body. (2002: 58)

Identity

Criteria used to define someone's identity in the physical world do not have the same importance online:

OFFLINE

- Age
- Race
- Social class
- Gender

MMORPGs

- Performance
- Presence
- Punctuality
- Social interactions

Identity

Widespread misconception: Internet users can create the online identities of their choice

Tends to ignore that:

- identity experimentations are often contested in online spaces

- most users don't take these experimentations seriously (identity tourism)

- game systems limit the choices of features and align them with social norms

Ref. Taylor, 2002

Identity

Facebook as a "technique of the self"
(Bonenfant & Farmer, 2012)

Hupomnemata: a notebook used by Ancient Greeks not "to reveal the hidden" or the "unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self" (Foucault, Ethics: 210-211).

Identity

Differences between a hupomnemata and a Facebook page:

- People are not the only author of their Facebook page

- People can easily compare their Facebook page with those of others

- Facebook is a rigid platform structured by capitalist interests and social norms

Ref. Bonenfant & Farmer, 2012: 121-130

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