

THESIS

PUT YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD:
ADOLESCENT USE OF FACEBOOK AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
HYPERREALITY

Submitted by

Elizabeth A. Taddonio

Communication Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2010

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

May 7, 2010

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ELIZABETH TADDONIO ENTITLED PUT YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD: ADOLESCENT USE OF FACEBOOK AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HYPERREALITY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

Jonathan Lupo

Jeffrey Snodgrass

Advisor: David Scott Diffrient

Department Chair: Sue Pendell

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

PUT YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD: ADOLESCENT USE OF FACEBOOK AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HYPERMEALITY

This thesis seeks to understand how adolescents, aged 13-15, use the online social network (OSN) of Facebook to perform identity. Over the course of three chapters, the researcher uses the frameworks of social semiotics, narrative studies, and performance studies to analyze the site's design, features, and users, respectively. This analysis is meant to clarify whether Facebook as a medium rearranges and changes the activities of a generalized adolescent population in U.S. America, or if the medium simply reinforces pre-existing social practices. To answer this question, the study focuses heavily on the use of a new term, "hypermeality," in order to explain the communal narrativization of the social self online.

The study concludes by stating that Facebook creates a hyperreal environment for both negative and positive outcomes of networking. These negatives include cyberbullying, self-centrism and problematic Internet use, while the positives include online community building and cosmopolitanism that might extend to offline behaviors and awareness.

It is the goal of this thesis to add to the conversation on new media technologies, contributing to a better understanding of how the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks can be applied to the study of OSNs—their role and function in the lives of adolescent computer users. This knowledge should foster the development of safe OSNs, intergenerational computer-mediated communication, and the de-stigmatization of new media cultures.

Elizabeth A. Taddonio
Communication Studies
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Summer 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Giorgia Aiello	Jeremy Grossman	RMNP
Avocados	Guacamole	Manuel Rodriguez
Baby carrots	Werner Herzog	Escobar
Baby Melvin	HoHighto	Safeway
Brooklyn, NY	Greg Hummel/ W Hollywood	Savannah
Daniel Bailey ¹	Hydrocortisone cream	Michael Scott
Ingmar Bergman	Ithacats	Seinfeld
Bloody marys	J Crew cardigans	Sharp white cheddar cheese
Jerrod Bohn	Kyle Jonas	Jeff Snodgrass ³
The Bolder Boulder	Garrison Keillor	STELLA
Bro Mikey	Kimmer!	SPCM 200
Brudder AJ	Lady Gaga	Taco dip
Mallorie Bruns	Lemons	Julie Taylor
Neko Case	Pierre Lévy	Taxslayer
Mark Clements	Lucile's breakfasts	Sean Thornton
Jodi Cohen	Jeremy's plants	Tilapia
CHI hair conditioner	Jon Lupo ³	Tumblr
Roseanne Connor	Rob Mack	Twitter
David Dahl Hansson	The MAG at the U of R	Bridget Tortora
John Denver	Netflix	Tom & Sue Tortora
Denver, Colorado	Joanna Newsom	Vodka soaked olives
Scott Diffrient ²	Frank O'Hara	Aly Wallberg
Elliot's martini bar	One-a-Day vitamins	Whole Foods fizzy water
Brianna Freed	Adam Panopoulos	The Wild Boar
Garlic Presses	Papa John	Yeast (for pizza crusts)
Gin martinis	Cecil Reeder	Mark Zuckerberg
Ira Glass	Cicero Griffin Reeder	
Cindy Griffin	Mal Reeder ⁴	

¹ With the completion of this thesis you are hereby bestowed with an honorary degree in dealing with Elizabeth's bullshit. "I am the least difficult of [wo]men. All I want is boundless love." Thanks for giving it to me. You da best.

² I couldn't have done this without you. (Literally. I needed your signature on the defense forms). But you also constantly encouraged "me" to be apparent through my writing, coached my voice, gave me faith in the academy, and made me believe that I possess some kind of talent. You're just about the tops, Skittles, and you're going places. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

³ It should have been illegal to work with such genuinely great people. Jon, aside from your obviously bright insights with this thesis, thanks for the Oscar party, the Sigur Ros and the witty banter. Jeff, this project would not be what it is without you telling me I could (and should) do it. Thank you.

⁴ I would not be here without you. It just wouldn't have worked out, because no one else thinks I'm funny. Obviously this is insufficient space for the love letter you deserve, as we packed a lot into these two years (like concentrated orange juice, grrrl). Unquestionably, everything has been worth it because I get to have you around for the rest of my life. You are the best thing that happened to me out here. The best. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction: Virtual Face, Virtual Place	1
Chapter 2	Little Boxes on a Web Site: A Social Semiotic Analysis of Facebook Design	22
Chapter 3	A Never Ending Story: The Creation of a Hyperreality Through Narrative, Interactivity, and Hyperlinks	39
Chapter 4	Performance by the (Facebook) Dashboard Light: Online Impression Management and Situational Identity	60
Chapter 5	Conclusion, or: Will we Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Facebook?	82
	References	92
	Appendix A: Recruitment Letter	100
	Appendix B: Letter of Consent	101
	Appendix C: Forum Questions	104

Chapter One

Introduction: Virtual Face, Virtual Place

On September 17, 2009, a man was arrested after he logged into his Facebook account during a burglary and forgot to log out after leaving the house (Dybwad, 2009). When a burglar cannot go without checking his Facebook in the time it takes to rob a house, a social phenomenon has taken hold.

The pervasiveness of Facebook extends beyond larcenists. Mashable.com recently published Nielsen Online ratings of time spent per person at popular Web sites. The results were startling, “. . . Users spent an average of 5 hours, 46 minutes on Facebook in the month of August [2009]. To put that in perspective, that’s **triple the amount of time they spent on Google** [emphasis in original]” (Ostrow, 2009). In addition, as I began this research in April of 2009, the Facebook pressroom statistics Web site stated that more than 200 million active users spend a total of more than 3.5 billion minutes on Facebook each day worldwide (Facebook, 2009). Vogelstein (2009) writes that those 200 million active users equate to “about one-fifth of all Internet users,” and Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg attests in a videoblog posted to his Facebook fan site, “This population would be the fifth largest country in the world” (Zuckerberg, 2009).

Zuckerberg and co-founders Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Eduardo Saverin launched the site in 2004 as “The Facebook.” What began as an interactive tool to link college students together on the cohorts’ home campus of Harvard University

soon extended beyond the Ivy League to other colleges. By December 2004 membership reached one million, and as of April 2010, 400 million people have an account registered to Facebook — making it the most popular social networking site to date. As if user numbers weren't enough evidence of Facebook's prevalence in society, a 2007 press release stated that Microsoft took a "\$240 million equity stake in Facebook's next round of financing at a \$15 billion valuation" (Facebook, 2007).

Adolescents on Facebook

Though Facebook was originally begun as a college-based online social network (OSN), it opened its doors to high school students in September of 2005. As a result, Facebook needed to take a stance on exactly what demographic the site was open to. The policy as of November 26, 2008, reads:

Facebook does not knowingly collect or solicit personal information from anyone under the age of 13 or knowingly allow such persons to register. If you are under 13, please do not attempt to register for Facebook or send any information about yourself to us, including your name, address, telephone number, or email address. No one under age 13 may provide any personal information to or on Facebook. In the event that we learn that we have collected personal information from a child under age 13 without verification of parental consent, we will delete that information as quickly as possible. If you believe that we might have any information from or about a child under 13, please contact us through the form on our privacy help page. (Facebook, 2008)

Regulations like this provide evidence of the surprisingly high demand for OSNs by children and adolescents. According to an article published by the *Guardian UK* in 2008, an Ofcom (a UK media watchdog and regulatory group) study found, "among children with internet access, more than a quarter of eight to 11-year-olds claimed to have a profile page on a social networking website" (Johnson, 2008). Though these findings chronicle media use in the UK, it can be logically speculated that they transfer across the Atlantic to the United States, Facebook's home country. A much-cited research report

published by the Kaiser Family Research foundation in 2005 states that, on a typical day, 47% of 8-to-18-year-olds go online, and 28% of those go online for more than one hour (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005, p. 8). As a whole, “Teenagers comprise one of the fastest-growing segments of the online population. 87 percent of American teens use the Internet, compared to only 66 percent of adults,” (Stern & Willis, 2007, p. 212). Statistics like these show that the teen population of Facebook is likely both substantial and poised to grow.

For the tail-end of Generation M, defined by the Kaiser Foundation as those born between 1987 and 1997 (Rideout et al., 2005), Facebook provides a new way of viewing the world. That is, this Web site provides a new lens for social interaction and friendships. Generation M spends, “an average of just over one hour each day using a computer, including about :48 [forty-eight minutes] online” (Rideout et al., 2005, p. 30). They will grow up always knowing what a Facebook account is, “the first to grow up in a world saturated with networks of information, digital devices and the promise of perpetual connectivity” (Montgomery, 2002, p. 189). To aid in this “perpetual connectivity,” “Facebook” is now a pervasive verb, and the site that was formerly a mirror of “actuality” is now an outlet for virtuality—requiring active user participation. An OSN is now not only (re)enforcing accepted social norms, it is also dictating them. “Friends” are constantly available, and our online identities are ever exposed to judgment, change and interpretation. Does Facebook, with its constant availability, openness, and platform of free expression, offer adolescents a new venue for more satisfying identity performance, despite perpetual connectivity and openness for critique?

Research question

The way researchers frame new media technologies has been based largely on the models put forth by Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams. In *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, and Kelly (2003) write:

McLuhan holds that new technologies radically change the physical and mental functions of a generalized ‘mankind’. Williams argues that new technologies take forward existing practices that particular social groups already see as important or necessary. . . . Williams’ argument for the development of new technologies is sociological. It arises from the development and reconfiguration of a culture’s existing technological resources in order to pursue socially conceived ends. (p. 81)

This thesis will focus on which, if either, theory of mediated communication adolescent is exemplified by Facebook. Does Facebook as a medium rearrange and change the activities of a generalized adolescent population in U.S. America, or does the individual’s Facebook use involve a mimesis of the lived actual reality by reinforcing existing practices? In this study, I will explore three key aspects of the Facebook interface and their relationship to identity expression in adolescents (age 13-15). The study will offer insight into the ways in which the social semiotics of Facebook’s interfaces, its interactive platform, and its invitation to perform identity is both continuous with and divergent from pre-existing views of adolescent identity formation.

Literature Review

The Virtual and the Hyperreal

“Welcome to humanity’s new home. Welcome to the virtual. . . .”

- Pierre Lévy, *Becoming virtual: Reality in the digital age*, p. 187.

The notion of that the Internet serves as a utopic space for ongoing identity performance of self is not an entirely innovative one—I’m hardly the first researcher to understand and point out the idea that OSN technology allows the existing social practice

of identity performance to take place in a different manner. In order to further understand the implications of new media on existing behaviors, it is necessary to establish a theoretical grounding for the research. This thesis will be rooted in a definition of virtuality informed by the works of Lévy (1998, 2001), Baudrillard (2007, 2008, 1994/2006), Ryan (2001, 2006) and Landow (2000). Lévy (1998) argues that, “Strictly speaking, the virtual should not be compared with the real but the actual, for *virtuality and actuality are merely two different ways of being*” (p. 23) [emphasis added]. Though this distinction is important, I do not think the actual and the virtual are necessarily mutually exclusive ways of being. Instead, I combine Lévy’s notion of actual/virtual with Giddings’ (2007) findings from a cybertextual analysis of the video game *Lego Racers 2*. Giddings concluded:

The established distinctions between the virtual and the actual across the diverse conceptual frameworks of new media studies are inadequate. . . . The virtual and the actual were each contained within the other, intertwining, each inflected by the other. (p. 46)

This work will focus on how use of social networking among adolescents can be continuous with established norms of relational identity formation, even as those norms are perhaps paradoxically subject to transformation and ongoing negotiation via virtualizing sites like Facebook. In order to do this, the research will be deeply wedded to the intertwining of actual and virtual.

Lévy (1998) asserts that a virtual body is one that is split into possibilities. He writes, “. . . The body escapes itself, acquires new velocities, conquers new spaces. It overflows itself and changes technological exteriority or biological alterity into concrete subjectivity. By virtualizing itself, the body is multiplied” (Lévy, 1998, p. 43). In my research, Lévy’s idea of multiplicity of the virtual self is combined with the idea of

virtuality that Ryan (2001) promotes throughout her research. Ryan's definition of the virtual is "derived from Aristotle's distinction between potential and actual existence (*in potentia* vs. *in actu*)" (p. 26). When used in conjunction with one another, these two definitions lead to a virtual self that is both split and fluid—a self that can be manipulated and performed to reach its full potential and supercede the actual. Such performative possibilities lead me to coin a new term, "hyperhypermeality," or the reality of the self created through communal narrativization on OSNs.¹ According to Baudrillard (2008) we are "building ourselves a perfect virtual world so as to be able to opt out of the real one" (p. 37). In a virtual hypermeality, one can opt out of "reality" by performing the perfect subjective self.

Another facet of the "virtual" as explored by this thesis is its definition in terms of time and space. Landow (2000) writes:

Digital text is virtual because we always encounter a virtual image, the simulacrum, of something stored in memory rather than any so-called text 'itself' or a physical instantiation of it. Digital text is fluid because, taking the form of codes, it can always be reconfigured, reformatted, rewritten. (p. 166)

Landow's use of the term "simulacrum" is based on Baudrillard's (1994/2006) definition of simulacra and Ryan's (2006) elaboration on this definition. Baudrillard (1994/2006) describes the process of simulation as "substituting the signs of the real for the real" (p. 54). As a result of this substitution, reality becomes hyperreal. According to Ryan (2006),

¹ The word "hypermeality" is not entirely my own, as a Google search revealed the term "meality" defined by Urban Dictionary (2010) as, "The reality or point of view displayed by an extremely selfish/self absorbed person, as if other people are not real but merely extras in the movie of said person's life." My definition does not follow this connotation, but instead should be read as a modification of reality, virtuality and hyperreality. The use of "me" should not be read as an emphasis on the self bordering on narcissism, but instead as an emphasis on two "me's": The reader and the profile holder. The obvious "me," who writes the profile, narrates the self on the screen. However, because that narrative involves his/her audience as an active participant (see chapter three), the "me" can also extend to that audience of readers turned writers.

hyperreality is “a copy that kills the desire for the original because it is better shaped, more coherent, more predictable, and therefore more intelligible” (p. 72). Facebook uses several media to represent the author of the profile, and to aid in the performance of an avatar or online self. As Lévy (1998) attests, “The text will have served as an interface to ourselves” (p. 49). When applied directly to online hypertext and computer interfaces, the reading of an individual’s virtual, hyperreal-hypertextual Facebook profile becomes the interface to the self. This interface, when placed under a social semiotic lens, can uncover the ways in which interactive, representational, and compositional meaning is created through use of visual resources and intertextual connections.

Social Semiotics

Social semiotics provides a means of understanding how language and any other symbolic representation of reality are necessarily positioned within social contexts. Extensive theoretical grounding can be found in the work of Halliday (1978), who wrote on the functional use of language in social contexts — to assimilate into or maintain social structure. He writes, “A social reality is itself an edifice of meanings — a semiotic construct” (p. 15). It is imperative to understand Facebook as a site for the edifice of meanings to create a social identity, that is, a semiotic construction of the virtual self.

Semiotics concerns the use of symbols in order to represent the world around us. Though Halliday’s work pertains to language as social semiotic (also the name of his much-cited book), the principles by which he understands its constitution are relevant to both linguistic and visual texts. Kress, in both his solo work (2003) and his compilations with Hodge (1988) and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001), reinterprets social semiotics through a visual rather than linguistic lens in order to study advertisements. Chapter two will

discuss visual communication modes and conventions as constitutive of the grammar of visual design. In this context, visual design is the framework for visual discourse, and is dependent upon both the text and its audience. As stated by Jewitt and Oyama (2001), “[Semioticians] can also explore how semiotic resources may be expanded so as to allow more options, more tools for production and interpretation of images and other forms of visual communication” (p. 140). A semiotic approach to a website’s design and interface allows for the exploration of the visual tools and resources used in the production and interpretation of the screen.

In relation to these visual tools and resources are the boundaries created for users on the screen.² In her discussion of racial identity on the Internet, Nakamura (2002) explains that the web interface is often “reductive” and “archaic,” one that “encompasses a user’s racial identity within the paradigm of the ‘clickable box’” (pp. 101-102). The clickable box paradigm, though not discussed in this work in relation to race, is important in understanding the visual resources available to Facebook users. The box/boundary concept is also alluded to in boyd and Heer’s (2006) discussion of “how the performance of social identity and relationships shifted the Profile from being a static representation of self to a communicative body in conversation with the other represented bodies” (p. 1). The two concluded that, at least with Friendster, much of the expression of identity was linked to actors interpreting and creating social context. They state that while “Friendster provides a communicative environment,” “cultural structures developed both on and offline build the framework necessary for ongoing communication” (p. 10). Therefore,

² I acknowledge here the much-discussed (and much speculated) boundary of public/private. The propensity for privacy relies heavily on relationally constructed ideas of boundaries and the ways in which teens understand their peers’ negotiation of those boundaries. This will be further discussed in chapter four.

the OSN of Friendster helped recreate the traditional mode of identity formation by fostering an online community with the relational aspects necessary for understanding, creating and negotiating boundaries.

Another key concept used within social semiotic visual analysis is that of “interactive” meaning, or what Halliday refers to as “interpersonal” meaning. Interactive meaning consists of framing, salience and modality, or information value. The ways in which images are connected to or disconnected from each other (framing), the visual prominence of certain aspects of those images (salience), and the placement of elements in the layout (information value) of the image are all key in the semiotic reading of a Facebook page. Therefore, this section of analysis will use the notions of framing, salience and modality in order to better understand and offer explanation for the social semiotic value and attributes of the Facebook page.

Narrative

Another attribute of the Facebook is its interactive platform for its users. Interactivity is defined by Ryan (2001) as, “the collaboration between the reader and text in the production of meaning” (p. 16). In order to achieve this interaction, she states that the user must have the ability to both explore and change an environment (Ryan, 2001, p. 67). Ryan argues that interactivity is more fully developed in an electronic environment, as electronics allow for mobility of text, hypermediacy, kaleidoscopic readings, interrupt structure and exploitation of temporality. Ryan’s notions of interactivity are heavily influential to this work, and those aspects of interactivity inherent within electronic mediums will be discussed in greater detail throughout chapter three.

In conjunction with interactivity, narrative has played an essential role in conceiving of reality — both actual and virtual. John Niles (1999) calls human beings “homo narrans”: “That hominid who . . . learned to inhabit mental worlds that pertain to times that are not present and places that are the stuff of dreams. It is through such symbolic mental activities that people have gained the ability to create themselves as human beings . . .” (p. 3). In other words, human beings use narratives not only to understand and organize the world around them, but also to construct it. These narratives, as asserted by Seymour Chatman (1978), are constructed of story events strung together to create a sequence. Though the nature of traditional narrative is linear and hypertext is non-linear, a biographical narrative can be “read” on an online profile. Turkle (1995) expresses the idea of bricolage (borrowing the term from Claude Levi-Strauss) to describe the process of “tinkering” by computer programmers. When programmers use a bottom-up technique, they tinker with the materials at hand by arranging and rearranging them to “play” with the elements of the code (Turkle, 1995, p. 51). As Turkle states, in simulated microworlds, users “learn about how things work by interacting with them” (p. 52). Facebook users similarly “tinker” and interact with the story events at hand in order to create the communal collage narrative.

The “writing” of this narrative, which is part of an online social *network*, relies just as much on its readers for meaning as its writers. Chapter three will analyze how adolescent users can navigate, through hyperlinks, to create a communal narrativization of the virtual self.

Psychological Definitions of Self and Adolescent Identity Formation

Facebook and other OSNs present a different venue for the study of relational communication, which grounds the development of self. According to Yingling (2004), identity development is the process of internalizing social experiences and negotiating experiences at odds with each other (p. 108). Toward adolescence and into adulthood, however, a “generalized Other” provides a model for self, in that “Other is the social audience for which the self is presented” (Yingling, 2004, p. 115). She continues, “The self is that for which one is accountable to others; self is presented rhetorically for the Other, and the cumulative result, mediated by memory, is identity” (p. 18). Therefore, identity is the sum of all performances and presentations of the self, as honed by memory and experience.

Gottfredson (1981) states that the period of orientation to social valuation takes place between 9 and 23 years old (p.545). Yingling (2004) cites Piaget’s view of adolescence as the final stage in cognitive development, and the egocentrism that results during the teen years (p. 186). She writes that teens often experience ego-centrism as a failure to differentiate some aspect of subject-object interaction, or the assumption that “everyone is as obsessed as they are with their own appearance and behavior” (p. 186). This obsession takes the form of an “imaginary audience” or the “construction of an anticipated audience and its reaction to the teen consumer” (p. 186). Yet the “imaginary audience” of pre-OSN teenage development may now very well be a *real* audience — a public audience of the peers and strangers who may compose the teen’s OSN. In a presentation on why youths “heart” MySpace, boyd (2006) states, “Because the digital world requires people to write themselves into being, profiles provide an opportunity to

craft the intended expression through language, imagery and media.” Later, boyd (2008) discusses the frameworks through which OSN space should be studied. She writes:

In these more recent technologies, “community” is an egocentric notion where individuals construct their social world through links and attention. Rather than relying on interests or structure-based boundaries, current social groups are defined through relationships. Each participant’s view is framed by her or his connections to others and the behaviors of those people. (p. 27)

This emphasis on relational identity formation and other-centric ways of viewing the self is echoed by Lévy. He argues that the definition of “new technology” (and I venture to say “new media”) should encompass, “the multi-form activity of human groups, a complex collective becoming that crystallizes around material objects, computer programs, and communications devices. It is the social process in all its opacity, the *activity of the other*, which returns to the individual in the form of the foreign, inhuman mask of technology” (Lévy, 2001/1997, p. 10). Continuing with this notion of other-centered performance, G.H. Mead “makes the crucial distinction between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ in conceptualizing self. The ‘me’ is the socialized self, made up of the internalized attitudes of others as experienced in the early years of life. The ‘I’ . . . is the unsocialized self . . .” (Elliott, 2001, p. 27). Therefore, a hyperreality should be seen as the reality of the *socialized* self created through communal narrativization.

Lévy and Boyd situate the ideas put forth by Yingling and Mead within a different realm of identity formation. They bring the notion of performance of a “me” for an “other” out of the actual and into the virtual. The two reaffirm the idea that OSNs provide a performative and discursive space for teens to both “act out” identity for an imaginary audience and “write” themselves into being. And, as stated before, Facebook’s interactive

platform and screen design may aid in communal narrativization of the socialized, virtual self, or virtual hyperreality.

The Fractured Self and Performance

In the actual world separate from the virtual world created by the Internet, many psychologists believe that human beings perform multiple identities in relation to the people and environments they interact with. Elliott (2001) writes, “Selfhood is flexible, fractured, fragmented, decentred and brittle . . .” (p. 2). With this description of self comes the notion of a shifting and plastic identity—it is grounded in situation rather than permanency, and in truth rather than Truth. Gergen (2000) states, “one has an identity only because it is permitted by the social rituals of which one is a part” (p. 157). Likewise, Elliott (2001), uses sociologist Erving Goffman’s definition of the self as an “awareness of the multiplicity of roles that are performed in various situated contexts; such performances involve individuals in continually monitoring the impressions they give off to, and make upon, others . . .” (p. 31). This returns to the notion of the Other-centered, or Other-aware, individual and answers the question: For whom are the narratives of self written? The self is an aggregate of continuous impressions made by the Other. Human beings work to control these impressions through calculated performances, which in turn (re)configures relationships between self and Other and self and society.

McKenna contributes much research to the understanding of how the Internet effects the expression of what she and others call the “true self.” Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons (2002) discuss the notion of a “true self” by synthesizing the work of Goffman (1959), Jung (1953), Rogers (1951) and Higgins (1987). They state that the aspects of the true self are, “those identity-important and phenomenally real aspects of

self not often or easily expressed to others” (p. 34). The true self, then, is a latent psychological idea within each human being, accessed through performance of socially produced identities. Through their research, Bargh, et al. (2002) found that, “[the Internet] facilitates the expression and effective communication of one’s true self to new acquaintances outside of one’s established social network...” and that “trait content related to a participant’s true self was more accessible in memory following an interaction with a stranger over the Internet” (pp. 44-45). This suggests that the Internet as a medium facilitates the expression of a “true self” and helps form relationships.³

As the narrative of the self is written, and read, by the self and other, subjectivity is revealed to be a social process “immersed in communication” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2000, p. 6). Gubrium and Holstein (2000) continue, “When we interact with others, we openly refer to ourselves and, in giving voice to our identities, convey a sense of who we are and how we feel about ourselves, and what we will do about it” (p. 6). It is important to understand that adolescents learn who they are by adapting or choosing not to adapt, by reacting or by absorbing how others work. This is a crucial skill to have in any “real world” situation. One must know when, where and how to act appropriately, rationally and correctly. One acts appropriately, rationally and correctly for the Other.

Turkle gives insight into how humans interact with computers in order to form a “second self” on the screen. In particular, much of her 1984 book *The Second Self* lends insight into how children grow up with computers. She writes, “With adolescence, there is a return to reflection, but this time reflection is insistently about the self” (p. 137). Whereas Turkle’s experiences with children and computer use were focused on

³ See also McKenna, Green, and Gleason (2002), who conclude that meaningful, and stable, relationships can be formed online due to the “absence of the gating features that are present in face-to-face situations” (p. 28).

programming and video games, not OSNs, the principles of her writings are still relevant. She writes, “[Adolescents] use programming as a canvas for personal expression and then as a context for working through personal concerns. They use the computer as a constructive as well as a projective medium” (p. 138). She calls this seeing of the self “the mirror of the medium,” and this notion heavily influences my own discussion of youth performance of identity in virtual space that is Facebook.

CMC and Adolescents

As exemplified by Turkle, adolescents are an emerging sample for many academic experiments with computer mediated communication (CMC) and self-expression. Academia and popular media alike have given much attention to the projected consequences, advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet to socialize and perform the self. Many scholars have hypothesized that the Internet and OSNs would first and foremost be employed by introverts as a means of communication, though studies have found that there is no overt correlation between introversion and network size, self-esteem, body image, or anxiety (see Acar, 2008).⁴ These findings are more in line with pre-existing notions of identity performance using relational feedback, and do not promote the idea that those users with low self-esteem have a higher propensity for using Facebook or other OSNs to articulate identity. Similarly, the sheer volume of

⁴ Likewise, Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel and Shulman (2009) conducted a study of 125 college students at a large MidWestern University in the United States to test perceptions of physical attractiveness based on Facebook profiles. They concluded, “Friends’ comments overrode self-comments, supporting warranting theory exclusively. Implications concern boundary-setting research for warranting, and potential effects of social comments on a variety of new information forms” (p. 229).

Facebook users suggests that the site is not exclusively alluring to those with low self-esteem or poor social skills.⁵

Specifically focusing on adolescents as a research sample, Gross, Juvonen and Gable (2002) studied the daily logs of 130 seventh graders in a California public school and found “time on-line [sic]—overall or in specific domains (e.g., chat, games)—was not correlated with psychological adjustment” (Gross, Juvonen and Gable, 2002, p. 84). Similarly, Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut and Gross (2001), conducted a meta-analysis of various studies, especially focusing on a HomeNet study by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, to find that, “moderate computer use does not negatively impact children’s social skills and activities” (p. 26). The researchers continue, “On the contrary, e-mail and the Internet may actually help maintain interpersonal communication and sustain social relationships” (p. 26).

Specifically, Facebook has been studied for its use and benefits by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007). The researchers found that Facebook helped “students accumulate and maintain bridging social capital,” which showed an interaction with

⁵ The work of Caplan (2003, 2005) favors the idea that there is “a significant relationship between psychosocial health and preference for online social interaction” (2003, p. 638). Caplan also studied the preference for online social interaction in relation to Problematic Internet Use. He concluded, “individuals who lack self-presentational skills are especially likely to prefer online social interaction over face-to-face communication” (Caplan, 2005, p.721). Bargh and McKenna (2004) used a meta-analysis of numerous theories and studies to conclude that there are, “many cases and situations in which social interaction over the Internet is preferred and leads to better outcomes than in traditional interactions venues, as well as those in which it doesn’t” (p. 587). Wang, Walther, and Hancock (2009) also assert that, “Interpersonal dynamics generally provided stronger effects on members in virtual groups than did intergroup dynamics, in contrast to predictions from previous applications of social identification to computer-mediated communication” (p. 59). These findings suggest that effects of Internet use are contingent upon the circumstance and other variables, and that Internet use can be both problematic and helpful to interpersonal dynamics. Likewise, this disparity between results shows that more research is needed in the field regarding Internet use and its psychological effects.

subjective well-being measures (p. 1162). They write, “For less intense Facebook users, students who reported low satisfaction with MSU life also reported having much lower bridging social capital than those who used Facebook more intensely” (Ellison, et al., 2007, p. 1163). Continuing in the study of college students’ use of Facebook, Zywicki and Danowski (2008) concluded that, “Low self-esteem users may be trying to enhance their self-image, and high self-esteem users may be trying to protect their self-image or popularity” (p. 19). These findings, in conjunction with the aforementioned conclusions, suggest that Facebook use may be linked, positively, to satisfactory self-expression.

Similarly, the case study of Julia Weber, a girl born “in the 1990s,” was used to “examine girls’ everyday ‘domestic’ use of digital technology, tracing how it evolves over time as new technologies are introduced into the home” (Weber, 2007, p. 51). Weber found that multitasking and relating to peers through Cyberspace is “the new normal,” and that “children have unique ways of adapting, subverting, and integrating technologies to suit their own play and communicative purposes” (p. 62). In conjunction with this, her findings stress that “the role of digital technology in Julia’s life seems to amplify or help her actualize who she is” (p. 64).

Finally, Stern (2007) conducted a “qualitative, descriptive analysis of the content [of girls’ sites] to identify stylistic and substantive themes” and reveal more about how home pages translate to self-presentation (pp. 160-161). Her sample of homepages authored explicitly by girls aged 12-17 revealed that “adolescent girls who post homepages are, indeed, using the web as a safe place to speak” (p. 175). The web, Stern asserts, provides girls with “greater opportunity to openly express thoughts, interests and to create a public identity” (p. 176).

Summary

Though research is available on both the use of the Internet and its effects on adolescents, the data is inconsistent. The continued expansion of the Internet and its daily functions warrants additional research. More specifically, the rise of new media technology and the social media calls for academic attention, with a focus on those adolescent users who never had a “before” and live a life saturated by new media. From the conclusions drawn by the aforementioned studies, it can be seen that Facebook, as an OSN and as an example of new media technology, can be a useful tool for socialization and identity formation in adolescents.

According to Trenholm and Jensen (2008), “People communicate as they do not only because of individual abilities, experiences and personalities, but also because they live in a certain place and a certain time” (p. 15). As contemporary U.S. American culture is characterized by its heavy reliance on digital technology and the Internet, it is important to study how communication is affected by these media. Youth communication and use of the Internet is especially relevant, as it can give insight into the progress and projected turns new media communication are making and taking.

In order to contribute to the academic conversation on Facebook and OSNs, this study will focus on Facebook’s design and its correlation with adolescent identity. Returning to Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams’ respective views of technology and social practice, I will focus on how the theories of social semiotics, narrative and performance can be applied to the Facebook interface in order to determine if the technology itself is creating new functions for the expression of the self or reinforcing pre-existing needs.

Method

This research question will be framed using three different theoretical methodologies, as stated in the literature review: Social semiotics, narrative studies, and performance studies. For organizational purposes, the Facebook Web site (<http://www.facebook.com>) will be broken down into three main areas for critique: the homepage or News Feed, the user profile page, and the user wall. Each chapter will then use a separate theoretical lens to analyze one or more of these three areas. I will conclude by gesturing toward possible implications and applications of this theoretical analysis and critique of Facebook, especially in regard to youth media culture and adolescent development.

In addition to this theoretical critique, user feedback will also be included as a gauge and grounding for arguments. For all ethnographic research, four participants were recruited using both convenience and snowball sampling.⁶ Once eligible participants were found, they were contacted via US mail with a letter of consent, signed by both the participant and the parent or guardian (see appendices A&B).

⁶ For all intents and purposes, I fully acknowledge the limitations inherent in using such a small sample. Initial recruitment yielded 12 possible subjects. Of those, six returned consent forms. Of those six, four actually participated in the group. Under the time constraints of a Masters thesis, this was all I had to work with.

I feel it important here to mention the institutional difficulties with research on adolescent populations. Though the protocol review process is necessary to be in line with institutional review board policy and human subject protections, it did present many difficulties in relating to subjects. Putting on the “researcher” hat and using all of the terminology accepted by the IRB and human subjects office functioned to distance me from the subjects, as many of them no longer saw me as a Facebook user myself, but as a researcher working for a large University. This was especially exacerbated by the signing of formal consent documents, which were admittedly quite intimidating. Likewise, I myself had to “friend” the subjects in order to invite them to the private group, giving them access to my own Facebook profile. I believe this combination of formal/informal set up a barrier where otherwise candid conversation could have occurred. I believe a healthier blend of academic sensibility with “real life” candor would yield better, more honest responses, and I hope to continue this research outside of the academic setting to compare findings.

Participants were then asked to join a closed forum Facebook group. This group was designed to facilitate discussion, and had 12 discussion prompts open to be answered by all invited members (see appendix C). These answers were then analyzed and recorded. The responses were integrated into analysis for chapter four of this work.

Summary

Much of the mainstream media has speculated that the allure of online social networks (hereinafter OSNs) like Facebook lies in their indulgence of an increasingly narcissistic population. This would suggest, however, that use of OSNs is self-centered, and that people use the sites without regard for the actual *social network* to which they provide a link. This, to me, seems like a mistake. What exactly is the benefit of writing oneself into being online if one does not have an audience?⁷ As someone who came of age connecting to the Internet via AOL 2.0 and witnessed the rise of the dot-com, it is hard to believe that OSNs are anything but a platform for relationally forming a sense of identity⁸. Profiles are most certainly other-centered, and in this way OSNs facilitate the performance of identity where it previously did not exist. Facebook, especially, is place for all of the identities we must use on a daily basis to converge, a virtual sieve for the desirable to remain, highlighted by the glow of a PC (or Mac's) liquid crystal display.⁹

Facebook's popularity and continuous immersion into the everyday practices of Internet users make it an important communicative tool. In a 2004 interview with *Current*

⁷ See page 12 for further discussion of danah boyd's notion of "writing oneself into being" online. This use of the term "writing" is also connected to communal narrativization of the self, which will be explored in chapter three.

⁸ See page 13-14 for further discussion of the terms "self" and "identity." It is my belief that the self is a concept latent within human beings. The self is reached through *performance of identity* — "The self is anchored in, and experienced in relation to, the day-to-day contexts of routine social life" (Elliott, p. 142). For this reason the term "self-expression" should be seen as synonymous with the terms "identity," "performance," and "formation" hereinafter.

⁹ See page six for the definitions of virtual used to inform my study.

Magazine Zuckerberg said, “We don’t view the site as an online community — we bill it as a directory that is reinforcing a physical community. What exists on the site is a mirror image of what exists in real life” (Nagowski, 2004, p. 24). The vision was simple but important: Facebook would exist to reinforce or mirror pre-existing social forums, not become one itself. Currently, the site’s page states that the Facebook mission “is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, 2008). Its prevalence and its “newness” propel research into its use no longer as a fad but as a tool for everyday communication needs.

In the introduction to *Cyberculture*, Pierre Lévy writes, “Those who denounce cyberculture today strangely resemble those who criticized rock music during the fifties and sixties” (Lévy, 2001, p. 12). With each new media technology comes the opportunity to either cease or continue the process of discovering its potential. New media technologies and identity studies are relevant not only within the field of communication studies, but also to educators, psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists concerned with the ways in which humans act and adapt. Turkle (1984) writes, “Putting very young children together with computers encourages a rich and continual philosophizing” (p. 137). It is the goal of this thesis to add to the conversation on new media technologies, contributing to a better understanding of how the previously mentioned theoretical frameworks can be applied to the study of OSNs—their role and function in the lives of adolescent computer users.

Chapter Two

Little Boxes on a Web Site:

A Social Semiotic Analysis of Facebook Design



The screenshot shows a Facebook post and its best answer. The post is from a user named 'beachhhg...' and asks for a good quote to put on a Facebook profile box. The best answer is from a user named 'T M', who suggests a funny, laid-back quote and recommends searching for 'funny quotes' on Google.

Resolved Question [Show me another »](#)

Whats a good quote to put on my facebook about me box?

Anyone have any good ideas, like something that has to do with who i am, or something funny, idk, any ideas????

1 year ago

[Report Abuse](#)

Best Answer - Chosen by Voters

lol well we don't know much about you as a person, but I can try :) I am a funny, laid back kind of person who doesn't take much seriously, so for my yearbook quote I put, "Flying is easy, throw yourself at the ground and miss." If you google search "funny quotes" though, there are many sites that compile a lot of famous funny quotations that you can look through. Good luck!

1 year ago

An avatar signs into Yahoo! answers, asking a group of anonymous and unknown stranger avatars for a glimpse into her “self” — “something to do with who I am.” Another avatar responds by telling her to Google search “funny quotes” and hope for the best. And ultimately, this is how Facebook works. We upload an image of ourselves or something else that is representative of ourselves, and this avatar is prompted, by the site, to summarize who it is using the site’s design. We then test the waters, fill in the boxes with our favorite quotes and films and activities, and hope for the best.

In this chapter, I will explore how the “language” of Facebook is rooted in a social semiotic reading of boxes. That is, boxes function to organize aspects of the site: the personal profile or “info,” the wall, and the livefeed section. This boxed reading not only sets up the site for easy usability, but also prepares the user for easy navigation and summarization of the self. Moreover, it prompts the user to invite feedback from his or her friends, forming a sense of self communally created with the other. Ultimately, adolescent users *and their friends* can make paradigmatic changes to each separate box on Facebook in order to better create a syntagmatic version of the self.

Literature Review

Creation of anything — a self or a shelf — relies on the ability to manipulate signifiers for an audience. As Hodge and Kress (1988) write, “. . .The text doesn’t exist, semiotically, unless it has an audience, which must set the text in some kind of social relationship, as well as attributing a relationship of text to the world” (p.60). Meaning-making is thus a communal effort, a give-and-take between audience and text. Halliday (1978) writes, “The formation of the personality is itself a social process, or a complex of social processes, and language — by virtue of its social functions — plays the key part in it” (p. 15). Largely, the language of a Web site is its design. As Kress (2003) writes, “The dominance of the screen as the currently most potent medium . . . means that it is these practices and these conceptions which hold sway, and not only on the screen but also in all domains of communication. The affordances and the organizations of the screen are coming to (re)shape the organization of the page” (p. 6).¹⁰ As it follows, users of a site must be literate in its design in order to follow along and to make meanings.

¹⁰ It should be noted that Kress (2003) also states, “Awareness of the affordances of modes and the facilities of media provides competence, but design crucially introduces the interest and the

The notion of meaning making is further stated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001): “Designs are (uses of) semiotic resources, in all semiotic modes and combinations of semiotic modes. Designs are means to realize discourses in the context of a given communication situation. But designs also add something new: they realize the communication situation which changes socially constructed knowledge into social (inter-) action” (p. 5). Using Halliday’s view of language as a foundation, Kress and van Leeuwen assert that *design itself* takes on the social functions formerly placed on language. Halliday (1978) writes, “Every child is brought up in a culture, and he [sic] has to learn the patterns of that culture in the process of becoming a member of it. The principal means whereby the culture is made available to him [sic] is through language. . . .” (p. 213). It would follow that design becomes the means whereby adolescent users interact and form identity within cyberculture.¹¹

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) primarily guides my visual reading of the design and layout of Facebook, though it is important to understand that this visual analysis was mainly conducted using print advertisements and photography. As stated in chapter one, Jewitt and Oyama (2001) write, “Images can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame. In this way they

desire of the maker of the message/text” (p. 50). In earlier work, Hodge and Kress (1988) write, “Social control rests on control over the representation of reality which is accepted as the basis of judgment and action” (p. 147).

This perspective leans heavily in a political economy direction — that is, to critically unfold the power structure behind the production and design of the site. Though this critique certainly has a place in the scholarly work on Facebook, it is in my interest to treat the design as simply a text, focusing on the *user’s agency within* that text and understanding how users respond to a given design.

¹¹ Lévy (2001) defines “cyberculture” as “the set of technologies (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, modes of thought and values that developed along with the growth of cyberspace” (p. xvi). Considering Facebook a part of “cyberspace,” “cyberculture” is a fitting parallel to “culture” in “actual space”.

interact with viewers and suggest the attitude viewers should take towards what is being represented” (p. 145). This interactive meaning consists of framing, salience and information value. For this chapter, framing will be defined as the ways in which elements in the site’s layout are connected to or disconnected from each other, salience as the visual prominence of certain aspects of those elements, and information value as the placement of elements in the layout.¹² These terms, or modes of visual communication, are crucial to the interpretation of a visual text. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) write, “. . . Modes become shaped in response to *discourse*, where discourse itself is the effect of the socially shaped design practices” (p. 56). This cyclic relationship between design, discourse, and mode is essential to the explanation and understanding of how the design of Facebook contributes to the creation and maintenance of an identity in cyberculture.

Analysis

Start Up: The Personal Profile

For the purpose of my research, I set up a new Facebook page under the pseudonym Susie Pepper. This allowed me to go through the start up process of writing a profile, including the prompts given by the site and its design. In this section, I’ll discuss the layout of the personal profile in terms of framing, salience and information value. All of these concepts are related to what Lisa Nakamura (2002) refers to as the “clickable box paradigm” — a space where identity is visual “boxed.” For Nakamura, this paradigm functions to inform and label the lived experience. Specific to her work, boxes function to separate and delineate racial identities as one or the other, creating an interface that is often “reductive” and “archaic,” and stifling hybrid definitions of race (pp. 101-102). Of

¹² Definitions here have been paraphrased and interpreted mainly from Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), p. 184.

course, Nakamura's work is centered on racial and ethnic studies, and there is no overt section for "race" or "ethnicity" within a Facebook member's profile. However, notions of how the "clickable box" paradigm and interactivity affect identity performance online will be carried throughout this work.

In Nakamura's clickable box paradigm, visual texts rely on what Kress (2003) calls the visual grid. He writes, "At the first level of analysis, whether the formal analysis of theoretical work or the informal analysis of everyday reading and viewing, we are dealing with the mode of layout and its elements. These entities exist as 'graphic blocks,' elements in the mode of the layout" (p. 68). By employing the "box" as the given organization of the site, user profiles are the carrier, or syntagmatic whole, complete with possessive attributes, or paradigmatic choices, defined through sectioned off areas of the page.

Upon sign up, the Facebook homepage is the user's introduction to the site's layout (see figure 2.1). The taskbar, running across the top of the Facebook site, remains consistent on each page. This visually orients users, reading left to right, and creates the hierarchy of functions the web site provides. The center of the page is literally boxed in with horizontal and vertical lines, creating separation between the "welcome" and to-do list, ways to connect with friends, and friend suggestions. Running along the bottom of the screen is the "homepage help" box, which can reorient users and offers further explanation of the site. As is evident on the "welcome" box, connecting with friends is first on the visual "to do" list of the homepage, while a personal profile is second. Seeing as the focus of this study is identity formation, however, the personal profile will be analyzed first.

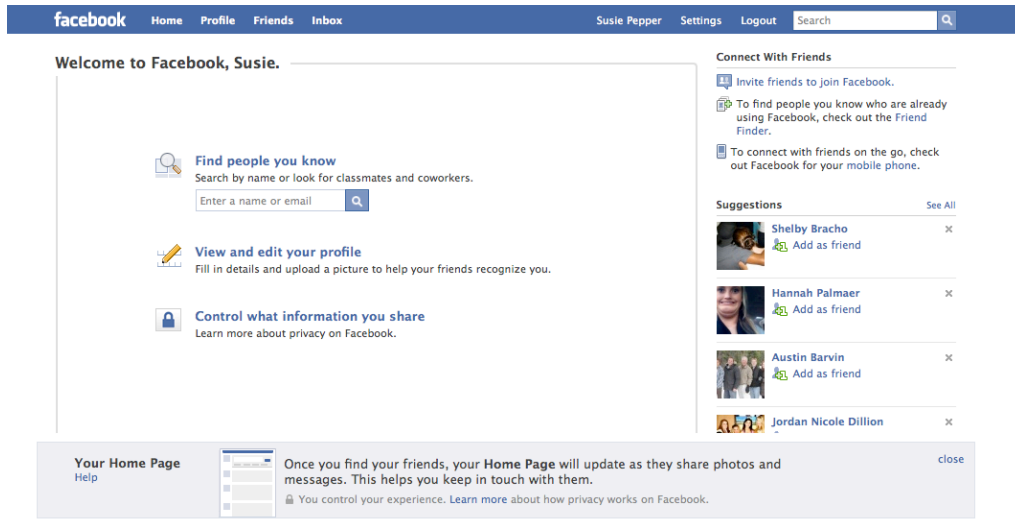


Figure 2.1. Opening welcome screenshot for Susie Pepper (Jan. 29, 2010).

When a user chooses the “view and edit” your profile link from the homepage, he/she is directed to the profile page. In order to edit a profile, one must click the “info” tab. Here, tabs function to separate the different boxes of the self — the basic info page is manipulated by the user, while the wall (discussed in the next section) is communally manipulated by the user and his/her friends. Once on the info tab, information is again delineated and boxed in, vertically stacked and organized into basic information, personal information, contact information and education and work (see figures 2.2 and 2.3).

As we analyze and read through the profile page, it’s crucial to understand that *placement* on the page, or information value, has significant meaning. Kress (2003) writes, “The resource which is used for making meaning in the visual mode is that of (*position in*) *space*. In a framed space, say the rectangular space of the page or the screen, elements can be placed at the bottom or at the top, to the left or to the right, or in the centre. These positions have meaning-potential” (p. 69). In an ex-post facto summary of usability testing on adults and children, Byerly (2007) concludes, “Eye tracking studies have consistently shown a ‘golden triangle’ where both children and adults tend to

look—the area above a diagonal line from the right top to the left bottom” (p. 31). On the Facebook profile page, tabs are located starting at the top of the page, just below the consistent placement of the orienting blue strip (described in figure 2.1). As the eye reads across the top of the page left to right, it travels from the “most significant,” largest, and most salient position (here, the photo) and across the tabs (here, in the simplest form, wall and info). Again, note that “wall” is in a position ahead of “info,” which in turn gives it higher information value when it comes to visually reading the page. This places emphasis on the communal interaction on a profile, rather than the personal listing of information. In turn, when writing a personal profile and filling out the information prompts, a user is always aware that the eyes of their friends are just a tab away, and that their audience is indeed very real.

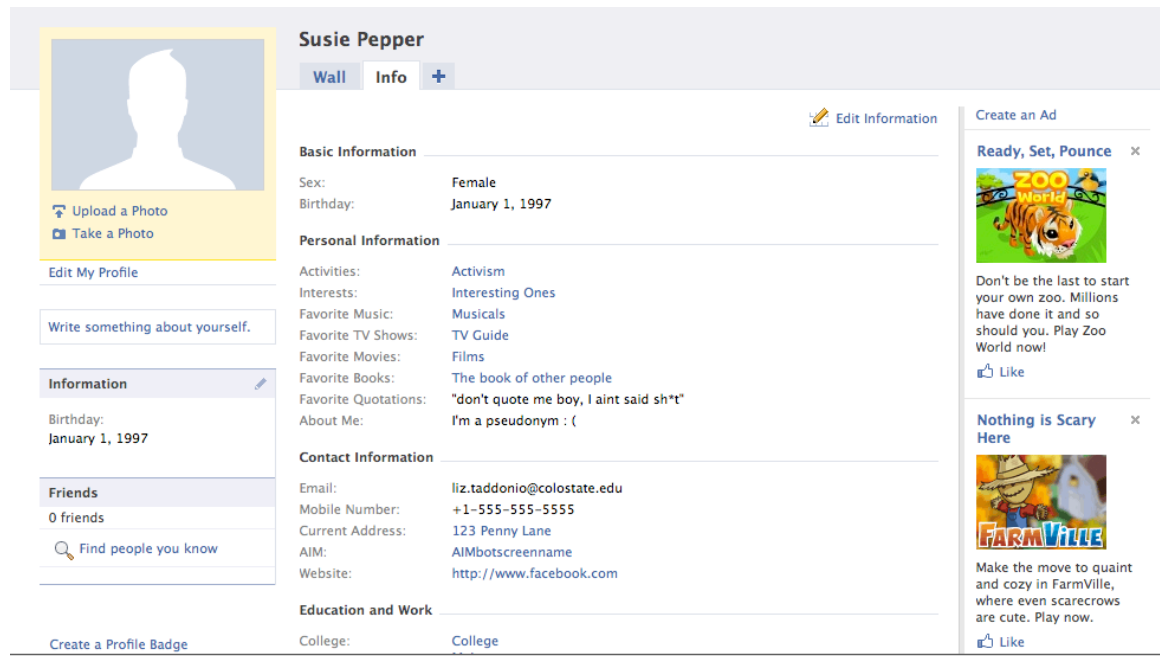


Figure 2.2. Basic info tab, full view (Jan. 29, 2010).

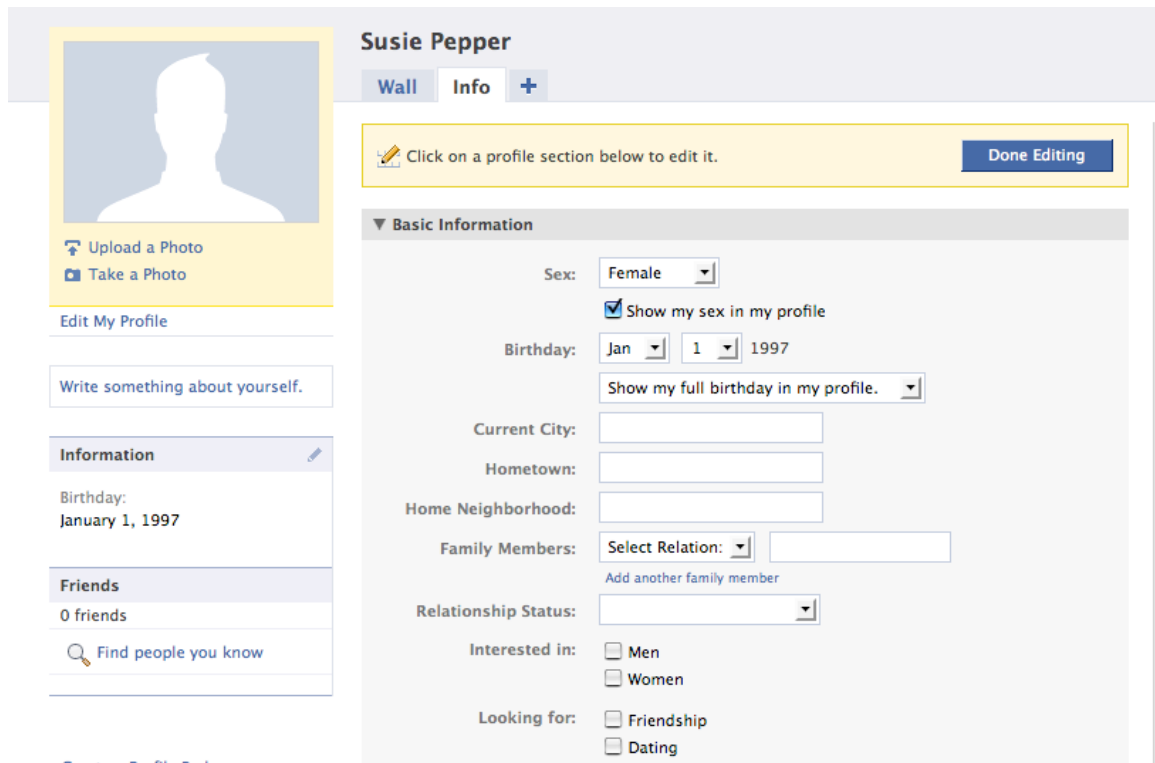


Figure 2.3. Basic info tab, full view in edit mode (Jan. 29, 2010).

As the viewer then scans the page diagonally from the right to the left, when the “info” tab is selected one’s eyes must follow through the middle section of the page where information is stacked vertically (see figure 2.4). This neat, vertical elongation, (a term that will be discussed at length in the next section) provides for an obvious hierarchy of information. Here, the visual mode of framing is employed. Each section of the “info” tab is connected to and disconnected from the other using boxes. Within those sections, also, boxes are used as a means of framing information.

Figure 2.4 is a screen capture of the “basic information” box of the larger “info” tab. This calls attention to the “info” tab as one syntagmatic structure, or carrier. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), discuss this as follows: “Analytical processes relate participants in terms of a part-whole structure. They involve two kinds of participants: one *Carrier* (the whole) and any number of *Possessive Attributes* (the parts)” (p. 89). In this sense, the

“info” tab is the *carrier* while the *possessive attributes* are all of the information boxes within, including “basic,” “personal,” “contact,” and “work/education.” These boxes, however, can also be read as carriers of possessive attributes — figure 2.4 shows that “basic” info is made up of the possessive attributes of sex, birthday, current city, hometown, relationship status, etc... All of these attributes are linked to their carriers through the use of framing: Each text box is included within a larger box, which is included within a larger box. In spite of this connection through the use of framing, there are also clear elements of disconnect. The paradigmatic choices one can make within the “basic info” section are certainly disconnected from the paradigmatic choices made within the “personal info” section through the use of visual disconnect — the headlines are bolded and followed by a horizontal line, cutting them off from the previous section. The summarization of identity is conveniently boxed in.

▼ Basic Information

Sex: Female

Show my sex in my profile

Birthday: Jan 1 1997

Show my full birthday in my profile.

Current City:

Hometown:

Home Neighborhood:

Family Members: Select Relation: Add another family member

Relationship Status:

Interested in: Men Women

Looking for: Friendship Dating A Relationship

Political Views:

Religious Views:

Save Changes Cancel

Figure 2.4. Basic info tab, blank, detail (Jan. 17, 2010).

Lastly, when one reads through the page and finally reaches the least salient, and also least significantly placed box, the eye ends on what I call the disclosure box (see figure 2.5). The disclosure box, which is only visible to new Facebook users when they first edit their profile, explains that basic information is always available to everyone. The fact that this box is at the bottom of the page decreases its information value. In addition, it is smaller, which decreases its salience. It is also offset in color — the other boxes are white and this one is light blue and stands out. This could add to its salience (if its placement were not so insignificant), though it serves better in disconnecting the privacy aspect from the rest of the page. Changing the color of the box breaks the consistency, which frames this issue as separate from the filling out of information boxes. Also, the fact that this box is “closeable” while the other boxes in the info section are not makes it a less permanent, more dispensable aspect of the profile page. This is a footnote to the profile, something to be read once and then closed. It is a solid reminder that the info section is read by others, but because it is read at the end, the notion of privacy is final afterthought in the writing of the self.¹³

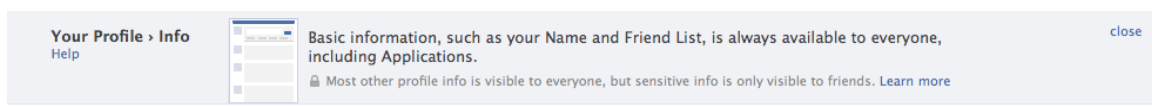


Figure 2.5. Basic info disclosure box, displayed upon profile startup (Jan 17, 2010).

Keeping up with friends: The wall and newsfeed

Though the personal profile would appear to be the main point of a thesis discussing identity, in the world of OSNs a profile is a smaller part of the main function of the network. By definition, Facebook is meant to connect people. It's a *social*

¹³ In popular news media, privacy is one of the foremost issues discussed regarding Facebook. Again, I believe this topic has a place in the scholarship on OSNs. Throughout this and later chapters, privacy will only be discussed in relation to the willingness to share information with the other, not in terms of the infrastructure of the Web site or its regulations.

networking site. For this reason, this section will analyze the wall tab on a user’s profile, discussing vectors, framing, and vertical and horizontal elongation. The wall tab, a fixture on Facebook from its beginning, is a space for “you and your friends to post content, such as photos and messages” (see figure 2.6). In the last year, the wall feature has expanded, and users now comment on and even “like” other users’ posts. Using the design, Facebook members can relationally make paradigmatic changes to each other’s profiles, shifting the overall identity on the screen and reinforcing certain behaviors. With a wall, emphasis on identity is placed squarely on a relationship to the other.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), “. . .The semiotic code of language and the semiotic code of pictures each have their own quite particular means of realizing what in the end are perhaps quite similar semantic relations. What in language is realized by words of the category ‘action verbs’ is in pictures realized by the elements that can be formally defined as *vectors*” (p. 44). Using vectors, one can follow the visual action and direction of an image or page. Like framing, vectors serve to visually connect one image, or aspect of an image, to another.

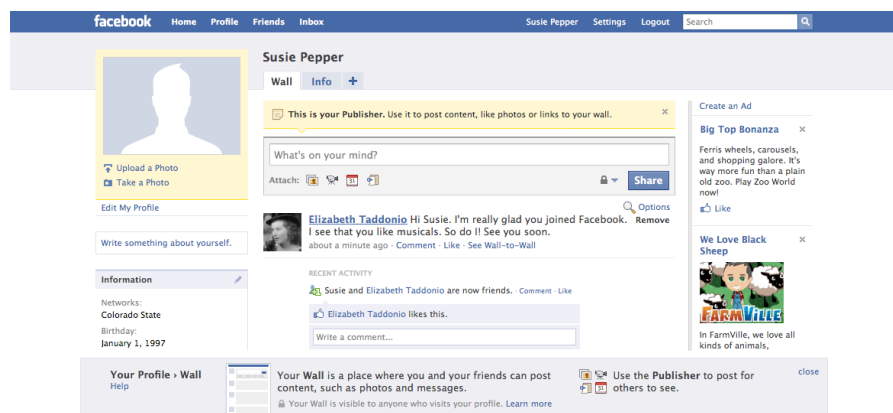


Figure 2.6. Wall tab, showing friend’s activity on wall and Facebook explanation of design (February 1, 2010).

The Facebook wall relies heavily on vectors and framing. When a member writes on another member's wall, a box appears with the text, photo, or hyperlink he or she has posted. Beneath that box is a timestamp, along with hyperlinks to "comment," "like," or "see wall-to-wall." This logical placement within the box of the wall post follows the same "golden triangle" described earlier. The user reads left to right, and then down to the bottom of the box to their next options. The options, in turn, are clearly based on their reaction to the post. The empty box below the post even encourages a response, which begins a back and forth creation of the wall (see figure 2.7). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) write, "When participants are connected by a vector, they are represented as *doing* something to or for each other" (p. 56). They continue, "The more elements of the spatial composition are connected, the more they are presented as one unity of information, as belonging together . . . Connectedness can be emphasized by vectors" (pp. 215-216). Because the visual elements of a Facebook wall post are clearly linked to its comments, the user becomes visually linked to his/her friends and their comments.

The visual connectivity between friends and their wall posts represents the fact that they are, indeed, doing something both to and for each other. Once again, the *carrier* is the user's overall profile, while the *possessive attributes* become the comments and likes provided by other users. In this way, the *other* is very much a part of the whole. Whenever a person adds to a friend's wall, this addition is not only an addition to the overall profile, but also a visible testament to the profile (and the person's) popularity.

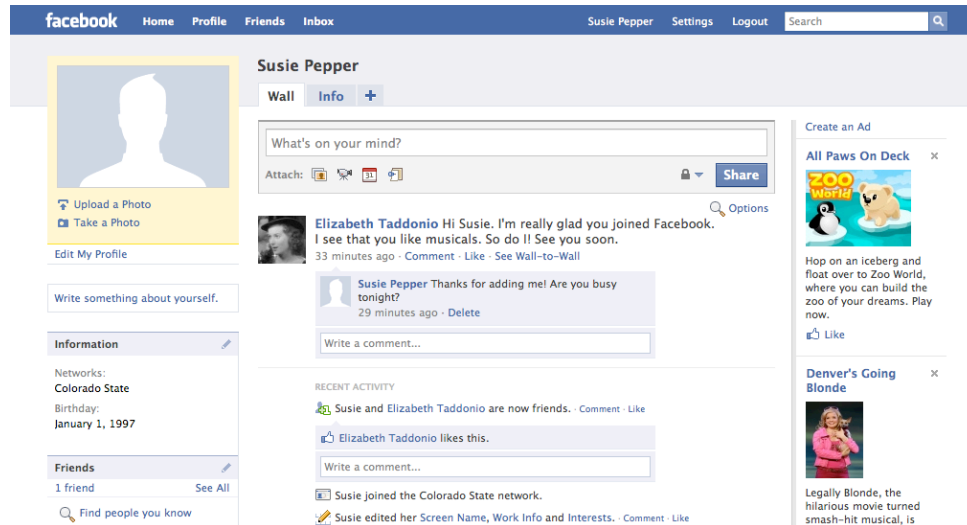


Figure 2.7. Wall tab, showing friend’s activity on wall and Susie Pepper’s responses. (February 1, 2010).

Within the boxes of the wall tab, some patterns of reading both horizontal and vertical elongation emerge. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), “*Horizontal elongation* causes a shape to lean towards the kind of structure in which what is positioned on the left is presented as the ‘Given’, information that is already familiar to the reader and serves as a ‘departure point’ for the message, while what is positioned on the right is presented as ‘New’, as information not yet known to the reader, and hence deserving his or her special attention” (p. 55). In the case of a Facebook wall post, the horizontal elongation begins with the “given” of the person who posts photo (see figure 2.8). Since the profile holder can post on his or her own wall, this can be either the friend, or the profile holder. This makes sense visually, as the *visual photo* of a person is most recognizable, serving as “a ‘departure point’ for the message.”¹⁴ What’s most important within the Facebook wall post is the message itself, which is the new information presented from the given, recognizable friend.

¹⁴ A profile photo does not necessarily always depict the user — often users chose separate avatars or photos as representation. This will be explored in chapter four, framed as performance and as the ideal or virtual self.



Figure 2.8. Wall post detail (February 1, 2010).

Elongation on the vertical level, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) can be defined in print as, “If, in a visual composition, some of the constituent elements are placed in the upper part, and other different elements in the lower part of the picture space or the page, then what has been placed on the top is presented as the Ideal, what has been placed at the bottom as the Real” (p. 193). As stated previously, Kress and van Leeuwen’s analysis was applied to print advertisements. Even so, these ideas can be translated to a Facebook profile. The vertical elongation of the conversation places the original post as the “Ideal,” while it follows that the remainder of the comments are the Real. In this sense, perhaps the Ideal can be better defined as the beginning of the conversation—the starting point—while the responses help the user gauge the effectiveness of his/her post. In addition, linguistic choice of terms like “Ideal” and “Real” harken back to the introductory discussion of the Real and the Virtual. In understanding the beginning of the procession of comments as the Ideal, it follows that this beginning is indeed virtual, or manipulated to reach its full potential and supercede the actual. Should this be the photo, for instance, a user might choose this to be the most Ideal representation of self.¹⁵ Commentary, when viewed as “Real,” then grounds that

¹⁵ Representations and performance will be discussed at length in chapter four. It should be brought to the reader’s attention that my own Facebook profile picture, throughout these examples, is of Maureen O’Hara. These screen captures were taken during Doppelganger Week,

ideal. This visual hierarchy of responses leaves the poster aware that his/her messages are meant to be shared and responded to. There's no sense in posting a message if it will not elicit a response, or even better, a "like." This type of encouraged user feedback emphasizes the Other as audience.

Returning to chapter one, Yingling (2004) asserts that identity development relies heavily on a "generalized Other." This Other provides a model for self, in that "Other is the social audience for which the self is presented" (p. 115). In psychology, this Other is often an imagined audience, one that's not immediately real or possible to construct. With Facebook, however, the audience one posts to is somewhere between imaginary and real — an audience of other "box people," ready to comment on and augment the expanding personal profile and wall. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) write, ". . .Texts always demand action as a response, whether of interpretation or of articulation or both" (p. 41). The actions demanded by the clickable boxes of a Facebook wall serve to start and finish conversations. They are extensions of the personal profile, put forth by Facebook friends. They are the definition of communal, relational identity formation.

Conclusion

The boxes on a member profile, displayed on the larger Internet window, both separate and connect the different spaces for identity. Turkle (1995) writes, "Each of these activities takes place in a window; your identity on the computer is the sum of your distributed presence" (p. 13). Similarly, Lévy (1998) simply states, "The text will have served as an interface to ourselves" (p. 49). The reading of an individual's profile has less to do with the individual than how he/she is reflected in the profile. Thus, the text is not

another concept discussed in chapter four. This photo, however, is a perfect example of how I chose an Ideal representation over an actual representation of self.

self-centered, but other-centered. Posts are focused on eliciting a response from friends—the design itself encourages the connectivity between boxes through use of hyperlinking.

Of course, it would be wrong to state a black and white definition of the way people use Facebook, and it is important to note that not all Facebook members even use the site with the primary goal of writing a profile or maintaining a wall space. With the addition of game applications (Mashable.com recently reported that 11 million Facebook users play the virtual farming game, “Farmville,” daily) membership to Facebook has various different functions, depending on the user. However, the analysis included here and in future chapters is meant to delve deeply into the possibilities created by the site in terms of identity, especially the aspect of design and user agency within that design. Taken in this manner, the profile and wall can be read specifically as a system of different contradictions.

Turkle (1995) continues, “Windows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system” (p. 14). The term system evokes the image of interacting, interdependent elements that create a working, productive whole. The Facebook profile page combines windows and tabbed browsing to explore and connect the different aspects of the self (at least as conceptualized through a “profile page”). In many ways, these aspects of the self, though all visually presented on the page as a syntagmatic consolidation, are paradigmatically fragmented. Likewise, while boxes can serve to close sections off, disconnecting them from other aspects of the same larger profile, vectors and framing allow for connectivity between the profile holder and his/her friends. Lastly, though there may be some static notion of a self depicted on the page, this self is also constantly fluid and changing according to friend feedback and user activity.

These contradictions (consolidation/ fragmentation, connections/disconnections, static/fluid), though seemingly perilous to a properly functioning system, may just be indicative of what younger Internet users have the skillset to manage.

In short, the visual design of Facebook relies on boxes, stacked on top of each other to build the whole. This whole, this system, is then imbued with the ability to not only negotiate, but also resolve, the contradictions of visual design and lived experience. In this way, Facebook as medium may reinforce lived social reality while rearranging and even changing the social definition of growing up and coming into one's "self" for Generation M.

Chapter Three

A Never Ending Story: The Creation of a Hyperhyperreality Through Narrative, Interactivity, and Hyperlinks

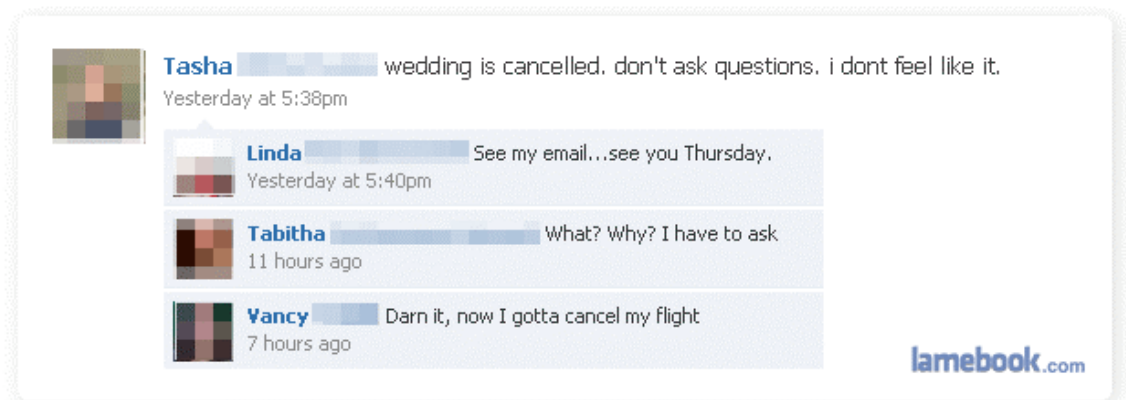
Today, I logged on to Facebook and checked my boyfriend's page. Our relationship has been long distance for a month now since he moved to Paris. I saw he had a comment from a girl who also lives in Paris. After using Google translator, I found out they had had a "magnifique" night together. FML

#9331664 (282) | I agree, your life sucks (7858) – you totally deserved it (1158)
On 03/23/2010 at 4:06pm – love – by videoseven (woman) – Spain (Madrid)

(via <http://www.fmylife.com/love/9331664>)



(via facebookfails.com)



(via lamebook.com)

In many cases, the opportunity to update friends through online information sharing can be beneficial. As someone who moves quite frequently, I've saved money and time with the ability to "mass update" my friends and family on the happenings of my life. Photos and videos from travels, interesting articles, people I've met — they all are easily shared using my Facebook page. However, as depicted above, Facebook is also a two-way street, an experience involving both the user and his/her friends' feedback. Whether the user chooses to share it or someone else chooses to share it for him/her, the information is there and a story unravels in real time, on the Facebook News Feed. The resulting narrative collage is both read, and written, communally.

As described on the official Facebook "fan" page — connected to the "about" link at the bottom of the Facebook homepage — the site's mission is to:

Give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Millions of people use Facebook everyday to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet. (Facebook, 2010a)

This emphasis on a social, interactive, multi-mediated platform provides the basis for the user experience on Facebook. As stated in previous chapters, for the purpose of this thesis and its focus on adolescent Facebook users in particular, the aspects of Facebook News Feed and profile as narrative will constantly be framed using Yingling's other-centered, relational theory of identity formation.¹⁶ First, I will provide a brief overview of the literature on narrative and new media, focusing on the notions of interactivity, hypertext and cybertext. Next, I will analyze the interactive and hypertextual elements of the Facebook newsfeed and wall/profile page, providing grounding for the overall conclusion

¹⁶ In this chapter, relational identity formation should be taken as synonymous with communal identity formation. The only distinction between the two should be that "relational" refers to a one-on-one interaction, whereas "communal" refers to two or more people interacting. This distinction is my own.

that Facebook, as a medium, has a narrative quality that substantiates the creation of a hyperhyperreality. I argue that the term hyperhyperreality should be used when discussing the type of narrative communally created by users of OSNs, as the archaic connotations of "narrative" are limiting and incomplete. In addition, I make a case for the understanding of Facebook as a medium that not only reinforces, but also changes the way adolescent users create the narrative of self.

Literature Review

In terms of reconciliation toward a precise definition, “narrative” and “new media” have unresolved issues. Overwhelmingly, the lenses of either new media as “game” or new media as “electronic literature” are most commonly used for narrative analysis and thus most commonly accounted for: New media provides a narrative with different characteristics determining whether or not it will be *played* or *read*. In spite of this, I believe there are other ways of conceptualizing narrative (and, as I argue, perhaps the best reconciliation is to come up with a new term altogether).

Zimmerman (2004) writes, “If I’m intersecting games and stories to create something new out of the synthesis of both, my aim with the concept of narrative should not be to replicate existing narrative forms but to invent new ones” (p. 157). Though he again frames narrative newness as the intersection between game and story, he calls for the reconceptualization of their hybridity. OSNs like Facebook — without game/contest qualities or even straight-forward “story” intent — have not yet been analyzed in terms of narrative qualities. For this reason, the terms “narrative,” “interactivity,” “hyper/cybertext” and “hypermedia” should be explored. In doing this, a frame should

emerge by which a new concept of narrative — hyperhyperreality— can be used to analyze the qualities given to Facebook and other OSNs.

Narrative Defined

As mentioned in chapter one, John Niles (1999) calls human beings “homo narrans”: “That hominid who . . . learned to inhabit mental worlds that pertain to times that are not present and places that are the stuff of dreams. It is through such symbolic mental activities that people have gained the ability to create themselves as human beings . . .” (p. 3). In other words, human beings are creatures capable of using symbols not only to understand and organize the world around them, but also to construct it. In terms of human development, Yingling (2004) writes:

Stories told about a child in his or her presence often provide the child with information about the teller’s attitude toward them, and may reinforce their emotionality by replaying particular experiences . . . Children’s own stories seem to serve two functions. First, they replay and change stories to resolve internal conflict and thus regulate their own feelings about self; and second, they disclose information about the self for others. (p. 109)

Here, storytelling is an important function in identity formation, as it allows a child to understand the self and to perform the self for others.¹⁷ Murray (2004) writes, “For me, it is always the story that comes first, because storytelling is a core human activity, one we take into every medium of expression, from the oral-formulaic to the digital multimedia” (p. 3). The world, and the individual’s identity, is woven into a story to fulfill the human need for an understandable existence.

It is important, however, to know that there is an academic distinction between narrative, story, and discourse. Chatman (1978) makes important contributions to the

¹⁷ Performance of identity will be further discussed in chapter four. However, it should be noted that the use of narrative in identity formation and maintenance is a substantial feature of human development.

study of narrative structure of fiction and film.¹⁸ He breaks down the story into “events” arranged in a precise way to create a plot. The plot, then, is the resulting sequence of story events, which emphasizes or de-emphasizes certain events, shows or tells others, leaves some interpreted and others inferred, etc (Chatman, 1978, p. 43). Here, the structuralist author acts as the bricklayer, adding story events and building them into a plot. Chatman (1978) diagrams a simple narrative as the combination of story events with discourse, or the “means by which the story is communicated” (p. 19). If the story is the what, the discourse is the how, and the narrative is the combined structure.

Barthes (1966/1991) adds specifics to the structure of narrative, discussing the “implicit system of units and rules” which inevitably create a narrative (p. 81). These units include cardinal functions and catalysers, or major story events and the actions that tie them together, respectively (p. 93). In later essays, Barthes adds to the structuralist model the notion that the reader can function also as the writer, as the author takes on the role of scriptor of the work (writer of story events), while the reader interprets the work into text (Barthes, 1971/1991, p. 157). Foundational texts by Chatman and Barthes diagram narrative into a set of criteria. However, new media and post-structuralist analysis of texts expand the definition of narrative and create debate about exactly which texts can be considered narratives.

With the evolution of media comes the evolution of the definition of narrative itself. Ryan (2006) asserts, “A medium will be considered narratively relevant if it makes an impact on either story, discourse, or social and personal use of narrative” (p. 25). Facebook is a narratively relevant medium in that it makes an impact on discourse and social and personal use of narrative. Returning to the anecdote at the beginning of this

¹⁸ Chatman is heavily indebted, as all narrative scholars are, to Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

chapter, my own Facebook hyperhyperreality has made an impact on other discourse (how things are said) and on personal/social use of narrative (the ability to instantly view the details of a user's life through his/her wall or News Feed).

Ricoeur (1991) discusses the personal use of narrative, in that, returning to Yingling's argument about the identity function of narrative, "human lives become more readable when they are interpreted in function of the stories people tell about themselves" (p. 73). Philosophically, Ricoeur explains that narrative identity helps solve the difficulty inherent in conceptualizing personal identity and its permanence over time (p. 76). Using this thinking, Ricoeur (1991) asserts, "the narrative constructs the durable character of an individual, which one can call his or her narrative identity, in constructing the sort of dynamic identity proper to the plot, which creates the identity of the protagonist in the story" (p. 77). Within the plot — or the string of story events — comes the mediation between permanence and change that plagues the formation of an identity. Yet who "writes" these story events? And who strings them together?

Here Murray conceptualizes cyberdrama, her own word for the narrative inherent in gameplay, through the role of agency. Murray (2004) states that to make a better cyberdrama, the user should have more dramatic agency (p. 10). But how does one know and understand agency as related to Facebook newsfeed? We cannot actually see our friends move, and we cannot interactively change their profile pictures or avatars or manipulate their actions. Admittedly, a Facebook profile does not include an entire virtual world full of objects to move, change, and use. However, this does not necessarily mean that the comments and actions users can take on a friend's status updates or wall do

not involve some kind of narrative agency that *can* certainly impact both a public and private identity. This notion, too, will be explored later on.

As agency is a concept necessary for narrative in gaming, so is a conclusion a necessary condition for narrative in digital literature. Blok (2002) writes, “In contradistinction to the book the borders [of the digital novel] are not that easy to visualize and determine” (p. 173). The lack of a formal conclusion leaves a narrative open—“Reading digital narrative then also becomes a struggle to find an ending and thereby to conclude a meaning for the narrative” (Blok, 2002, p. 174). In spite of this, Blok sees digital literature as a viable narrative. His reasoning is centered on the *intent* of the author of the narrative itself, as he explains, “It is precisely because or by way of the intention that the narrative is shaped. The intention is its fundamental condition — otherwise it would not be a narrative but simple gibberish” (Blok, 2002, p. 173). With Facebook, however, user intent is a hybrid of self-expression and intent to inform. This “informative,” “keeping in touch with” function creates a cohesive story of self, though it is open-ended. In addition, the author is a collective, ever-changing entity not just one individual, which differentiates Facebook and other OSNs from digital narrative.

Along with being open-ended, Facebook profiles can be open to judgment and differing interpretations. Transitioning from conclusions into interactivity, Blok (2002) writes, “it is hard to demarcate the content, since while reading you don’t necessarily read the whole content or for that matter, due to the interactive element, read exactly the same story as other readers” (p. 173). The reader’s command over the content read and the order it is read in allows for interactivity. In previous literature, narrative is given various ‘qualifiers’ to deem it cybertextual, or a cyberdrama. These qualifiers — agency, open

interpretation and unfixed unendings — come together when considering Facebook and other OSNs as a narrative. They also create the interactive platform that defines Facebook and pushes users to communally form a hyperhyperreality.

Interactivity

As stated in chapter one, in this thesis interactivity is defined by Ryan (2001) as, “the collaboration between the reader and text in the production of meaning” (p. 16). In order to achieve this, she states that the user must have the ability to both explore and change an environment (Ryan, 2001, p. 67). Van Looy and Baetens (2003) state that what differentiates a cybertextual narrative from a printed narrative (a book, for instance) is its interactive quality. They write, “During cybertextual dialogue, [the reader] effectuates a semiotic sequence involving an activity of physical construction which can impossibly be accounted for just by the concept of ‘reading’” (Van Looy and Baetens, 2003, p. 21). This necessary physical “work” toward meaning-construction indicates interactivity.

Ryan argues that interactivity is more fully developed in an electronic environment, as electronics allow for mobility of text, hypermediacy, kaleidoscopic readings, interruption of structure and exploitation of temporality. That is, electronically a user can move text and (re)arrange it as s/he sees fit, beyond the boundaries of structure and time. In a discussion of digital literature, or “hyperfiction,” Blok (2002) states:

The greater or lesser element of interactivity in digital literature — the reader’s choice between different links that can either be graphically or textually based — institute a norm that does not presume a single designed path through the fiction. Readers are given a series of choices, and the narrative does therefore not exist as a locked sequence but is to be seen more as a network that has to be exploited by the reader. (p. 169)

Here, interactivity signifies “choice” and the previously mentioned need for “action” or “work” by the reader. This action is rephrased as “participation” by Zimmerman (2004)

in his description of “explicit interactivity.” He states, “This is ‘interaction’ in the obvious sense of the word: overt participation such as clicking the nonlinear links of a hypertext novel, following the rules of a Surrealist language game, rearranging the clothing on a set of paper dolls” (p. 158). Zimmerman’s explanation singles out clicking hypertextual links as an activity, performed by the user, in order to interact with the text (in this case, a narrative). As we’ll see in the next section, when it comes to interactivity and narrative, hypertextuality and hypermedia play a crucial role in the consideration of Facebook as a platform for hyperhyperreality.

Hypermedia and Hyper/Cybertext

Lévy (1998) defines digital hypertext as “a collection of network-based multimodal information that can be quickly and ‘intuitively’ navigated” (p. 57). Navigation occurs through linking, an activity that involves the (re)construction of a semiotic code for the user’s own pleasure. Landow (2000) defines the link as the element that “plays the defining role [in information technology], for all the chief practical, cultural, and educational characteristics of this medium derive from the fact that linking creates new kinds of connectivity and reader choice” (p. 154). In short, the link provides users (readers) “access to a wide repertoire of schemas and scripts” (Douglas and Hargadon, 2004, p. 201). The pleasure of reading lies in what Douglas and Hargadon (2004) write are, “our attempts to discover congruencies between the hypertext and an array of often mutually exclusive schemas, and, ultimately, our ability to make sense of the work as a whole” (p. 201). Landow (2000) continues, “By permitting one to make connections between texts and text and images so easily, the electronic link encourages one to think in terms of connections” (p. 159). The reader’s choice creates enough

ambiguity to require active engagement with the text, to mentally “link” or connect the virtual links on the screen.

Douglas and Hargadon’s use of the term “schema” connects interactivity and hypertextuality back to narrative. Van Looy and Baetens (2003) also discuss linking through the use of narrative language. They write, “In hypertext the reader determines the unfolding of the text by clicking or selecting certain areas on the screen called hyperlinks, after which the screen reloads and presents another part of the text (node, lexia, page)” (p. 14). This *agency* for the reader of the text creates an *interactive* environment in which the work and choices of the reader create the scope of the story told. Lévy (1998) writes, “. . . Hypertextualization multiplies out opportunities for producing meaning and makes the act of reading considerably richer” (p. 56). A hypertextual reader can have as “rich” an experience as s/he chooses, can understand as detailed or as vague a story as s/he chooses, depending on how many “links” s/he chooses to follow.

Levy (1998) reinforces the reader’s agency, writing, “The space of meaning does not exist before the text is read. It is while moving through the text, mapping it, that we fabricate and actualize meaning” (p. 48). Using this as a guide, one can understand Facebook as an unmapped, open-ended narrative. A user can follow links of his or her choosing, and add links to others’ pages, which act as autonomous story events. Other users fabricate and actualize meaning by weaving these events together as a plot, whenever they choose to continue to click and interpret. There is no longer one author, but many, and the story of the individual is uncovered depending on how far the reader chooses to delve into the links. Therefore, as Holmqvist and Andersen (1993) assert, “The medium should be conceived as a *collage* medium...” (p. 167).

This collage consists of hyperlinks and hypertexts, as previously stated. In addition, hypermedia plays a role in the hyperhypermeality, or identifying narrative collage. Liestol (1993) describes the hypermedia *environment* as follows:

. . . An open and individual system where readers and writers share the same electronic environment and users may contribute with their own texts and link them in various ways to the documents already in the system. The hypermedia *environment*, then, becomes an ever-growing and changing body of interconnected electronic texts. In these relations the concept of context gains new significance — texts no longer appear in isolation and nor are they displaced from relevant and related contexts. (p. 267)

Returning to the other-centered, relational/communal identity formation, a user's hypermedia environment situates that user in a larger context of his/her friends — no loner in 'isolation.' The user, the 'me,' is always-already embedded in the other, because both augmentation of story events and their sequential plot making relies on the other as reader. Identity is placed in its relevant and related contexts, those being whatever and whoever the user is linked to. Liestol (1993) concludes, "Hypermedia communication offers *integration* of media, *inclusion* of context, and *interaction* with each individual user" (p. 281).

In the following analysis, I will synthesize the aforementioned literature on narrative, interactivity, and hypertext in order to explain how a Facebook profile and newsfeed can create a communal hyperhypermeality. This hyperhypermeality should be understood as an identifying narrative collage — open ended and difficult to exhaust. As Blok (2002) writes, "and the narrative does therefore not exist as a locked sequence but is to be seen more as a network that has to be exploited by the reader" (p. 169). In addition, "This might render it difficult for the reader to exhaust the narrative and its possibilities..." (p. 176). Though many literary critics may see this as a weakness of

narrative or even a characteristic that necessarily excludes Facebook from being considered a narrative, I believe that this merely emphasizes the continued production of meaning taking place for the reader as author.

Analysis

News Feed as Hyperhyperreality

In September of 2006, more than two years after its initial launch, Facebook added the News Feed and Mini-Feed features. In an official post to the Facebook blog, engineer Ruchi Sanghvi explained:

News Feed highlights what's happening in your social circles on Facebook. It updates a personalized list of news stories throughout the day, so you'll know when Mark adds Britney Spears to his Favorites or when your crush is single again. Now, whenever you log in, you'll get the latest headlines generated by the activity of your friends and social groups.

Mini-Feed is similar, except that it centers around one person. Each person's Mini-Feed shows what has changed recently in their profile and what content (notes, photos, etc.) they've added. Check out your own Mini-Feed; if there are any stories you don't like, you can remove them from your profile. (Sanghvi, 2006)

When a user logs in, the homepage is a News Feed of friend activity (see figure 3.1). In January of 2010, Facebook updated the News Feed page to appear in two sections — the “Top News” link or the “Most Recent” link — which were sorted out by relevance to the user’s activity on Facebook. Top News detailed friends who the user communicated with the most, while Most Recent remained a real time feed of all friends’ activities.

When a user logs in to his/her Facebook account, the homepage (see figure 3.1) is the first interface s/he sees. As stated previously, this page is primarily concerned with the user’s Top and Most Recent news. The News Feed is intended to be a quick recap of friends’ updates, and it’s an easy way for users to comment on other users activities. In figure 3.1, Susie was able to “like” Daniel’s photo without having to search for his

profile. As a user scrolls down News Feed, s/he can add comments or “like” friends’ status updates, wall posts, shared links and shared photos. As other users comment on the same News Feed “story,” notifications appear on the homepage (see figures 3.2 and 3.3).

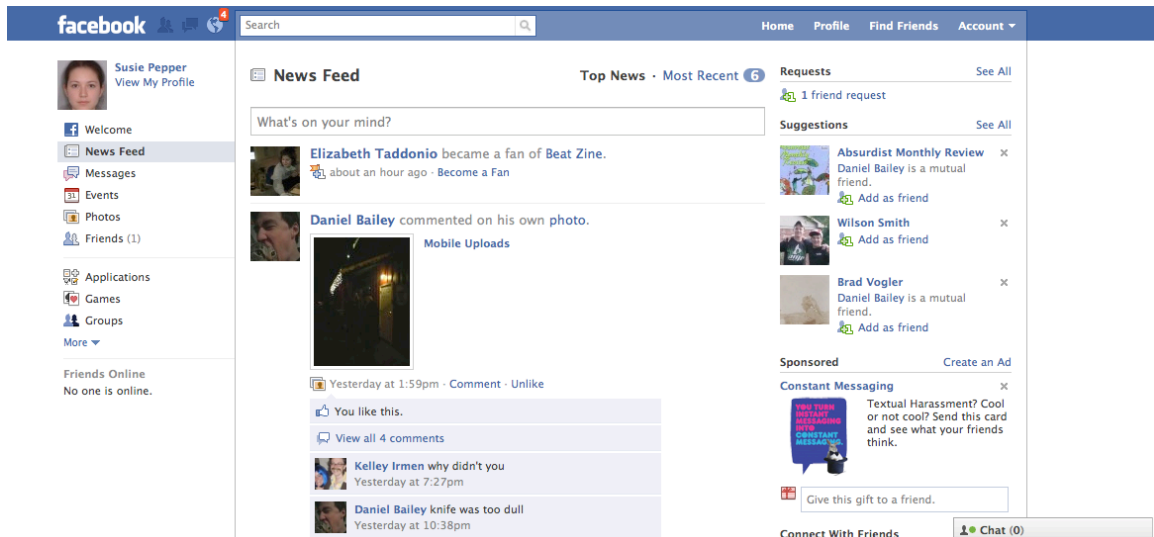


Figure 3.1. Screenshot of Facebook News Feed taken from Susie Pepper’s homepage March 8, 2010.

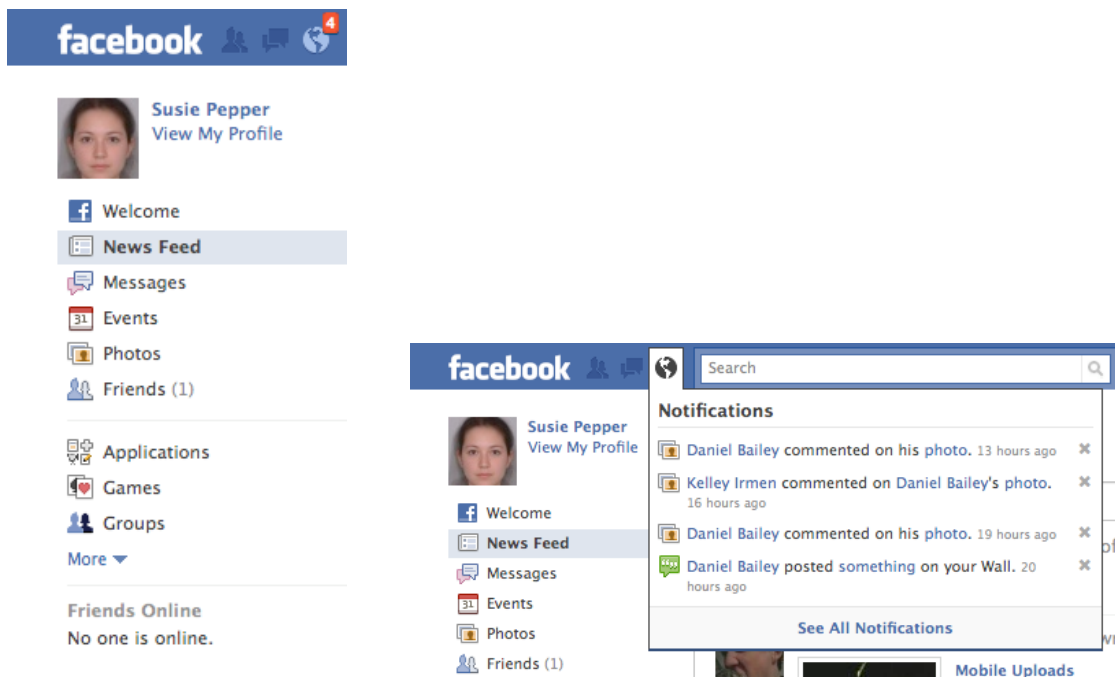


Figure 3.2 (left). Upper left corner of homepage showing “notifications” for Susie Pepper on March 8, 2010 (red number indicates four new activities). Figure 3.3 (right). Once clicked, the notifications expand to link to each instance of new activity.

This story-building is instant, and constant. The more “action” a story receives, the more users see the story on their Top News feed. As long as the users are all friends, the communal reading and commentary can take place — the adding of feedback and asking/answering of questions. This gives the original poster (in the case above, Daniel was the first to post), validation in the form of friend feedback. Returning to the notion that adolescents are constantly performing for an imaginary audience, it’s easy to see that Facebook facilitates and reiterates this psychological claim. The fact that the Other audience is virtual means that it’s always-already there — a user cannot stop being present and accessible to his or her friends as long as s/he remains a Facebook user. The audience is also prompted to post feedback, which boosts the dynamic and places even more emphasis on the communal/ relational component of identity formation. Giddens (1991) writes, “Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*” (p. 53). If this biography is pieced together through hyperlinks, communally added to by the Other, then self-identity literally becomes wedded to the Other. Certain behaviors, photos, and links are commented on or (quite literally) “liked” more than others, which can serve to reinforce those behaviors and/or links and denounce others.¹⁹

Users can also participate in and augment friends’ hyper hyperrealities through posting of hypermedia. For the purpose of this argument, and to preserve the privacy of my underage subjects, I’ll use my own Facebook profile as an example of the use of photos and “tagging” to create a hyperhyperreality. Tagging occurs when a user uploads

¹⁹ Chapter four will discuss this at length, as the performative aspect of the Facebook profile is analyzed.

a photo and adds a hyperlink to connect friends to that photo. In figure 3.4, I've captured a screen from my Facebook profile depicting myself and my friend Daniel at an event. When a user hovers his/her cursor over my name, the photo is highlighted where I have been tagged (this feature is especially helpful when identifying friends of friends in group photographs). In addition, the title of the album — “3 Voices Flash! Addition” — tells that this photo was taken at a poetry reading (the 3 Voices poetry readings are a fixture in the Colorado State University's poetry department). Incidentally, previous Mini-Feed announcements on my profile also confirmed that I was attending the event (see figure 3.5 for example Mini-Feed story, which occurs when one RSVPs to a Facebook event invitation). Had the friend clicked the hyperlink to the event, s/he could have seen that Daniel was going to be reading poetry, indicating his profession, or at the very least his (and my) interest. Likewise, the fact that the friend who posted the photo captioned it with “Cutes ♥” indicates that the two people depicted are in a romantic relationship. Were a friend to further inquire and click on my name, a link to my profile would show that, indeed, Daniel and I are “linked” to each other's profiles through relationship status (see figure 3.6).

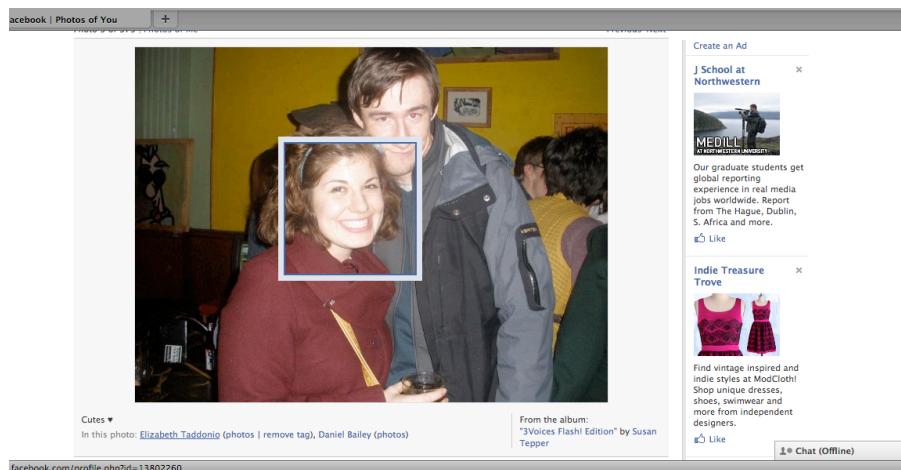


Figure 3.4. Screenshot of tagged photo, through which hyperlinking creates a narrative (March 8, 2010).

RECENT ACTIVITY


 Elizabeth attended Tuesday Night Toast for Lauren's Birthday. · Comment · Like

Figure 3.5. Screenshot of Mini-Feed. This is what appears on a user's wall when s/he RSVPs to a Facebook event (March 8, 2010).



The screenshot shows a Facebook profile page. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Wall, Info, Photos, Boxes, Video, Graffiti, and a plus sign. To the right of these tabs is an 'Edit Information' link with a pencil icon. Below the tabs is a section titled 'Basic Information' with a horizontal line underneath. The information listed is:

Networks:	Colorado State Grad Student '10 Ithaca College Alum '08
Current City:	Fort Collins, CO
Birthday:	January 9, 1986
Hometown:	Rochester, NY
Relationship Status:	Married to Daniel Bailey

Figure 3.6. Screenshot of my Facebook personal profile. Should a friend inquire into my hyperhypermeality from the tagged photo, my relationship status links me to the other person pictured in the photo.

Naturally, the depth to which a friend would want to explore that narrative, which first appeared on the News Feed with one tagged photo, is his/her *choice*. A friend can click through the photo and move on, or delve further into the narrative to its nearly unending unfolding. This ties back into the earlier reference to open narratives and the creation of plot through connecting story events: communal activity creates a plot defined as a relational dynamism between autonomous story events (like a photo tag or a status update). In addition, each friend that comments on the activity has a hyperlink attached to his/her name that connects the comment directly to his/her profile. Though it connects users to one another through hyperlinks, a Facebook News Feed first and foremost is meant to update users on their friends' stories. Literally called "stories" by the engineers that created the platform, each of these snippets can create a narrative plotline of a user's life, with story events and links of both banality and importance. This communal collage narrative should be known as the hyperhypermeality.

Wall and Profile as Hyperhypermeality

From the News Feed, a user's profile and wall can be accessed. In this section, I'll discuss how the profile page offers a more expansive, user-specific narrative than the News Feed. Through wall posts/wall-to-wall and status updates, a user's hyperhypermeality is a condensed and continuous collage narrative. This then acts as a place where the user and his/her friends can instantly access not only the present, but the past, in a form of instantaneous nostalgia.

As described earlier, the News Feed is a running list of a user's friends' activities, regardless of the user's own involvement in those activities. The wall, then, is the running list of all of a specific user's (the profile holder's) activities. Since there are so many actions a user can take on Facebook, however, the wall is organized using different subtabs, or links (figure 3.7). These links create activity lists from friends, the user and their friends, and just the user. With the "User + friends" tab, a running list of all activity posted by friends involving the user can be accessed. This is useful in generating a hyperhypermeality, in that interests, relationships and experiences can be read.

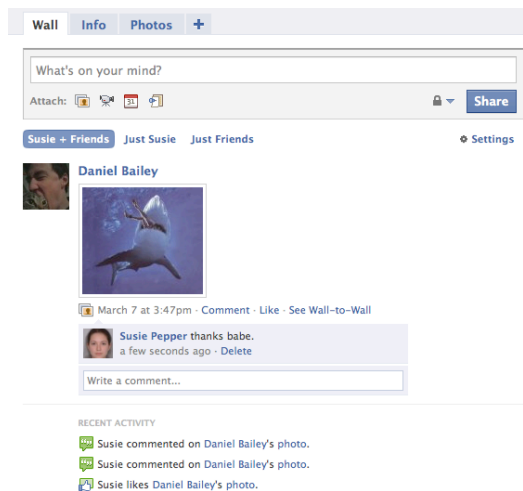


Figure 3.7. Screen capture of Susie Pepper's wall. Note that the top links (beneath the status update bar) organize the wall navigation into "Susie + Friends," "Just Susie" and "Just Friends." Taken March 24, 2010.

One aspect of the wall post is the link to “see wall-to-wall,” in which every post between friends, in chronological order, is revealed. The wall-to-wall is literally a digital archive of all “conversations” between two friends, and though it has a certain beginning, there really is no end to when two friends can stop posting. Wall-to-walls can reveal banal details of everyday life, or they can reveal poignant moments in relationships, all depending upon the degree to which users choose to share. This record of dialogues via wall posts creates a communally shared virtual memory for the user, and this one aspect of the user’s hyperhyperreality can be relived and reread every time he or she logs in to his or her Facebook account. This record is also available to any mutual friends the two wall-to-wall friends have, making the hyperhyperreality is accessible and readable to various different audiences (see figure 3.8).

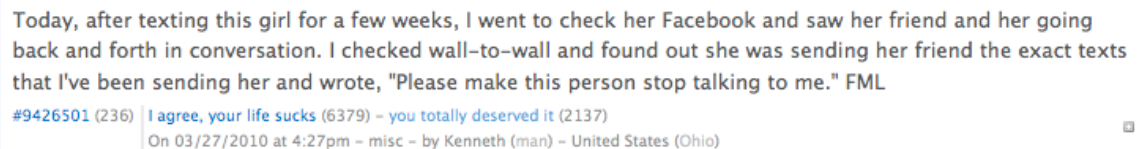


Figure 3.8. Example of use of wall-to-wall function (via fmylife.com). Here, the friend using the wall-to-wall (C) emplotted story events between his friend (A) and one of her friends (B) in order to make sense of his relationship with his friend (A).

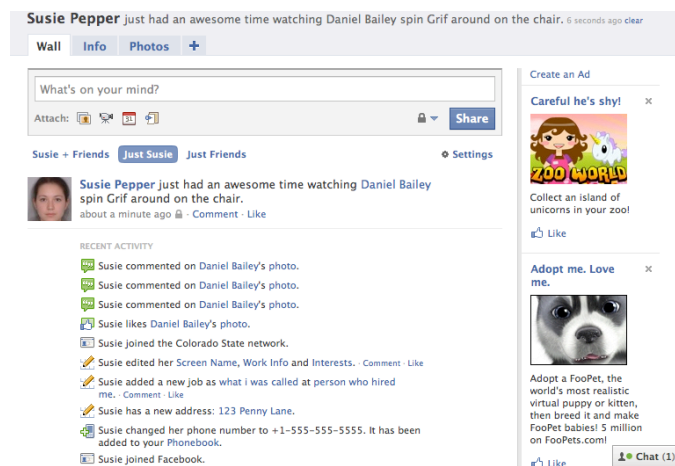


Figure 3.9. Screen capture of Susie Pepper’s wall activity. The minifeed offers a list of activity from most to least recent. The most recent status update by Susie has tagged Daniel Bailey. This tagged update will, in turn, appear on Daniel’s minifeed and wall.

Similarly, by clicking the “Just user” link, status updates and other posts solely made by the user are revealed (see figure 3.9). Status updates are exactly what their name suggests — they are (mostly) short messages posted by the user in order to keep their friends up-to-date on their lives. These messages appear on the user’s wall and on the Live Feeds of their friends. Though status updates are meant to be informative, they can also be abstract thoughts, song lyrics, or personal jokes between friends. Through hyperlinks, status updates also now function to “tag” friends and link them to one another (see figure 3.9). For the purpose of creating a narrative, status updates offer a direct story event created specifically by one user. In spite of this agency, status updates are indeed communal, and can be commented on by friends. Referring back to examples in the introduction, friends can mock each other or even uncover different aspects of each others’ hyperhyperrealities that they may not have wanted to know. In any event, the reading of status updates, and the connectivity between them all, is placed on the user and friend as plot builder.

Conclusion

Everyday, Facebook users add to their hyperhyperrealities and the hyperhyperrealities of others. As this condensed and communal collage narrative forms, it enables users to reread and reflect on their experiences, their friendships, and their hobbies over time. For me, a member since its inception in 2004, Facebook is a collection of the people and places I’ve seen since then. It provides a platform for introspection and for a form of tangible nostalgia, whereby I can constantly go back and read over ‘my’ narrative. In short, my friends and I are communally writing my life, and creating my virtual self.

Recall the study by boyd and Heer (2006), which explored “how the performance of social identity and relationships shifted the Profile from being a static representation of self to a communicative body in conversation with the other represented bodies” (p. 1). The two concluded that, at least with Friendster, much of the expression of identity was linked to actors interpreting and creating social context. They state that while “Friendster provides a communicative environment,” “cultural structures developed both on and offline build the framework necessary for ongoing communication” (p. 10). That is to say, the two saw the design of the site as the catalyst for the social (in my study communal) contextualization of situations. In my study, the context is created through reader and writer choice, which in turn create an on-going narrative. This continuous linking and decisions on which links to click do not stop until the user chooses to cease clicking.

This unending quality does not come without cost, which can take the form of obsessive clicking and checking. Lepucki (2010) describes status updates and notifications as hidden candy at the bottom of a Christmas stocking. She writes:

The problem with Facebook and Twitter, I’ve realized, is that the Christmas stocking is infinite, and infinitely full. There is *always* another piece of candy to claw at. One piece is delicious, but one begets two, and three, and four, and, okay, five...it’s not long before you’ve made yourself sick. (Lepucki, 2010)

In this sense, the fact that narrative is so communal is a double-edged sword — its positive, self-affirming quality might create a dependency on these affirmations.

Blok (2002) writes, “The narrative, the design and functionality of digital literature is closely tied to the technology that produces it, and the computer must therefore be brought into the discussion of digital literature — not in the context of literary works, nor as their theme, but as an element producing meaning that affects the

narrative” (p. 177). Considering human beings as homo-narrans, Facebook as a medium is incredibly significant to the interactions it produces. Each autonomous News Feed story event, whether banal (“taking a walk with the dog”) or important (“just found out I’m going to have twins!”) can be plotted in different ways, necessitating the existence of friends as narrators. It is this for this reason that users ‘unfriend’ exlovers or exfriends: With access to autonomous story events, emplotting a narrative can be a painful experience, allowing one to live through a narrative s/he is no longer a part of.²⁰

Hyper hyperrealities, or identifying narrative collages, may come to augment, or even replace, the everyday interactions that shape a user’s personal narrative. Ricoeur (1991) writes, “we equate life to the story or stories we tell about it. The act of telling or narrating appears to be the key to the type of connectedness that we evoke when we speak . . . Here, the question of identity is deliberately posed as the outcome of narration” (p. 77). If adolescents articulate the self through storytelling and narrative, hyperhyperrealities provide generation M with a different type of platform. On this platform, narratives are communal, they are interactive, and they use hypermedia to bring experiences to virtual “life.” As a result, the story truly is never-ending.

²⁰ In November of 2009, the New Oxford American Dictionary announced that the 2009 Word of the Year was “unfriend,” as in “to remove someone as a ‘friend’ on a social networking site” (Heussner, 2009).

Chapter Four

Performance by the (Facebook) Dashboard Light:

Online Impression Management and Situational Identity

In late January of 2010, Bob Patel introduced “Doppelgänger week” by asking Facebook members to “replace their profile photo with a celebrity that looks like them” (Grossman, 2010). Friends kept Patel’s trend alive by posting status updates stating, “It’s Doppelgänger week on Facebook; change your profile picture to someone famous (actor, musician, athlete, etc.) you have been told you look like. After you update your profile with your twin or switched at birth photo then cut/paste this to your status” (The Guardian Online, 2010). Though this was meant to be another fun Facebook meme, it also revealed an important aspect about the Facebook profile and the picture choice in general — if all the world is a stage, then all the interface is a place for performance.

With the Doppelgänger meme, performance became a game of appearance, where Facebook members could replace their own likeness in a serious, fantastical, or witty way. Doree Shafrir, a writer for *Gawker*, pulled apart the trend, explaining:

The Doppelgänger meme has been revealing a little too much about my Facebook friends' psychology since it started last week. It's a delicate, awkward dance, right? If your friend replaces her profile picture with Kate Hudson, are you supposed to tell her that she doesn't resemble her? *At all?* No, right? Awkward! But a fake "OMG you *do* look so much like her!" is just as awkward. There is *no right answer*, just as there is no right answer to the question of who your

Doppelgänger is. Unless you turn it into a big joke—hey, look, I think I look like Al Bundy! Oh yes, ha ha ha, you are funny person. (Shafir, 2010)

Though the meme emerged at a particular, and brief, moment in Facebook history, the social motivation behind it is something consistent with how people perform their identities on a daily basis. Human beings have to make certain decisions about their actions and appearances in order to present themselves to the Other, whether as honest expressions of whom they believe themselves to be or not. Erving Goffman (1959) writes, “There is a statistical relation between appearances and reality, not an intrinsic or necessary one” (p. 71). For the most part, people attempt to display themselves realistically to their public audiences, though their motivation for “fudging” the facts is understandable.²¹ Whether to be fun, or to appear better online, the virtualization of the self is not necessarily symptomatic of the tendencies of a sociopath.²²

In this chapter, I’ll explore how the Facebook profile and wall both align with and deviate from previous psychological, communicative and sociological notions of relational identity performance and maintenance. I begin with a review of the literature on performance, focused mainly on Erving Goffman’s 1959 work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, a foundational text across disciplines. Next, while previous chapters relied on analysis of visual evidence and my own experiences with the site, this chapter will introduce the voices of my four respondents. I conclude with the notion that Facebook, as a medium and as a virtually real space for hyperhyperreality, changes the ways in which individuals can perform identity. This change, as with all technological

²¹ Goffman suggests, “There are not many French cooks who are really Russian spies, and perhaps here are not many women who play the part of wife to one man and mistress to another but these duplicities do occur . . .” (p. 71). That is to say, though all performances require management, few people manage multiple performances and construct multiple corresponding situations.

²² Return to the introduction for the definition of virtual.

changes, may have negative consequences in the form of narcissism, limitless openness to bullying, and even loneliness. However, these deleterious effects should not overshadow the potential for OSNs to facilitate community building, empathy with others, and a cosmopolitan awareness of global issues that can be accessed more easily and efficiently than ever before.

On the Facebook ‘Front’: A literature Review

The notion that identity is fluid and adapts to circumstance is commonly accepted across disciplines. That is, “Self-identity . . . is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens, 1991, p. 52). Likewise, Kennedy (2001) writes, “. . . Social scientists have insisted that identities are constituted and validated through ongoing interactions” (p. 2). To come into “being,” humans rely on Others to articulate and enact the self. This “being” action is reinforced only when humans have an Other for comparison — someone to “be” for. Jenkins (1996) summarizes and defines this concept well, stating, “It leads me to propose a definition of the self as each individual’s reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted *vis a vis* others in terms of similarity and difference, without which we would not know who we are and hence would not be able to act” (p. 30).

Taking this Other-centered quality of identity formation into consideration, Yingling (2004) asserts, “Relationships are not entities or outcomes, but instead are ways of being in a human, social environment” (p. 113). All human identities are thus thoroughly infused with a social quality, prompting some scholars to refer to “identity”

solely as social identity (Jenkins, 1996, p. 4). Kennedy (2001) explicates the social identity:

According to interactionist theory (for example, Mead, 1934), what guarantees this overlap between individual and social identity is the fact that the self is constituted through interactions with significant other who provide us with various definitions of ourselves. Indeed, we are unable to know ourselves except through our perceptions of how others see us and how they respond to our characteristics and actions. The wider set of ongoing and organized social relationships — or the generalized other — provides actors in micro-relationships with an agreed interpretation of characteristics and actions and thus gives an overall coherence and confirmation to shared interactive experiences. (p. 4)

Because it is dependent upon socializing with others, identity hinges upon relationships beginning at an early age. “The child’s understanding of relationship begins in the contrast between self and other” (Yingling, 2004, p. 114). When the Other is recognized, identity is summoned and a performance can take place.

Goffman (1959) defines performance as “the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (p. 22).²³ A performance manifests before certain audiences at specific times and in certain contexts in order to manipulate the audience’s perception of an individual. These manipulations occur using different tactics and techniques, the more obvious of which is “front.” Goffman (1959) defines front as “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (p. 22). Appearance and manner make up an individual’s front.

²³ Throughout this chapter, Goffman provides the theoretical anchor for identity performance. I acknowledge the extensive body of literature on performance, more prominently Judith Butler’s work with gender and society. However, where Butler focuses on performance within an institution, in accordance with societal norms, I prefer to discuss performance more broadly, using Goffman’s foundational texts as a guide.

“Appearance may be taken to refer to those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer’s social statuses” (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). Historically, appearance and its social connotations shift with societal norms. For example, what was once a sign of the proletariat working class, blue jeans now may be taken as a functional fashion statement and can be made in costly designer brands. Many unfixed aspects of appearance involve premeditated planning and can have relational consequences (hairstyle, clothing choice, use of makeup, etc). Appearance is typically not fixed, though certain physical characteristics may be (thick hair, crooked teeth, skin tone or clarity, etc). In addition to appearance, manner, or “those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation” (Goffman, 1959, p. 24) also plays a role in an individual’s performance front. Manner is read and understood through certain situationally-embedded intricacies, like facial expression, tone of voice, body language, etc. Facebook, as a medium, disembods these intricacies, as they are not a part of computer-mediated-communication on this platform. Though this may seem like a detrimental aspect of Facebook communication, it may also encourage users to seek alternative expressive possibilities. These possibilities, as discussed earlier, include the use of hypermedia and linking. In a sense, the loss of one form of performance fosters the use of other performance boosters not available in offline interactions.

Both appearance and manner are contingent upon the situation, yet “when an individual appears before others his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they have come to” (Goffman, 1959, p.6). Performance is crucial, then, in not only defining the two players and their relationship to each other, but also in relationally

defining the situation and thus the appropriate and fitting performance. Once value is given to performance, impression management and expressive control come into play.

Expressive control and impression management involve an individual's manipulation of front in order to "put his/her best face forward." "When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). The idealized self is a performance for the Other wherein an individual packages himself as a finished product — an end product presented for judging sans the efforts that went into the impression management (Goffman, 1959, p. 44).

Impression management is learned from an early age — mainly during adolescence. As I have indicated in earlier chapters, adolescents are, for the first time, not only aware of themselves but also of Others. This awareness results in the need for the best possible self to be presented, and it oftentimes means that adolescents are searching for symbolic extensions of the self to present to the Other for approval. It is for this reason that "tweens" have become such an important target audience for the branding and marketing of clothing, music, and other commodities. Children, therefore, know to be selective in their performances, and Yingling (2004) writes, "children's own stories are likely to present features of self that they select to present and thus affirm. Self-presentation is a more advanced ability than self-labelling and necessitates choices among self-labels about what the children wish to reveal" (p. 110). When children step

into adolescence and shift from labeling to presenting, they join adults in their performance for the generalized Other.²⁴

Analysis

Impression management

The claim that a Facebook profile involves performance is, in many ways, an obvious one. As one can gather from previous chapters, and even from the introduction to this chapter, a profile involves a collection of initially empty boxes filled with different, strategic choices and representations of self. In this section, I will discuss the use of the personal profile to aid in impression management and expressive control. In order to do this, I will use both observational analysis of the Facebook profile page and the voices of my four subjects.²⁵ These voices lend a perspective on how and why Facebook is used, and bolster my argument that impression management is more convenient on a social networking site and that identity is easier to construct through a communal lens. Though this communal quality may lend itself to greater empathy in adolescents, it may also have consequences for the traditional notions of identity building in the long run.

The fact that Facebook is a ground for relational identity formation is apparent from the subjects' responses as to why they joined. All four stated that they did so because they already had friends on it, or that friends suggested they join. Allie, a 15-year-old female subject, wrote, "Over the summer i decided to join, i wanted to see how many friends i could get. And i joined facebook because my mom would not let me get a

²⁴ One prominent example of how children make this shift involves gender. While children, from an early age, are taught to use the labels "boy" and "girl," this is very different than *performing* gender. As an act of rebellion, many adolescent girls identify as "girls," never doubting the label, while they simultaneously perform masculine activities, or wear more masculine clothing.

²⁵ All subject names are pseudonyms.

myspace, and more of my friends had facebook.”²⁶ This is aligned with psychological theories that adolescents, using the Other as a basis for self, would use the same methods and platforms as their friends. It also goes to show that Facebook can act as a form of validation or grounding of self, as friends publicly add up and can be visibly accessed. Thomas, a 15-year-old male, concurred, stating, “It seems like Facebook is just more popular with people our age, which causes more of our friends to join Facebook over Myspace. Most people join these things because of other people.” That adolescents make decisions about what network to join based on “other people” should hardly come as a surprise, as many adolescents also choose to wear (or not wear) brands, listen to (or not listen to) music, behave (or not behave) in certain ways because it is popular/unpopular with friends. In this way, choices about Facebook use mirror choices about other grouping techniques commonly used by adolescents. This platform is simply an offshoot of pre-existing identity-honing practices.

As seen in chapter two, the profile itself is a collection of listed information meant to highlight certain aspects of the self and hide others. Goffman (1959) writes, “If an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards” (p. 41). The creation of a Facebook profile is an act of impression management. In fact, it is an even more obvious act of impression management than may occur offline, as anyone who creates a Facebook profile is given a standard format for filling out and selecting information. Though in the end, the numerous intrapersonal choices that people make in performance are concealed, making most identity performances a polished package, the

²⁶ All quotes are [sic] and taken verbatim from the subjects’ type-written responses from the Facebook group and/or personal Facebook messaging.

choices made on Facebook are more transparent than those offline. For example, making a list of five favorite movies or writing a brief descriptive paragraph about oneself does not happen in most social situations. That is, though material may come up in social situations offline, there is a greater conjectural invitation to the audience fill in gaps in performance. These online lists are explicit and contrived in a manner that suggests packaging and deliberate choice. This deliberation aids in bringing out the “virtual,” as discussed in chapter one. The virtual hyperreality, as I called it, is that all-encompassing identity that can be manipulated and performed to reach its full potential and supercede the actual. The virtual hyperreality synthesizes information from the offline, actual self to perform, on the screen, the best potential self.

Deliberate packaging, as mentioned earlier, usually means that there may be a certain degree of disparity between front and reality, though significant infringements are typically rare. Some subjects discussed a disparity between the people they knew in “real life” — here, offline — and their packages on Facebook. For example, Thomas wrote, “In all honesty, I have witnessed a few cases where people may post sad statuses and whatever else on Facebook, but be completely happy in reality. I believe this is done for special attention.” On one hand, this provides an example of performing for the Other — doing things for “special” attention requires that attention is being given to the performer. The fact that Thomas equates emotional states to presentation of self is also in tune with notions of performance, in that *manner* can be inferred through online actions. Karrie, a 13-year-old female subject, also discussed manner and “false” performance, writing, “sometimes people portray themselves as either being way nicer or way meaner.” Manner is often debated by scholars studying online communication, in that certain nuances

apparent during offline interpersonal communication, like expression, body language and vocal tone, are absent from computer mediated communication. It is interesting to note, here, that two subjects could discern certain manners from online profiles, though more attention will be focused on situational manner and performance in the next section.

In addition to the maintenance of manner, appearance is also subject to manipulation for performance's sake. Both female subjects stated that photos were an important part of the user profile. Though Allie does not fill out a profile, for instance, she does update her photo often. She writes, "I update my profile picture every couple of weeks, i only change it when i feel i need a new one. But i never update my info, i currently have nothing in those categories." Karrie mentioned photos as well, writing, "[I update my profile] a lot hahaha . . . photo's and other things .. photos because i like to have new ones up, so people can see, and other information because i like to change it up a bit." This ease of "changing it up a bit" again reiterates the impact of social networking sites on the ability to manipulate performances. Photos are perhaps the most interesting aspect of performance, for their hyperreal, representational, and persuasive qualities.

Ryan (2006) describes hyperreality as "a copy that kills the desire for the original because it is better shaped, more coherent, more predictable, and therefore more intelligible" (p. 72). This definition is derived from the work of Baudrillard, who theorized that what we understand to be the "actual" world is in fact a simulation, a representation covering the "real." Use of a photo to aid in the creation of an online identity can augment the offline identity in a "more intelligible" fashion — a virtual, hyperhyperreality.

The concept of photographs is important, in that a photo can be “faithful to a specific actuality,” and “puts on display a moment the [user] chooses, investing the [user] with autonomy or with perfect sovereignty over the material we see” (Belsey, 2005, p. 98). In turn, “The picture that emphasizes its meaning therefore has no specific tense, but is capable of spanning past, present and future” (Belsey, 2005, p. 98). A user who chooses a childhood photo, for instance, may want to share an aspect of themselves others might not have seen, or may choose that to represent their “playful” or child-like present-tense self. Another popular Facebook photo has the user in front of a famous landmark, which may signify the user’s sense of travel, culture and overall “worldliness.” The photographic representation works outside of actual time, allowing the user some control over his or her narrative and an ambiguous avatar subject to the reading of online friends.

Photos afford the user the opportunity to choose which moment(s) of his/her life are the best summation of all moments. Knowing this, a photo can be a very persuasive form of performance. For example, Allie wrote, “I think some people take a profile picture to make them look better or cooler than they really are. . . Like to make their personal story seem greater.” This emphasizes that a photo is chosen with an audience in mind, and that the photo is a strategic piece of performance and impression management. The “idealized” self (or virtual self, returning to the introduction of this paper) may be easier to pin down on a platform that allows such a collage of personal attributes, tastes, positions, values, and appearance. This idealized self also may not match up to the individual’s lived behavior as a whole. In addition, when asked if Facebook changes the way that she feels about herself offline, Karrie answered, “i think when people comment

on pictures, i mean everyone likes getting complimented.” This shows, at least in part, that there is some kind of validation in friend responses to an individual’s posts, and that this validation may be the impetus for impression management and the performance of the idealized virtual self.

In spite of the opportunity for overt manipulation and even dishonesty in presenting the self, subjects responded that profiles were helpful in “keeping up with” friends. This suggests a certain amount of honesty in packaging. For example, Thomas stated:

The part of Facebook that I think tells you the most about a person is the "Info" tab on their profile. This tab basically just describes yourself and gives out almost all of your information. That is if you choose to post that information.

Thomas also stated that the profile information was important because “I am able to see how my close friends are doing, because most of them post statuses on a regular basis.” In addition, Michael, a 14-year-old male, uses Facebook primarily to keep in touch. He wrote, “I like to see what people are doing and I use the chat too, Just to see whats going on.” Allie, a 15-year-old female, agreed, stating, “i like to see what everyone is up too and seeing their posts.”

Though there is certainly an awareness of the Other in the strategic performances adolescents make on Facebook, for the most part these performances are true to the experiences people have had with their friends offline. Friends are not using the medium to completely posture, but simply to reflect their offline life. Additionally, none of the participants mentioned “friending” people who they’d never met in real life, suggesting that Facebook acts as an extension of pre-existing relationships and a pre-established self. In spite of this, there is still not an established “situation” in which appropriateness of

performance and response has been established. In the next section, I will focus my analysis on manner and the loss of the ability to identify a situation through performance.

Body Language, Information Sharing, and the Situation

According to Giddens (1991), “Facial expressions and other gestures provide the fundamental content of that contextuality or indexicality which is the condition of everyday communication. To learn to become a competent agent — able to join with others on an equal basis in the production and reproduction of social relations — is to be able to exert continuous, and successful, monitoring of face and body” (p. 56). Though, as stated previously, monitoring of the face and body does happen on Facebook, it does so on the level of representations. That is, a photograph stands in as a representation of a person and his/her identity. In some cases, this is not helpful at all in assessing the situation (for example, some members post baby photos, or photos of their pets, car, or children). In cases where members do not choose a first order representation of themselves, like a current photo of their face, representations might signify something else — an identifying concept or life philosophy. Perhaps choosing a photo of a nature scene is meant to signify the user’s love of the outdoors, where a photo of a coffee cup might signify a person’s interests or hobbies. In other words, all photos are specifically chosen representations and thus performances of the profile holder, whether direct (photo of him or herself) or indirect (abstract photo of an object).

These representations, regardless of their forms, are two-dimensional and are not able to convey nonverbal feedback to their audience. Therefore, the element of *manner*, though it can be discerned from words, is almost altogether lost on an online social network. There is no *defined* situational context, because the self (on the profile) is, for

the most part, stationary within a static set-up. Changes in body language only occur at the level of representation, and important social cues cannot be discerned as they are in offline interpersonal interaction. Variables such as tone of voice, facial expression and eye contact are not present on the screen. The ability for a performance to define a situation and allow the players to determine appropriate responses and actions is thus lost. There is no longer a bodily or facial index.

This may be the reason that Thomas, though vocal about his desire to keep up with friends through status updates, explained that there can be a certain amount of oversharing online. He writes, “I think [having] a ‘status’ is a bit unnecessary. Sure it tells people a little about you, I just think some people go out of the way with it. Posting their every move in reality.” Thomas indicates that there is a limit to what kind of information should be shared online, and that “every move in reality” doesn’t need to be on there. Returning to the previous chapter and the notion of story events, Thomas seems to believe that certain story events are appropriate for Facebook, while others are not. The undergirding of this idea is that Facebook profile story events should be selective — they should highlight the flattering and create the virtual self, the idealized self. Unlike in real life situations, however, without a defined situation, it is not possible to determine exactly what should be said and what should be kept private, other than what is flattering and what is not.

In addition to the stationary self on Facebook, the platform itself remains relatively constant. In the last couple of years, Facebook underwent changes and updates to the interface about 2-3 times per year. In most cases, not only did the design change, but also the features provided. In an interview with *TechCrunch* founder Michael

Arrington, Facebook creator and CEO Mark Zuckerberg explained that in the last decade “social norms” have shifted. He states:

When I got started in my dorm room at Harvard, the question a lot of people asked was ‘why would I want to put any information on the Internet at all? Why would I want to have a website?’

And then in the last 5 or 6 years, blogging has taken off in a huge way and all these different services that have people sharing all this information. People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people. That social norm is just something that's evolved over time.

We view it as our role in the system to constantly be innovating and be updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norms are. (Kamer, 2010)

In an essence, Zuckerberg is trying to explain that social norms on the Internet continue to evolve, and that OSNs like Facebook evolve with them. In this way, the medium is performative as well, shifting its front to the online situation in order to put its best face forward. However, this performative drive to incorporate new features or enhance “front” is propelled by an economic desire for a substantial share of Internet users and a majority of the online market. As its popularity grows, Facebook continues to offer newer features to compete with other social networking or info-sharing sites (the most notable of these being the “like” feature, the news and minifeeds, usernames, photos, videos, chat, gifts, and mobile browsing).

Zuckerberg’s critics, like *Valleywag* writer Foster Kamer, do not see the changes made to the site as reflective of the user’s needs, but as those *creating* the user’s needs.

He writes:

At the end of the day, the social norms were ones Zuckerberg created and shifted with his product. He's in control the entire time, and the more information that was given to and invested in it by individual users, the more control he had over what to do with it. (Kamer, 2010)

Kamer correlates shifts in social norms directly with the medium itself, as people feel “comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people.” This chicken/egg debate ultimately points out that the inner and outer negotiations of the Web site mirror the negotiations the users make with online and offline identities daily. As offline identity performance is reflected by the user’s online identity, so are outside, competing social network features and standards reflected by Facebook’s design platform.

This shift in social norms is not yet complete, and the situation not yet solidified, as adolescents like Thomas question the necessity of sharing so much information. Karrie noted that “your adress and things are unnessary and hazardous,” indicating that adolescents are aware of limits to online behavior. That said, it remains difficult to understand exactly what information *should* be off-limits, and it stands to reason that if adolescents see their friends sharing information, they will be more comfortable sharing that information as well. Two notable recent studies support this claim. In a study of college students with Facebook profiles, Lewis, Kaufman and Christakis (2008) concluded, “. . . Students with more private profile friends and more private profile roommates are in fact more likely to maintain a private profile themselves” (p. 87). In addition, through interviews with a sample of 16 London teenagers, Livingstone (2008) concluded that younger users were more willing to sacrifice privacy for identity expression, whereas older users were more apt to express identity through links to other friends (Livingstone, 2008, p. 408). Therefore, if Generation M seems more, or less, comfortable exerting personal identity in a “public” space, it stands to reason that they

are taking the cues from both the design interface and each other about what can, and can't, be shared.

Complicating the issue of defined situation and appropriate performance is the notion that our performances change according to audience. Goffman (1959) calls this audience segregation, and writes, “The individual ensures that those before whom he plays one of his parts will not be the same individuals before whom he plays a different part in another setting” (p. 49). As Facebook expands and users accumulate hundreds of friends, family members, coworkers, teachers and casual acquaintances all have access to postings. Still, audience segregation *can* be achieved on Facebook. One might change the way one types when it is to a coworker rather than a friend, or to a family member rather than an acquaintance from the past. Postings can also be visible to some and not others, though it requires a certain amount of literacy to navigate the privacy settings and block applications and visibility. This type of privacy setting is also an “all or nothing” affair — allowing my family, for instance, to see all of my tagged photos or none at all.

As mentioned in chapter three, however, no user has complete control over his/her hyperhyperreality, as it is a communal collage narrative that is constantly being augmented by both the user and his/her friends. That's to say, friends may act as a kind of checks-and-balances system to users performing false identities, especially with their ability to tag any photograph they wish. Here, unflattering representations, behavior, and interests may be made public should the user be tagged in a photo, wall post, or status update. Though users can “detag” themselves, photos can remain online and accessible to mutual friends. In a sense, this loss of complete control over performance can be difficult to deal with and is a problem significant to Generation M. Cyberbullying, for instance,

can have a detrimental effect on self esteem, as photos or hobbies can be made public to such a large scale audience. It can also mean that evidence of less than favorable actions may forever be present on the Internet, whether tagged or not.

Conclusion

In regard to performance, many hazards have been brought up between Facebook and adolescents. The conceding of privacy, the ability to perform a false self, the loss of offline non-verbal situational competency, and the constant openness to cyberbullying and/or sabotage of hyperhyperreality are new issues presented with the new medium of online social networks. Generation M, and all adolescents growing up with these tools, are said to have shorter attention spans and a larger propensity for narcissism and self-indulgence. In addition to the obvious ability the site gives adolescents to be inwardly involved and spend hours on a profile, critics also claim that Facebook creates a self-same predilection to the Other. That is, users do not go out seeking new experiences with diverse audiences or different media, but stick to the same network and interests they already hold. Bauerlein (2008) writes:

Adolescents are painfully self-conscious, to be sure, and they feel their being intensely, agonizing over a blemish on the cheek and a misstep in the lunchroom. But the yardstick of their judgment comes not from the past but from the present, not from wise men and women but from cool classmates, not from art and thought through the ages but from pop culture of the moment. (p. 198)

Putting an emphasis on the fact that young people are supersaturated with other young people with similar backgrounds and interests, Bauerlein asserts that new media technologies are actually hindering intellectual and personally growth. He continues, “their idols are peer idols, their triumphs the envy of friends, not adults. Their self-criticism . . . is social and shortsighted” (p. 198). Instead of gaining the ability to situate

themselves in the context of the world-at-large, adolescents instead may remain boxed into their own social networks.

This situation of the self in the (familiar) Other has also been blamed for inducing depression in users, as they have a constant audience to compare their actions, achievements, and life decisions against. One blogger (a woman in her mid-twenties) admits:

Whatever the reason, I sometimes feel devastatingly lonely, and that usually happens when I'm in a public place. I could be working at the office or at the bar; I could be in a department store dressing room or at a table with multiple friends. Hell, I could be on the dreaded Facebook seeing more and more people posting happy pictures of themselves and announcing their latest outing, relationship, or child. Then all of a sudden I get this leaden feeling in the pit of my stomach. (Pandora's Mittens, 2010)

This woman links her own feelings of loneliness to a nagging comparison culture whereby we only know our self-worth through the Others we openly judge (and who openly judge us) on a daily basis. This is problematic for adults but can be even more detrimental to young adults in their formative years. In spite of these criticisms, I'd like to offer a more positive analysis of the capabilities of the medium.

Loss of Perfection/Sense of Connection

Goffman (1959) writes, "We must be prepared to see that the impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps" (p. 56). Performance faux pas like a piece of food in the teeth, tripping when trying to impress a "crush," putting one's foot in one's mouth talking to an important contact, or discovering a stain on a shirt after a date all happen to human beings all the time. It's precisely because of these mishaps that people take so much care in deliberately manipulating their performances. These mishaps are never *fully* under the user's control

as the platform itself is communal. Therefore, it's always possible to see that other users have similar guilty pleasures (a wall post, for instance, might reveal that a certain 24-year-old graduate student with high brow taste is going to a Taylor Swift pop rock concert) or similar appearance mishaps²⁷ (a double chin in an unflattering photo, an accidental revealing of a sweaty armpit, etc.)

Likewise, Goffman (1959) states, "If the audience is to see only a brief performance, then the likelihood of an embarrassing occurrence will be relatively small, and it will be relatively safe for the performer, especially in anonymous circumstances, to maintain a front that is rather false" (p. 221). Facebook, as an unending and constantly accessible virtual identity, may allow for greater holes in the performance. All Facebook users at one point or another have found themselves in a situation where an unflattering tidbit has been posted by a friend. Optimistically speaking, perhaps these posts don't just have to be schadenfreude, and can hold a humanizing quality, if, in the time it takes for a person to de-tag photos or delete a revealing wall post, other users have seen this and recognized themselves. In concurrence, Lévy (1998) writes, "Just as there is a dialectic of signs and a dialectic of things, the dialectic of being requires that we mutually integrate the point of view of the other. . . . By (virtually) putting ourselves in the other's position, we accept the dialectic of substitution" (p. 116).

By integrating the point of view of the other, connections might occur where they hadn't before. That is, OSNs like Facebook make it nearly impossible to simply ignore the Other. Referring to television, Stevenson (2005) writes, "We might argue that practices of time-space compression make it increasingly difficult to shrug off our

²⁷ Barthes calls these mishaps of appearance "punctum," or the unplanned, uncoded disturbances apparent in photographs. See his 1980 work *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* for further examples.

responsibilities towards others in a shared world” (p. 81). One clear example of this is the viral video, leaked on Facebook in July of 2009, of “Neda,” an Iranian woman shot and killed at a protest of President Ahmadinejad. The raw footage was leaked and spread through OSNs, like Facebook and Twitter. This clearly disturbing video of a woman dying in the streets of Tehran became incredibly influential in young people’s awareness of the Other — and not just the self-same Other of their close social network. The *Los Angeles Times* (2009) reported:

More than 100 Facebook pages have been created in honor of Neda Agha-Soltan, who was shot and killed during clashes in Tehran on Saturday As Bloomberg notes, just one of these group pages has already garnered more than 15,000 members. The 55 people who administer the page come from around the world, including Zambia, Kuwait, Canada, Italy, the U.S. and Haiti.

Though membership in Facebook groups do not correlate to increased *action*, they do indicate increased awareness. This awareness branches beyond Bauerlein’s “social and shortsighted” use of new technology, and is a truly hopeful indication of a cosmopolitan civil society enabled by new media technologies and OSNs like Facebook. Lévy (1998) rather optimistically writes:

Cyberspace promotes connections, coordination, and synergy among individual intelligences. And its effects are even more pronounced when a living context is shared, when individuals or groups are able to identify one another in a virtual landscape of interests and skills, and when this is a greater diversity of shared or mutually compatible cognitive modules. (p. 144)

While OSNs like Facebook can be used to point out our differences, to single out and manipulate holes in performance, they can, by the same token, be used to find common ground and shared experience. The potential for connectivity cannot be taken out of the equation, nor can the potential for performance manipulation and self-reflection. I suspect that had I had a Facebook profile as a young adult, I would have had the opportunity to

discover that there were more people enjoying the activities I enjoyed and listening to the music I listened to. In this sense, perhaps it would have been easier for me to surpass the self-doubt that accompanies not fitting in. In addition, while Facebook does connect the user to his/her immediate social network, the use of hyperlinks help facilitate connections beyond a comfort zone, making cosmopolitanism a truly attainable ideal.

Without disrespecting the concerns of neo-luddite scholars or psychologists, which are indeed grounded in sound reasoning, it is important to understand that performance in any medium can be manipulated in negative or positive ways: “The heart of the matter is that by living, acting, and thinking, we weave the very fabric of life of others” (Levy, 1998, p. 136). Hopefully the performance capabilities of Facebook are not completely lost in the cynical view of relationships, and new technologies like it are able to connect users on that most important level — human to human.

Chapter Five

Conclusion, or:

Will We Learn to Stop Worrying and Love the Facebook?

“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”

Kurt Vonnegut, "Thoughts of a Free Thinker", commencement address, Hobart and William Smith Colleges (26 May 1974)

When I began writing this thesis, Facebook had 200 million users. As of April 12, 2010, the site had doubled its number to 400 million users, each with an average of 130 friends (Facebook, 2010b). In addition, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg made an estimated \$3 billion from 2009-2010, all by the time he'd reached the age of 25 (Parade, 2010). At this moment in history, Facebook is the largest social networking site of all time. The site's success is so far-reaching that in September of 2009, Barack Obama told students at Wakefield High School in suburban Arlington, VA to “be careful what you post on Facebook. Whatever you do, it will be pulled up later in your life” (Huffington Post, 2009). Mention by the President is big, but the foreboding tone of Obama's advice is really at the heart of the matter with Facebook and its use by adolescents.

In this concluding chapter, I will recap the findings of my study, returning to my original research question to address whether or not Facebook reinforces pre-existing needs, or creates new functions for the expression of the self. I will then discuss some

projected consequences of Facebook, and conclude with my own take on adolescent use of social networking sites.

Social semiotics

This section relied heavily on the work of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen to analyze and close read the Facebook profile and wall interfaces. These two interfaces were analyzed as both paradigmatic parts and as a syntagmatic whole in terms of framing, salience, and information value. The contradiction found in analysing the text as both fragmented and consolidated was carried throughout the findings, as seemingly opposite functions came together to form a working system. Within this system, boxes served to close sections off, disconnecting them from other aspects of the same larger profile, while vectors and framing allowed for connectivity between the profile holder and his/her friends. In addition, the identity depicted on the page seemed static, though this identity was constantly fluid and changing according to friend feedback and user activity. In short, the interface design was riddled with contradictions, and yet continued to run in a logical, readable manner.

In terms of reinforcement and change, the site itself, with its compartments and boxes, may be literally functioning to do what human beings metaphorically do on a daily basis. That is, humans communicate with some and create separate, compartmentalized conversations appropriate for each setting. We give each other space during interpersonal communication encounters, and we connect other parts of our lives in logical, useful ways. However, this daily, real life negotiation of different “boxes” is not nearly as clear-cut as it appears on the screen. On the screen, one must not only negotiate these

contradictions, but must also resolve them in order to make a site (and one's social network) run smoothly. Going beyond simply multitasking, young Facebook users must be literate in the design of the site in order to communicate through it and make connections with the self (a profile) and the Other (wall posts). Never before has it been so easy to "box in" or compartmentalize an identity, and yet to access that identity as a whole. In this way, Facebook as medium may reinforce lived social reality while rearranging and even changing the social definition of growing up and coming into one's "self" for Generation M.

Narrative

Another way of negotiating different boxes of self is through storytelling, which acts as a crucial component to understanding oneself, especially for adolescents. Yingling and Ricouer discuss how narrative allows for conceptualizing identity and making it cohesive over time and space. When one breaks life happenings down into story events, these events can be strung together to create a manageable self. Stories are also important for reinforcing the self to others. In essence, we learn ourselves through the stories that are told about us, and the stories we tell about ourselves.

On Facebook, story events occur as status updates, friend activity, wall posts and photo tags. These story events, autonomous instances, become significant when given order by friends. Using hyperlinks and branching out without end, narrative is not linear, but literally webbed, interconnected, and communal. In a truly Poststructural way, friends become readers as writers, narrating stories depending on the order in which they stack story events.

In promoting this communal, rather than personal, articulating of character or identity through narrative, Facebook creates new functions of the expression of self. Throughout chapter three, I suggest that this new function be called a hyperhyperreality, or a space where story events are a collage, given narrative significance by the friend as writer. Therefore, in putting one's self on Facebook, a user is ceding some personal control over narrative and allowing for input by friends. The narrative, therefore, is no longer personal, but communal.

Performance

In spite of losing some control over narrative, Facebook also allows for an unprecedented amount of identity performance and manipulation. The platform itself asks users to condense the self into the boxes mentioned earlier, all with an audience of friends in mind. In this chapter, subjects mentioned following friends' status updates and profile changes, and changing their own profile (photos in particular) to update their network. In addition, they mentioned being able to discern a person's performance of manner and appearance, and saw some discrepancies between the real life friend and the friend's Facebook identity.

Here, Facebook activity matches up with Goffman's real life expectations of performance, in that there is a constant awareness of the Other with comparison and critique built into interactions. Those interactions both shape and are shaped by performance. On Facebook, however, the audience does *not* change with circumstance or specific interactions, and therefore it is difficult to situationally assess the proper performance. Instead, performance becomes a constant game of picking and choosing what to post and what to leave out, a game of putting one's best face forward. On the

flipside, the ever-present audience is also there for constant comparison and judgment of our own actions against, which can exacerbate an already difficult time period of questioning and articulating the self.

Along with this ever-present Other comes the potential for community building. Though most of my questions to the subjects centered on how they used the site for identity building, the majority of answers focused not on themselves, but on their concerns about the Other. The number one reason they said they used Facebook was to “keep in touch with” friends from previous real life experiences. Likewise, on Facebook, as in real life, people take chances and put themselves out there, hoping to find people to connect with. Being constantly available increases connectivity, allowing users to find groups, reconnect with old friends, and find common ground as well as difference. By communally writing narrative, in a sense Facebook users are also communally performing identity. Though the platform mirrors much of what people do offline, it creates a hyper-version of offline relationships and offline behavior: a hyperhyperreality.

Consequences

If, as my findings suggest, Facebook creates a hyper-version of offline relationships and offline behavior, the same problems nagging adolescents are exacerbated with this technology. Cyberbullying, in particular, is a huge problem for adolescents, and the medium is without a doubt one of the culprits. Hinuja and Patchin (2009) offer five issues specific to cyberbullying: anonymity and pseudonymity, disinhibition, lack of supervision, viral nature, and limitless victimization risk (pp. 20-25). For Facebook, disinhibition, lack of supervision, viral spread and limitlessness are

inherent in the medium. Disinhibition in particular was alluded to by my 13-year-old subject, Karrie, who wrote, in response to how the site gave her more freedom, “i think writing something to someone is differetn to saying it.” The limitlessness of the medium, as discussed in the “never-ending” story written in a hyperhyperreality, is also very apparent through my analysis. This is a crucial aspect of Facebook, as the effects of cyberbullying can be devastating. Just this January, Pheobe Prince, a 15-year-old girl from Massachusetts, committed suicide after continuous harassment over “Facebook, in text messages and in other high-tech forms” (Krasny, 2010).

Aside from this incredibly grave effect, social networking sites are also speculated to be end of all privacy and inhibition for Generation M. Overwhelmingly, warnings like the one Obama gave to Virginia high schoolers, are issued. These foreboding messages remind users — and especially young users — that you are your social network, and that anything posted on the Internet is up for mass interpretation. Mayfield (2010) even writes, “The measure of your *reputation* is what you do plus what others say about you ... As the social web has distributed the power and influence formerly held by the mainstream media, it has created the need for personal reputation awareness.” Awareness of reputation is one thing, whereas fear-mongering is another. At some point, all of Generation M will be politicians, teachers, lawyers, doctors and journalists. They will all be clambering for jobs, and they will all be subject to online scrutiny. With the pervasiveness of online media, reputation management is an issue of common sense more than anything else. And the users I talked to, aged 13-15, seemed web-literate enough to know what should and should not be made public for security reasons (the consensus

seemed to be that phone numbers and street addresses should not be on a Facebook profile).

Reputation awareness, however, could mean an unhealthy amount of self-awareness as well, as the other major argument against social networking is that it is breeding a culture of narcissism and self-centrism. Edan Lepucki, a blogger for *The Millions*, documented her own “Social Media Detox,” writing:

It saddened me to see all these people, chained to their online lives, posting flattering photos of themselves, “liking” a funny status update, posting or retweeting a link. It’s a never-ending race to remind others that we’re here, that we exist. It reminds me of when I used to do dance routines and little plays for my mom. “Look!” I’d yell every few seconds. “You’re NOT watching! Look!” It gets exhausting. And it’s not really living. (Lepucki, 2010)

The irony in Lepucki’s article, of course, is that without the advent of social media she would not have a career or platform for her voice. Most commenters (and all of the 33 who responded to her post agreed with her) also pointed this out, writing that they found her post on Facebook or Twitter. In spite of this, her overarching argument that performance for the Other can become a narcissistic addiction as much as a tool for connecting with others definitely has its place. As proof, her post is backed by newly published books with condemning titles, including *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* and *You are not a Gadget*.

Another book with a shock title laments the loss of Generation Y and now Generation M to “puerile banter.” In *The Dumbest Generation*, Bauerlein (2008) writes, “For 15-year-olds in the United States in the twenty-first century, the yardstick of pertinence is personal contact, immediate effects” (p. 168). Bauerlein makes observations that certainly resonate with anyone who teaches students teetering between generation Y and generation M, most of which center on lack of attention, the immediacy of seeking

information but not retaining knowledge, and the prolonging of adolescence instead of the eagerness to enter adulthood.

All of these arguments serve to warn of the possibility of social networking gone wild, though they never seem to quite emphasize that these really are *worst case scenarios*. Additionally, whether written by baby boomers or self-reflexive Gen Y-ers, they come off as spoken by a curmudgeonly old man shaking his fist at “kids these days” as he laments the lack of respect for generations prior. You can almost hear the writers shouting to “get off my [digital] lawn.”

As a result of these publications, however, children with a propensity for online communication are dismissed as narcissistic, and many Internet saavy adults are infantilized (much like *Star Trek* convention goers and video gamers). Internet culture is surrounded by the taboo of those “not equipped” for “real” communication, and regarded as a tool for the socially awkward adult or the emotional adolescent seeking a voice. Researchers trying to understand and prevent negative behavior in adolescents online, or just those looking forward to the changes Facebook will bring about for Generation M, are then left in the wake of Internet stigma. This stigma often means fighting popular culture and parents’ conceptions that social networks are a breeding ground for bullying and narcissism, not to mention sex predators and identity thieves. This poses serious challenges to the continued growth of online social networks, and to the development of new, productive ways to use the platform.

Closing remarks

So where does this leave this thesis? The 400 million current Facebook users debunk the idea that social networks are merely for the socially inept, and the frequent

use of Facebook to organize offline meetings and/ or (re)enforce offline relationships is testimony to the fact that the platform really does have connective potential. In fact, the emphasis my subjects put on keeping in touch with friends, above all else, indicates that they are fully aware of the Other people out there. Fully expecting my adolescent interviewees to indulge in their popularly conceived narcissism, I was surprised at the extent to which their responses were Other-centered, and at how much they skirted the questions regarding their own Facebook profiles and identity performance.

Though it's clear that Facebook, as a medium, creates a hyperreal environment for bullies, it can also create a hyperreal environment for community building. Groups and "Fan" pages, along with the creation of "event" pages to organize offline meetings, bring users together just as much as they separate them. Referring back to the quote by the late Kurt Vonnegut at the beginning of this chapter, young people should seek each other out to form communities in the best ways they can. Whether these communities are online or offline, they will inevitably have like-minded members and those who are left out. Similarly, whether adolescents are online or offline, they can constantly compare themselves to their peers and their social networks. It is up to researchers, parents, and teachers to help them develop skills necessary to forming identity and self esteem, and to teach them to use mediums like Facebook for positive self-expression.

Without a doubt, Generation M uses Facebook, with its emphasis on the *social* and the connections between people, to consistently stay connected to their network of friends and family, to negotiate the contradictions between the real and the virtual and the on/offline, and to communally write eachothers' hyperhyperrealities. This skillset alone imbibes them with capabilities unknown to those who grew up without this technology.

In this way, whether they realize it or not, they are their own community of skilled social networking users.

Douglas Adams cleverly addressed the generational gaps in technological adaptation, writing “a set of rules that describe our reactions to technologies”:

1. “Anything that is in the world when you're born is normal and ordinary and is just a natural part of the way the world works.”
2. “Anything that's invented between when you're 15 and 35 is new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it.”
3. “Anything invented after you're 35 is against the natural order of things.”²⁸

It is up to adults, parents, teachers, psychologists, and communication studies scholars to not let the affliction of difference completely debunk social networking among adolescents. Though they may be changing the ways in which previously established societal norms take place, it does not mean their potential and development should come to a halt. Instead, this should be further impetus for research on young people and online social networks, and should give both adolescents and adults to the opportunity to connect despite their generational differences. Afterall, “Many people need desperately to receive this message: ‘I feel and think much as you do, care about many of the things you care about, although most people don't care about them. You are not alone.’”²⁹

²⁸ Adams, D. (2002). *The salmon of doubt: Hitchhiking the galaxy one last time*. New York: Harmony Books.

²⁹ Vonnegut, K. (1997). *Timequake*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

References

- Acar, A. (2008). Antecedents and consequences of online social networking behavior: The case of Facebook. *Journal of Website Promotion*, 3, 62-83.
- Bargh, J., McKenna, K., & Fitzsimons, G. (2002). Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the 'true self' on the Internet. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 33-48.
- Bargh, J., & McKenna, K. (2004). The Internet and social life. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 573 – 590.
- Barthes, R. (1991). Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives. In *Image, music, text*. (Stephen Heath, Trans.). New York, NY: Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1966).
- Barthes, R. (1991). From work to text. In *Image, music, text*. (Stephen Heath, Trans.). New York, NY: Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1971).
- Baudrillard, J. (2006). The precession of simulacra. In M.G. Durham & D.M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keywords*, (pp. 453-481). S.F. Glaser (Trans.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. (Original work published 1994).
- Baudrillard, J. (2007). *The intelligence of evil or the lucidity pact*. C. Turner (Trans.). New York, NY: Berg.
- Baudrillard, J. (2008). *The perfect crime*. C. Turner (Trans.). New York, NY: Verso.
- Bauerlein, M. (2008). *The dumbest generation: How the digital age stupefies young Americans and jeopardizes our future*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Belsey, C. (2005). *Culture and the real*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Blok, R. (2002). A Sense of Closure: The state of narrative in digital literature. In H. Balling & A.K. Madsen (Eds.), *From Homer to hypertext: Studies in narrative, literature and media*, (pp. 167 – 180). Gylling, DK: University of Southern Denmark Press.
- boyd, d. (2006). Identity production in a networked culture: Why youth heart MySpace.

American Association for the Advancement of Science, St. Louis, MO. February 19. Retrieved on May 5, 2009 from <http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/AAAS2006.html>

- boyd, d. (2008). How can qualitative Internet researchers define the boundaries of their projects: A response to Christine Hine. [Electronic version] In Annette Markham and Nancy Baym, (Eds.), *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method*, (pp. 26-32). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved May 11, 2009 from <http://www.danah.org/papers/>
- boyd, d., & Heer, J. (2006). Profiles as conversation: Networked identity performance on Friendster. [Electronic version] In *Proceedings of the Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-39)*. Kauai, HI: IEEE Computer Society. January 4 - 7. Retrieved May 11, 2009 from <http://danah.org/papers/>
- Byerly, G. (2007). Look in their eyes — eye tracking, usability, and children. *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, 23(8), 30-32.
- Caplan, S. E. (2003). Preference for online social interaction: A theory of problematic Internet use and psychosocial well-being. *Communication Research*, 30, 625 - 648.
- Caplan, S. E. (2005). A social skill account of problematic Internet use. *Journal of Communication*, December, 721-736.
- Chatman, S. (1978). *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Douglas, J.Y., & Hargadon, A. (2004). The pleasures of immersion and interaction. In N. Wardrip-Fruin & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First person: New media as story, performance and game*. (pp. 192-206). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Dybwad, B. (2009). BUSTED: Burglar arrested after checking Facebook during robbery. Retrieved September 17, 2009 from <http://mashable.com/2009/09/17/facebook-robber-arrested/>
- Elliott, A. (2001). *Concepts of self*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers
- Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends:” Social capital and college students’ use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12, 1143 - 1168.
- Facebook. (2007). *Pressroom: Facebook and Microsoft expand strategic alliance*. Retrieved October 24, 2007 from <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics#/press/releases.php?p=8084>

- Facebook. (2008). *Facebook principles*. Retrieved April 21, 2009 from <http://www.facebook.com/policy.php>
- Facebook. (2009). *Pressroom: Statistics*. Retrieved March 26, 2009 from <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/press/info.php?statistics>
- Facebook. (2010a). *Fan page: Info*. Retrieved March 8, 2010 from <http://www.facebook.com/#!/facebook?v=info&ref=pf>
- Facebook. (2010b). *Pressroom: Statistics*. Retrieved April 12, 2010 from <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>
- Gergen, K. (2000). *The saturated self*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Giddings, S. (2007). 'I'm the one who makes the Lego racers go': Studying virtual and actual play. In S. Weber and S. Dixon (Eds.), *Growing up online*, (pp. 35-48). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Gottfredson, L.S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 28(6), 545-579.
- Gross E., Juvonen, J., & Gable, S. (2002). Internet use and well-being in adolescence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 75 - 90.
- Grossman, A. (2010). Interview with Bob Patel, creator of "Doppelganger Week" on Facebook." *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved April 4, 2010 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alex-grossman/interview-with-bob-patel_b_438025.html
- The Guardian Online. (2010). It's doppelganger week on Facebook. *The Guardian Online: PDA The Digital Content Blog*. Retrieved April 4, 2010 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2010/feb/03/digital-media-facebook-doppelganger-week>
- Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A. (2000). *The self we live by: Narrative identity in the postmodern world*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.

- Heussner, K.M. (2009) 'Unfriend' or 'Defriend'? Facebook fans debate. *ABC News Online*. Retrieved April 6, 2010 from <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/AheadoftheCurve/unfriend-defriend-facebook-fans-debate/story?id=9106240>
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J.W. (2009). *Bullying beyond the schoolyard: Preventing and responding to cyberbullying*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Hodge, R., & Kress, G. (1988). *Social semiotics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Holmqvist, B., & Andersen, B. (1993). Narrative computer systems. In Andersen, Holmqvist, Jensen (Eds.), *The computer as medium*, (pp. 148-168). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Huffington Post. (2009). Obama on Facebook: 'Be careful what you post'. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved April 12, 2010 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/09/08/obama-on-facebook-be-care_n_279482.html
- Jenkins, R. (1996). *Social identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jewitt, C. & Oyama, R. (2001). Visual meaning: A social semiotic approach. In T. van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis*, (pp. 134-156). London, England: Sage Publications.
- Johnson, B. (2008). Adult social networking sites attract young users. *The Guardian UK* [electronic version]. Retrieved October 15, 2009 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/apr/02/socialnetworking.ofcom>
- Kamer, F. (2010). Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg on your erased privacy: 'These are the social norms, now.' *Valleywag*. Retrieved Jan. 11, 2010 from <http://gawker.com/5444885/facebooks-mark-zuckerberg-on-your-erased-privacy-these-are-the-social-norms-now?skyline=true&s=i>
- Kennedy, P. (2001). Introduction: Globalization and the Crisis of National Identities. In P. Kennedy & C. J. Danks (Eds.), *Globalization and national identities*, (pp 1-28). New York, NY: Palgrave.
- Krasny, R. (2010). Teen suicide puts spotlight on high-tech bullying. *Yahoo! News*. Retrieved April 14, 2010 from http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100409/tc_nm/us_bullying_teen_4
- Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. London, England: Routledge.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London, England: Routledge.

- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London, England: Arnold Press.
- Landow, G.P. (2000). Hypertext as collage-writing. In P. Lunenfeld (Ed.), *The digital dialectic*, (pp.150-170). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lepucki, E. (2010). Ceasing to exist: Three months in the social media detox ward. *The Millions*. Retrieved April 6, 2010 from <http://www.themillions.com/2010/04/ceasing-to-exist-three-months-in-the-social-media-detox-ward.html>
- Lévy, P. (1998). *Becoming virtual: Reality in the digital age*. (R. Bononno, Trans.). New York, NY: Plenum Trade.
- Lévy, P. (2001). *Cyberculture*. (R. Bononno, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1997).
- Lewis, K., Kaufman, J., & Christakis, N. (2008) The taste for privacy: An analysis of college student privacy settings in an online social network. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 79 – 100.
- Liestol, G. (1993). Hypermedia communication and academic discourse: Some speculations on future genre. In Andersen, Holmqvist, Jensen (Eds.), *The computer as medium*, (pp. 263-283). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Lister, M., Dovey, J., Giddings, S., Grant, I., & Kelly, K. (2003). *New Media: A critical introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Livingstone, S. (2008). Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: Teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression. *New Media & Society*, 10, 393 – 411.
- Los Angeles Times. (2009). Iran: More than 100 Facebook pages honor Neda. *Babylon and Beyond: LA Times Blogs*. Retrieved April 17, 2010 from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2009/06/iran-more-than-100-facebook-pages-honor-neda.html>
- Mayfield, A. (2010). 3 tips for managing your online reputation. *Mashable*. Retrieved April 12, 2010 from http://mashable.com/2010/04/08/managing-online-reputation/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+Mashable+%28Mashable
- McKenna, K., Green, A., & Gleason, M. (2002). Relationship formation on the Internet: What's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 9 – 31.

- Montgomery, K. (2002). Digital kids: The new online children's consumer culture. In C. von Feilitzen & U. Carlsson (Eds.), *Children, young people and media globalization*, (pp. 189-208). Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom Publishers.
- Murray, J. (2004). From Game-Story to Cyberdrama. In N. Wardrip-Fruin & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First person: New media as story, performance and game*. (pp. 1-11). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Nagowski, M. (2004). The face behind thefacebook.com: An interview with Mark Zuckerberg. *Current Magazine*, 24-25.
- Nakamura, L. (2002). Menu-driven identities: making race happen online. *Cyber types: Race, ethnicity, and identity on the Internet*, (pp. 101-135). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Niles, J.D. (1999). *Homo narrans*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ostrow, A. (2009). People spend 3x more time on Facebook than Google. *Mashable*. Retrieved September 19, 2009 from <http://mashable.com/2009/09/17/facebook-google-time-spent/>
- Pandora's Mittens. (2010). Let's all be lonely together. *Still Shouting; Still Random*. Retrieved March 24, 2010 from <http://pandorasmittens.tumblr.com/post/470659520/lets-all-be-lonely-together>
- Parade. (2010). What people earn: Celebrity salaries. *Parade*. [Electronic version], Retrieved April 12, 2010 from <http://www.parade.com/news/what-people-earn/slideshows/celebrity-salaries-2010.html?index=8>
- Ricoeur, P. (1991). Narrative identity. *Philosophy Today*, 35(1), 73-81.
- Rideout, V., Roberts, D., & Foehr, U. (2005). Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 year-olds. *A Kaiser Family Foundation Study*. Retrieved April 23, 2009 from www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Executive-Summary-Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds.pdf
- Ryan, M.L. (2001). *Narrative as virtual reality*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ryan, M.L. (2006). *Avatars of story*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sanghvi, R. (2006). Facebook Gets a Facelift. *Facebook.com*, September 5. Retrieved March 7, 2010 from <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=2207967130>.

- Shafir, D. (2010). The Facebook Doppelgänger meme is embarrassing. *Gawker*, Feb. 5. Retrieved April 4, 2010 from <http://gawker.com/5464500/the-facebook-doppelganger-meme-is-embarrassing>
- Stern, S., & Willis, T.J. (2007). What are teenagers up to online? In S. Mazzarella (Ed.), *20 Questions about youth & the media*. (pp. 211-224). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Group.
- Stern, S. (2007). Adolescent girls' expression on Web home pages: Spirited, somber, and self-conscious sites. In S. Weber & S. Dixon (Eds.), *Growing up online*, (pp. 159-179). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Stevenson, N. (2005). Media, cultural citizenship, and the global public sphere. In R.D. Germain & M. Kenny (Eds.), *The idea of global civil society: Politics and ethics in a globalizing era*, (pp. 67-82). London: Routledge.
- Subrahmanyam, K., Greenfield, P., Kraut, R., & Gross, E. (2001). The impact of computer use on children's and adolescents' development. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 22, 7 - 30.
- Trenholm, S., & Jensen, A. (2008). *Interpersonal Communication*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen*. New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Turkle, S. (1984). *The second self*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Urban Dictionary. (2010). Definition – Hypermeality. Retrieved May 9, 2010 from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=hypermeality>
- Van Looy, J., & Baetens, J. (2003) Introduction: Close reading electronic literature. In J. Van Looy & J. Baetens, (Eds.), *Close reading new media: Analyzing electronic literature*, (pp. 1-24). Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press.
- Vogelstein, F. (2009). Great wall of Facebook: The social network's plan to dominate the Internet — and keep Google out. *Wired*, 17:07 [Electronic version]. Retrieved September 17, 2009 from http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/17-07/ff_facebookwall?currentPage=all
- Walther, J.B., Van Der Heide, B., Hamel, L.M., & Shulman, H.C. (2009). Self generated versus other-generated statements and impressions in computer-mediated communication: A test of warranting theory using Facebook. *Communication Research*, 36, 229-253.
- Wang, Z., Walther, J.B., & Hancock, J.T. (2009). Social identification and interpersonal communication in computer-mediated communication: What you do versus who

you are in virtual groups. *Human Communication Research*, 35, 59-85.

- Weber, S. & Weber, J. (2007). Technology in the everyday lives of 'tweens.' In S. Weber & S. Dixon (Eds.), *Growing up online*, (pp. 49-66). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Yingling, J. (2004). *A lifetime of communication: Transformations through relational dialogues*. MahWah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Zimmerman, E. (2004). Narrative, interactivity, play, and games: Four naughty concepts in need of discipline. In N. Wardrip-Fruin & P. Harrigan (Eds.), *First person: New media as story, performance and game*. (pp. 154-164). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Zuckerberg, M. (2009). Fansite. *Facebook.com*. Retrieved September 17, 2009 from <http://www.facebook.com/markzuckerberg>
- Zywica, J., & Danowski, J. (2008). The Faces of Facebookers: Investigating social enhancement and social compensation hypotheses; predicting Facebook™ and offline popularity from sociability and self-esteem, and mapping the meanings of popularity with semantic networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 1 – 34.

Appendix A

Dear Participant;

My name is Elizabeth Taddonio and I'm a Master's student at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, CO. I'm writing to let you know about the opportunity to participate in my thesis project. It's my goal to understand how teenagers like you use Facebook. In order to do this, I'm using a Facebook group to give an online group interview. The Principal Investigator for the study is my advisor, Jeffrey Snodgrass, Ph.D., Dept. of Anthropology; I am the co-Investigator.

If you say you will participate, you will be invited to a private, closed Facebook group. You must already be a Facebook member, and you must be able to provide your own computer with Internet. You will only be required to log in and answer questions once, but I would love for you to return to the group and respond to other participants. With your permission, I may also call you on the telephone or use Facebook chat to reconnect or follow-up on your responses.

When I write up the results and responses, I won't use your name or any kind of links to your page. I will take pictures of the screen and your answers, but your name and photo will be hidden. Wherever I quote you, I'll use a fake name and your age. There will be no ways to link you to my study. There are no immediate benefits to you for participating in this study, though you will be contributing to the knowledge of new media and its use in the field of communication studies. There are no known risks to participating, and I will protect your identity in every way I can.

It's up to you if you want to participate in this study. If you say you would like to, then change your mind, you can always delete yourself from the group, delete your comments from the page, and let me know that you don't want to do it anymore. If you would like to participate in this study, please reply to this email and send me your home address. I will mail you a consent form that you and your parents need to read, sign, and return to me. This form will give you information about the project and by signing it, you are letting us know that you agree to participate in the study. I will send you a stamped envelope to return this form to me. Once I receive your signed form, I will contact you via Facebook.

I'm excited about this research and I really hope you'll help me out. Without volunteers like you, it wouldn't be possible!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Taddonio
Co-Investigator
Graduate Student
Communication Studies
Liz.taddonio@colostate.edu

Jeffrey Snodgrass, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Principal Investigator
Dept. of Anthropology
970-491-5894
Jeffrey.snodgrass@colostate.edu

Appendix B

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: *Put Your Best Face Forward: Adolescent Use of Facebook and the Establishment of a HyperMEality.*

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jeffrey Snodgrass, Ph.D., Dept. of Anthropology

NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR: Elizabeth A. Taddonio, Graduate Student, Dept of Communication Studies

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:
Jeff Snodgrass, Dept. of Anthropology, Colorado State University, TEL: 970 491-5894/5447; jeffrey.snodgrass@colostate.edu
Elizabeth A. Taddonio, Dept. of Communication Studies, Colorado State University, TEL: 585 313 8985; liz.taddonio@colostate.edu

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

This study examines how teenagers use Facebook. We hope to understand how new media technologies impact teen development in the United States.

PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED:

You will be asked to join a Facebook group and answer questions about how you and the people you know use Facebook. There will be other participants varying in age from 13 to 15 years old in this group. You will be able to revisit, delete, and change your comments on the group page throughout the study. Your participation in this study requires commitment to visiting the Facebook Web site, joining a Facebook group, and answering questions at least once. With your permission, the researchers may also call you on the telephone or use Facebook chat to reconnect or follow-up on your responses. We ask you at the end of this form if it would be okay to re-contact you via the telephone. You are free to answer questions and terminate participation at any point throughout the study. You will be required to provide your own Internet access. The group's creator, Elizabeth Taddonio, will write the questions with advice from Dr. Snodgrass and other faculty. These questions will ask about your time as a member of Facebook and how you use the site. **The final research will not use any identifying information about your personal Facebook page.**

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES:

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this study. However, it is not possible to identify all potential risks in any research. The researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

BENEFITS:

There are no immediate benefits to you for participating in this study, though you will be

contributing to the knowledge of new media and its use in the field of communication studies.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your answers will be combined with answers from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will use your answers but no identifying information linking you to your answers (pseudonyms will be assigned to your answers, though your real age will be reported). We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

LIABILITY:

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. If you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigators, Elizabeth Taddonio at 585-313-8985 or Dr. Jeff Snodgrass at 970-491-5894. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep with you. The other should be returned to the address found on the self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Yes No I agree that I can be contacted via telephone if the researchers wish to follow-up on any of my comments

Yes No The researchers can audiotape my telephone interview

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on January 21, 2010.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Participant name (printed)

Participant signature

Date

<p>Please complete:</p> <p>Your Name as it appears on Facebook: _____ Age: _____</p> <p>Phone Number: _____ Email: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p>
--

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

As parent or guardian you authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to you by Elizabeth A. Taddonio (or Jeffrey Snodgrass) and you are satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian name (printed)

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

Please sign and return one copy of this form in the self-addressed, stamped envelope included. Feel free to contact Elizabeth Taddonio at (585) 313-8985 or Jeffrey Snodgrass (970 491-5894) for any questions regarding the research. Questions about participants' rights may be directed to Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at (970) 491-1655.

Appendix C

Questions for interviews and Facebook forum

1. How often do you use Facebook?
2. Why did you choose to join Facebook?
3. What are your favorite things to do on Facebook?
4. What are the best things about using Facebook?
5. How often do you update your Facebook?
 - a. What aspect of your Facebook profile (photos, favorite music/ tv show/ movies, contact information, about me, status etc . . .) do you update most often? Why?
6. How do you typically “show” people who you are offline? Through dress? Through “style”? Through your choice of music, brand names, or any other things you can buy?
7. Do you ever feel like there’s a difference between who you are in “real life” compared to how you present yourself on Facebook?
 - a. If yes – what kind of things are different? And why do you think that is?
 - b. If not – why do you think that is? What is it about the site that gives you more or less freedom?
8. Do you ever show a different part of who you are on Facebook that you don’t always show in “real life”?
 - a. If yes – why on Facebook but not in life?
 - b. If not – Can you think of anyone who uses Facebook this way? Why do you think that is? (see next question)
9. Have you ever noticed a difference between someone’s online profile and the person you “know in real life”?
 - a. If yes, describe it. Why do you think this happens?
10. Before you were on Facebook, was your daily expression of identity different?
 - a. Does Facebook change the way you think of yourself in “real life”?
11. Do you feel like Facebook changes the way you feel about yourself – good or bad?
 - a. If yes – what about it?
 - b. If not – why do you think that is?
12. Which parts of the site do you think help in showing your identity the most? Which are the least helpful or unnecessary?