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Virtual Identities

When it comes to what constitutes as our identity we often think about materialistic objects. This ranges from the clothes we wear, the type of car we drive, our career, and even the neighborhood we live in. In Robert Atwan's *Convergences*, the reader saw a multitude of ways people construct their identity. John Freyer demonstrated how the simple necessities such as jackets and toasters made up his identity due to the emotional attachment he had with each item from its past use. Brillat-Savarin even made the bold statement, "tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are (Atwan 109). I love this statement; however, I don't feel like it suits your essay. Your essay has a lot of do with facebook, therefore I just don't think this statement is needed. However, what about our virtual identity? Is that something that is real or make believe? The 21st century saw the rise of many social networking sites such as MySpace which came out in 2003 only to be surpassed by Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook. Facebook still reigns supreme today and within the last quarter it was made up of 1.19 billion users (thenextweb.com). That is 1/7 of the world's population and Facebook is still reaching out to more people. That means there are 1.19 billion virtual identities out there, but are these identities real? I believe these statements should be in the body of your essay. This essay will analyze how individuals go about creating their virtual identity and what factors lead to the construction of a real or false

identity on social networking sites. Furthermore it will discuss the current trend of virtual identity suicide. *I love your thesis, it is very strong.*

In Robert Atwan's *Convergences*, he opens up the first chapter by introducing the reader to the complexity of forming an identity. Perhaps the most famous case of this is selecting a yearbook photo that will grace the pages for years to come. Atwan poses the question, "do you select the one that makes you look most attractive, even if it's not a good likeness" (62)? In fact this is one of the first steps in creating a virtual identity on Facebook. The profile picture is very similar to this yearbook selection. Many choose to select a picture just based on how hot they look or if it depicts them in a youthful manner. The user may snap a photo of themselves after applying pounds of makeup or after working out to show off the pump. *However, is this really their true identity, or something merely artificially constructed to show the world at your best? I don't think you should end this paragraph with a question (I need to take my own advise on this).*

There are studies that suggest social networking is just a tool to give people the ability to portray their ideal self. *However, what types of people are willing to go to these extremes? Maybe instead of asking a question, you could say.. People are willing to go to the extremes on social media to become someone they want to be, rather than who they are.* According to the Department of Psychology at California State University, "individuals with a less coherent sense of the self and lower self-esteem reported presenting their false self on Facebook to a greater extent" (Michikyna). This means a certain percentage of those one billion users are creating a false identity for themselves, an identity that the world will judge. The ideal self or identity that these individuals wish to create often composes of their dreams, wishes, and aspirations. For example, an individual may post a career they have not obtained yet, or even create a false social life by adding unknown friends.

Research from California State university also suggest Social networking sites such as Facebook give users the ability to experiment with a multitude of different personalities. If someone for instance is still unsure about their identity in the real world, they may test multiple identities online. Basically the individual will want to see which one works and gathers more praise from their community or society. All of this is again connected to the individuals self esteem. Individuals with depressive symptoms tend to be more, “strategic in their self-presentations (Michikyna). This is usually due to pressure from within to conform or fit in which can only be achieved in their mind through careful construction of the self online. On the other hand those with higher self esteem tend to portray a more realistic portrayal of themselves (Michikyna). This would make sense because there isn’t a large gap between their actual lives in reality from their social networking profiles. If they had an actual social life all their peers would know that what was on their profile site was false.

Besides the California State College Studies, other studies suggest that identities on social networking sites like Facebook do reflect the actual identity of the user. The Department of Psychology at Johannes Gutenberg-University in Germany suggests that true identities are exposed on Facebook. For example the study suggests that, “that OSNs may constitute an extended social context in which to express one’s actual personality characteristics, thus fostering accurate interpersonal perceptions (Back and Stopfer). In other words if you are a shy person out in society, Facebook may give you that desperate need for social interaction. It prevents the individual from actually having to have a face to face conversation with someone. Therefore, they may feel more at ease and in a comfortable position to express their true self.

The studies from Gutenberg also claim that it would be difficult to create an idealized identity on Facebook. For example, the article makes the point that, “OSN profiles include

information about one's reputation that is difficult to control (e.g., wall posts) and friends provide accountability and subtle feedback on one's profile" (Back and Stopfer). Facebook after all is a place to connect with friends and if this person doesn't have an accurate portrayal of their true self they will be exposed.

The next area of importance pertaining to virtual identity is losing it all together.

Facebook after all has over a billion users, so what would lead someone to commit this "virtual identity suicide"? This is a good question, but I wouldn't put this question in your essay. The main concern is over privacy and a virtual identity is at the hands of a major corporation that has access to all your information. Austrian psychologists at the University of Vienna found that nearly half of the old Facebook users in their study deleted their virtual identities due to privacy concerns (Ellyatt). These concerns stem from the constant fear of the power of the NSA and Wikileaks (Ellyatt). This study suggests that some people are obviously not depicting their virtual identity in a false light if they are willing to delete their account due to privacy concerns.

Virtual Identities are being created on a constant basis in our 21st century society. Facebook alone has more than a billion users and will likely to grow even if a small percentage creates virtual suicide. The question is raised again on whether virtual identities are indeed realistic portrayals of ourselves. I have shown evidence from both sides that show it is ultimately still a conflicted issue. Is social networking truly a vehicle for us to show our idealized selves? Perhaps it really is just another communication tool with our real identities displayed in order to meet new people and interact with old friends. Only the future will tell if Social networking is indeed the best way to reveal our identities to the world. Regardless, there will still be people out there who use it as a way to depict their identity whether it is part of reality or not.

- I think your analytical introduction is really good, but it is too long. You may want to consider shortening it down a little. You also have a few grammar mistakes. You need a strong finishing statement in your analytical introduction. Over all, the analytical introduction is good. I really enjoyed reading your essay. It is very informative. Everything that I suggest for you is highlighted in yellow. One of the things I believe you should work on is all the questions. You have a lot of questions in your essay. All the questions are really good, but all of them aren't needed. Overall, your paper is really good and I think you got all your points across.