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Facebook Stalking 101

It's a perilous line to walk, some kind of tightrope spanning the Mariana Trench (only not underwater but something comparably deep), the one that separates the resourceful sport of Facebook stalking and the restraining-order-warranting obsession of actual stalking. It is not surprising, therefore, that Facebook stalking is generally taboo. Still, I have no reservations in admitting I am a bona fide Facebook stalker.

Before entering the perilous cyber-world of stalking, it is crucial to understand the social decorum within this territory. Typically, Facebook stalking is an acceptable term when used in jest. However, one must be sensitive to each stalkee and conscious of revealing how much one has actually acquired through Facebook. The unsaid rules goes as this: any information that could not have been acquired from anywhere other than the Book of Faces ought not be referred to; information that has not recently been posted on the Book of Faces ought not be mentioned as having been learned from the site. It is crucial to remember that Facebook also remains unsaid when you and the stalkee have not been properly introduced.

The beauty of Facebook stalking is that a vast world of information is accessible to anyone upon learning the basic skill set. The trick is to remember everything you read so as to make connections. For example, if Subject A was once in a relationship with Subject B but then both are listed as single, when Subject A instantly becomes in a relationship with Subject C one can conclude A broke up with B for C. Even juicier conclusions can be reached as information accumulates and the stalker learns to be more observant.

The experienced stalker knows to check mutual friends for information about a person whose profile you are not able to access. The experienced stalker knows to exhaust group searches before giving up on finding a person they met briefly. The experienced stalker knows to follow wall posts in order to create a dialogue for the story you are developing.

Why is it that everyone seems to do it? Very few have yet to succumb to the temptations of Facebook stalking as it seems no one can resist omniscience on, admittedly, the most superficial level. Are we paranoid? Do we thirst for gossip? For myself I can unabashedly admit to Facebook stalking on a regular basis purely out of curiosity, a need to understand the back story of the people around me. I cannot be content simply with current experiences; I need that supplementary prequel.

It is undeniably strange that people have such an investment in someone they hardly or do not at all know. Quick to make friends with whom Facebook allows them to share personal data, the cyber community has created a new form of intimacy, an empty gesture of friendship. There are the types, addicted to Facebook and its extensive network, who friend everyone they can; their popularity driven by caprice of hundreds of people who nonchalantly decide whether or not to click "Accept" or "Ignore."

When did we become a society that will tell a perfect stranger what we cannot share with our closest companions? And when did we quantitatively evaluate our social value through the number of people who accepted our meaningless offers of friendship? When did we make a hobby of learning about people we'll never actually know because our only connections are the weak wifi signals transmitted to our laptops?

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