

Character and . . .

Social Media

Volume 1 / 2015

INTRODUCTION

ANNALEE R. WARD, *Character and Social Media*

ARTICLES

GARY PANETTA, *Stewardship and Global Social Media*

MATTHEW R. SCHLIMM, *Fantasy Football and Friendship:
The Company We Keep Online*

JENN SUPPLE BARTELS, *Parents' Growing Pains on Social Media:
Modeling Authenticity*

RESPONSE

JOHN STEWART, *Ethics and Social Media: Responses to Panetta,
Schlimm, and Supple Bartels*



WENDT CHARACTER INITIATIVE

UNIVERSITY of DUBUQUE

Editors

Annalee R. Ward, Editor

Patience A. McCarty, Editorial Assistant

John Stewart, Editorial Consultant

The faculty essays presented here emerge from a semester-long process of reading and writing together in an environment of critique and review. Nevertheless, this invited journal of essays represents the authors' views and not necessarily the views of the Wendt Center for Character Education or the University of Dubuque.

Contact Information

Wendt Center for Character Education 563-589-3440 (office)

University of Dubuque

563-589-3243 (fax)

2000 University Avenue

wendt@dbq.edu (email)

Dubuque, IA 52001

wendt.dbq.edu (website)

Copyright Notice

Copyright © 2015 by the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque; all rights reserved. Brief portions of material in this publication may be copied and quoted without further permission with appropriate citation of the sources of the excerpt included in the copy. Copies may be made for classroom use if 1) the material is distributed without charge or fee above duplication costs; 2) the materials are photocopies, not reprints; 3) the material includes full bibliographic citation and the following statement: "Copyright by the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque. Reproduced by permission of the Wendt Center." This policy extends also to electronic copies or links posted in online course management or e-reserve systems, provided access is restricted to students enrolled in the course. This statement serves as the Wendt Center for Character Education's official permission for using material under the conditions specified above.

The *Character and . . .* Journal is published by the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, IA.

Character and . . .

Social Media

Volume 1 / 2015

Character and Social Media

Annalee R. Ward 1

Stewardship and Global Social Media

Gary Panetta 10

Fantasy Football and Friendship: The Company We Keep Online

Matthew R. Schlimm 26

Parents' Growing Pains on Social Media: Modeling Authenticity

Jenn Supple Bartels 51

Ethics and Social Media: Responses to Panetta, Schlimm, and Supple Bartels

John Stewart 71

Character and Social Media

Annalee R. Ward

“Facebook Post Sparks Deadly Violence Against Ahmadis in Pakistan.” A post of an allegedly ““obscene and objectionable picture of the Kaaba [Islam’s holiest site] and a scantily clad woman”” resulted in a mob attack that killed a grandmother and her two young grandchildren and burned several homes to the ground. Social media—is it grounds for engaging responsible citizens or for prompting reactive violence?

Fantasy Football, a social media enabled game, can get heated in the competitive trash talking that characterizes so much of the interactions. But does that very trash-talking actually reveal character and promote community? For Dale Earnhardt Jr, it fostered a friendship with Dale Ives and led to Dale’s becoming crew chief for Earnhardt.

A mother, frustrated with her teen daughter’s behavior, sells her Katy Perry concert tickets on Facebook with the line, “spoiled brat daughter doesn’t deserve these tickets . . . For Sale.” Punishment, shaming, sharing. Parents use and abuse their children on social media. Do those actions reflect good character or even help foster character formation in their kids?

The articles in this journal take up these kinds of situations and carefully consider their implications for shaping the kind of people we are—shaping our character.

Attitudes toward Technology

Increasingly, life revolves around social media, the web, and “smart” technology. Anticipation abounds for the next greatest release to solve a problem we didn’t know we had. As with changes in dominant media that have preceded us, language of fear and language of utopia run through discussions. The fearful proclaim that the only way to appropriately engage technology is to shun it. This view abandons critical engagement and God’s call to be responsible stewards of His world. Optimistic voices invest great hopes in technology’s abilities, often idolizing it. This view blunts our need to question the materialism inherent in technological development and the communal problems new technologies cause. Raising questions of stewardship or virtuous behavior may seem like an antiquated practice more useful for the out-of-touch, but it is most needed now given the decline in common values.

Raising questions of technology’s place in our lives is not a new practice. For example, Neil Postman, an astute critic of how our use of particular media shape the way we think, cautions that we are becoming: “. . . [a] world in which the idea of human progress . . . has been replaced by the idea of technological progress” (70). He continues, “Technopoly . . . consists in the deification of technology, which means that the culture seeks its authorization in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology” (71). If Postman is correct, then character formation questions need to be a part of this practice.

We see the technology concerns taken up in literature such as Orwell’s *1984*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and more recently in Dave Eggers’ dystopian novel, *The Circle*. This book seems especially relevant as it evokes what Google might be becoming. He suggests a world that has gone technology crazy—a world that takes many elements of our on-line lives to logical extremes. In that society, people live by the mantras: “Sharing is Caring,

Privacy is Theft, and Secrets are Lies” (303). As you read Jenn Supple’s article in particular, consider how these mantras are already embedded in many Facebook practices.

In this journal, we hope to offer a different voice than that of condemnation or naïve optimism—a voice of critical reflection. Reflective self-consciousness is often not welcome to the conversation, but it is necessary. Digging into God’s world with thoughtfulness rather than easy sound bites or witty taglines rarely means discovering simplistic answers. In fact, when we pause reflectively, we end up examining our own attitudes and use of technology, specifically social media. We discover in those our own conflicted stances: we see good, we see harm. We see flawed human beings making great choices and making poor choices. We see possibilities for community building, but we also see technology’s powerful potential for domination and destruction. How can we be thoughtful, responsible users?

Character and Social Media

Character—a concept at the heart of our actions—matters, perhaps more than ever, in our use of social media. In talking about character, we engage virtue(s) as central to forming ourselves and our society. Shannon Vallor asks the important question, “What impact will habitual use of new social media have on the development of users’ *character*, and in particular, on their development of various social *virtues* essential to the good life?” (194). Because virtue is more than head knowledge, but is also rooted in excellent habits, concern about social media habits needs to be taken seriously.

Vallor highlights the virtues of patience, honesty and empathy as “communicative virtues,” and explores their significance for social media (195). She worries that social media will harm real relationships and real communicative ability if they “are designed and driven by market pressures alone, with indifference to

communicative virtues and their essential role in developing and sustaining human connections” (200). While the very name “social media” suggests connectivity, experiencing it sometimes proves isolating and dissatisfying. The activity of “Facebooking” or “googling” or emailing or playing virtual games employs a disembodiment that cannot capture what happens in face-to-face encounters. Add to the issues what happens when the offer of anonymity is present, and we discover life-draining, vice-inducing practices with the potential to cause tremendous harm to relationships.

The question remains. How can we exercise excellent moral character on social media? I believe the answer lies in our worldview, in our attitudes, and in our habits.

By worldview, I mean our deep commitments and understandings of who we are as human beings. When we begin in the knowledge that God created us in his image as beloved and valued, our interactions with others should be seen through that lens. We don’t want to objectify, belittle or otherwise cause harm to another human being—one who bears the image of the holy and divine. Nevertheless, at times we all act as if we’ve forgotten that. That’s where we need God’s grace to “reboot” through repentance and acceptance of his grace to move forward.

Secondly, our attitudes toward technology need to be revisited regularly. By reminding ourselves that technology is not, and cannot be our savior, nor is it solely an unredeemable enemy, we practice an alert awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. This critical mindset equips us to fight off the assaults of “gotta have” or “never use” with discernment. By checking our attitudes, we begin to rightly align our desires as those which ought to seek the good of others. This challenge is perhaps best summarized by Stephen Monsma, et. al.: “Responsible technology must rest upon a servant-like commitment to love God above all and one’s neighbor as oneself” (244). The attitude of service directs us

toward better goals and ultimately helps develop better character.

The third practice we need in order to grow an appropriate practice of moral character on social media lies in examining and challenging our habitual use of it. A focus on habits as character-forming is nothing new. From Aristotle to church fathers to Charles Duhigg's *The Power of Habit*, a concern for harnessing our habits continues as a key part of the discussion of character. When we become consumed with checking our Twitter feed or Facebook posts, or when we engage in Fantasy Football or on-line gaming excessively, we are forming habits that hinder our care for others and for the world. Too much use of our screens and we find we've built the habit of distractedness into all we do. And, as Nicholas Carr argues, that very distractedness negatively affects our ability to be empathetic and compassionate (221).

The opportunity to be shaped by or to shape our technologies remains. In *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age*, media scholar Quentin Schultze challenges us to be people who demonstrate virtue in our technological practices. "Humility asks us to justify our technological decisions not on the basis of what they do for our egos, but on the basis of caring for others as responsible stewards of the gift of creation" (107). When we practice stewardship, care for the world and for others, we are also shaping the kind of people we are becoming for the better.

The Articles

In the first article, Gary Panetta explores the dangers and possibilities that connectivity poses. Using the lens of stewardship, he challenges us to use social media for "the common good." The *Charlie Hebdo* case highlights what Neil Postman considers a danger of the ascendancy of technology: the trivialization of symbols. Although discussing the

commercialization of religious symbols, Postman's comment might very well express the concerns of Muslims in this example: "The constraints are so few that we may call this a form of cultural rape, sanctioned by an ideology that gives boundless supremacy to technological progress and is indifferent to the unraveling of tradition" (170). If users of social media fail to exercise restraint, fail to consider possible consequences of their on-line actions, not only is individual character damaged, but the broader social life is also affected. As we know, revolutions are now empowered by social media.

Moving from the large-scale focus on world issues to the leisure experience of Americans, Matthew Schlimm makes the case that social media also provide opportunities for positive relationships and leisurely fun—things that build community. He examines Fantasy Football's capacity to foster friendship while cautioning of its potential to indulge vice.

"What does it mean to be a responsible parent when it comes to using social media?" asks Jenn Supple Bartels. Questions of oversharing, consent, digital footprints, even engaging in one's own identity work through images of one's children challenge our desire to practice integrity, justice, and compassion. Yet she, too, arrives at that cautionary intersection of discerning use and reminds us that authenticity and stewardship must both be considered as key to excellent character online.

Communication scholar John Stewart concludes our journal with a summary and response which challenges us to remember how character is shaped by our use of social media. We can use it mindfully, purposefully, or we can yield to the technology's shaping power. When we choose to use our technologies wisely, we exercise a more virtuous character.

This Journal Project

In the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque, we ask questions about character and how it is shaped by or shapes current topics. Hence, this journal *Character and . . .* is an effort to provoke both the questions and reflections on the answers. This inaugural issue is a joint effort of College and Seminary that focuses on *Character and . . . Social Media*.

Bringing together students and faculty from different disciplines yielded rich conversations.¹ The process of developing these articles involved regular team meetings, common readings, and lots of discussion. At times, our moments of “ah ha” had us leaping out of our chairs. At other times, our circling around and around on particular issues had us in despair. Our hope is that you, our readers, will discover your own “ah ha’s” and be challenged to continue the discussion. May you discover the joy of practicing wise use of technology, forming good habits, and being the kind of people whose character matters.

Annalee R. Ward, author of publications in ethics and communication, is currently Director of the Wendt Center for Character Education at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, IA. Through programming and curriculum, Ward works to ensure the Wendt Center fulfills its mission to “engage the university community in a cooperative and spirited effort to foster intellectual understanding of and personal commitment to leading lives of purpose and excellent moral character.”

Notes

¹ We acknowledge the contributions of Seminarian Terri Jo Crego who participated in the discussions via Skype. Ultimately, unfavorable circumstances led to her dropping off the team late in the process.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Marin Ostwald. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962. Print.
- Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to our Brains*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011. Print.
- Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and in Business*. New York: Random House, 2012. Print.
- Eggers, Dave. *The Circle*. San Francisco: Alfred A. Knopf, McSweeney's Books, 2013. Print.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. 1932. New York: HarperCollins, 1989. Print.
- Monsma, Stephen V., Clifford Christians, Eugene R. Dykema, Arie Leegwater, Egbert Schuurman, Lambert Van Poolen. *Responsible Technology: A Christian Perspective*. Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship. Ed. Stephen V. Monsma. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986. Print.
- "Facebook Post Sparks Deadly Violence Against Ahmadis in Pakistan." *NBC News*. NBCNews.com, 28 Jul. 2014. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

Orwell, George. 1984. 1949. Because that's the original publication New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 1987. Print.

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. Print.

Ross, Catherine. "Social Media Discipline: Mom Sells Daughter's Katy Perry Tickets Online." *WDAY News*. Forum Communications Company, 29 Jul. 2014. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

Ruffin, Jessica. "Fantasy Football Leads to Friendship for Earnhardt, Ives." *Hendrick Motor Sports*. HendrickMotorsports.com, 31 Jul. 2014. Web. 5 Aug. 2014.

Schultze, Quentin J. *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002. Print.

Vallor, Shannon. "New Social Media and the Virtues." *The Good Life in a Technological Age*. Eds. Philip Brey, Adam Briggie, and Edward Spence. New York: Routledge, 2012. 193-202. Print.

Stewardship and Global Social Media

Gary Panetta

Abstract

Social media gives local citizens global reach. How can we learn to behave responsibly as global citizens of a new digital order? The concept of stewardship can help us as we struggle to discover what it means to accomplish the common good in an ever more interconnected world.

For better or worse, we all have access to a universal megaphone. It's called social media. Thanks to everything from Facebook and You Tube to blogs to smart phones, acts by single individuals suddenly have global consequences. Sounds, words, and images created by groups and individuals in one part of the world can pop up in another at any time. How will we use our new global megaphone? How will we act as global citizens?¹

The concept of stewardship can help us. Stewardship is the idea that whatever resources or powers we possess—personal and collective—are not our own, but are entrusted to us for the common good. Stewardship of social media implies that these new technologies are gifts we are responsible for using well, especially when we use them to affect the lives of others by attempting to shape public policy or to pursue a political agenda. The concept of stewardship implies an underlying character or

disposition: an “ethical mind” that guides the choices we make (Gardner 127-151, 158).

In what follows, I will examine two uses of social media for political ends in light of stewardship and the ethical orientation required by stewardship. The first example describes how a left-wing French weekly, *Charlie Hebdo*, used Facebook and old-fashioned print technology to distribute a satirical cartoon spoofing Islam in the midst of an inflammatory international situation in 2012.² The second example consists of efforts by a human rights activist, Ory Okolloh, to fight for civil society and democracy in her homeland of Kenya using blog technology. Okolloh’s efforts led to the creation in 2008 of the Ushahidi map, a social media tool that now figures prominently in disaster relief and in other humanitarian endeavors (Thompson 45-46, 61-63).

However, before discussing these two cases, I want to consider briefly the concept of stewardship.

Stewardship

Imagine a good friend leaves on vacation. For one month, you are responsible for taking care of your friend’s exotic fish aquarium. Your duties include feeding the fish daily and cleaning the aquarium weekly. Your friend expects the fish to be happy and healthy when she returns.

Since you value your friendship, you take extra efforts in caring for the fish. Certainly, you feed the fish and clean the tank on schedule. But you also observe the fish carefully, looking for signs of illness and are ready to call the vet if needed. In addition, you pay attention to factors that your friend didn’t mention, such as room and water temperature. In short, you treat your friend’s fish aquarium as if it were your own. You want the fish not only to survive, but to flourish under your care.

This exemplifies practicing stewardship. Stewardship involves managing or taking care of something that has been entrusted to us, as if we ourselves were the owner—with the kind of involvement the actual owner might demonstrate.

The concept of stewardship applies whenever we take care of what belongs to others—aquariums, houses, cars. But stewardship also applies to larger, more intangible things. For example, a CEO or an executive director newly appointed to lead a business or a nonprofit might exercise stewardship by considering her post as something other than an occasion for following the technicalities of what is expected. Decisions would be guided by a lively sense of what is in the best long-term interests of the organization.

The concept of stewardship could be extended still further. In the Reformed Protestant tradition, for instance, stewardship is a corollary of God's act of creation. God originates and preserves creation, and human beings are meant to participate in God's work. Creation is held in trust by human beings, who are intended to use the resources of creation responsibly to bring about peace, health, order, and beauty in ways that express God's love for all (Book of Order 148-149).

Belief in God, however, is not necessarily a precondition for stewardship. The concept—if not the term—naturally suggests itself when we consider to what extent we rely on the resources, institutions, and discoveries of previous generations as we go about our daily lives. We often pride ourselves on being self-made people. But our very ability to be self-made depends on a larger society that educates us, provides opportunities, safeguards our property, and ensures our well-being.

The concept of stewardship also suggests itself when we consider how much power we can exercise over the surrounding world upon which we depend for survival. A classic example is the

power we wield over the natural environment. What we dump upstream eventually reaches those who live downstream: the fact of ecological interdependencies mocks the notion that we can simply treat nature as personal property.

The upstream-downstream problem also has an ethical counterpart – especially in the case of social media, which bring us into a web of digital relationships that potentially span the globe. Social media’s power to send information at will across cultures multiplies the possibilities for strife and misunderstanding, as well as for cooperation and mutual enlightenment. What we communicate and how we communicate matters more than ever. We need to pay attention to what we say and how we say it. Stewardship is about paying attention. So what does good stewardship of social media look like?

Rather than a list of rules, I want to make a case for a basic orientation, a way of asking questions in any given context that can help us make good choices—or, at least, avoid disastrous ones.

Given human nature and the “everything goes” character of digital media, I retain no illusions that my suggestions will serve as quick-fix solutions or change others’ opinions. I also acknowledge that, sometimes, ethical decision-making involves difficult trade-offs with no clear-cut answers.

Nevertheless, because of this technology’s vast power, we need to think harder about what it means to cultivate a basic ethical orientation when we use social media. We sometimes believe we are wielding fly-swatters; in reality, each of us has been given a sledge hammer.

What does a basic ethical orientation look like? How can it help us be good stewards of social media?

Facebook and *Charlie Hebdo*

Consider Facebook. Is it always a good idea to post something on Facebook no matter how others might react? Such was the question that faced staff members of *Charlie Hebdo*, a left-wing Paris weekly, during the fall of 2012. The publication was getting ready to release cartoons spoofing Islam and the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook, and in its print edition. The Prophet was not only caricatured and mocked, but also depicted naked in some scenes (Simons).

Spoofing Islam was nothing new for *Charlie Hebdo*; a year earlier, the magazine had been firebombed because it had published deliberately blasphemous cartoons poking fun at sharia law (Willsher).

But this time, the decision about whether to publish could have global ramifications. Riots were already breaking out across the Middle East over a film trailer distributed on YouTube titled “The Innocence of Muslims.” Created by admirers of a California-based, anti-Islamic cleric named Zakaria Botros Heinen, the 15-minute sequence depicted the Prophet Muhammad as a child-molester and as a womanizer (Garrison *et al.*). Publishing additional cartoons might only throw fuel on the fire.

Nevertheless, *Charlie Hebdo* decided to go ahead and publish the cartoon. Editor-in-Chief Stephane Charbonnier explained the reasoning for publication to *Der Spiegel* this way:

Extremists don't need any excuses....We are only criticizing one particular form of extremist Islam, albeit in a peculiar and satirically exaggerated form. We are not responsible for the excesses that happen elsewhere, just because we practice our right to freedom of expression within the legal limits....My job is to provoke laughter or thinking with drawings – for the readers of our magazine. (Simons)

What if some are offended by the drawings? Charbonnier replied:

If they are not amused by our cartoons, they don't need to buy our magazine. Of course they are allowed to demonstrate. The right to protest needs to be protected, so long as one abides by the law and refrains from violence....If the government believes that Muslims have no sense of humor, then that's an insult that turns the faithful into second-class citizens. (Simons)

The United States and French governments weren't so sure. "We have a free press that can express itself right up to the point of caricature," said French prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, "But there is also a question of responsibility" (Zaimov). "Obviously we have questions about the judgment of publishing something like this," said White House spokesman Jay Carney. "We know these images will be deeply offensive to many and have the potential be inflammatory" (Zaimov).

Before the entire affair was over, violent protests led to 200 injuries and more than a dozen deaths (Porter), including that of ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans at the U.S. Embassy in Benghazi, Libya (Zaimov); the French government closed embassies and schools in 20 countries (McCormaic); Pakistani soldiers fired tear gas at a stone-throwing mob attempting to break down police defenses (Crilly and Lauter); and President Barak Obama was burned in effigy (McCormaic).

The degree to which rioters responded to the cartoons by *Charlie Hebdo* is unclear. Much of the worst violence, including the deadly attacks in Benghazi—inspired by "The Innocence of Muslims"—had already occurred or was already in progress.

Stewardship as Ethical Orientation

What are we to make of *Charlie Hebdo* and its decision to publish cartoons spoofing Islam? What light does the concept of stewardship throw on this particular example of social media in action? In this case, stewardship helps us reflect on the importance of responsibility and relationships.

Stewardship reminds us that we are responsible to something bigger than ourselves: namely, the collective pool of resources and institutional arrangements that make so many aspects of our lives possible. This includes gifts such as social media, and technology in general. Stewardship also reminds us that we live in relationship with others—even if the “others” in question live on the other side of the globe.

Stewardship, then, implies several consequences in regards to the *Charlie Hebdo* affair. It helps us understand that the magazine—and, by extension, each of us—is not an entity unto itself. True, *Charlie Hebdo* is privately owned and protected by laws that allow its staff members to exercise freedom of speech. Even so, the very ability of *Charlie Hebdo* to publish depends on inherited national and global institutional arrangements. In principle, a global meltdown of law and order would make exercising any sort of freedom impossible. Thoughtful people do not saw off the branch they are sitting on.

Stewardship also helps us understand that human relationships are crucial. Any act of communication brings us into relationship with another person. How we treat one another when we communicate remains no small matter. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul counsels his readers not to place stumbling blocks in front of other people.³ Paul argued that sometimes doing the right thing means limiting our own freedom for the best interests of another person. Indeed, we may be legally entitled to

exercise a freedom; however, this is not the same as being morally entitled to exercise a freedom.

What difference would applying these principles have made at *Charlie Hebdo*? A range of possibilities suggest themselves.

One possibility might be to distribute the cartoons in the name of global good. In this scenario, the rationale for distribution would prove different from that which *Charlie Hebdo*'s editor-in-chief stated to *Der Spiegel*. The rationale would be justified less by simply appealing to a legal right to freedom of speech and more by an appeal to the good of humankind. For instance, an argument could be made that we achieve a great global good when we stand up for freedom of speech—especially in the face of violent international opposition that seeks to hold such freedom hostage by threatening to riot or burn down embassies. In an increasingly interdependent world of many religions and cultures, peoples of diverse backgrounds must learn to express dissent and offense peacefully, without infringing on the rights of others.

However, other arguments are also valid. For instance, it could be argued that the global good requires self-restraint when it comes to distributing certain kinds of information through social media. Self-restraint might especially apply to satirical cartoons, a genre that lends itself to extreme expression in a way that news reports or even written opinions do not (Gardner 119). Such self-restraint might simply consist of delaying publication until a particularly tense international moment has passed. Or it might consist of toning down what might be published. Or it might involve not publishing at all.

The concept of stewardship does not dictate a specific plan of action. But it does require going beyond the kind of black-and-white, fight-or-flight thinking that a narrow insistence on one's individual rights engenders—whether the rights in question

involve freedom of expression or the alleged “right” to be offended when others poke fun at your own religion or culture.

Stewardship requires recognizing that our individual acts—especially when amplified by technology—may have far-flung consequences. We may not even intend these consequences; nevertheless, we must try to anticipate them and take responsibility for them. To do so demands what Howard Gardner, a professor of cognition and education at Harvard, has called “the ethical mind” (Gardner 127-151, 158).

According to Gardner, the ethical mind demands a certain level of abstract thinking. It requires us to see what we do in terms of social roles: for instance, that of worker or citizen. It also requires us to make judgments about these roles. In general terms, what does it mean to be good workers or good citizens? Are we succeeding or failing to measure up to these ideals (Gardner 158)? Gardner describes how the ethical mind works in this way:

. . . The individual must be able to step back from daily life and to conceptualize the nature of work and the nature of community. He or she needs to consider such questions as: What does it mean to be a lawyer/physician/engineer/educator at the present time? What are my rights, obligations, and responsibilities? What does it mean to be a citizen of my community/my region/the planet? What do I owe others, and especially those who—through the circumstances of birth or bad luck—are less fortunate than I am? (Gardner 129)

Still, the ethical mind might pose other questions: “What is the greatest good that can be accomplished in this situation?” “What are the harms that might result—even if unintentionally—from my actions?” To ask such questions is to realize that each action engaged in—each word spoken or transmitted, each click of a mouse or press of button—contributes to the ongoing

construction of a common world. Is this common world which we are building a good one? Is it one we can be proud of?

Obviously, individuals and groups will approach such questions with different preconceptions and commitments. Uniform answers are unlikely. But this is no reason for abandoning the responsibility to discuss and debate the common good and, perhaps, reach a compromise.

As technology ties the globe closer and closer together, the common good will become increasingly identical with the global good; more and more, Gardner's question will be the one we have to ask ourselves as global citizens: "In what kind of a world would we like to live if we knew neither our standing nor our resources in advance?" (Gardner 127).

Developing the ethical mind is a daunting task. What does it look like in practice?

Social Media and the Greater Good

Consider the story of Ory Okolloh and the invention of the Ushahidi map. Okolloh was a young law student in the United States in 2003, when she began using blog technology to criticize corrupt government practices in her native country of Kenya. Okolloh won a sizable following on the Internet (Thompson 45-46).

After Okolloh returned to Kenya, she continued to blog, posting photographs of giant potholes and other images that she considered evidence of incompetent and compromised leadership. In 2007, violence erupted after a rigged election. Thanks to her blog, Okolloh circumvented government-censored media and began documenting human rights abuses based on eye-witness accounts sent to her by e-mail and cell phones (Thompson 45-46).

As the task became overwhelming, Okolloh wondered whether there was a more efficient way—a tool that would allow anyone to post images on a shared map. Okolloh blogged:

Google Earth supposedly shows in great detail where the damage is being done on the ground. It occurs to me that it will be useful to keep a record of this, if one is thinking long-term. For the reconciliation process to occur at the local level the truth of what happened will first have to come out. Guys looking to do something—any techies out there willing to do a mashup of where the violence and destruction is occurring using Google Maps? (Thompson 62)

Okolloh's post was seen by a friend, Erik Hersman, a website developer living in the near-by city of Nairobi. Hersman thought he knew just the person with the expertise to help build such a map: a friend named David Kobia, a Kenyan programmer, who was living in Birmingham, Ala. Although they were dispersed geographically, Hersman, Okolloh, and Kobia were, nevertheless, able to create a map-based tool that anyone could use to document the time, place, and nature of violence carried out by the Kenyan government against its own people. The map was called Ushahidi, Swahili for "testimony," because of its power to allow people to bear witness to the unfolding atrocities in Kenya. Ushahidi attracted the attention of international nonprofit foundations, who then funneled two-hundred-thousand dollars to Hersman, Kobia, and Okolloh so that they could begin tweaking the map to receive reports from Twitter and social media sites, making its information-collecting potential all the more powerful (Thompson 62-63).

The contrast between *Charlie Hebdo* and Ushahidi is striking. Okolloh made enterprising use of the freedom afforded by social media and digital technology, but not for its own sake. Instead, she used her technologically-empowered freedom for the common good: at first, documenting government corruption and,

eventually, documenting human rights abuses. Okolloh's guiding purpose was not freedom for freedom's sake, but freedom in the service of helping to restore civil society and democracy to her troubled country.

Okolloh demonstrates the ethical mind in action. Even when she was a student far from home, Okolloh considered what it meant for her to be a citizen of Kenya, and what obligations she owed her country. Later, back in Kenya, her sense of duty led her to take considerable personal risks to bring about the most good she was capable of in the midst of a grim situation, hoping against hope that democracy would eventually be restored.

Conclusion

Click by click, we are building a common world.

To be good stewards of social media isn't merely to be good caretakers of technology; it is to be caretakers of the world that this technology is creating. In a very real sense, it is to be caretakers of the kinds of selves we are becoming in a world fashioned by technology. We are, after all, communicative creatures. What we say and how we say it shapes who we are and who we become.

To be good stewards means to take responsibility for what we say and how we say it—for who we are and who we become. In short, to be good stewards means to take responsibility for the common world that we are building.

But to take responsibility for a common world requires first recognizing that we share a common world. This recognition requires us to give up our ignorance, our apathy, or our self-interest. It entails our understanding that our actions have consequences—sometimes, far beyond what we predict. We must

not only ponder the good we can bring about, but also the evil that we can unintentionally commit.

To come to all of these realizations is to begin to adopt a general ethical orientation. Through this, we realize that freedom for freedom's sake means little. If freedom means anything at all, it is to discuss and debate the common good, and to strive for it.

Stewardship reminds us of something else, as well: this common world that we are creating, and the technology that makes this common world possible, are not our own. This common world has been entrusted to us by God. We owe our watchfulness and solicitude—our stewardship—to our God who sustains us.

A former journalist, Gary Panetta is a Seminary Student at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. He expects to earn his Master of Divinity degree in 2015.

Notes

¹ The literature on global citizenship is vast. As an object of analysis, “global citizenship” precedes social media and is, in fact, a phenomenon of globalization. Japanese analyst Kenichie Ohamae argued well before the appearance of social media that globalization was creating transnational citizens even as it diminished the significance of the nation state in his 1990 book *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*. See also Martin Albrow's *The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity*.

The prospect of a global citizen has created a host of questions peripheral yet significant to the question of citizenship. Will citizenship be driven by a sense of the global good or market economics? Carlos Alberto Torres ponders this question in “Globalization, Education, and Citizenship: Solidarity versus Markets?” According to Barry Gills in “Democratizing Globalization and Globalizing Democracy,” how we define citizenship matters because a new definition of citizenship – one that bridges global, regional, national, and local

concerns – is part of a larger effort to retool world political systems to catch up with globalization.

As we rethink global citizenship and its implications, what resources does traditional political thought offer beyond liberal cosmopolitanism and nationalism? Michael Kenny considers these in “Global Civil Society: A Liberal-Republican Argument.”

The challenges of educating students for global citizenship are the concern of Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Jason Harnish in “Contemporary Discourses of Citizenship.” The ethical challenges for business are discussed by Deborah C. Poff in “Ethical Leadership and Global Citizenship: Considerations for a Just and Sustainable Future.”

² On Jan. 7, 2014, in a more recent incident, ten staff members of *Charlie Hebdo* – including the paper’s editor, Stephane Charbonnier – as well as two police officers were assassinated by Islamist gunmen. This horrific act highlights the threat to freedom of speech posed by religious extremism and the need for everyone – religious and nonreligious – to stand against violence and intimidation and for the rule of law.

³ I owe this insight to the Rev. Jim McCrea, pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Galena, IL.

Works Cited

Abowitz, Kathleen Knight and Jason Harnish. “Contemporary Discourses of Citizenship.” *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (2006): 653-690. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.

Albrow, Martin. *The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996. Print.

Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part II, 2013-2015. Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2013. 148-149. Print.

Crilly, Rob and Devorah Lauter. "Anti-Islamic Cartoon Adds Fire to Muslim Demonstrators." *The Daily Telegraph*. 21 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Gardner, Charles. "The Ethical Mind." *Five Minds for the Future*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008. 127-151, 158. See also "The Respectful Mind," 103-125. Print.

Garrison, Jessica, Ken Bensinger, and Harriet Ryan. "Makers of Film Drew from Cleric;

Three Men Involved in 'Innocence of Muslims' are Devotees of Zakaria Botros Henein, Who Lives in Orange County." *Los Angeles Times*. ProQuest, 16 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Gills, Barry. "Democratizing Globalization and Globalizing Democracy." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 581, Globalization and Democracy (2002)*: 158-171. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.

Kenny, Michael. "Global Civil Society: A Liberal-Republican Argument." *Review of International Studies, Vol. 29, Governance and Resistance in World Politics (2003)*: 119-143. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.

McCormaic, Ruadhan. "Paris braced for protests over cartoon." *The Irish Times*. 21 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Ohamae, Kenichie. *The End of the Nation-State*. New York: Free Press Paperback, 1996. Print.

Poff, Deborah C. "Ethical Leadership and Global Citizenship: Considerations for a Just and

Sustainable Future." *Journal of Business Ethics: About Global Leadership and Global Ethics and Possible Moral Compass*, Vol. 93, Supplement 1 (2010): 9-14. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.

Porter, Henry. "Islam Must Embrace Reason and Responsibility." *The Observer*. 23 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Simons, Stefan. "A Drawing Has Never Killed Anyone." *Der Spiegel*. 20 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Thompson, Clive. *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology is Changing Our Minds for the Better*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2013. 45-46, 61-63. Print.

Torres, Carlos Alberto. "Globalization, Education, and Citizenship: Solidarity v. Markets?" *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 2, *Education and Democracy* (2002): 363-378. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.

Willsher, Kim. "Cartoons Give France New Worry; A Magazine Stirs Fear of a Backlash with Its Caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad." *Los Angeles Times*. ProQuest, 20 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Zaimov, Stoyan. "Naked Muhammad Cartoons in French Magazine Raise Global Alert." *Christian Post*. 20 Sept. 2012. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

Fantasy Football and Friendship: The Company We Keep Online

Matthew R. Schlimm

Abstract

Approximately one in ten Americans play a fantasy sport such as fantasy football. People under 35 spend over four hours a week on this pastime. This presentation examines what fantasy football is and how it can impact a life of character.

Aristotle believed that friendship was a virtue, that it went hand-in-hand with other virtues. “Without friends,” he writes, “no one would choose to live, even if they possessed all other goods” (Aristotle 451, §). People become like their friends, imitating behaviors in the people closest to them. Friends shape each other’s attitudes, desires, and character. Many people try things they wouldn’t otherwise, simply because of a friend’s recommendation. Friends can make loneliness vanish and laughter abound—which, in turn, can allow people to overcome feelings of desperateness that hold the potential for moral catastrophe. Close friends often know us better than we know ourselves, and they can offer companionship and correction in times of greatest need.

The last decade's growth of social media means that people now relate to friends in new and different ways. For Facebook users, "friend" has become a verb that simply means someone is added to a list and has access to what you post on your page. With Twitter, friends "follow" one another, meaning they can communicate to each other with "tweets" that are 140 characters or less—messages shorter than this sentence.

Another highly popular form of social media is fantasy sports. The Fantasy Sports Trade Association claims that fantasy sports involve more than 10% of the nation's population, with an estimated 33 million American users. Fantasy sports users under the age of 35 spend an average of 4.2 hours per week engaging in sports media (Brown, Billings, and Rauhley 333-342).

What, exactly, is a fantasy sport? There are many variations, but essentially, it is a game where players assume the roles of owner, head coach, and general manager of a fantasy team comprised of actual professional athletes. When actual athletes score for their professional teams, they also score for the fantasy teams they are part of.

So, when I play fantasy football, my friends and I gather online in late August for a draft. We select the NFL athletes we want on our respective teams. We invent names and mascots for our teams. After the draft, we decide which NFL athletes will start on our fantasy teams. We can send messages to each other or the league. We can trade players. We can add undrafted players and drop underperforming ones. We can use the vast powers of the internet to research which players to start and which to bench. We can spend a great amount of time in this sport. In the end, my friends and I find ourselves relating in a season-long digital arena that can be engaging, fun, highly competitive, and filled with trash-talking. Some elements of fantasy football can take place in person as friends gather to watch games or even to draft players. However, increasingly, the game is played online.

Is it worth it? How does such a pastime impact the moral life? Are the friendships formed and maintained through fantasy football the types of relationships that, as Aristotle indicated, are essential to a life of character? Or, does fantasy football simply bring out the worst in people, reducing friends to competitors? I wrestle with these questions in this article, using passages from Aristotle and the Bible, along with modern writings, to arrive at a more developed understanding of fantasy football, friendship, and the moral life. In the end, I conclude that fantasy football can serve a positive role in the moral life, though it is neither all-sufficient nor without ethical risk.

Types of Friendship

In his main book devoted to ethics, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines friendship as a relationship where two parties wish each other well, are aware of each other's feelings of goodwill, and base these feelings on positive qualities in each other (Aristotle 457, §). He classifies friendships into three types:

1. Fun friendships.¹
2. Useful friendships.
3. Virtuous friendships.

Aristotle displays an obvious preference for this third category, saying it represents friendship in its most perfect form. He believes that virtuous friendships can also prove fun and useful; however, with virtuous friendships, companions ultimately value each other for who they are, not just the fun or usefulness they may bring to each other's lives.

Aristotle's thoughts on friendship can provide a helpful framework for evaluating fantasy football and its role in facilitating friendships.² He prompts us to consider how important fun and useful friendships are for the moral life, even when they do not fully blossom into virtuous friendships.

Fun Friendships

Friendship with a witty person brings pleasure to one's life. The same is true when one becomes friends with others who have a good sense of humor, who engage in similar pastimes, or who playfully approach certain topics. Aristotle does not hold these sorts of friendships in the highest esteem; he does not see them as evil, but he does see them as defective. According to him, such relationships are fleeting. He believes that "fun" friends value each other less for who they are and more for what enjoyment they offer.

However, fun friendships may have much more value to the moral life than Aristotle admits. Playfulness, in particular, is an essential component of a well-rounded moral life.³ Recent research on refugees shows that children who have been forced out of their homes and suffered wartime trauma benefit tremendously from play. When these children engage in creative, playful exercises, harsh, old realities fade away while new futures are imagined (Tolfree 53-56).

Although most people do not face the trauma of refugees, each of us inhabits a fallen world—one filled with suffering that defies explanation.⁴ In this type of moral universe, people need ways of breaking free from their past, whether that past elicits shame over one's mistakes, outrage over injustices, or fear about one's future.⁵ In the realm of play, old realities are temporarily suspended. People can receive a break from accepted norms. Imaginations can run wild. New ways of existence can be imagined. When play is over and people return to the tasks of their lives, they can do so refreshed and revitalized.

The Bible endorses playfulness on many occasions. Some texts clearly display a sense of humor, retelling funny occurrences (e.g., Acts 12.11–16). Others show a willingness to suspend given realities, imagining the world in new and fresh ways that upset

the established hierarchies of power. The book of Esther tells the story of Jews in exile facing persecution by the evil war criminal Haman, who wants to wipe them out. Through Esther's cunning courage, the Jews are saved. Even King Ahasuerus ends up doing everything Esther requests. This story offers a playful reinterpretation of reality for marginalized readers who are given hope that harsh realities like persecution are not all that exists. A day of celebration and feasting—the Jewish festival of Purim—exists on the other side of evil times. Readers who join Jews in this story find relief from existing realities as new ways of existence are playfully imagined (cf. Craig *passim*).

The Bible also emphasizes taking a weekly day of rest; it says God did so after creating the universe (Gen. 2.1–4a). It contrasts the workaholic demands of slavery with the rest-required ways of God (Deut. 5.12–15). When Jesus talks about giving rest to those who are weary and heavy-laden, he does so in the context of a discussion about weekly rest (Matt. 11.28–12.8). As biblical scholar Dennis Olson puts it, “We need time and activities that restore our energies, quiet our anxious minds, and regenerate our troubled spirits” (Olson 43-66).⁶

Fantasy Football and Fun Friendships

Fantasy football, by its very nature, is a game that gives players a break from tired old realities.⁷ Members of a league are no longer warehouse workers with monotonous tasks, office workers with impossible deadlines, or sales reps whose futures ride on making the next sale. Players are given a level playing field—free from the demands of everyday life. In the imaginary world created by fantasy football, jobs are left behind.

In turn, every member of a league takes on the new roles of owner, general manager, and head coach.⁸ In real life, such roles belong to society's elite. In fantasy football, however, all members of a league receive this privileged status.⁹

What If Monopoly Reflected U.S. Wealth Distribution?

In the game of Monopoly, players begin on equal footing. Each player receives \$1,500 to start the game.

However, if five players played this game and were each given amounts of money relative to the wealth distribution in the US, they would each receive the following:

Player 1	\$6,317
Player 2	\$842
Player 3	\$318
Player 4	\$15
Player 5	\$8

One thing that makes games like Monopoly enjoyable is that people enjoy equality at the outset, whereas in real life, they may have distinct disadvantages.

The Bible itself emphasizes the equality of all human beings. Genesis 1.27 describes God as creating humanity in “God’s own image,” and this title extends to all of humanity, women and men alike.¹⁰ In a bold and counter-cultural move, the Bible dares to proclaim that all of humanity has sacred worth and God-like characteristics (Middleton 206).

One thing that makes games so fun is that they give people glimpses of the equality we all have in God’s eyes. For the most part, when people play games, they start out on equal footing.¹¹ (See “What If Monopoly Reflected U.S. Wealth Distribution?”¹²) They gain a glimpse of what it

will one day be like when the universal worth of all peoples is affirmed.¹³ Throughout the course of the season, participants in fantasy football leagues are given the autonomy to act like head-coaches of the NFL. They draft players, set lineups, offer trades, and research match-ups. In fantasy football, a group of college students suddenly gets to do what only millionaires do in real life. Fantasy football offers a refreshing break from the stresses we

regularly face—relief from, as Martha Nussbaum puts it, “the vulgar heat of everyday life” (47-48). Fantasy football offers an invitation to a fantastic world where old realities are turned upside-down.¹⁴

Granted, fantasy football is not a failsafe entry into restful play. Instead of offering a momentary relief from stress, it can become a form of escapism that causes people to ignore real life problems that merit careful attention. Or, as a season progresses and members of leagues watch their teams perform poorly, it can reinforce feelings of frustration and even resentment. Owners often feel a sense of injustice and anger when players they were certain would play well instead get injured or underperform. Pay-in leagues become especially competitive, because games cease to be fun pastimes and instead become real-life struggles over the prize money at the end of the season. Greed takes over, fantasy recedes to the background, and too much rides on players who may have an off game or fall to injury. Fantasy football has the potential to bring out the worst in people, even when it is designed to offer a pleasurable experience for all involved.

Fortunately, there are ways to counteract these negative outcomes of the fantasy football experience. In particular, *leagues can be designed to encourage playfulness and humor, rather than unhealthy levels of competition.*

This past year, the commissioner of one of my leagues had a bold idea: he declared that our league would be themed with elements from 1980s culture. Team names had to refer to something from the decade known for big hair, boxy cars, and keyboard synthesizers. Our league featured these teams:

1. The Gridiron Goonies (a nice alliteration that refers to the movie *The Goonies*)
2. The Hulksters (with logos featuring the legendary Hulk Hogan)

3. The Rad Rockers (with logos showing famous bands from the 1980s with wild hairstyles)
4. The Cobra Kai Dojo (a reference to the movie *The Karate Kid*)
5. The Hill Valley DeLoreans (a reference to the movie trilogy *Back to the Future*)
6. WhoYouGonnaCall? Tim Tebow! (a reference to the movie *Ghostbusters* and, of course, Tim Tebow)
7. The Battle Cats (a reference to the green and yellow striped tiger that He-Man would mount when heading into battle)
8. Papa Smurf (from the cartoon about blue-bodied miniature people)

Although many people had reservations about the commissioner's request that they choose names related to the 1980s, it ended up being a great experience. We were able to relive parts of our childhood. These goofy names were a persistent reminder that our league was simply a game, not anything to be taken too seriously. We had many chuckles and moments of *Oh, yeah! I remember that!*

Interestingly, studies have shown that when videogamers have villainous avatars, they tend to act meaner toward others, but they are nicer when they have heroic avatars (Herbert). *Mutatis mutandis*, choosing one's team name is not a morally neutral decision. Fantasy footballers do well to choose names that are positive or funny.

Another tradition in our league is that teams' logos change each week (we gave the Oregon Ducks a run for their money). Our Super Bowl featured a matchup between the Gridiron Goonies and Papa Smurf. The owner of the Gridiron Goonies



chose the meme on the left as his logo for that week (“Bring Me Another Smurf Baby”).

These elements made our league more conducive to playfulness and laughter, rather than stiff-necked competition and degrading trash-talk. We certainly exchanged smack with each other, but it was done more playfully than in some of the leagues I have witnessed. For example, after I chose to start St. Louis Rams Quarterback Sam Bradford early in the season (a player with a questionable track record), a member of my league wrote, “Friends really shouldn’t let friends start Sam Bradford.” The comment was witty enough that it made me smile, rather than grow angry.

Our league also has a no-wager policy. It is free for everyone to play, with only bragging rights on the line. As a result, the league is more carefree. The difficulty of free leagues, of course, is that members can easily lose interest halfway through the season. However, this tendency is counteracted by two features. First, people who go to our league’s webpages find things to make them laugh. Second, most people in this league were friends before the league started, and it serves as a good way to maintain existing friendships (see “Fantasy Football and Virtuous Friendships” below).¹⁵

Finally, this league is made up of people with very good moral character, who also know how to have fun. Few things in life are more important than whom we choose to be our friends. As the first Psalm puts it, “The truly happy person ... doesn’t stand on the road of sinners, and doesn’t sit with the disrespectful” (Ps. 1.1). This observation is especially true with internet friends. Social media can bring out the worst in people (Suler 321-326).¹⁶ Games (online or offline) can also cause people to show their vices: sore winners and sore losers snatch away the joy that comes from games. Both social media and games are combined in fantasy football. Therefore, the risks are high for people to reveal the

worst parts of themselves. Thus, it is important to exercise a fair amount of selectivity when deciding whether to join particular leagues or whom to invite.

Reflecting on the nature of fantasy sports, communication scholar Allison Burr-Miller writes:

While the more overt pleasures of fantasy participation come from competitive success (having a good draft, winning a week's matchup, or winning a league championship), the spectrum of the game's symbolic medicine goes far beyond winning and losing. This is not to say that winning does not matter, but it is to say that fantasy participants produce complex texts that tell a larger story. These texts are articulations of loyalties, personal relationships, everyday thoughts and feelings, and other elements of a participant's identity that are expressed through fantasy participation. (Burr-Miller 457-458)

One of the greatest benefits of fantasy football is that it gives users a variety of ways to have fun, far beyond the traditional fan that roots for one team.

Useful Friendships

The second major type of friendship that Aristotle discusses is friendship based on usefulness or utility. Two neighbors may, for example, keep an eye on each other's property, especially when one neighbor goes out of town.

As with fun friendships, Aristotle could have said more about the importance of useful friendships for the moral life. Living in a fallen world naturally involves struggle. Genesis 3 talks of humanity facing great difficulty in matters like work. Other parts of the Bible depict the struggles people face just getting by.

Friendships, the Bible says, can help people when facing these sorts of struggles. The book of Ecclesiastes puts it this way:

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their hard work. If either should fall, one can pick up the other. But how miserable are those who fall and don't have a companion to help them up! Also, if two lie down together, they can stay warm. But how can anyone stay warm alone? Also, one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn't easily snap. (Eccl. 4.9-12)¹⁷

What Ecclesiastes describes somewhat abstractly, readers find concretely illustrated in the biblical story of Ruth. While the characters Naomi and Ruth are technically mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, they function as close friends.¹⁸ Through cooperation, they survive the harshest of situations, including the loss of family members, dangerous travel, and severe poverty. Naomi offers Ruth sage advice, which Ruth carries out; in turn, Ruth is able to provide for both of them. Rather than emphasizing friendships of utility as fleeting and imperfect, the Bible recognizes their importance for surviving and thriving in a world that has more than its share of difficulties.

Fantasy Football and Useful Friendships

Fantasy football does relatively little to enhance primarily useful relationships; but under some circumstances, it may move in this direction. For example, a football league among co-workers may add elements of fun, excitement, and camaraderie to workplace relationships, allowing co-workers to bond over something other than their work. Such an activity could boost morale, but it would not necessarily enhance workplace productivity. In fact, such productivity could easily decrease as coworkers spend more time researching NFL stats and less time doing their jobs.

Or, a fantasy football league may introduce members to people they did not previously know, people with whom they may form useful relationships. However, such friendships do not always, or even usually, form. With online relationships, one can easily act as if the other person is not really there. Unlike a board game, I can play fantasy football against other people and never once say a single thing to them. I may get to know very little about them as people. I can simply check to see how my players and my opponent's players are doing without much real human interaction.

In short, the potential exists for relationships of usefulness to get started through fantasy football. However, there is little that ensures such relationships become formed.

In fact, on a deeper level, something more sinister may be taking place with fantasy football. In his book *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr argues that the human brain tends to adapt to its environment. When the internet becomes that environment, our brains spend less time in deep concentration and more time scanning, jumping from topic to topic, and deciding whether to click on hyperlinks. We remember less of what we read, even as we read far more than ever before. As our brains adapt to the world of the web, we may be losing some of our most valuable cognitive capacities. Thus, as Carr's book title suggests, with the internet, we spend our days wading around in the shallows of the shoreline while neglecting the vast depths of the ocean.¹⁹

Virtuous Friendships

According to Aristotle, in virtuous friendships, two people know each other well enough that they understand who the other person is. They admire the goodness within the other, seeking the welfare of the other person.

The Bible offers additional insights into the value of virtuous friendships and what they look like. Several texts suggest that love often finds its greatest expression within the context of close friends:

- “Friends love all the time” (Prov. 17.17).
- “Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one’s nearest kin” (Prov. 18.24, NRSV).
- “No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15.13).

Elsewhere, the Bible suggests that friends know us better than we know ourselves, providing useful checks on self-deception that leads to moral catastrophe:

- “Oil and incense gladden the heart, And the sweetness of a friend is better than one’s own counsel.” (Prov. 27.9, *Tanakh*)

True friends go so far as to risk offending each other in order to improve character:

- “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Prov. 27.6, NASB).

It is within the context of faithful friendships that Jesus promises to be present:

- “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them” (Matt. 18.20).

The Bible portrays these sorts of virtuous, godly friendships most vividly in the book of Daniel. Facing harsh persecution by those with power, Daniel and his friends stick together, forming a small community of resistance that maintains its faith in an otherwise hostile environment (see esp. Daniel 1–3).

Fantasy Football and Virtuous Friendships

At first glance, it would seem that virtuous relationships do not grow deeper through fantasy football. Friendships based on virtue require vulnerability and intimacy. Friends who bring out the moral good in each other admit their struggles, confess their sins, and confront each other about how to live better lives (cf. James 5.16). Such activities do not occur in fantasy football leagues. Most communication, even when it is directed to one member of a league, is visible to all members of a league. Intimacy and deep friendship rarely occur simultaneously among a group of a dozen competitors.

At the same time, fantasy sports allow friends from across the world to come together in shared activities. At a bare minimum, fantasy football can allow people to maintain pre-existing friendships based on virtue. It does not suffice as a substitute for all face-to-face gatherings, but it can fill gaps when geographic and temporal constraints disallow regular in-person get-togethers.

In addition, fantasy football may provide a forum by which people can begin to know other people better, so that virtuous friendships can then result offline. For example, a church in Cadillac, Michigan, has created a fantasy football league. League members gather weekly with their families to watch NFL games with fellowship and food. Through such activities, solid friendships are formed that extend far beyond the bounds of the game. Some people even come into the life of the church through this ministry. Fun friendships become virtuous friendships (Kraai 13).

Research suggests that friendships among men often solidify through the participation in common activities (Shields 1-25). Virtuous friendships may be more valuable to the ethical life than fun friendships, but virtuous friendships need to start somewhere.

They often begin amid the pleasurable sharing in joint activities like fantasy football.

The Dangers of Fantasy Football

I have clarified how fantasy football can be a source of ethical and moral help. At the same time, it is appropriate to be upfront about some of the moral dangers that reside in this kind of wireless connection. As hinted at above, social media already feels to some users as though it is an invented fantasy realm—an imaginary space where they can take on different personas and act in ways free from normal social norms and graces (Suler 321-326). When a form of social media is, by its very name, called “fantasy,” users may feel even more welcome to act as if typical standards of morality no longer apply. Obviously, the word “fantasy” in “fantasy football” refers first and foremost to the idea that professional athletes play for teams that users coach and manage. Yet, the word itself may invite some players to imagine they are partaking in an imaginary world where they no longer need to care about other league members as actual human beings. After all, they do not see these other players, they do not look them in the eyes, they do not see firsthand how their comments affect others, and they are stripped of many features of face-to-face communication. Trash talking can go much too far, because users never see how their words affect others reading them. In one league I played in, things got so out of control that one player threatened to email another player’s boss, telling the supervisor of all the awful things the employee had ever done in college. Fantasy can be a very good thing, but it is far from a good thing when “fantasy” is interpreted to mean a space outside morality and ethics.

In an article for the online magazine *Think Christian*, Todd Hertz describes how fantasy football tempts him with many of the cardinal sins. He writes:

Gluttony is not just about food. It's overindulgence in a quest for pleasure or comfort. I have little self-discipline when it comes to fantasy football. I always think that just a little more research, one more trade, another free-agent addition or more number crunching will lead me over the top. And then, I will be happy and fulfilled.

Greed is the inordinate accumulation of material things, status, power or security at the expense of others. I so badly want to accumulate. Two (slightly modified) questions in that self-evaluation tool nail me: Do I seek to use others, my friends, to get what I want? and Do I cheat and steal to get what I want? If I could, I would.

Pride can control me in any competition. Somehow, it becomes self-defining. It's been said that fantasy sports are about proving to your friends that you are better than they are. That resonates. I love the community aspect of this game, but I can also fall prey to just wanting to crush my friends. Prove that I am smarter. Competition is good; less helpful is when an insecure need for validation grows into spiteful vanity.

Envy goes beyond jealousy. It's not only wanting what someone has, it's feeling that if you can't have it, nobody should. It's not only saying, "I don't want you to have Drew Brees if I cannot." It's also thinking, "If I can't win, I hope that jerk doesn't." Yes, I do get offended by the success or good fortune of other fantasy team owners. And I can feel contempt for those I feel are inferior. All over fake scores from fake football rosters.

Wrath flows right out of pride and envy for me. I'll let two self-reflective questions speak for me: Am I cynical, prone to grumbling or easily annoyed in

fantasy football? Do I blame others for my circumstances?

Sloth is probably the single most convicting sin on this list for me, in fantasy football or out. Sloth doesn't equal being lazy. Heck, the sheer effort I put into researching defensive metrics is hard work. Instead, the core of this vice is spending time in a way that takes you off mission, away from commitments. It's a refusal to grow, serve or sacrifice for others in favor of trivial things.

For people who have played fantasy football, Hertz's list is all too familiar. Sometimes, the best recourse during an abysmal season is to stop caring about it so much.

Conclusion

Fantasy can play a valuable role in the moral life. To experience rest *as rest*, human beings need imaginative ways of engaging the world that give us freedom from some of the burdens we face in daily living. Fantasy football provides a playful way of bonding with friends, one that can give users at least a fleeting glimpse of the equality we all have in God's eyes.

Yet, fantasy football also has dangers. All too easily, users can become obsessed with checking stats, focused on winning money, covetous of NFL players on someone else's team, thinking about whether they are better than their friends, or angry that NFL players underperformed. In the process, users deprive themselves of other rich forms of friendship that are essential to the well-lived life. As we strive to win, we may lose the playfulness, fun, and friendships that the game fosters at its best moments.

By surrounding ourselves with people who have both a good sense of humor and high moral character, these pitfalls can be avoided. We can have a blast, even if we lose.

Those who play fantasy football in positive ways will want to ask themselves not only what fun, utility, or virtue they gain from the experience. They will also ask how they are making the experience fun, useful, and virtuous for others. It may be more important to post something sure to elicit laughter from league members than to win on any given Sunday.

One also needs to remember that fantasy football is not all-sufficient. While it provides a forum for fun friendships to flourish, it does little to enhance useful or virtuous friendships. At best, it lets people maintain virtuous friendships and introduces players to others with whom offline friendships can take root.

Fantasy football can play an important minor role in our lives. However, when it becomes all-consuming or über-competitive, users lose sight, as Wayne Booth puts it, of the “friends who demonstrate their friendship not only in the range and depth and intensity of pleasure they offer, not only in the promise they fulfill of proving useful to me, but finally in the irresistible invitation they extend to live during these moments a richer and fuller life than I could manage on my own” (223).

Matthew R. Schlimm is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, and has authored books investigating ethics in the Old Testament.

Notes

¹ In the Loeb Classical Library, H. Rackham translates Aristotle’s work, talking about friendships based on “pleasure.” Aristotle uses the Greek word *hēdonē* to talk about “pleasure.” This word has negative connotations when used in the New Testament (e.g., Titus 3.3). Today, it is often associated with sex (“hedonism”). However, “pleasure” had a different meaning for Aristotle.

He thus sees that it can be “good” (Aristotle 439 §7.13.1; 605–607 §10.5.10–11). He even goes so far as to say, “It is therefore clear that we must pronounce the admittedly disgraceful pleasures not to be pleasures at all, except to the depraved” (Aristotle 607 §10.5.11). Because he often connects pleasurable friendships with witty exchanges between companions, and because of the linguistic baggage attached to the word “pleasure” today, I have chosen to talk about fun friendships.

² Craig Condella uses Aristotle’s concept of friendship to evaluate Facebook, concluding,

“Facebook presents us with something of a double-edged sword. While it allows us to continue friendships which might have otherwise and regrettably shriveled on the vine, its propensity to create and maintain friendships in such great abundance risks choking the deeper sorts of friendships which matter most” (Condella 121).

While Condella makes many valid points, my article goes in different directions not only by looking at fantasy football, but also by doing more to affirm friendships based on pleasure and usefulness that may not turn into friendships based on virtue.

³ Although dated, there is an excellent discussion of the importance of play in Johnston, esp. chaps. 3–4; cf. Berger; Ryken. Thanks to Elmer Colyer and Gary Panetta for drawing these works to my attention.

⁴ As I point out elsewhere, “Fundamental to all of [the biblical book of] Genesis...is the driving metaphor WE ARE EXPELLED FROM PARADISE” (Schlimm 125). Humanity no longer dwells in a delightful garden free from suffering. We now work with sweat on our brows and thorns in our feet.

⁵ Granted, guilt, anger, and fear can serve useful purposes. However, it is also possible for people to become so entrenched in these emotions that they lead desperate lives that can easily turn toward moral catastrophe.

⁶ Olson makes this comment while talking about the Sabbath. As he observes, the Sabbath initially was simply a day of rest. Later in Israel’s history, it was associated with worship.

⁷ While I emphasize how fantasy football facilitates other ways of viewing reality, several publications describe how fantasy football gives users experiences of arousal, enjoyment, entertainment, learning, and even enhanced self-esteem. See Brown, Billings, and Ruihley, 338–339; Billings and Ruihley, 5–25; Farquhar and Meeds, 1208–1228.

⁸ This sort of identification can be interpreted as an extension of the type of parasocial interaction and identification fans have with athletes even apart

from fantasy sports. For more on this topic, see Earnhardt and Haridakis, 27–53; cf. Burr-Miller, esp. 448–450.

⁹ Two further observations are worth noting. First, the manner in which fantasy football gives users additional identities reflects postmodern trends that avoid any single metanarrative, preferring instead a constellation of identities and small narratives for navigating the world. Second, as pointed out to me by Gary Panetta, one can object that fantasy football does not offer enough of a critique of social dynamics: it reinforces ideas that one should covet the position of millionaire owners, general managers, and head coaches, rather than envisioning a more egalitarian social order free from such hierarchies and elites.

¹⁰ Here and elsewhere, the Common English Bible translation is used (unless otherwise noted).

¹¹ With respect to fantasy football, the comments here are less applicable to “keeper” leagues where teams retain at least some of the same players from the previous year. Many leagues are not keepers: at the start of each season, there’s a draft where people get to pick their team. These picks are often in a serpentine format, so that even if you have the last pick in round one, you then get the first pick in round two.

¹² The numbers here are calculated using data in Norton and Ariely, esp. 10, which says that the wealthiest 20% of people in the U.S. own 84% of the total wealth, the second most wealthy 20% of people own 11%, the middle 20% own 4%, the next 20% own 0.2%, and the poorest 20% of people own 0.1%.

¹³ A helpful concept in Christian theology is the “now-not yet” tension. Simply put, this term means that God’s will and kingdom can be partially glimpsed in the here and now, even though God’s will and kingdom is not yet fully realized. According to orthodox Christianity, it is only with Christ’s return to earth that God will establish a new heaven and new earth that fully reflects God’s will. In the meanwhile, we catch glimpses of what God wants for creation, even as evil also pierces through, reminding us of our need for God’s intervention.

It is easy to see how the “now-not yet” tension plays out in terms of human equality. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech presented clear glimpses of a society that valued all people equally, even though both in his day and in our own, it is clear that society still has a long way to go.

Games may also give us partial glimpses of equality in the *here and now*, even as it is clear we have *not yet* achieved such equality.

¹⁴ This world of fantasy has continuity with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque (122–132).

¹⁵ Our league has also discussed having a pay-in at the start that is refunded to everyone who plays throughout the season. Those who start NFL players on bye weeks lose their pay-in fees, which go to the league champion.

¹⁶ Social media can also insulate people from one another, as described by Sherry Turkle in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* and "The Flight from Conversation."

¹⁷ Early in his discussion of friendship, Aristotle makes similar remarks, writing:

Friends are an aid to the young, to guard them from error; to the elderly, to tend them, and to supplement their failing powers of action; to those in the prime of life, to assist them in noble deeds...for two are better able both to plan and to execute. (Aristotle 451, §8.1.2)

However, as Aristotle proceeds, he expresses less appreciation for friendships based on utility.

¹⁸ Thus, Ruth leaves Moab to stay with Ruth, even though she likely would have stayed in her homeland (like her sister) if the relationship was solely based on being in-laws and not also on being friends (cf. Wadell, 316). Furthermore, the Hebrew name Ruth means "friend" or "companion."

¹⁹ On a somewhat related note, Pollock observes that fantasy football may be distracting fans from the evidence that the sport has extremely detrimental effects on athletes' brains.

Conversely, Burr-Miller, 456–458 argues that fantasy sports actually assist users, providing equipment for living in a fragmented and postmodern world. However, she could have better explained and substantiated this claim. Peter Gray asserts on a more general level that play is essential for preparing people for life.

I would like to thank Jenn Supple Bartels, Gary Panetta, Terri Jo Crego, and especially Annalee Ward for all their assistance as I wrote this article. I would also like to thank members of the Grace and Late Hits League for showing me how fun and meaningful a seemingly trivial pastime can really be.

Works Cited

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. H. Rackham. Rev. ed. Loeb Classical Library 73. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson. Theory and History of Literature 8. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Print.

Berger, Peter L. *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1969. Print.

Billings, Andrew C., and Brody J. Ruihley. "Why We Watch, Why We Play: The Relationship between Fantasy Sport and Fanship Motivations." *Mass Communication and Society* 16 (2013): 5–25. Print.

Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Friendship*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Print.

"Bring Me Another Smurf Baby." *Daily Picks and Flicks*. 13 Apr. 2013. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

Brown, Natalie, Andrew C. Billings, and Brody Ruihley. "Exploring the Change in Motivations for Fantasy Sport Participation During the Life Cycle of a Sports Fan." *Communication Research Reports* 29 (2012): 333–342. Print.

Burr-Miller, Allison C. "What's Your Fantasy? Fantasy Baseball as Equipment for Living." *Southern Communication Journal* 76 (2011): 443–464. Print.

- Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2011. Print.
- Condella, Craig. "Why Can't We Be Virtual Friends?" *Facebook and Philosophy*. Ed. D. E. Wittkower. Chicago: Open Court, 2010. *Popular Culture and Philosophy* 50. 111–121. Print.
- Craig, Kenneth M. *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnavalesque*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995. Print.
- Earnheardt, Adam C., and Paul M. Haridakis. "An Examination of Fan-Athlete Interaction: Fandom, Parasocial Interaction, and Identification." *Ohio Communication Journal* 47 (2009): 27–53. Print.
- Farquhar, Lee K., and Robert Meeds. "Types of Fantasy Sports Users and Their Motivations." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007): 1208–1228. Print.
- "Welcome to the Official Site of the FSTA." *Fantasy Sports Trade Association*. YourMembership.com, n.d. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Gray, Peter. "The Play Deficit." *Aeon Magazine*. Aeon Media Ltd., 18 Sept. 2013. Web. 28 Jan. 2014.
- Herbert, Wray. "Know Thy Avatar." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc., 22 Jan. 2014. Web. 28 Jan. 2014.
- Hertz, Todd. "Fantasy Football's Seven Deadly Sins." *Think Christian: No Such Thing as Secular*. ReFrame Media, 15 Sept. 2013. Web. 26 Sept. 2013.

- Johnston, Robert K. *The Christian at Play*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983. Print.
- Kraai, Daina. "Church Runs Fantasy Football League." *The Banner* (Feb. 2014): 13. Print.
- Middleton, J. Richard. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005. Print.
- Norton, Michael I., and Dan Ariely. "Building a Better America— One Wealth Quintile at a Time." *Perspectives in Psychological Science* 6 (2011): 9–12. Print.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print.
- Olson, Dennis. "Sacred Time: The Sabbath and Christian Worship." *Sunday, Sabbath, and the Weekend: Managing Time in a Global Culture*. Ed. Edward O'Flaherty and Rodney L. Petersen with Timothy A. Norton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 43-66. Print.
- Pollock, Greg. "The Evil Genius of Fantasy Football: How the Game within a Game Keeps Fans Ravidly, Uncritically Engaged." *Slate*. The Slate Group LLC, 9 Oct. 2013. Web. 14 Oct. 2013.
- Ryken, Leland. *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995. Print.
- Schlimm, Matthew Richard. *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011. Print.

- Shields, Ben. "Fantasy Sports: Playing Basketball on a Digital Court." *Conference Papers: National Communication Association* (2007): 1–25. Print.
- Suler, John. "The Online Disinhibition Effect." *Cyber Psychology & Behavior* 7.3 (2004): 321–326. Print.
- Tolfree, David. *Restoring Playfulness: Different Approaches to Assisting Children Who Are Psychologically Affected by War or Displacement*. Falun, Sweden: Scandbook, 1996. Print.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic, 2011. Print.
- . "The Flight from Conversation." *New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 21 Apr. 2012. Web. 15 May 2014.
- Wadell, Paul J. "Friendship, Friendship Ethics." *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. Ed. Joel B. Green. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. 316-318. Print.

Parents' Growing Pains on Social Media: Modeling Authenticity

Jenn Supple Bartels

Abstract

Parents' Growing Pains on Social Media: Modeling Authenticity addresses the question of what it means to parent with integrity in a digital environment. Issues of disclosure, boundaries, identity, and authenticity all contribute to a consideration of locating the ethical line in creating a digital footprint for others (specifically our children).

It started innocently enough. Parents dabbling in social media, posting a status update about their child here, a baby photo there; then came faux Facebook and Twitter accounts for those same babies and toddlers (written by those same parents) (Bazon), Mom Blogs, and BabiesofInstagram. The backlash soon followed: STFU Parents, Top 10 Reasons I Hate Mommy Blogs, and Unbaby.me (Lawler). Some parents joined the backlash, decried this “oversharenting,” and attempted to create a virtual tabula rasa for their children’s eventual foray into social media (Webb). Other parents defended their right to share about their children what they wanted, where they wanted, and as often as they wanted (Perez).

Regardless of which side of this debate one falls—blank slate or open book—it is clear parents are a formidable force on social media and are using it to share things about their children (“Digital Lives”). According to a 2010 study by internet security firm AVG, 92% of children in the United States have an online presence (due to their parents’ disclosure) by the time they are two years old, and for 33% this presence was established before they were born via prenatal sonograms (“Digital Birth”).

The Internet has been described as the ultimate identity workshop, a stage on which a variety of roles can be enacted, and a gallery allowing for a multiple selves to be designed and displayed (Bruckman). Navigating this process with integrity is a challenge for any online individual. Parents have the added weight of negotiating not only their own identities, but also those of the children they choose to share about on social media. What does it mean to parent with integrity in an omnipresent and enduring online environment? How are parents to balance using social media for the purpose of updating family and friends about their life, which includes their children, with respecting the boundaries of those not old enough to understand and/or provide consent to that disclosure? Where is the ethical line in creating a digital footprint for others? As a parent, I have taken each of them to the mat in my own life, and rarely emerged confident of victory.

Social Media and the “Other”

Since beginning to explore the issue of parents disclosing about their children online, I’ve heard multiple variations on the following: “Is this really that big of a deal? It’s social media. That’s what it’s there for. Besides, how does posting a photo or telling a story about your child online differ from what people say and do in real life?” Good points and fair questions. In my family, we have a ritual of divulging embarrassing stories and photos about any family member who dares bring a date home to meet other family

members. Timelines for bedwetting, stories about sports failures, and photos of early cross-dressing are hauled out with military precision. Aren't those embarrassing? Don't they involve an audience? Isn't their sharing facilitated by parents in a social environment? Of course; but online social media is different in both scope and permanency. What is amusing and momentary in face-to-face interaction takes on a greater significance when the audience increases to nearly 2 billion internet users world-wide and the disclosure is, in effect, un-erasable ("World Internet Users"). Given both the scope and permanency of the ever-evolving technological landscape, parenting with integrity on social media will always be a moving target. However, the self-reflective and other-oriented practice of authenticity can aid those struggling with hitting this target, even if defining authenticity is equally challenging.

Sociologists Phillip Vannini and Alexis Franzese note there is "no single theory of authenticity and a multitude of definitions." Of these multiple definitions of authenticity, the most concise is "being true to one's self." Vannini and Franzese acknowledge authenticity as both a feeling and a practice that includes "sincerity, truthfulness, and originality" that must take into account both the self and the other (1621). The "other" in parents disclosing about their children on social media includes the minors as both topic and audience of this information. Communication scholar Julia T. Wood acknowledges online behavior is always a cooperative action "in relationship to others" (110).

While online behavior may occur in relationship to others, cooperative action between adult author and audience members on social media obviously differs from the dynamic that exists between parents as adult authors and their minor children as disclosure topics. The latter dynamic exemplifies the role of power in dichotomous social order described by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, in which "the second member is but the other of the first" (14). In this context, adult authors are the norm and

their children the “other.” In *Saints and Postmodernism*, feminist communitarian scholar Edith Wyschogrod asserts that the “Other” is “the touchstone of moral existence...not a conceptual anchorage but a living force” whose existence is tied to “compelling moral weight” (Wyschogrod xxi). This weight is the compelling force behind this paper’s exploration of how the parents can use the practice of authenticity to guide disclosure about their children on social media.¹

Awareness: When is it About You?

The first step in parenting authentically in a digital environment involves the self-reflective awareness that disclosing about one’s children on social media is sometimes more about the parent than the child. For example, a Facebook user named Vanessa announces the birth of her son, Jayden, on that site. The first

Vanessa [redacted]
Lil baby Jayden [redacted] and a head full of hair. And of course, he came into this world via 100% natural, non-medicated childbirth!



Mobile Uploads

Share · 15 hours ago via BlackBerry · 🌟

Deborah [redacted] and 26 others like this.

View all 25 comments

Nick [redacted] · Congrats!
41 minutes ago

Deborah [redacted] · What a cutie! Congrats, and you rock!
10 minutes ago

sentence of this post introduces “Lil baby Jayden” and his “head full of hair.” While the subject of the second sentence is still officially Jayden, his mom Vanessa wants you to know something about herself: she is the type of mother who produced a child “via 100% natural, non-medicated childbirth!” (Koenig

“Birth”). The work of sociologist Erving Goffman clarifies what is happening here.

According to Goffman, humans are social creatures who naturally act in ways that “convey an impression to others”—a practice that has come to be referred to in varying circles as impression management, self-presentation, and identity performance (*Presentation 3*). For Goffman, these impressions, presentations, and performances are natural ways of signaling socially constructed and multidimensional identities, which are embodied in three distinct but related “orders” (Jenkins 17):

- The personal (individual order) dimension of identity consists of those characteristics that people believe make them unique (organized, introverted, or homely);
- The relational (interaction order) dimension of identity locates us in relationship with others (child-parent, brother-sister, student-teacher);
- The communal (institutional order) dimension of identity is based on larger group membership or association (ethnicity, religion, organizations). (Hecht *et al.*)

Goffman points out that society is structured to reward the performance of certain roles within each of these dimensions of identity, while punishing the performance of others (*Presentation 6*). In Vanessa’s case, she is rewarded for her performance of “100% natural, non-medicated childbirth.” The second commentator following her post, Deborah, acknowledges the dual subject matter of Vanessa’s initial post by applying the same format in her response: (first sentence = Jayden) “What a cutie!” (Second sentence = Vanessa) “Congrats! You rock!” (Koenig “Birth”).

At the same time, obvious identity performance like Vanessa’s is often seen negatively, as something false, inauthentic, or manipulative (Crant). Interestingly, in J. Michael Crant’s work on impression management evoking a negative response, he notes

that “paradoxically, given the phrase ‘impression management,’ little research has explicitly examined observers’ impression of impression managers” (1446). Despite this hole in the scholarly literature, social media is rife with responses to parents’ online identity involving their children.

The most well-known site presently devoted to such response is *STFU, Parents*. It began as a blog by Blair Koenig chronicling the overt self-presentation done by parents online, primarily on Facebook. It has since expanded to include a Facebook page of its own, Twitter account, and book entitled *STFU, Parents: The Jaw-Droppingly, Self-Indulgent, and Occasionally Rage-Inducing World of Parent Overshare*. Vanessa’s post referencing her “100% natural, non-medicated childbirth” was featured on the *STFU, Parents* blog, where her post earned her the ascribed identities of “birth junkie” (one who talks about nothing other than their birthing experiences) and “sanctimama” (one who looks down on the parenting choices of others and considers parents superior to non-parents). One might write off sanctimamas and birth junkies engaging in “mommyjacking” and “mompitations” as the inevitable culmination of our self-obsessed, helicopter parent, social media addicted culture; however, Koenig predicts:

In a few years, we will probably see a considerable amount of pre-teen overshare from the parents who overshare about their toddlers today. I already see plenty of examples of parents who overshare about their teenagers getting their periods or growing armpit hair, and I'm sure those examples will increase over time. (Erickson)

If Koenig’s predictions are correct, there is all the more reason for parents’ awareness of how they practice their own identity work when posting about their children, whether that work is explicit or implicit. Literature on impression management traditionally focuses on the

"direct" ways individuals actively engage in self-presentation by altering their own behavior (Brown *et al.*). Less discussed is an individual's use of others in their self-presentation, known as "indirect" impression management (Andrews *et al.* 143).

When parents cast their children in a particular role or light to create and manage impressions of themselves, they are engaging in "altercasting" (Weinstein and Deutschberger (454). Most applicably, Jessica Collet examines the ways in which mothers "manage the appearances of their children and how they use those appearances to establish their identities as 'good mothers'" (Collett 332). Children are uniquely suited to serve as impression management markers for parents. If we are the company we keep, then parents' worth can be tied to the accomplishments of their offspring. This has been found to be especially true for mothers, whose children are considered the direct "results of her maternal instincts, her worth as a human being" (Tardy 444). For example, when my oldest son was four years old, I posted a version of the anecdote below on Facebook.

On our way home from M_____ getting a haircut, he decided to bring up politics.

M_____: Do you like President Bush?

Me: I don't have anything against him personally; I'm just not a big fan of some of his ideas.

M_____: Which ideas?

Me: He had this idea for schools, called No Child Left Behind, that was supposed to make sure all kids were learning in schools. That sounds like a good thing, but

he didn't make sure the schools had the money needed to do this idea and then punished them for not being able to do it.

M___: How could he do that?

Me: Well, it's called an unfunded mandate and it's not very fair, is it?

M___: No. I hate unfunded mandates!

The next day I told M___ to brush his teeth and he declared he would not do it because it was an unfunded mandate. I told him he had a toothbrush, toothpaste, and the skills needed to complete the task, so it was completely funded, and to get his butt in the bathroom.

While heading to the bathroom, M___ told me he had nothing against me personally, but he just wasn't a big fan of my ideas. 😊

Charles Horton Cooley's metaphor of the looking-glass self is particularly useful for deconstructing the identity work present in this example. In Cooley's looking glass, an individual's perception of him or herself grows out of their interactions on the relational and communal levels. The three moves made in doing so are an individual imagining how another views them, how that individual imagines being judged as a result of that viewing, and how that individual feels about him or herself as a result of that judgment (Cooley). At the time the Unfunded Mandate Anecdote (UMA) was posted, I was a newly-divorced mother and spent significant amounts of time imagining how others viewed me as a result of my having divorced the father of my young child. I imagined being judged harshly for this choice and felt shame for having been a "bad" wife, mother, daughter, woman, etc. My resulting behavior

was to present a “face” or image of myself that others would find pleasing and hopefully, thereby, reduce that shame (Goffman *Nature*).

Cialdini, Finch, and De Nicholas found that those who had recently undergone an “image-threatening experience” (such as a divorce) were more likely to link themselves to “positively-toned” others in an attempt to sway perception of their public “face,” or identity, known as “facework” (197). At the time of the UMA posting, I was aware of selectively tweaking elements of the anecdote for optimal role embracement, displaying positive “mom” qualities and engaging in appropriate “mom” activities (Snow and Anderson). For this performance, I received “likes” and positive comments ranging from “More M____ stories!!!” to “you need to write a book with the things your son says!” This is not an unusual result of such disclosure, as research by Ringel Morris notes that posts by mothers about their children receive nearly double the positive “attention” (favorable comments and “likes”) than non-child-related posts. My UMA anecdote, while perhaps slightly less overt than Vanessa’s birth announcement, served the same function: to present a self that would be looked upon favorably by disclosing about another (my son).

However, as previously noted, to brag about oneself through one’s children can have negative consequences, unless one is skilled in doing so with delicacy. A form of this that is particularly suited to the self-presentation of social media is the art of “humblebragging,” a term coined and defined by Harris Wittels as a “specific type of brag that masks the boasting part of the statement in a faux-humble guise” (xi). In her *Pregnancy, Parenting, and Lifestyle* blog, *mom.me*, Sally Schultheiss illustrates humblebragging:

“I’m such a boring mom. All we do is stay around the house and craft.”

Translation: I'm such a great mom. I spend quality time with my children doing activities that will benefit them in so many ways.

Another form of this act is one in which the humblebragger seems aggrieved by something that paints them in a positive light.

"I'm so exhausted. I've been up late every night this week helping Ellie study for the spelling bee finals. Shoot me."

Translation: My child is achieving academically as result of my parenting investments, but I'm acting like it's a hardship so you don't hate me for being AWESOME!

Humblebragging can also include the use of photographs as an additional means of managing others' impressions. As writer and mother Hazel Davis admits, "As soon as I'd posted the picture I regretted it. Of course I didn't regret the picture of my darling gorgeous beautiful daughter but the supposedly funny comment beneath it: 'My poor child, covered in dirt. Call social services.' Naturally I didn't mean I was a bad parent. Far from it, in fact I wanted everyone to look at the picture, admire my daughter and then admire how earthy and [outdoorsy](#) we all were." In this example, using her child as an indirect form of self-presentation allowed Davis to claim multiple (favorable) identities: a good mother who spends time with her child, "earthy and "outdoorsy," and, most importantly, humble about it all.

Children serve parents' impression management as props in humblebragging specifically because of their elevated social status as innocent, beautiful creatures whose care is the ultimate self-sacrifice, but also through their limited social status as lacking the full rights of adults and thereby conceding boundary regulation to their parents. According to Goffman, children are often seen as "non-persons," both incomplete and open, in that they can be approached and addressed in ways adults cannot (*Behavior* 104).

Offline, this could manifest itself as children being stared at in public or adults feeling free to chastise or direct the behavior of children not their own. On social media, parents disclose photos and stories about their children that would never be allowed if roles were reversed. I'm relieved to say my experience in social media has not involved my happening across a single account of an adult pooping in a tub. I wish I could say the same about children. These stories are so rampant that an entire section of *STFU, Parents* is devoted to parents' oversharenting about their children's "Bathroom Behavior."

While some may struggle to see what positive self-presentation



Gina and Melissa accomplish in disclosing about their children defecating in the bath ("I'm patient, self-sacrificing, tolerant, loving, etc."), what is hopefully apparent is that this sort of revelation about another adult would be considered unseemly. Gina's daughter and Melissa's son are treated as incomplete and open objects, lacking the position and resources to block or erase this information about themselves. To the argument that Gina and Melissa are their parents and have the right to share this information, I offer counterpoint in the form of an acronym: WYDTAAA. Would You Disclose That About An Adult? If Edith

Wyschgrod is correct that children, by the “mere” basis of their humanity, hold equal moral weight with adults, how can there be separate standards for ethical online disclosure for both? A parent’s right to serve as gatekeeper of information regarding their child does not supercede their responsibility to serve as stewards of that information.

Authenticity: Whose Truth is it?

I once asked a room of very smart people what the definition of authenticity was. The first response was “being honest, telling the truth.” While honesty may be a requisite part of authenticity, it’s not a complete synonym. This is where many of us, parents included, struggle with disclosure on social media. Is “truth” the only requirement for sharing information about ourselves or others online? For others, including children, who decides what constitutes truth and who has the right to tell it?

According to theologian and ethics scholar Dietmar Mieth, both the communication sphere and type of truth claimed must be weighed in answering these questions. The immediate sphere is for personal and discrete disclosure, the group sphere allows for disclosure relative to a specialized community, and the public sphere is where abstract matters may be engaged with potential anonymity (93-94). On social media, personal and discrete disclosure is occurring in group and public spheres, creating a potential scope of audience generally unintended by the author. Mieth also acknowledges that, in regards to “morally responsible interpretation” of truth, “time is another important factor and is mostly overlooked”—which is particularly relevant given the near-permanence of online information (94). What is true in a given moment, within a specific context, is likely not to be the truth of a child’s entire life.

Consider the potential weight of “whose truth is it” when parents are intentionally using social media disclosure to embarrass and shame their children. Take, for example, the mother who posted the following picture of her daughter on her Facebook page. The text on the sign states:



“My name is _____. I am a kind, caring, smart girl, but I make poor choices with social media. As a punishment, I am selling my iPod and will be donating the money to the charity Beat Bullying, in hopes of changing my behavior as well as bringing awareness to bullying. Because bullying is wrong (Weir).”

When this photo went viral, reactions were varied: some accusing the mother of cyberbullying her daughter to teach her a lesson about cyberbullying, while others claimed, “This makes me happy, because so often people only get caught after it’s far too late to help the victims. Brava, mom. Brava” (AngryCOMMguy). This is a modernized application of branding children with a scarlet letter that is nearly impossible to remove completely and can potentially be seen by one-third of the world population (Biggs).

While audience members of parents using social media can take what they’re viewing with a proverbial grain of salt, children on the receiving end of a public shaming are unlikely to do so. Returning to the principle of other-oriented authenticity and asking if this is something we would do to another adult, blogger Heidi Stone asks how parents would feel about pictures of them wearing a sign declaring their most shameful moments going viral on social media. Would they feel their authentic selves were being expressed if known primarily and forever as “that dad who gambled away his paychecks and made his family homeless” or “that mom who drove drunk with her kids in the car”?

Children deserve to grow into their authentic selves without the omnipresent digital baggage of their poorest choices posted by their parents on social media. For this to occur, parents must balance the use of their children as subject in their online self-presentation with their responsibility to serve as stewards of their children's digital footprint (Kumar and Schoenebeck). Achieving this balance is key to modeling authenticity for our children and respecting our children's individual right to authentic self-authorship.

Conclusion

Self-presentation on social media serves to construct and manage multiple dimensions of parental identity. This identity work can be done both directly and indirectly. Parents' posting about their children on social media is a form of indirect self-presentation, includes both altercasting and humblebragging, and can result in mixed responses from an audience. The scope and permanency of social media disclosure places parents in the position of privacy stewards for their child's digital footprint.

The first step in parenting with integrity online is developing awareness of how the information we as parents disclose about our children can be about our own facework. Once parents achieve this awareness, they can then make choices about future disclosure guided by the practice of self-reflective and other-oriented authenticity. Those choices lay the foundation for their child's digital footprint, providing them the opportunity to develop their own authentic voices.



Jenn Supple Bartels is Assistant Professor of Communication, Acting Communication Department Head, and Director of the COM 101/Speech Communication program at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, Iowa. She has also co-authored a public speaking text.

Notes

¹ This paper explores “parenting” with integrity; however, the majority of examples that follow are from mothers. The current research on social media usage by parents is overwhelmingly focused on mothers. As our socially constructed definitions of family and fatherhood continue to evolve, a closer look at fathers’ use of social media is also needed.

Works Cited

- Andrews, Martha C. and Michele K. Kacmar. "Impression Management by Association: Construction and Validation of a Scale." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 58.1 (2001): 142-161. Print.
- AngryCOMMguy. "Mom Catches Daughter Cyber-bullying." *Imgur*. Imgur, 5 Jan. 2014. Web. 1 Feb. 2014.
- Bazon, Emily. "No, I Will Not Follow Your Baby on Twitter." *Slate Magazine*. The Slate Group, 4 Sept. 2013. Web. 1 Nov. 2014.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity, 1993. Print.
- Biggs, Phillippa, ed. *The State of Broadband 2012: Achieving Digital Inclusion for All*. Rep.

Geneva: Broadband Commission for Digital Development, International Telecommunications Union, 2012. Print.

Brown, Jonathon D., Rebecca L. Collins, and Greg W Schmidt. "Self-Esteem and Direct Versus Indirect Forms of Self-Enhancement." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55 (1988):445-453. Print.

Bruckman, Amy. "Identity Workshop: Emergent Social and Psychological Phenomena in Text-Based Virtual Reality." *Amy Bruckman's Papers*. Unpublished article. April 1992. <www.academic.edu/2888/80/identity-workshop>.

Cialdini, Robert B., John F. Finch, and Maralou E. De Nicholas. "Strategic Self-Presentation: The Indirect Route." *The Psychology of Tactical Communication*. Ed. M.J. Cody and M.L. McLaughlin. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1990. 194-203. Print.

Collett, Jessica L. "What Kind of Mother Am I? Impression Management and the Social Construction of Motherhood." *Symbolic Interaction* 28.3 (2005): 327-347. Print.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner, 1902. Print.

Crant, J. Michael. "Doing More Harm than Good: When Is Impression Management Likely to Evoke a Negative Response?" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 26.16 (1996): 1454-1471. Print.

Davis, Hazel. "Are You a Humble-brag Parent?" *Parentdish*. AOL (UK) Limited, 2014. Web. 4 Apr. 2014.

"Digital Birth." *AVG Digital Diaries*. AVG Technologies, Oct. 2010. Web. 1 Feb. 2014.

"The Digital Lives of American Moms." *Nielsen Newswire*. The Nielsen Company, 11 May 2012. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

Erickson, Christine. "'STFU, Parents:' the Latest in Social Media Baby Poop." *Mashable*. Mashable, Inc., 29 Apr. 2013. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

Goffman, Erving. *Behavior in Public Places; Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York: Free of Glencoe, 1963. 104. Print.

---. *The Nature of Deference and Demeanor*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, College Division, 1967. Print.

---. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959. 3, 6. Print

Hecht, Michael L., Ronald L. Jackson, and Sidney A. Ribeau. *African American Communication: Exploring Identity and Culture*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2003. Print.

Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2004. 17. Print.

Koenig, Blair. "Birth Junkies and Sanctimamas Have Some Things to Say." *STFU, Parents*. STFUParentsBlog, 20 Sept. 2013. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

---. *STFU Parents: The Jaw-dropping, Self-indulgent, and Occasionally Rage-inducing World of Parent Overshare*. New York: Perigree, 2013. Print.

Kumar, Priya and Sarita Schoenebeck. *Forthcoming Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW '15): "The Modern Day Baby Book: Enacting Good Mothering and Stewarding Privacy on Facebook."* Mar. 2015, Westin Bayshore Hotel, Association for Computing Machinery: 18th ACM Conf. on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing. 14-18 Mar. 2015. Web.

Lawler, Ryan. "Unbaby.me? Yes, Please." *TechCrunch*. AOL Inc., 4 Aug. 2012. Web. 1 Oct. 2014.

Madden, Mary, Amanda Lenhart, Sandra Cortesi, Urs Gasser, Maeve Duggan, Aaron Smith, and Meredith Beaton. "Teens, Privacy, and Social Media." *Pew Research Internet Project*. Rep. Pew Research Center, 21 May 2013. Web. 1 Apr. 2014.

Mieth, Dietmar. "The Basic Norm of Truthfulness: Its Justification and Universality." *Communication Ethics and Universal Values*. Ed. Clifford G. Christians and Michael Traber. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997. 87-104. Print.

Perez, Sarah. "Unbaby.me? Unfriend.me Instead." *TechCrunch*. AOL Inc., 4 Aug. 2012. Web. 02 Feb. 2014.

Ringel Morris, Meredith. "Social Networking Site Use by Mothers of Young Children." *Microsoft Research*. CSCW'14, 15-19 Feb. 2014. Web. 1 Apr. 2014.

Schultheiss, Sally. "Humblebrag: Motherhood's Newest Pastime." *Mom.me*. Berman Brown, LLC, 2014. Web. 4 Apr. 2014.

Snow, David A. and Leon Anderson. "Identity Work among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities." *American Journal of Sociology* 92.6 (1987): 1336-1371. Print.

Stone, Heidi. "Destroying Your Child's Heart - One FB Picture at a Time." *Pebblechaser.wordpress.com*. Automattic Inc., 7 Jan. 2014. Web. 1 Feb. 2014.

Tardy, R. W. "'But I Am a Good Mom': The Social Construction of Motherhood through Health-Care Conversations." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 29.4 (2000): 433-473. Print.

Vannini, Phillip, and Alexis Franzese. "The Authenticity of Self: Conceptualization, Personal Experience, and Practice." *Sociology Compass* 2.5 (2008): 1621-1637. Web. 1 Dec. 2013.

Webb, Amy. "Why We Post Nothing-Nothing-About Our Kid Online. You Should Do the Same for Your Kids." *Slate Magazine*. The Slate Group, 4 Sept. 2013. Web. 1 Oct. 2013.

Weinstein, Eugene A. and Paul Deutschberger. "Some Dimensions of Altercasting." *Sociometry* 26 (1963): 454-466. Print.

Weir, Sarah B. "Mom Cybershames Daughter for Online Bullying. Who's the Bully Now?" *Yahoo! SHINE*. Yahoo Lifestyles Network, 6 Jan. 2014. Web. 1 Feb. 2014.

Wittels, Harris. *Humblebrag: The Art of False Modesty*. New York: Grand Central Pub., 2012. Print.

Wood, Julia T. *Who Cares?: Women, Care, and Culture*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1994. Print.

"World Internet Users Statistics Usage and World Population Stats." *World Internet Users Statistics Usage and World Population Stats*. MiniWatts Marketing Group, 18 Feb. 2014. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

Wyschogrod, Edith. *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990. xxi. Print.

Ethics and Social Media: Responses to Panetta, Schlimm, and Supple Bartels

John Stewart

Sometimes academic research contributes to the understanding that a few specialists have of gene manipulation, ancient history, or theories about the beginning of the universe. Other times, scholars focus their well-developed knowledge and analytic skills on topics that almost everybody can relate to; and the three essays in this journal are an example of this kind of work. Gary Panetta, Matthew Schlimm, and Jenn Supple Bartels look carefully and closely at social media— blogs, fantasy football, Twitter, and especially Facebook—so those of us who read their work can better understand some of what we’re doing online almost every day.

Most people are aware that social media consumes much of the interest, time, and energy of literally billions of humans world-wide. But, partly because these activities are so common, many of us miss their significance. These three authors demonstrate that important human work is done using social media: Public policy is shaped; religious beliefs are asserted and challenged; friendships

are established, developed, and destroyed; personal and role identities are negotiated; and most importantly, character is shaped—sometimes for better, and sometimes for worse.

Social Media and Citizenship

Gary Panetta uses the ethical construct of stewardship to examine two social media events: the Facebook publication of a satirical cartoon spoofing Islam, and the use of blog technology to create the Ushahidi map—a visualization of government corruption and human rights abuses.

One strength of Panetta’s discussion is that he makes it virtually impossible to think of “stewardship” as an abstract, academic label for who-knows-what. Panetta shows that stewardship is a common, even everyday, part of each of our lives. Any time we are managing or taking care of something that has been entrusted to us, whether it’s a pet fish, a house, or a car, we are practicing stewardship. *And* Panetta effectively shows how Reformed Christianity teaches us that creation itself is held in trust by human beings, which makes stewardship both an everyday concern and a profound, life-defining challenge for every human being. He also uses the ecological construct of “the upstream-downstream problem” to underscore how social and digital webs make our stewardship actions consequential for not only those close to us, but potentially, to everyone with access to the internet.

Panetta does not try to lay out a list of rules for ethical use of social media, because he knows there are too many variables and differences to enable any one set of standards to apply universally. Instead, he makes a case for “a basic orientation, a way of asking questions in any given context that can help up make good choices about our use of social media—or, at least, avoid disastrous ones.” Why do we need this basic ethical

orientation? Because although we might think that our puny contributions to social media sites are only fly-swatters, the widespread impact of these media means that “each of us has been given a sledge hammer.”

He uses the *Charlie Hebdo* case to show how stewardship helps us reflect on the importance of responsibility and relationships. Every time we contribute to social media—*every time*—we’re potentially affecting a world-wide web, and stewardship demands that we stay aware of this level of influence. Social media acts may be local, but they can and often do have global impact. In Panetta’s words, “Stewardship requires recognizing that our individual acts—especially when amplified by technology—can have far-flung consequences.” He argues that we need to be guided by a general ethical orientation like the one offered by Howard Gardner. It should include a series of questions about one’s own identity, rights, obligations, and responsibilities: what I owe others, what harms and goods I might be contributing to, and what kind of common world I am helping construct.

The Ushahidi map case study reinforces these conclusions. The woman who helped create it, Ory Okolloh, demonstrates concretely what it means to have an ethical orientation. She thought beyond herself—in global terms, rather than just exercising freedom for freedom’s sake. Panetta emphasizes how she learned to “count the consequences . . . see through the eyes of others . . . pay attention . . . in short, to practice good stewardship of the world.”

When Panetta writes about stewardship as an opportunity to apply the Golden Rule, he enters a conversation among people who affirm this standard, and others who urge consideration of what they call “the Platinum Rule.” Panetta writes that stewardship “involves taking care of this thing that has been

entrusted to us as if we ourselves were the owners,” which is an admirable standard. *And* in the global world Panetta addresses, it can be important to understand that this standard can often be helpfully enhanced by thinking not about what I would do as owner, but what the *other* person might prefer. This is the key feature of what some call “The Platinum Rule.” Panetta’s essay implies that Ory Okolloh and her helpers were thinking this way when they created the Ushahidi map, and this kind of thinking escapes the ethnocentrism that thinking only from my perspective can engender.

Panetta’s essay also prompts me to think about how power figures into the topics he addresses. The sheer number of people on Facebook today makes this topic important. One needs only consider the advice in Genesis to “be fruitful and multiply. . .and subdue the earth” to recognize that one challenge of what Panetta calls “holding creation in trust” is to balance the enormous power humans are given with equally strong humility and awareness of the needs of others. Locally, changing a Facebook profile picture and sharing multiple posts about drinking events can affect an entire friendship network’s perceptions of a person’s character; and globally, when a political organization posts a video of a violent execution, the impact is felt in capitals on every continent. Social media postings potentially have this kind of power.

Overall, Panetta’s essay demonstrates how stewardship is a quality of excellent moral character, and how the connection between stewardship and moral character can enhance his readers’ understanding of their uses of social media.

Fantasy Football and Friendship

Matthew Schlimm maintains Panetta’s ethical focus but shifts it to a very different use of social media: fantasy football. In an

unusually courageous move, Schlimm puts his identity as a scholar at risk to analyze an activity that almost nobody would believe, at first glance, warrants serious reflection. Fantasy football is just seasonal, digital fun, right? What could be serious about this pastime?

Not only does Schlimm answer this question, he engages Aristotle in the process. He shows how Aristotle's understanding of three kinds of friendship can be used to display what is often actually happening when friends or media acquaintances play fantasy football together.

One contribution of Schlimm's essay is his inventory of the dangers of activities like fantasy football. I suspect that few of those who are fielding teams have considered how the activity might lead them to fall into greed, pride, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth. Schlimm argues that even playful activities can have serious consequences.

However, the bulk of Schlimm's essay connects fantasy football to elements of friendship and to the biblical extensions of Aristotle's three-part depiction. He discusses the equality humans have in God's eyes as one example. He also balances his analysis by noting how "fantasy football has the potential to bring out the worst in people. . . ." He offers vivid examples that demonstrate how his own league successfully resisted this temptation by emphasizing playfulness rather than "stiff-necked competition and degrading trash-talk."

Clarifying what Aristotle means by "useful friendships," Schlimm notes that fantasy football "does relatively little to enhance" such friendships. His references to Nicholas Carr's book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* reinforces this point.

Schlimm's treatment of Aristotle's third category of friendship argues that fantasy football may be a starting point for the development of a virtuous bond. As he summarizes, "fantasy football can provide fertile ground for growing these deeper relationships."

In the end, Schlimm accomplishes his goal of showing that "Fantasy can play a valuable role in the moral life," and fantasy football can be one practice that does this. He clearly shows that there's more to fantasy football than meets the eye; and through this, he encourages its participants to be more reflective about this part of their engagement with social media.

Parents' Growing Pains

Jenn Supple Bartels obviously has both a keen eye for what's going on behind the scenes of many parents' Facebook postings about their children and the courage to turn her sharp analytic skills on her own practices. She focuses on the identity work that is done in these postings, asking such questions as, "What does it mean to parent with integrity in an . . . online environment?" and "Where is the ethical line in creating a digital footprint for others?"

Supple Bartels' main analytic constructs are "authenticity" in relation to "the other"—that is, how parents' Facebook postings about their children often serve to shape a flattering image of them as parents, sometimes at the expense of their children. ". . . disclosing about one's children on social media," she notes, "is sometimes more about the parent than the child." Her examples show how many postings that seem to be simple reports about children are actually doing what Robert B. Cialdini, John F. Finch, and Maralou E. De Nicholas call "facework" for the parents. Other critics have pointed out, online and in print, the frequency and inappropriateness of what one author calls "The Jaw-Droppingly,

Self-Indulgent, and Occasionally Rage-Inducing World of Parent Overshare.”

These postings manipulate children, Supple Bartels notes, at a time in their lives when they can't make their own decisions about how personally public they want to be. This is an abuse of parental power. It doesn't help that these kinds of posts often occur when parents are especially in need of shoring up their own self-confidence. Bartels offers an example of her own Facebook activity when she was a newly-divorced mother to support this point.

Her analysis of “humblebragging” is also astute. She keenly illustrates how posts like, “I'm such a boring mom. All we do is stay around the house and craft” are thinly-disguised efforts to polish mom's image while appearing to be self-critical. The ethical problem here is that children are serving parents' impression management goals “as props,” not as people.

Like Panetta and Schlimm, Supple Bartels emphasizes that social media creates ethical challenges partly by conflating the personal and the public. Posts are often personal, even intimate, and yet they are made available to billions. When a post publicizes a child's unfortunate and uncommon mistake, it produces a permanent record of an incident that, in a more reflective and humane world, would have been kept private.

I thoroughly appreciate Supple Bartels' engaging and insightful analysis of social media use. She effectively helps Facebooking parents take “the first step in parenting with integrity online, [which] is awareness. . . .” The next step might be to locate some online examples of the ways parents can post about their children with both authenticity and care for others. Reflection on these examples might even lead to some guidelines for parental posting

with integrity. Most parents, especially new ones, would welcome suggestions about how to share the joys and even the memorable frustrations in ways that honor their children’s personhood while supporting, encouraging, and giving joy to other parents. Like Panetta and Schlimm, Supple Bartels has performed a real service by helping readers understand that it’s *not* “just Facebook/Twitter/Snapchat/blogging.”

Conclusion

What we post online matters. It makes a difference. It can enhance or damage the character-development of our own lives and the lives of the people we post about. For something as powerful and far-reaching as social media, ethical use is reflective use. We should remember that millions, even billions may read what we write. We should consider the possible effects of our comments on all the “Others” it implicates. We should adopt an ethical orientation that emphasizes stewardship, caring, authenticity, and integrity. We should think before we post.

John Stewart, a communications scholar and author of several books, is the former Vice President of Academic Affairs at the University of Dubuque. He currently serves as Special Assistant to the President at the University.

Works Cited

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. H. Rackham. Rev. ed. Loeb Classical Library 73. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003. Print.

- Cialdini, Robert B., John F. Finch, and Maralou E. De Nicholas. "Strategic Self-Presentation: The Indirect Route." *The Psychology of Tactical Communication*. Ed. M.J. Cody and M.L. McLaughlin. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1990. 194-203. Print.
- Koenig, Blair. "Birth Junkies and Sanctimamas Have Some Things to Say." *STFU, Parents*. STFUParentsBlog, 20 Sept. 2013. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.
- Wittels, Harris. *Humblebrag: The Art of False Modesty*. New York: Grand Central Pub., 2012. Print.