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■ In my opinion

## ...and I'm addicted to Facebook

"Oh my god, he totally poked me!"

"Well, poke him back — you're both in the 'I Was Trashed In My Facebook Pic' group."

"Oh, wait, he's also in that 'Fuck All You Haters ... I'm Gonna Pop My Collar' group."

"Ew, never mind!"

He poked me? What might have seemed like a lead into a discussion of sexual harassment has become a regular figure of speech. Within the period of just a few months, poking, joining groups and facebooking that really cute guy you saw in last Thursday's lecture have become commonplace.

The Facebook, according to its Web site, "is an online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges and universities." For those not part of the soon-to-come "I'm Addicted to Facebook" group, here's the rundown: Any person with a university e-mail address can join, post a picture, write information about him or herself, start or join groups and add friends, spouses, etc. Users can even click on items in their individual profile to find others with the same classes, interests or favorite music.

Unlike other online communities such as MySpace, Facebook "is a mirror image of what exists in real life," according to founder Mark Zuckerberg in an interview with Current Magazine. Zuckerberg eats dinner at Jack in the Box and punctuates his sentences with the phrase "which is really sweet." Zuckerberg, not even old enough to legally purchase a beer at the time of that interview, has, with the help of



AILEE SLATER  
FURTHER FROM PERFECTION

a few friends, created one of the most amazing resources of our time.

The Facebook, amazing? Yes. It strikes this columnist as more than wonderful that some of the brightest minds of this generation are using their talents not to build nuclear bombs or attack home computers with viruses or spam, but to help people make and strengthen communities of friendship. And that is a laudable goal.

In terms of material for the sociology or anthropology of sexuality, Facebook provides a plethora of material. Members can post their relationship status, which sex they are interested in, and if they are looking for friendship, dating, random play or "whatever I can get." I haven't actually heard of two "whatever I can get" facebookers finding one another and getting whatever they can, but I don't doubt the occurrence of such events. Even being fairly liberal about sexuality, I guess I'm still old-fashioned when it comes to concepts such as "meeting the person you're about to sleep with" and "checking to make sure he or she doesn't have any venereal diseases before you shack up."

Nevertheless, Facebook is the perfect venue for discovering if that

cute guy you see every day on the bus is single or if that wicked-hot girl in chemistry lab is interested in men. It's socially acceptable by Facebook standards to message someone because you're in the same group, enjoy the same music, or both think that "Underground Hip Hop Tastes Better Than Candy Bars." Opportunities like these to form random connections do not exist in any other arena. How often do you see a bumper sticker proclaiming "I Know and Enjoy the Aicha Dance?" Facebook offers a wonderful way to make these random, yet possibly meaningful, connections without appearing (too) deranged.

Yes, our personalities are being defined by strings of "I Heart Blank" and "Blank is Fun," and groups exist more as a means to prove one's identity rather than as places to arrange actual baby-seal-clubbing expeditions. Still, being able to put yourself out there for acquaintances, friends and possible love interests feels pretty damn liberating. Gone are the days when one had to take twelve shots before daring to approach a random person.

In true Facebook fashion, while researching for this article, I requested the friendship of every founding Facebook member. No response yet, but I'm confident that each one will soon realize the strength of his or her individual bond with me. Especially Chris Hughes; what a cutie! Maybe he'll join my "I Heart the Creators of Facebook" group.

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■ Editorial

## Celebrating Iraqi votes — a needed seed of hope

On Sunday, the people of Iraq fulfilled a national dream by voting in a democratic election. Though the results are still being tabulated, preliminary reports suggest that voter turnout was much higher than expected — some estimating as many as 60 percent of registered voters came out to cast their ballots — with far less violence than widely feared.

This is certainly an occasion for celebration. The long-suffering people of Iraq have accomplished something truly inspirational. It is a triumph that so many people hungry for democracy braved nightmarish conditions, with insurgents promising widespread bloodshed at polling places, in order to make their voices heard. This first taste of democracy will surely prove addictive. The first step has been taken, and far from stumbling, the nation of Iraq has taken it in stride.

Rather than voting for a president or prime minister in yesterday's election, Iraqis voted for candidates who will make up a 275-member National Assembly and 18 provincial legislatures. The assembly is responsible for creating a permanent constitution and selecting a president and two deputy presidents. These three members will then select a prime minister, who will serve until the next set of elections in 11 months.

While there was impressive voter turnout in many regions in Iraq, in other regions turnout was virtually nonexistent. The Sunni city of Samarra, for example, had fewer than 1 percent turnout, according to Reuters. The majority of Iraqi Sunnis boycotted the elections, either by choice or through intimidation, which has the potential to throw the legitimacy of the elections into question and further divide Iraq along sectarian lines.

Furthermore, the fairness of the election is difficult to ascertain, due to the fact that international election monitors were not present in the country for fear of being targeted by insurgents. The relative peace of election day (we say relative because 35 people were confirmed dead as a result of multiple suicide bombings) was achieved through intense security measures that included curfews and street barricades. This is by no means the end of the insurgency. The freedom that the majority of Iraqis so desperately desire will not suddenly occur due to this election. They have only begun down that long road ahead.

What yesterday's vote means for the American occupation remains to be seen. Concrete answers from the Bush administration are still few and far between. Will fewer U.S. troops be needed? Will the timeline of U.S. involvement in Iraq be greatly reduced? It is doubtful that yesterday's success has had any effect on the answers to these important questions.

But our notes of caution are not meant to dampen this historic day. There will be time to worry about the road ahead; today, let's revel in the fact that a much-needed seed of hope has been planted in the Middle East. Hopefully, it will put down strong roots and grow for many years.

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