

Kisses under the Starlight: The Performance of Masculinities and Emo on MySpace



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Abstract

The online presentation of identity and performance of masculinity is explored through an investigation of Emo subculture on MySpace. MySpace is a social networking site (SNS) that provides users with a way to express their identities creatively through text and various visual mediums such as customisable backgrounds and photo albums. The MySpace profiles of twelve young men aged 18-25 and presenting as Emo – a musical subculture associated with attitudes of emotionality and introspection – were analysed. The profiles of these Emo boys were introspective in their tone and portrayed a complex expression of the creator's identity. The Emo boys used their MySpace profiles to express emotions they were experiencing through the use of poems or philosophical reflections on life, as well as displaying an androgynous self-image through their profile pictures. These attributes of emotionality and the use of colours and motifs commonly associated with femininity suggest that the Emo identity provides an avenue for young males to defy stereotypical gender discourses. This transgression of hegemonic masculinity is highlighted through a comparison with a sample of profiles from a general search of young males on MySpace. A comparison of the Emo and the more 'mainstream' profiles revealed that the profiles reflecting an Emo identity were over three times more likely to be set to *private*. This may suggest that those males presenting themselves as Emo are aware that they are not conforming to hegemonic masculinity, and that this may invite negative attention.

Keywords: Masculinity, MySpace, Emo, Social networking, transgression.

Introduction

There has been much scholarship on gender presentation online and the ways in which gender discourses are reproduced through social networking sites (SNSs) (Van Doorn, 2010). Much of this research has asserted that males are reproducing traditional gender discourses in their online identities (Suler and Phillips, 1998; Kendall, 2000). Our research addresses some of the ways in which these gender boundaries may be being transgressed by young males, in particular those performing their masculinity through the Emo subculture. Through an analysis of the MySpace profiles of male users aged 18-25 who present themselves as Emo, we are able to identify some of the ways in which young males in the 21st century are defying popular notions of hegemonic masculinity through self presentation on their profiles. Thiel-Stern (2009: 3) asserts that 'MySpace serves as a space for identity articulation and creativity', but her research focuses primarily on girls. MySpace allows for more personal customisation than other SNSs, with hundreds of backgrounds, the creation of photo albums, the insertion of other images and the display of blogs and text. Therefore, we chose to examine MySpace profiles as a possible space for creative identity construction by males too. Emo is short for 'Emotional Hardcore', and as such the Emo culture on MySpace presents a particularly fruitful site for analysis.

Through carefully considered text, artistic backgrounds and carefully chosen photos, Emo users articulate their identity. Aspects of their MySpace performances of gender involve displaying elements commonly associated with femininity. Preliminary research revealed that the use of such feminine elements is symptomatic of the Emo subculture and its style. Our research highlights that 'Emo boys' may be taking on male identities that differ from that of the hegemonic male model and are doing so within the conventions of the Emo subculture. Furthermore, our research has produced an unexpected finding. Males who present as Emo on MySpace appear to be more likely than 'mainstream' young men to limit public access to their profiles by employing the service's privacy settings. We discuss not only the ways in which Emo boys may be deviating from hegemonic masculinity, but also the extent to which MySpace is a safe space in which to do so.

Social Networking and Young People's Identity

The explosion of SNSs since 2003 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007) has been accompanied by often negative discourses in the news media (The 7.30 Report, 2010; Thiel-Stern, 2009; Today Tonight, 2007). Thiel-Stern addresses these negative discourses by examining dominant narratives in the media about young people's use of MySpace. According to Thiel-Stern (2009: 21), young people use MySpace as a 'space for identity articulation and creativity', creating content and representing themselves outside of the traditional stereotypes, rather than being represented by others. However, she argues, the media is engaged with a number of moral panics about young people's use of MySpace. The news media perpetuates hegemonic stereotypes of both boys and girls. Boys are represented in the media 'even more narrowly' (2009: 25) than girls, stereotyped as aggressors and bullies online and in the so called YouTube 'fight club' videos (Crawford, 2011; Hall, 2011). These negative stereotypes of boys acting as aggressors and deviants online are also perpetuated in other literature (Suler and Phillips, 1998). The supposed aggression of boys online is juxtaposed with the stereotype of girls on MySpace who, according to Thiel-Stern (2009), are portrayed as either powerless victims or sexually promiscuous, too naive to be aware of their actions.

Research addressing boys' online behaviour has shown that in their online lives, whether on SNSs or in other forums such as online gaming (Companion and Sambrook, 2008) or chat rooms (Kendall, 2000), boys' identities mainly conform to a model of hegemonic masculinity that is perpetuated in offline life. According to Companion and Sambrook (2008), boys engaging with the online gaming world reproduce forms of hegemonic masculinity in line with the ideal of physical power and a lack of emotion when choosing their characters.

Thiel-Stern's research explores the responses in the media to SNSs, rather than the sites themselves, and further, she focuses primarily on girls' identity creation. Numerous other studies explore girls' use of the internet for identity creation (Stern, 1999; Stern, 2002; Dobson, 2008; Grisso and Weiss, 2005; Tsoulis-Reay, 2009). As such, there exists a body of literature examining girls' use of the internet; however, the body of work on boys' identity creation online is comparatively small. Furthermore this research focuses mainly on online gaming forums and online chat rooms (Kendall, 2000; Companion and Sambrook, 2008) and research specifically addressing boys' use of SNSs remains comparatively rare. This article follows on from Thiel-Stern's work and the literature claiming that hegemonic masculinities are perpetuated online and seeks to partly redress the imbalance in the research on boy's online identity creation on SNSs. We sought to identify young men who may be doing something new and creative on MySpace, namely, Emo boys, and examine whether the Emo subculture allows them to transgress stereotypical gender discourses.

Masculinities

In order to establish whether young men who identify with the Emo subculture, *Emo boys*, may be

transgressing traditional gender discourses, we first need to discuss what these discourses entail. Traditional masculinities are often discussed through the theory of hegemonic masculinity. Howson (2006) has argued that this form of masculinity is the benchmark which all other genders follow. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the ideal masculine form (Vigorite and Curry, 1998). Connell (1995) has argued that this form has been created by society and becomes predominant when others accept this ideal through persuasion, hence becoming 'normal' or 'ordinary'.

Like other gender forms, hegemonic masculinity is considered to be a performance (Butler, 1990). The characteristics and attributes that are associated with hegemonic masculinity are aggression, assertiveness, strength, boldness and logic (Pollack, 1998). The idea that men are naturally more aggressive and domineering than women is a widely held belief within society (Wienke, 1998). Writing in the 1950s, social constructionist Talcott Parsons argued that there are specific sex roles for men and women within society, where women are 'expressive' and men are 'instrumental' (as cited in Connell, 1995: 22). Connell (1995) has argued that the differences between men and women were strongly exaggerated in academic journals at that time as well as in the media.

The performance of hegemonic masculinity requires that men avoid all feminine behaviour (Edley and Wetherell, 1995). They are required to acquire success, status and breadwinning competence; to be strong, confident and independent as well as aggressive, violent and daring (Edley and Wetherell, 1995). Media outlets such as television, movies and advertisements are said to strongly perpetuate these stereotypes (Boni, 2002).

Pollack (1998: 304) refers to a 'boy code' whereby boys learn from a young age to be 'stoic, strong, daring and a self that is attracted to violence and power.' When boys do not follow this ideal they are subjected to a shame-hardening process, which is thought to eventually lead to the suppression of their emotions (Anastasi, 2005). For example when boys cry at a young age they are scolded with the words 'big boys don't cry!' These discourses are common within western society, and Pollack (1998) has argued that they further perpetuate the boy code as well as hegemonic masculinity. Society has expectations for men to abide by these 'boy code rules' and for boys to control their emotions.

Anastasi (2005) looks at the Emo music subculture, characterised by its personal or emotional themes (Phillipov, 2009), and argues that this particular genre allows boys and young men to voice their pain and turmoil. Pollack (1998) argues that there is no space for men to talk openly of emotion, and Anastasi (2005) applauds Emo music as a healthy avenue for young men to deal with and express their emotions. According to Overell (2010: 142), the rise in popularity of Emo music coincided with the explosion of MySpace and other SNSs in 2007. MySpace in particular plays host to a large number of Emo communities, becoming known anecdotally as 'emospace' (Overell, 2010: 142). Although Emo music entered popular culture and gained success in the mainstream music charts, those who identify as Emo steadfastly position themselves as outside the dominant or 'mainstream' culture. According to Overell (2010: 142), a lot of this 'self-positioning' occurs in the realm of MySpace profiles. Other online Emo communities such as '_emoxlykewoah' provide an insight into Emo adherents' view of what it is to be Emo, namely to feel 'strongly' or 'deep(ly)' (Overell, 2010: 143). This identification with emotionality, associated with femininity, manifests itself in the 'androgynous style' (Overell, 2010: 145), discussed below. These aspects of Emo identity are sharply opposed to the defining elements of hegemonic masculinity discussed above.

Being Emo

In order to establish criteria by which we could identify young men on MySpace who adhere to the Emo subculture, we conducted preliminary research online. We began our preliminary research with some notion of what it means to be Emo, and what an Emo looks like. However we wanted to know what young people from within this culture believed Emo to be and what makes someone Emo. To this end, we gathered

information from two websites; luv-emo.com and emo-corner.com. Both sites identified the key aspects of Emo culture as music, style/appearance and attitude.

According to both sites, the term Emo began in the 1980s with a genre of punk music, but has been reappropriated by popular culture. Mainstream music such as 'My Chemical Romance' has made the Emo subculture more accessible and Emo has come to encompass the way one dresses and expresses oneself through appearance. The Emo boy is well dressed and puts a great deal of effort into his appearance. The basic clothing style consists of tight black jeans, tight t-shirts, often plain black or promoting a band, and Converse All Stars or Vans skate shoes, usually old and worn. They also often wear studded belts and wrist bands. Clothes are usually black; however, unlike Goths the Emo style is most often a combination of black and contrasting bright, florescent colours. Also central to the Emo style is hair, dyed black and with a side-parted long fringe. Emo boys often straighten their hair and spend a great deal of effort styling it. Emo boys also often wear eyeliner; however, according to both sites it must be subtle to avoid to the Goth look. Piercings are also common; according to emo-corner.com, lip rings are particularly common among Emo boys. Motifs such as skulls, stars and crosses are also common.

The site luv-emo.com includes a section titled *Emo Layouts*, meaning backgrounds and visual designs for SNSs such as MySpace. These Emo layouts are nearly all combinations of black and bright florescent colours, in particular purple, pink and blue. Skulls, stars and images involving pierced and bleeding hearts are common, as are images of stylised Emo girls. These images of other Emos often convey some emotion such as loneliness, through body language, facial expression or colours. Another common motif is cartoons also conveying loneliness or sadness, whether by facial expression, body language or text.

Of most importance to our research is the Emo *attitude*, how these boys feel and think about themselves. Both sites are in agreement as to what an Emo attitude entails. According to these sites Emo is short for emotional and this is the key aspect of the Emo attitude. Emo is about self-expression and having an 'emotional personality' (luv-emo.com). Emo boys are 'sensitive' (emo-corner.com) and in touch with their emotions; being Emo is an 'emotional state of mind.' Both sites emphasise the importance of self-expression and being emotionally 'deep' and introspective as part of the Emo subculture.

These elements of the Emo culture - emotion and sensitivity - as well as the aesthetic aspects of hair styling and grooming, are all things that could be said to be in opposition to hegemonic masculinity in the 21st century. As noted above, hegemonic masculinity dictates that men should not openly display emotion, and it is defined in opposition to what is feminine. As the Emo subculture displays all these attributes, we hypothesise that the performance of this identity on MySpace may allow males to transgress these gender boundaries of hegemonic masculinity in their expression of self on MySpace. This study then explores Emo culture on MySpace through a small sample of profiles as a way of testing this hypothesis.

Methodology

Inclusion criteria

The target demographic for our research was males aged 18-25. We began by searching for MySpace profiles of young Australian men displaying the Emo identity; however, as the results were very limited, we widened the search to be international. Sexuality was not one of our search criteria, nor do we address sexuality in our profile analyses. The focus of our research is on the performance of masculine identity in the male Emo subculture, not on the sexuality of Emos.

We employed the following criteria to identify the MySpace profiles of young Emo men.

- The Emo visual *brand* as revealed through choice of profile background, layout, colours and motifs.
- The Emo *look* as revealed through their profile owner's profile picture and other images of themselves.

The look includes hairstyle, clothing, accessories and make-up.

- The Emo *attitude* as revealed through emotional quality of their written expression.

MySpace profiles did not need to display all of these criteria to be included in the analysis. For example, an otherwise apparently Emo boy may not have chosen to use a background layout, or he may have chosen to display his Emo identity through motifs and images rather than words. Two of the above listed criteria were enough to identify the profile owner as Emo.

Search methodology

Six searches were conducted on six different occasions, and over 600 profiles were browsed through these searches. On three separate occasions, the search term 'Emo boy' was entered into the MySpace search engine, and the results were then limited to the age group 18-25. From these three searches a total of 120 profiles were browsed. Next a search was conducted using the 'friend list' of the MySpace page of the band My Chemical Romance, which was identified in our preliminary research as belonging to the Emo music genre. A general search of males aged 18-25 was then conducted and those profiles displaying a male presenting with the Emo look were viewed. Finally the friend lists of the Emo boys identified in earlier searches were browsed. From these combined searches 12 profiles were selected for analysis. A general search was then conducted for the MySpace profiles of Australian males, the only criteria being the age range of 18-25, so as to provide a broader, comparative sample of young males on MySpace. The first 20 of these profiles were viewed and appeared to display significant elements of hegemonic masculinity, allowing for a tentative comparison between a general sample of public male profiles and the Emo profiles.

Ethics

The focus of our research was the performance of masculinity of Emo boys on MySpace, rather than the individual Emo boys themselves. For this reason, we only examined material that the profile owners have posted publicly. All of the profile owners' identities are protected in the findings reported here, and no identifying material is reproduced from the profiles analysed. According to Elm (2009), studying social life online complicates the issue of privacy and in certain circumstances it may be less harmful not to contact the participants. The forum of MySpace provides the opportunity for varying degrees of privacy. Individuals can choose to make their profiles completely private, semi-public or public; the material analysed in the study is drawn only from publicly accessible MySpace profiles. The Association of Internet Researchers determined that collecting data without informed consent could be acceptable if the environment from which it is drawn is public and the material is not sensitive (Elm, 2009: 133). The publicly accessible profile material analysed included the profile's Emo visual brand, the profile owner's Emo look and the owner's demonstrated Emo attitude.

Findings

The Emo brand

We began our analysis with the backgrounds of the selected Emo boy MySpace profiles. The backgrounds of the twelve profiles shared commonalities including colour schemes, motifs and themes. The colours used were primarily black and pink, often incorporated through motifs and text on a greyscale backdrop. Only four out of the twelve profiles did not display this type of colour scheme. These four either left the background as the default white, or used plain black. The use of black is in line with the favouring of black in hair and clothing colour in the Emo style, while the integration of pink – a colour more commonly associated with femininity – sheds light on a less masculine element of the identity that these young men are expressing. In comparison, it was found that in the profiles of the young men from the general sample, pink was not commonly used;

however, black was used often. The use of a colour primarily associated with femininity, such as pink, does not conform to traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity. However, while the colour pink is traditionally associated with femininity, the combination of the black and the pink is typical of the Emo subculture.

Certain motifs were also common among the twelve Emo boy profiles, such as the 'love heart'. The background of Profile Eleven depicts two pink guns on either side of a pink love heart. The creator has chosen a picture of a gun, a symbol that could be associated with hegemonic masculinity because of its connotations of violence and aggression; however, he has coupled it with the more feminine image of the love heart and the colour pink, rendering the image somewhat ambiguous.

Several of the Emo boy profiles' backgrounds also had cartoons. Profile Five includes a cartoon that depicts an Emo boy ripping out his heart and handing it to an Emo girl with the text 'I give you my heart'. Similar cartoons were noted on the other Emo profiles studied. The cartoon displays a vulnerability and open expression of love, while connecting this love with a violent image of physical pain. Profile Twelve uses a cartoon in which a character is standing with a love heart on his chest, a band aid on his head and a piece of grass in his hand with the following poem in a speech bubble: 'I went to pick you a flower, but it was a Venus fly trap and it bit my head, so I killed it and got you this piece of grass instead.' The text and image in the background displays a positive expression of emotion through the giving of a gift while incorporating a darker side through the killing of the Venus fly trap.

The combination of images of violence, such as the gun, and images associated with emotion and femininity, such as the heart, may be an expression of the profile creator's view of love as a painful experience, or simply an artistic image that pleased the creator aesthetically. This combination is not only characteristic of the Emo subculture but it also highlights a potential transgression of gender boundaries. The Emo boy creators are incorporating elements of hegemonic masculinity with traditionally feminine images to create new meanings unique to their performance of masculinity.

Motifs were not typically used in the backgrounds of the profiles viewed from the general search for public young men on MySpace. These profiles were undecorated compared to those of the Emo boys. When decoration was used, it was done with images such as cars and sporting heroes, traditionally symbolic of power and strength, both attributes of hegemonic masculinity. Also used were sexualised images of women as objects, rather than subjects of emotion. The colours used also differed notably with those of the Emo boy profiles. While these more 'mainstream' young men also used black and grey, the colours that most often appeared were blues, greens and reds – none of which would be considered to carry connotations of femininity specifically.

The Emo look

All of the Emo boy profile creators displayed the Emo hairstyle, outlined above, in their profile pictures. Their hair was dyed black, long and straightened, and styled to fall over their faces in a 'fringe'. Three of the subjects were also wearing black eyeliner around their eyes. The combination of makeup and heavily styled longer hair created an androgynous look. Four of the subjects also had facial piercings and visible tattoos in their pictures, and black was predominant in their clothing and hair style.

The Emo boys placed a great deal of emphasis on their physical appearance with the use of makeup and a particular code of dress. This is not consistent with hegemonic masculinity as the use of cosmetic enhancement is almost exclusively a female domain. A good performance of hegemonic masculinity concentrates on strength and achievements rather than physical appearance. This finding suggests that the Emo boys are transgressing certain traditional gender boundaries.

In comparison, in the profiles pictures of the young men from our general search, the profile creators were not wearing any makeup nor had they styled their hair in any particular fashion. Their hair was either cut short or it was covered with a cap. Six of the young men from the general sample had chosen to use an

image of a car instead of themselves.

Other photos on the profiles of the Emo boys appeared to be constructed specifically for MySpace. They are often obviously taken by the subject in a 'MySpace pose', where the photo is taken from above and the subject is looking slightly away from the camera. These photos do not include anything or anyone in the background. None of the Emo boys are smiling in their profile pictures and five out of the twelve Emo boys are not looking directly at the camera, but rather at a downward angle or away from the camera. This 'self-hold' pose suggests a certain passivity, and a level of introspection as their sole purpose is self-display. The profile picture on Profile Two, for example, is carefully staged, as the creator is positioned in front of the camera from chest up, his eyes are closed and his head tilted down. His hands are positioned in front of his chest forming a heart shape and the photo is in black and white. The photo is artistic and staged to convey a particular meaning. The vulnerability expressed through the pose and the reference to emotion and love with the symbol of the heart do not conform to a hegemonic performance of masculinity. The majority of the photos displayed by the Emo boys were taken indoors. They suggest a location within the private, domestic sphere which is often considered a feminine domain.

The photos of the young men from the general search are distinctly different to those of the Emo boys. Their photos were usually taken of them either in a group of people, or engaged in a form of physical activity, such as riding a bike or hanging out with friends. Unlike the photos from the Emo profiles, which tended to be taken for self-display purposes, their photos are indicators of their offline lives. There were comparatively few individual photos from the general sample of young male profiles. When an individual photo was displayed it was usually of the individual performing a physical activity like surfing or bike riding, whereas the Emo boys were seldom shown performing a physical activity.

The Emo attitude

Although several of the Emo boy profiles were limited or lacking in text, four of them were quite extensive in their use of text. The text on these profiles was often introspective, engaging in self-reflection and attempting to convey a fairly complex expression of their identities. The text often reflected an almost philosophical outlook on their identity and life. The About Me section of Profile One commences with a quote:

Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Choose your words, for they become actions. Understand your actions, for they become habits. Study your habits, for they will become your character. Develop your character, for it becomes your destiny!

This quote uses a poetic style of repetition as a philosophical expression of self-reflection, expressing a desire for personal growth. Profile Two also includes a quote: 'Your life is like a diamond . . . it has to be broken into a million pieces before it can truly [*sic*] be appreciated.' The creator refers to this quote as his most memorable and 'heart filled'. The quote and his description of its relevance to him indicate emotions of hurt and heartbreak. The quote also expresses a belief that loss and pain, negative emotions, can have an enlightening and strengthening outcome. In comparison, personal material contained in the profiles of the young males from the general sample is generally limited to name, age, occupation and hobbies, presenting a comparatively basic expression of identity. The textual expression of these young males from the general search is tied to concrete facts rather than the more abstract notions expressed by the Emo boys. The majority of these young males also indicate their occupation within the first few lines of text, signalling the significance of what they do to their identity, reflecting the hegemonic model of masculinity in which a male's role as the bread winner is paramount.

The text of the Emo boys' profiles often focuses on the expression of emotion, both positive and negative. When writing about romantic or sexual partners, the Emo boys often use romantic language. In Profile Two, 'Kisses under star light' are highlighted in bold as one of the creator's interests, a romantic image that evokes a sense of affection and sensitivity. Profile Eight contains links to multiple blogs, the most common topic of which is love. The creator of this profile uses poetic language to express a romanticised view of his love

interest: 'You are as fair and sweet and tender, dear brown-eyed little sweet heart mine'. Other Emo boys do not openly speak of love for another person, but freely use the term 'love'; for example, the creator of Profile Eleven states: 'I am so totally in love with My Chemical Romance', using words that have traditionally had feminine connotations. The creator of Profile Twelve refers to his girlfriend as 'The one', a term traditionally used by women in relation to the man they hope to marry. Romance, as opposed to sexual attraction, is a traditionally feminine concept, as it is associated with emotion, vulnerability and monogamy. The performance of hegemonic masculinity entails logic and assertiveness rather than emotion, often focusing on the sexual interaction between men and women to the exclusion of emotion. As such, the Emo boys' use of romance and emotion contradicts the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Profiles from the mainstream young male sample did not use any overtly emotional language. When offering information about their partners, or women in general, their creators were either brief or referred to women in regards to sexual desire.

Many of the Emo boys also wrote about experiencing negative and painful emotions. The creator of Profile Three uses poems to convey loneliness and heartache following a relationship break-up. Both of the two poems on his profile are written as if addressed to someone in particular, creating the impression that through the poems, the creator is speaking to the person who has hurt him. Both poems evoke a sense of loneliness and loss, as well as a sense of vulnerability and insecurity as the creator wonders why he has been left. He expresses 'wishing' and 'hoping' and explicitly talks about crying and pain as well as 'feelings.' Several of the Emo boys profiles include references to 'dark time' in the lives of the creators, during which they experienced painful emotions. In Profile Three, the creator addresses a difficult period in his life that has caused him to 'let go of everything I ever lived for ...' again, openly expressing a state of high emotional distress and pain.

Several of the Emo boys identify likes and interests that do not necessarily conform to the hegemonic model of masculinity. The creator of Profile Ten lists 'girl pants' and 'hair' among his interests. The creator of Profile Six seems to be aware that his interests and style may not correspond with the accepted model of masculinity. He writes: 'for a boy to look like a girl is degrading', expressing his frustration with what he sees as the double standard of a society in which it is okay for girls to dress and wear their hair the way boys do, whereas it is socially unacceptable for a boy to look like a girl. In comparison, the hobbies and interests listed in the general sample of young male profiles are clearly symbols of hegemonic masculine performance. All of them share a combination of activities including sports, cars or other vehicles, technology such as video games, alcohol and 'mates'.

Many of the Emo boys express a certain defensiveness and defiance in their written expression, including statements such as: 'Poetic I know but if you don't like it don't read on.' This was written by the creator of Profile Two following an expression of pain at having to leave his home for Australia. The creator of Profile Four warns the reader, 'don't let looks fool you from something great!' implying that he believes his appearance may be viewed negatively by some people. He follows this statement with 'don't judge'. The creator of Profile Twelve is quite aggressive towards those whom he may not know, stating 'consider yourself hated by me until further notified.' This aggression is an overlap of the mainstream hegemonic masculine qualities discussed earlier. This attitude of defensiveness and defiance suggests that the Emo boys in this sample view their look or self-expression as controversial, and are aware that it may invite a negative response.

Privacy Settings

While conducting the MySpace profile search, it was noted that many of the profiles of young men displaying Emo characteristics were set to *private*, meaning that they cannot be viewed without the creator's permission. This was an unexpected finding, and to determine whether this was a particularly Emo move, a further MySpace profile search was conducted using the term 'Emo boy' and compared with a general search of young men between the ages of 18 and 25. The first 60 profiles from each search were tallied. It was found that 72% of the Emo boy profiles were set to *private* while this was the case for only 22% of the

general young male sample. Furthermore, of the 17 publicly accessible Emo boy profiles, 30% had at least one section set to *private*.

This finding suggests that the majority of the Emo boys in this study feel the need to limit access to their profile to those that they personally approve. By making their profile private, they are no longer in the 'public forum'. This suggests that they may be aware that the content that they put on their profiles might not be conforming to societal norms and may invite a negative response. This self-censorship also indicates that MySpace may not be a safe space for the enactment of any transgression of hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

Through their brand, look and attitude, the Emo boys in this study appear to be creating a complex, introspective expression of their identity through their MySpace profiles. Comparatively, the profiles of the general young male sample offer little in the way of individual expression. The Emo boys' choices of colours, motifs and themes for their profile backgrounds are commonly associated with femininity indicating a conscious transgression of gender boundaries. In comparison the backgrounds of the more mainstream young male profiles viewed were usually monochromatic, and often used images linked with a hegemonic model of masculinity. The Emo boys' photos seem to have been constructed specifically for self display on MySpace, demonstrating introspection while the photos presented in the general sample of young males function as a display off their offline life rather than a construction for the purpose of MySpace. Through their textual expression, the Emo boys expressed emotion and self-reflection, actively engaging with their emotions and identity. The textual expression in the general sample of young male profiles, on the other hand, was brief and was usually limited to their basic information, such as name, age and occupation. Our findings indicate that, despite some previous research suggesting that boys often reproduce gender discourses through SNSs (Bryant, 2008), the Emo boys in this study are doing something new and creative with their enactment of masculinity and identity expression. They are transgressing traditional gender discourses by utilising the creative functionality of MySpace. The comparison made with a small sample of non-Emo public male profiles of the same age range elucidates this transgression.

However, although the Emo boys' MySpace profiles analysed here were clearly engaging with masculinity in creative ways, the number of profiles displaying this transgression was limited. This is largely because the majority of the Emo boy profiles on MySpace offer limited public access. Profiles indicating the Emo characteristics of their creators were three times more likely to be set to private than non-Emo young male profiles. This finding indicates that the Emo boys may be aware of their transgression and the negative responses this may invite from viewers. Although the Emo identity may be an avenue for transgression of hegemonic masculinity, MySpace may not be a safe space for the enactment of this identity.

Notes

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