

Hunches about hunch.com

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On my neglected Facebook page sits an even more neglected "Like" button. Although I read what others post and occasionally add a comment, I grumpily avoid this particular feature. Technology based on personal preferences—a rapidly expanding group that includes Hunch, Pandora, various Google products and others—is a source of anxiety for me. I am ambivalent about the purpose and meaning of "liking" something.

My first problem is a moral one. Even if [Hunch](#) can sift through a world of choices and direct me toward things I like, do I want it to? Perhaps I would be better off directed toward things I *don't* like—perhaps my "taste profile" needs transformation, not confirmation. Don't our desires sometimes need to be corrected by standards that stand outside of us? As Kant wrote, "Morality is not the doctrine of how we may make ourselves happy, but how we may make ourselves worthy of happiness." Hunch is clearly not built on this model and may even stand against it.

Secondly, I am not sure it is to my benefit or the benefit of others to make it easier for advertisers to reach me. Even if this technology can properly identify my likes, what good is that if it just leads to more consumption on my part? Consumerism for consumerism's sake is something I decidedly don't like.

But underlying these moral considerations is an anxiety about the kind of self that is addressed by this technology. This post-postmodern self is made coherent by what it likes, and what thus can be marketed to it. Hunch collects a great deal of information about a person and then directs that information toward a coherent theory of the self. If I like this, I will like something like it still more. People become types, however complicated.

But isn't what I like under constant revision? Just how consistent a self do I have? And should a website be creating coherence for me when I don't have it for myself?

All this inner wrangling didn't stop me, after hearing an [interview](#) with Hunch's founder, from thinking about joining up. I was curious how accurate Hunch's hunches would be.

But at the site, I encountered more difficulties. The first thing Hunch asked me to do was to log in via Facebook Connect-and then allow my personal information to be transferred over from Facebook. This would include-and thankfully it was clear about this-my friends' information. Should I give Hunch permission to do this? Maybe it is harmless; it's just a database. Maybe my hesitation is quaint-Facebook has had [privacy problems](#) of its own. "You are paranoid, a Luddite," an inner voice chided. But I did not press "allow."

I worry that if Hunch has all of this information about my friends, it will think that I am like them. I have a Facebook friend who recently asked me to join "I Love America and You Should Too." Others post the latest prophecy reports. One recently asked, "Which porn star is Amy Frykholm most like?" and for a terrifying few hours before I saw it, that question remained on my wall.

The thought that I am like my Facebook friends frightens me.

What would Hunch make of it? Would it conclude that I like porn videos or anti-immigration legislation? Would it recommend that I watch Jack van Impe?

What if I hate the self that appears once I have answered Hunch's questions and given it access to everything anyone ever said to me on Facebook? Will I be tempted to add more information until my Hunch profile reflects the person I think I am?

The only way to find out is to allow Hunch to do its work.
But for now, I won't.