NO CONSEQUENCES: AN ANALYSIS OF IMAGES AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT
ON FACEBOOK

by

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Abstract

Goffman (1959) suggests that it is through communication that we are able to form impressions of self and express our identity to society. With the emergence of computer-mediated communication and social network sites we've witnessed a new form of communication online, and as a result, the traditional forms of impression management used to construct and display identity have shifted to include not just speaking or writing our identity, but displaying who we are through photographs online. This research investigates the connection between the use of a particular social network site, Facebook, and the pattern of impression management techniques through the management and addition of photographs on the site. A two-month ethnography of 16 participants was conducted followed by 3 interviews. Results indicate that digital natives (individuals who have grown up heavily in the presence of technology) tend to convey a variety of conflicting online identities through images, resulting in a "no consequences" generation that, while concerned with privacy, are more concerned with communicating an impression that fits within their primary social roles.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mom and dad for their support as I continue my education, to my brothers, Sean and Tony for keeping me strong, and to my sister Cathryn for keeping me close. This could not have happened without the Kansas State Debate Team who brought me to the wonderful town of Manhattan, or without my close friends, Nikki and Kara, who constantly remind me why I love what I do, and certainly not without Joe; thank you all so much for all that you do. Finally, and most importantly, I dedicate this to my sister, Wendy, without whom I wouldn't be where I am today.

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction: I Am Who I Choose to Be

A unique characteristic of communication rests in the concept of choice: the opportunity and desire for an individual to self-construct and present an identity under a variety of given circumstances. Certainly, the act of communicating helps us shape and express our selves, or rather, who we would like to be. Erving Goffman (1959) explains, from a symbolic interactionist viewpoint, it is how and what we say that defines who we are. The concept of self has been connected to communication long before the personal computer, and certainly long before public profiles existed on the Internet, but no one can doubt that the ability to have an internet site dedicated completely to one's self has changed the presentation of self in new ways. In the past, individuals defined who they were through interaction and experiences within their local community (Goffman, 1959) but, in a technologically advancing world, communication interaction has shifted from simple face-to-face encounters, phone calls and letters, to video chats, emails, instant messaging, and networking online. Therefore, impressions previously made with old communication technologies are frequently replaced by impressions made with new communication technologies (Zywica & Danowski, 2008). As a result, the term impression-management, which typically referred to face-to-face differences in encounters with a person can now be applied to the ability to monitor what people know about you when they encounter you online (Kleck, Reese, Behnken, & Sundar, 2007). With the proliferation of virtual social networking giants such as Facebook and MySpace, the youth (who currently dominate them), in many ways, are reshaping communication: increasing not only the number of people communicated with daily, but the kind of information considered appropriate to communicate to

the people that you know in varying degrees of context. These sites have become a phenomenon; a place where millions of people flock to showcase a profile of information about them while establishing ties (often weak ties) with friends and contacts all over the world from a host of situations—perhaps they met in class, briefly at a party, when they were five, ten, fifty years old—whatever it may be, there are no limits to who can be a "Facebook friend." The current literature surrounding social networks, both on and offline, has typically focused on the effects within dyads rather than on the individual (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) concerned primarily with social capital and concepts of community, and while past research connecting identity development to blogging and dating site profiles exists (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006), the literature on social network sites is still evolving in an effort to understand the impact that the sites have on individual users and how they communicate their identity through the sites to a varying group of strangers and friends alike.

Zywica and Danowski's (2008) study of Facebook users suggested that individuals spend a lot of time developing the perfect profile as a way to maintain social status. More specifically, they found that individuals tended to list socially acceptable (desired) likes, in addition to using a profile picture that made the user appear (at their most) attractive. They discovered that as the number of friends increased, so increased the time spent online ensuring the profile represented the user in a positive light. This online management process has led to the untagging of "unflattering" pictures and the deleting of negative wall posts from friends. Thus this (new) type of impression management in an online forum illustrates the (offline) struggle for many to be socially accepted. Therefore, it is at present important to understand how, as a result of the existence and frequent use of social networking sites, we communicate and manage our impressions.

Social Networking Site users (e.g., Facebook members) have quickly learned they can essentially "delete" information about themselves they deem socially unacceptable, or images they believe to be "unattractive." While many feel that the Internet has created a level of permanence to communicative events online (that is to say, everything we type and upload stays there forever), Facebook has provided the ability to detach yourself from these actions by the simple click of a mouse, deleting or altering any images or texts that are related to your profile at any given time. Arguably, the exchanges that arise in most face-to-face social situations are not as easily removable from our every day life encounters; once we say something to someone, the ability to take it back is likely impossible, though only a small circle may know what was said. Regardless of an "unflattering" or "unattractive" photo that exists of a person in a particular situation, that act still occurred, and was communicated to an audience. A picture (literal or one captured in our mind by experiencing it), is said to be worth 'a thousand words.' A picture has a way of speaking and explaining far more to a viewer than a mere description of the event or moment ever could. Understanding the impact social networking sites (SNS) has on users will help researchers to understand how socializing has evolved:

> No one has ever taken a look at social networking sites like Facebook and thought about them as a form of self-expression to a generation that has always known technology; has always known the graphical user interface of a computer screen, and asked students themselves what meaning they make of this communication. (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2008, p. 2)

We find ourselves in a cultural shift—in a world where communication patterns are no longer as easily identified by current theories and research, where a shift in public and private boundaries of information and sharing has opened up a new area of study for researchers across the board in

a variety of fields. We can no longer assume that individuals purely form relationships on the basis of dialogue, by the peeling away of layers that is suggested by Social Penetration Theory (Gibbs et al, 2006). Evidence is suggesting, instead of a gradual and regulated peeling of the layers, that individuals are now able to cut straight through to the inner layers of who that person is, simply by the viewing of a profile. Thus, theories of identity development and impression management must now confront the effect that a multitude of changeable information that is self-selected has on perceptions of identity. SNS profiles connect to varying groups of friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and family members, which forces an individual to establish a firm identity that satisfies all of those groups' knowledge/understanding of who that person is; despite the fact that that person could (and likely does) behave/act differently to each of those groups of people. Unlike simple audience analysis and adaptation, a SNS is much more challenged with its ability to tailor a site for a particular audience. Consider the fact that we often present ourselves differently to our parents, our boss, our best friend, or even general acquaintances. And it is not surprising that the person we present to these groups of people is often very different, and at times present conflicting constructions of identity.

Erving Goffman (1959) described our communication patterns and identity development as a stage of impressions we express with and toward others. More specifically, he discusses human expressions in terms of Front Stage/Back Stage behaviors, suggesting that we have different faces that are established to conceal irrelevant information as opposed to "real truths." Goffman is less concerned with the content of the message, but instead found value in how we choose to convey it, and to whom. With SNS, individuals have the ability/opportunity to alter, construct, and announce information about their self on a regular basis. The immediacy of information on Facebook and the opportunity to delete images and/or text that you previously

had available, or add information on top of what was previously there shows this concealing process at work.

A common example of where the concealing of (ir)relevant information occurs online is with the use of creating photo albums and posting images on the site. We have discovered that "showing pictures as part of a conversation or reviewing pictures to confirm social bonds" (van Dijck, 2008, p. 61) is a part of this act. The social game that we engage in as a result of social networking sites, such as Facebook, can illustrate the extent to which we use images, single snapshots of a moment in time, as illustrative of who we are in a constant and fixed manner. These photos serve as yet another form of impressions management online for a user; expressing to friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances an ideal of self.

Contemporary photography serves different functions today. The primary role of taking photographs in previous generations was as a memory marker. However, current research suggests that the advent of the digital camera has led to pictures being taken as a form of "live communication" (van Dijck, 2008). Instead of the typical "family photograph," camera phones and pocket cameras have allowed anyone to capture any image-worthy moment. Communicating with images is a new form of communication heavily utilized by the "Net Generation." For individuals born between 1982 and 2001 growing up in the presence of the Internet has offered a unique opportunity to learn and grow at an early age—information is more readily available, connections more easily made than ever before (Tapscott, 2007). It is no wonder then that many people prefer the name the "Net Generation": these so-called digital kids cannot remember a world pre-Internet, what high school was like without cell phones, instant messaging, and Facebook (Tapscott, 2007).

Martinez-Aleman and Wartman (2008) explain this as a shift in culture—a growth of the digital native in a computer-mediated world that must be examined as we continue to see these sites gain popularity. This cultural growth is important to study for three reasons. First, examining what the images suggest about a person allows us to understand how the current generation engages in public impression management through images, and second, in addition, it provides a link to the field of visual communication and the belief that individuals have come to share images as experiences, not simply as objects. Finally, drawing on Erving Goffman's analysis of self, the use of photographs in an online platform becomes a new stage for individuals to manage impressions in ways not previously understood.

Previous research (Pennington, 2008; Zywica & Danowski, 2008) is already suggesting that individuals heavily emphasize and manage images online, though the primary reason and what exactly they choose to manage remains unclear. Additionally, research in visual communication over the past decade has focused heavily on images as ideographs and social statements, whereas the study of the everyday photographic managing of images is largely untouched. Cloud (2004) leads a movement towards the study of image as social statement with her research on images in the context of United States war on terror, and while there is merit to studying the images used to justify and contain international conflict, the field of visual communication frequently bypasses the mundane digital images taken by the millions each day by individuals who simply want to document their lives. Facebook, however, is configured to use those very photographs as a form of communication. More specifically, Facebook users' ability to tag (and thus connect) the image to another person's profile illustrates that pictures are not merely objects: we are showing who we are through what we do, rather than what we say we do, we could have a status update that says "going to a Halloween party" but having images tagged

of you at that party creates a more cohesive communicative connection to convey the experience of being there. As a result, Facebook users communicate specific images of what they want visitors to their profiles to see as well as management of images that they have no control over existing on the site.

Photography has evolved beyond its original use, becoming a form of social communication, and in doing so has forced individuals to come to terms with how they are portrayed through not only text and what they choose to say, but how they are seen in pictures. The inability to control images (or their placement online) creates a discomfort and disconnect for the individual that is worthy of study. Prior to online photography, individuals only made public their behavior to people who were co-present. However, images have long been suggested to be worth more… more than a thousand words, and certainly more than the words of a bystander, especially if these images are unflattering. Goffman describes the process of dealing with this impression dissonance:

I have considered some major forms of performance disruption--unmeant gestures, inopportune intrusions, faux pas, and scenes. These disruptions, in everyday terms, are often called "incidents." When an incident occurs, the reality sponsored by the performers is threatened. The persons present are likely to react by becoming flustered, ill at ease, embarrassed, nervous, and the like. Quite literally, the participants may find themselves out of countenance. When these flusterings or symptoms of embarrassment become perceived, the reality that is supported by the performance is likely to be further jeopardized and weakened, for these signs of nervousness in most cases are an aspect of the individual who presents a character and not an aspect of the character he projects, thus forcing upon the audience an image of the man behind the mask. In order to prevent

the occurrence of incidents and the embarrassment consequent upon them, it will be

necessary for all the participants in the interaction, as well as those who do not

participate, to possess certain attributes and to express these attributes in practices

employed for saving the show. (Goffman, 1959, p. 210)

At the time of his writings, Goffman could not have accounted for what it would mean to "save

the show" in the context of online impression management. However, his analysis of the

discomfort of confronting front stage/back stage behavior is best illustrated by the taking of

pictures that an individual has little control over the final product. The result of a misplaced or

ill-received image online can be catastrophic; resulting in the loss of friends, jobs, and in some

cases, a life.

This thesis will examine the process of online image management, specifically examining

ways in which users confront (potential) conflicting perceptions of self as displayed in images

uploaded to the site. By using Facebook as a platform for social networking this research will

reveal how we function culturally at a time where our public/private (front stage/back stage)

behaviors collide online, blurring the strict lines of fixed identity, and as such, individuals must

manage those impressions regularly if they are to ensure that they are viewed in ways that remain

congruent with the image they desire others to see. Yet, how (if at all) do we confront the

conflict that arises from images of the self, and communicate an identity that explains these

images in relation to the various roles we engage in on a daily basis?

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

Social Networking Sites Defined

Social networking sites are places of transformative communication and are at an all-time height of popularity. The rise of these sites has invited a new line of research and inquiry regarding technology and communication. boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites (SNS) as:

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).

The development of SNS has enabled computer-mediated communication (CMC) to enter into an entirely new realm of research. Beer (2008) characterizes these sites further by suggesting that a SNS… "Can be understood as vast archives of information about their users, accumulated as they create content…if we so wish, and given sufficient time, we can dip into these archives at will" (p. 522). Beer argues for the importance of analyzing sociological tendencies of SNS users and that we must act as participants in SNS to fully understand the users. Beer's decision to use the word "archive" to refer to a profile becomes the foundation for which the research on identity and Facebook will be examined; we communicate and gather a large amount about ourselves that leaves a lasting footprint on the Internet long after we believe that communication to have ended.

Although social networking began its influence in the late 1990's, the sites did not reach a critical mass until 2003 wherein major social sites were launched (boyd & Ellison, 2007). While many of the early networks failed, two sites, MySpace and Facebook, have received unprecedented levels of popularity, with Facebook taking a commanding lead in growth in the most recent years (Martinez-Aleman & Wartman, 2008).

SNS profiles typically consist of the same kind of information: A picture of the user, his or her name (or pseudonym), the user's likes, dislikes, and a list of users that can connect the viewer to anyone else the user knows; Facebook and MySpace refer to these people as "friends." The profile is an archive of information constructed and altered at will by the user—and the history of these alterations to the profile remains on the profile, allowing visitors to the site to look at previous statuses or former profile pictures, with a time stamp indicating when the user added the information to the profile. This provides information on how individuals change and construct his or her public identity as desired.

Over time, the look and construct of profile pages have changed. For Facebook, the current main profile page consists primarily of the profile picture and the "wall" feature that allows both the user and "friends" of the user to comment. Facebook also has a running "newsfeed" that provides updates on any activity that the user has engaged in—this can range from writing on someone else's "wall" to uploading pictures, to status updates, and much more as these sites evolve to encompass a variety of applications, part of what has enabled Facebook to become the leading social network site on the Internet.

The Facebook Phenomenon

Facebook is currently the premiere social network site on the Internet. It is the fourth most trafficked website on the Internet, with 400 million active users, fifty percent of whom log

onto the website at least once a day for a total of 55 minutes. The use and trafficking of Facebook shows no signs of slowing down: over 5 billion minutes are spent on the website daily worldwide (Facebook Statistics, 2010). What helps Facebook maintain prominence in the arena of social network sites is its ability to adapt and conform. Facebook has the ability to link to the social giant Twitter, and includes music access much like MySpace that gained notoriety for in recent years. Facebook has done its best to have something for everyone anytime a competitor pops up that could potentially threaten its ability to continue to thrive. Its original distinction from other social network sites was an accessibility criterion: initially users had to have a college e-mail address to have an account with Facebook. The website, created by a student at Harvard, was intended to cater to and serve the college population. Facebook served this group for almost two years; however, its popularity morphed to include a separate high school version of Facebook, which merged with the original, and finally became a public access site in 2007 (Ellison et al., 2007). The original closed nature created an environment that fostered sharing information amongst and between college students across the country, promoting a maintenance of ties from high school students separated by college, and establishing new relationships with people met on campus, in class, or at a party. Facebook went public almost two years ago, and has since seen its growth in users in their late twenties and early thirties rise drastically, showing that a wide range of people engage in Facebook as a medium for communication (Facebook Statistics, 2010).

While research certainly suggests that the Net Generation has enhanced critical thinking skills as a result of the constant questioning over the validity of information presented on the Internet, less research has been undertaken to consider the generational differences that exist in relation to identity and growing up in a digital age. Called "narcissistic" and "lacking a sense of

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privacy" (Livingstone, 2008) the Net Generation is often the primary source of study when it comes to SNS, and for a good reason: Facebook is a public location where individuals have the opportunity to connect and communicate on a variety of topics at their leisure. boyd (2007) describes social network sites as 'mediated publics' marking them as similar to hanging out at a mall or a park. These online public places have become very comfortable venues for the Net Generation. And public spaces play a significant role in the social development of youth:

> They [public spaces] allow people to make sense of the social norms that regulate society, they let people learn to express themselves and learn from the reactions of others, and they let people make certain acts or expressions 'real' by having witnesses acknowledge them. (boyd, 2007, p. 2)

In mediated communication, the profile becomes the representation of the person communicating within the public space created: the public space is the network or networks the individual chooses to belong to (e.g., school or university, work, city affiliations). There is also an opportunity for a level of impression management through things like pictures, relational status and filling in the ambiguous "About Me" section on a profile. This compilation becomes the public identity associated with the user. Facebook's quick emergence and dominance in the SNS market has made it an ideal site to use to evaluate the impact that SNS has on the management of impressions and self-presentation for college students.

Within public spaces cliques begin to form that are representative of the cliques that exist offline within an individual's social situation. The social circles that form are not always identical to offline circles given the higher number of people who a user can communicate with through technology, often individuals will "friend" someone to get to know him or her, but may never again have contact with that individual despite being listed as "friends" on Facebook.

Research conducted by Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, and Walther (2008) found the feature on a profile that lists the number of friends one has illustrates how socially attractive (e.g., popular) a user is considered by other members of the site. They noted a contrast existed between the numbers of friends a user has in real life (a dozen or so friends) and their often-high number of friends listed in online profiles (often several hundred friends) and suggested the "attractiveness of popularity" leads users to accept and request "friends" online that they would otherwise not offline. This perception is viewed as universal, profiles with more friends were consistently found to be more attractive than those with a fewer number of friends listed. This desire to be received as socially desirable relates to Zywica and Danowski's (2008) research on popularity offline and how it was portrayed within social networking sites. Their study found that both popular and unpopular people used the site to build on their preexisting offline networks and as a way to expand their social circles, finding validation in the number of friends they acquired. Therefore, social networking sites emerged as a way to increase friendships and accrue popularity, which often contributes to higher levels of belongingness and self-esteem.

From its advent, Facebook established itself as a popular network tool to gain social capital in an offline world. Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield (2006) conducted a study that sought to ascertain the popularity, uses, and representations of self on Facebook. Over 1,000 first semester college students were surveyed. A second survey was administered at the start of their second semester, with 1,085 students participating. In the first survey, 84% of respondents were Facebook users; as of the second survey, 95.5% were users, pointing to its growing popularity on college campuses in a short period of time. In the second survey students were asked to rate (on a 5-point Likert scale) how accurately the profile portrayed them. The results produced a mean of 4.16, indicating a high fidelity with their profile and in their view of its representation of self.

This was consistent with qualitative research (Pennington, 2008); however, in the Pennington study participants indicated that while they believe the profile they had created was accurate, they felt differently about the accuracy of their friends' sites. Participants felt their friends would often "add" or "delete" information and images that would make them appear more socially appealing in the Facebook community.

As Facebook grows in popularity, research suggests a shift in impression management practices. Participants have begun to move away from an "accurate representation" of self towards an "idealized representation", suggesting that specific forms of impression management are occurring as a result of the use of the site. Gonzales and Hancock (2008) looked at personal information provided by individuals in a public setting (posted on a blog) versus private disclosure (written just on a piece of paper). Participants were told that a study on "the detection of personality traits in others' self-descriptions" was being conducted. Half of the participants were told that the information written would remain private; the other half were informed that the information they provided about their selves would be posted on a public blog. Results indicated that "making one's self identifiable on a publicly accessible blog would generate a new self-concept based on that self-presentation" (p. 179). Gonzales and Hancock explain this concept as self-construction, wherein an individual "actively engages in creating, maintaining and modifying an image that reflects one's ideal self" (p. 168). When it was information on a blog, individuals constructed their self as far more extroverted, yet, when the information was a text document they suggested they were more of an introvert. Self-construction and management techniques are the probable explanation for the disconnect that existed in the studies. In other words, individuals believe that the profile *is* who they really are, because it is an ideal image of how they want to be perceived as so that they impress the general public. Therefore, there exists

an increased tendency to become aware of the public nature of information, and adjust accordingly. This in turn causes a user of the online media to consider 'self' by social/communicative standards, ultimately sidelining consideration for who they may actually perceive their self to be on an individualized basis. Considering the current inconsistency in the literature, more research on self-construction and impression management through social network sites is needed. This study can extend what is currently known about Facebook as a public space and its impact on the manner in which users create a profile by scrutinizing impression management in this online forum, by considering the maintenance and management of identity going on, we can better understand the behaviors of the current generation.

Impression Management: Erving Goffman's View of Identity

Identity is defined as "a theory of self that is formed and maintained through actual or imagined interpersonal agreement about what self is like" (Guerrero, Anderson, & Afifi, 2007). Often identity is premised as a very personal concept: essentially, an individual's identity is privately constructed and developed. While we may engage in communication and interact with others on a regular basis, this theoretical frame posits that only the individual can determine self, and what they know to be true. Of course, this is a very idealized concept of self: to believe that communication has no bearing on identity development and construction is a denial of every day interactions and a vast array of literature that speaks to the contrary. Indeed, with the introduction of computer-mediated communication (CMC), this belief that many hold to be true appears to be erroneous. By creating an identity in the form of a profile, individuals have an opportunity to make decisions about their "self" and how they want to represent it in a public forum—providing now more than ever the change to manipulate and alter the self.

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Facebook users strategically create and define their public selves: from having complete control over the flow of information that others find out about them to self-selecting and listing specific areas of information (relationship status, birth date, etc) users are capable of working behind a screen to construct an ideal version of who they want their social network to see them as (the ideal self). This is further supported by Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs' (2006) research on online dating sites that exemplifies the ease and malleability of a profile. Specifically, the profiles are "subject to [higher levels of] self-censorship" than face-to-face encounters. Ellison et al. conclude that this ability to censor can have one of two effects: The first implication suggests the profile offers a skewed view of who the individual is, and the second effect implies that the nature of disclosing the information to a computer (not directly a person) makes that information a more accurate representation of who the person is as opposed to who they "play" in their every day lives. While neither effect is necessarily more accurate of whom the user is it does highlight inconsistencies in impression management theory that need to be addressed. It is highly likely that both implications are true and that there are individualized personality differences that create a tendency towards one behavior or another. Regardless, it is clear that participants in these sites are constantly aware of the ability to "hide" "delete" or "untag" the unwanted, visibly eliminating aspects of their every day life and communication encounters from the site that previously provided a look at that person in their everyday life.

Erving Goffman (1959) coined the phrase "impression management" to explain the process by which individuals manage how other people view their identity (or rather, the images they create through every day encounters). Goffman writes:

In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an explicit or implicit claim to be a person of a particular kind… He also

implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be and hence forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals. The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they ought to as the "is". (p.13)

In context then, when an individual proclaims that he or she is, for example, an athlete, a pre-established (imagined) concept of an athlete follows. People assume that this person is strong, coordinated, fast, and dedicated. For example, if someone said, "I'm a football player," then you presume that that person is [consistent with football stereotypes] probably large, strong, and not overly intellectual. When individuals use labels, socially constructed meanings result (Goffman, 1959).

Facebook is the number one photo-sharing site on the Internet with over three billion images uploaded to the site each month (Facebook Statistics, 2010). Because of this, it allows users to assign or communicate labels about who they are by way of pictures they upload to the site for others to view. It is not enough to say "I had a lot of fun with you at that party"—there is now the tendency to photo document the experience, upload it to Facebook, tag, and share those images for other uses to observe via photo documentation that you did in fact "have fun" at the party with your friends. Often the photo choices uploaded communicates to the viewers images or perceptions of that person; showing them in a variety of contexts and experiences that perhaps the viewer of the profile was not always aware that person was engaged in. If those images are not consistent with the perception of who that person asserts on the written/text side of the profile or what the viewer believes to be true of the use, those viewing the profile may have reason to be skeptical of that person's truthfulness and question the fidelity of the profile and as a result, the person, due in large part to social construction and an inconsistency between the data that exists (pictures, text, etc) and the claim (I am X) being made by both the text, the pictures,

and the person. Establishing a congruency between these three areas then becomes an intricate web for the user to maneuver through as they engage in the social networking process.

The most frequent instance where issues of fidelity arise occurs when SNS users post information or images that are contradictory to the actual perception others have of them. For example, an individual who enacts an online personality that appears to be outrageous and carefree because it is an image they want to communicate but one that contradicts their face-to-face beliefs, it could become problematic. The individual is creating a perception for the sake of social standing—so for example, say the user often jokes in their status, has text in the profile that would seem to suggest they have some extreme interests, but when the viewer of the profile turns to the images, they see a different person who does not appear to be engaging in any of the behaviors they indicated were a part of who they are—the viewer is left to determine whether they should believe the text, or the images, and as the common saying goes "a picture does not lie." The individual does not really like the things they say in the profile, or behave in the way they indicated, but because they want to well-liked, they try to suggest those things to be true, [For] "When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35).

As indicated, self-disclosure online has a reciprocity element. When users belong to a community such as Facebook they typically provide similar levels of information as the individuals within the network—for example, many Facebook users believe that relationship status is important and should be disclosed on a profile (Pennington, 2008). As a result, profiles will likely exhibit similarities in the types of information presented in profiles. Ellison et al. (2007) examined SNS use on Facebook and the concept of social capital. They loosely defined social capital as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual that accrue to an individual or group by

virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual

acquaintance and recognition" (p. 1145). Their research revealed the kinds of information

participants chose to include in their profiles, and whom they thought viewed their profiles. More

specifically, over 80% of users listed the following: name of high school, relational status,

pictures (generally cropped down to show just the individual), as well as a picture of the

individual with friends, and further contact information like AIM (AOL Instant Messaging)

screen name and email address, based on the assumption that old high school friends/people they

have not spoken to for a while would search out the profile. This information suggests the

intentional adaptation of profile based on a (viewing) target audience. What we see is that

Facebook users alter and continue to modify their profiles according to their perceived audience,

fitting into whatever social role is most likely connected to that audience.

Facebook is a communication vehicle where users constantly update or change their

"status" and write messages on the "walls" of their friends' profiles. Knowing how "status" and

"walls" work, we see the opportunity for users to engage in impression management:

> A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing, to be possessed and then
>
> displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well
>
> articulated. Performance with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it
>
> is nonetheless something that must be enacted or portrayed, something that must be
>
> realized. (Goffman, 1959, p. 75)

Thus, by participating in status updates and writing on walls, users are conducting, articulating,

and embellishing about the various roles of their everyday lives. In addition to status and wall

posts, users have the opportunity to alter their profile to adapt to what he or she believes to be

most representative on any given day. Livingstone (2008) suggests continual modifications occur

due to an expressed lifestyle of youth (the opportunity to label yourself on a profile) wherein questions such as "What do I actually want?" and "What matters to me?" lead to constant self-observation and, as a result, frequent shifts in profile information to accommodate the answers.

Facebook's numerous functions allows users ample opportunities to engage in the different forms of impression management, which can be broken down into three categories: management through images, management through text, and management through conversation. Management through images would entail the changing of profile pictures, uploading of photo albums to illustrate activities/events/moments in a user's life. Management through text would relate specifically to the degree to which a user changes the actual text part of the profile—the information such as religious attitudes, political affiliations, etc. that are seen as markers of a person's identity. Finally, management through conversation is seen through the use of the Facebook "wall" posts; where users can write messages back and forth in a conversational form that sets up a flow of impressions (Pennington, 2009).

Photos (or the image form of impression management) were suggested to be a large component and process for users. A common trend in responses from participants in the Pennington (2009) study found that the level of importance they put on the pictures they could view of someone on Facebook was significantly higher than the important they placed on the text of a profile. This was further indicated by a significant lack in participants having an "About Me" text section filled out on Facebook, but on average over 100 images (of themselves, usually from the past year or two) for users to browse through. Not only did participants find profile pictures important, but also the ability to look at images in general was something that was sought out in other's sites. Commonly participants responded that pictures were the biggest indicator for whether or not they chose to advance a friendship (Pennington, 2009). This was

likely due to the ability of an image to "document" the experiences of a person—when we first meet someone all we have to go on is what they say to us, but their inability to control the images that are produced from activities that engage in allows the viewer then to gauge and perceive whether or not that person is consistent in their impressions they have been giving off.

Facebook has an option when a picture is posted to the site to "tag" the people in it. By "tagging" that person, it creates a link from that image to that individual's profile. So, for example, if a user created a photo album that had pictures of them with their friends, then anyone visiting their profile would have the ability to see those pictures by clicking on a link on the profile to view photos. As a user, once an image is tagged of you, you are presented with the opportunity to "untag" (remove the link) of that photo from your profile. That does not mean the picture is not there—it just means it is more challenging for the average user to find. The majority of participants in the Pennington (2009) study indicated that they would regularly untag unattractive images or upload images where they looked particularly good, which aligns well with what Goffman discussed as active engagement in impression management. The study also revealed the active practice of purposely untagging pictures was an impression management technique by which they hoped to "hide" a part of who they are.

The most common emphasis for the untagging of photos from participants in the study was related to appearing attractive. Not only did users admit that they untagged unflattering photos, many believed there was a social pressure to be seen as attractive on Facebook. The desire to be seen as attractive illustrates the form of impression management where we become most concerned with whatever is most social preferred at a given time (Goffman, 1959.) Users of Facebook then are choosing photographs and text for a profile that show a specific image to be

consistent with a social standard set within their network. How then, is a social network determined to help an individual get to this point?

Goffman (1961) explains that in life, we take on many social "roles" which fit us into a variety of networks of individuals in like-minded roles. A role is defined as the "basic unit of socialization"—a set ideal for a person to step into, with functions and impressions associated with that role that must be met by the individual. Goffman writes:

> It is important to note that in performing a role the individual must see to it that the impressions of him that are conveyed in the situation are compatible with role-appropriate personal qualities effectively imputed to him: a judge is supposed to be deliberate and sober; a pilot in a cockpit, to be cool…these personal qualities imputed and effectively claimed, combine with a position's title, when there is one, to provide a basis of self-image for the incumbent and a basis for the image that his role others will have of him. (1961, p. 87)

How though, does one deal with multiple roles, where the judge is also a husband and son, the pilot a wife and sister? While many roles do not have a conflicting pattern of behavior (the judge is deliberate and sober and the courtroom, but can still be a caring and loving husband at home) there are some roles that require consideration. For example, the role of a college student out with her friends at a party can certainly be seen as contradictory to a daughter with her parents at a family gathering. Goffman explains that these two roles can coexist as a result of role-segregation, which is largely facilitated by audience-segregation. That is to say; how the daughter behaves in the company of her friends can stand in stark contrast to how she interacts with her parents, simply because these two roles do not constantly figure in with one another where the audience (friends and family) overlap. In a world where the college student is around

both her friends and family, it is likely the dominant or more easily accessible role (in this case, that of daughter) will win out as the primary behavior of the individual.

As previously mentioned, Facebook, while once closed to just college students, is now a public site where users are "friends" with a variety of people from the different roles they take on in life; classmate, sister/brother, daughter/son, friend, worker, etc. How then do we deal with the convergence of these roles together? Research concerned with the risky behavior of the digital native (Gross & Acquisti, 2007; Livingstone, 2008; Debatin et al, 2009) question how it is that users of social network sites such as Facebook fail to utilize privacy settings online that would prevent the convergence of roles; if the site as a setting that limits what your parent versus your boss versus your best friend see, why not use it? This is particularly true in the case of images— many users have photographs online that come from all aspects of their life that may not be acceptable for all the roles they play, that are viewable not only to anyone they accept as a friend on Facebook, but anyone who as a Facebook period, as the default setting on the site when creating a photo album is to make the pictures viewable to everyone on the site. One study (Pennington, 2009) showed that participants would, on occasion, remove or untag pictures of them with alcohol for concern about family or future employers seeing the images, yet images of this type still proliferate Facebook, along with many more photos that can cause conflicting impressions about the individual Facebook user. It would seem then that as we move forward in the digital age we must be concerned not only with our ability to communicate online, but our ability to communicate through images, instead of words, impressions of self in a variety of social roles.

Visual Representations of Identity: From the Kodak Culture to the Nokia Culture

In 1987 Richard Chalfen introduced society to a concept he called the "Kodak Culture." This culture, he explained, was based on snapshot photography. Images taken, he found, primarily in the home, that were a simple snapshot of events that occurred in the lives of family. He argued that it was these images that were then shared amongst friends and family as a way of communicating about the family life—Chalfen indicated that primarily positive events (birthdays, holidays, vacations) were documented, versus possible negative events (trips to the hospital, funerals, fights). Chalfen (1987) explains that this occurred out of a sense of understanding of social power; a family that is "good" is a family that has fun, celebrates, and shows love for one another, therefore negative events, or daily activities that simply lacked "events" remained undocumented. Taking snapshots with a Kodak camera served the function of communicating these community ideals to the rest of the family, friends, and acquaintances looking in—to convey an impression of family that fit the parameters of social standards.

While the Kodak Culture continued to grow throughout the 1990's, a shift began to occur in photography, wherein analogue photographs (images produces in a single hard copy either through a production company or a personal darkroom) were gradually replaced with digital photographs, a new technology at the time, that, now nearly twenty years old, has almost entirely eclipsed analogue images (Rubinstein et al, 2008). The mass availability and ease associated with the use of a digital camera (and retrieving the images taken by that camera) changed the game of snapshot photography, with analogue images the sharing process occurred in the home, making for a smaller audience and generally smaller number of images given that each picture produced elicited a cost. The local nature of sharing also helped provide context; the act of using the snapshots as a narrative to explain events helped the viewer get a better idea of the images. Digital photographs have allowed for the widespread sharing of a higher number of pictures

(saving the digital image to a computer and uploading it online costs time, not currency) but is done at the cost of context—the narrative has disappeared leaving a gap in the explanation of the snapshots and the event that can effect the interpretation of the image.

The shift culminated in what some researchers (Rubinstein et al., 2008) have referred to as the "Nokia Culture", based on the popular cell phone producing company who actively marketed that their phones also functioned as cameras to snap shots of day-to-day life events at any given moment of the day—illustrating that any moment could be a camera-ready picture taking opportunity. This availability of not just digital cameras, but a camera in almost every cell phone manufactured these days, has led to a re-definition of "events" worth documenting. Images flood the Internet of major life events still; birthdays, holidays, etc, but in addition, snap shots are being taken of the every day (sometimes considered mundane) events of life; cooking, hanging out with friends, relaxing at home (Rubinstein et al, 2008). In addition, the stigma of negative events has all but disappeared, and the availability of snapshots that document injuries, funerals, and other disasters are widely available online, too.

The shift to the Nokia Culture took individuals out of the home, and onto the Internet. While still primarily concerned and interested in sharing life events with family and friends, the increased connections that came with internet use led many people to begin to manage and control the images that are available as a way to impress upon the viewer a certain ideal of who they are. This can be seen as much like the perceptions of "Good Family" in the Kodak Culture; only now Internet users are posting images that convey them in the idealized version of their many social roles. The use of images as a way to manage impressions is not a new form, but as a result of Facebook use illustrated in prior research (Pennington, 2009) is certainly now a far

more prominent form of management, especially for digital natives. One researcher writes on the subject of digital photo sharing:

Clearly we are witnessing a shift, especially among the younger generation, towards using photography as an instrument for peer bonding and interaction. Digitization is not the cause of this trend; instead, the tendency to fuse photography with daily experience and communication is part of a broader cultural transformation that involves individualization and intensification of experience. (Visjick, 2009, p. 62)

This cultural shift is well documented in the online environment: each month there are billions of images being uploaded to Facebook, most of all them non-professional, digital images from either a small camera or even a cell phone. Photos are constantly being taken not as memories of an event, but as another opportunity to create a shared experience with others that also serve as a self-representation mechanism. Facebook allows these images to be placed into digital "photo albums" where they are shared with friends and family. Photos can identify who appears in the image with the use of the tag function previously mentioned.

The digital camera has transformed photo sharing. Digital photos allow for an extreme ease in posting, sharing, and sending photos online. Digital photography permeates today's culture:

Digital photography is part of this larger transformation in which self becomes the centre of a virtual universe made up of informational and spatial flows; individuals articulate their identity as social beings not only by taking and storing photographs to document their lives, but by participating in communal photographic exchanges that mark their identity as interactive producers and consumers of culture. (Visjick, 2009, p. 62)

Society often establishes particular physical norms. Facebook images, both the photo album and personal profile picture, are a place in which users and viewers evaluate images based on societal pressures and acceptability. As briefly touched on before, the photos that are uploaded to the site are not always consistent with the image that we attempt to portray of our self, which can create discrepancies in perception of the user in relation to the social roles in question. Goffman explains this particular phenomenon with his discussion on front and back stage behaviors:

> Through no one's intention, the persons present in the region may find that they have patently been witnessed in activity that is quite incompatible with the impression that they are, for wider social reasons, under obligation to maintain to the intruder. We deal here with what are sometimes called "inopportune intrusions". (p. 208)

These "inopportune intrusions" may be accounted for by the inclusion of photos tagged of an individual online that are either inconsistent with other images uploaded by that person (for example the majority of images capture them in the role of a studious, hardworking college student, yet the most recently tagged image shows them engaging in drunken behavior at a party), with what the viewer believes they know to be true of that person (the parents thought their child did not drink alcohol), or with the text that exists within the profile that establishes a certain impression of them (the person is perhaps a member of a group that is anti-drinking that is linked to their profile).

Facebook provides a way for users to "remodel our self-image to fit the pictures taken at previous moments in time" (Visjick, 2009, p. 63). Whether that image is current (or a favorite but dated photo) is not always relevant; what is of interest is the extent to which individuals manage and choose images to convey a particular impression of self online through cultural shifts and trends on what can even be seen as a weekly basis for many users.

Technology has greatly impacted a relational world that is slowly but continually evolving. Information previously considered private (or separate from other social roles) is exchanged openly for anyone to see, and often, altars what is assumed to be acceptable communication within developing relationships. By analyzing the choices in images to use as the profile picture, the creation of photo albums, and pictures the user is tagged in, we can hopefully better understand the relationship between visual communication and impression management. Statistics have already shown the wide variety of individuals that create profiles on Facebook; it is now necessary for researchers to understand the consequences of SNS impression management behaviors in a world that is predominately a visual culture.

Individuals are more aware than ever that they possess the ability to choose what other's know/see of them, and as a result, appear to be actively engaged a variety of impression management strategies unavailable prior to Facebook. The past few years have suggested that attractiveness was the most common emphasis of participants in respect to their impression management decisions (Zywica & Danowski, 2008; Pennington, 2009, Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). Many users felt that there was a social pressure to be seen as attractive on Facebook, and would alter images/text to coordinate with what the socially acceptable and/or attractive option would be. Many participants who indicated that the transition from high school to college, and college to the job market led to increased identity management. Finally, individuals in the Pennington (2009) study placed the most importance/interest in what images were conveyed on Facebook, rather than the text. Users admitted to "untagging" unflattering images from the site, and that pictures posted on friends' sites served as a better source of information than text data. Thus, there has been emerging research to suggest that image management is increasingly more popular than ever on SNS.

Strano (2008) was the first to examine the role of SNS image in relation to impression management on Facebook through profile pictures. A statistical analysis of self-reported image use of 427 participants were studied, with results indicating that most profile pictures were: of the user alone (49.4%) in an image that they thought they looked attractive in (17.1%) because they wanted people to see them as fun-loving (33.3%). When asked what prompted them to update/change their profile picture image users had three primary reasons: first, a more recent image had been taken, second, they were bored with the previous image, and finally, they had another picture (either new or old) that they thought they looked particularly attractive in that they preferred. At the end of the study, breaking down gender-differences, the researcher found that women tended to focus on having a light-hearted and attractive profile image that would likely include a friend or significant other, while men were focused primarily on finding and putting up a picture that made them stand out, look unique, and was generally a picture of them alone. The ability to manipulate and convey an impression through images about the self is becoming more and more prominent in society.

The idea that photography would ever be more than a hobby for the few, that snapshots would never find a place outside of the home, was at one time considered highly unlikely, despite the advancement of digital photography. In 1995, one researcher wrote the following about snapshot photographs in the digital age, suggesting it would simply never "take off" as a common form of online communication:

Still photography, on the other hand, is a very late entrant to this world. More particularly, snapshot photography—images taken by ourselves of ourselves, the self-representation of everyday life—has barely any place at the new electronic hearth. It is very early days yet for the digital domestic snapshot, whether scanned, frame-grabbed

from a video or taken on a digital camera. Private images have not yet entered the data

mainstream… this simply has not happened outside of advanced hobbyism. The very late

entry of snapshots into digital culture may itself be a clue as to their future status, but

discussion of these technological potentials at the moment involves unreliable futurology.

(Slater, p. 131)

Some fifteen years later, we can now account for and discuss the technological potentials that

Slater believed would never occur, and have. The literature has shown that impression

management is occurring via SNS and that Facebook is *the* opportunity to sell images of an

individual to anyone interested in looking at and believing a profile of quotes, pictures and

"facts" that users' self-select to showcase. Previous research has indicated a specific focus on the

idea of "attractiveness" and that images (and more directly, the images in this study) can clarify

the outcome of this artistry. Participants have repeatedly shown to actively alter and edit what

others see about whom they are perceived to be in an online setting. Erving Goffman (1959)

referred to this type of impression management as "saving the showing." As a result,

understanding ways in which participants "save", edit, or perhaps even construct impression is

the focus of this study and thus, leads to the main question for study:

RQ1: How are users' of Facebook engaging in impression management of social roles

online through images?

CHAPTER 3 - Method: Ethnography of Facebook Images

Research Design and Justification

To illuminate the relationship between our public impressions via photographs on Facebook, I employed an ethnographic approach to understanding the visual communication and impression management of Facebook images. Ethnography is defined as: "a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group" (Creswell, 2007, p. 68). Ethnography is the best methodological approach for this study, in that it is concerned with the cultural shifts and decisions made in regard to images as a form of communication in the digital world. Specifically, the study of individuals within social networks/roles within the field of ethnographic research can offer a view that can allow: "social scientists to situate individuals within their families, among their peers, and in relation to representatives of other social or cultural institutions" (Lecompte et al, 1999, p. 53). As previously mentioned, we can learn a lot from what we are told by participants, but the ability to immerse myself in the culture of Facebook as a social site allows me to gain a more in depth explanation and understanding of the connection between impression management and visual communication. By engaging in this form of participant observation, I was able to gain an understanding of the relationship that exists between the image management and Facebook use in a natural setting; I was able to incorporate myself into the site and the daily activities of the participants, to watch as their management of images unfolds instead of asking them to speak about it after the fact, resulting in more reliable results. Ethnographies are most often used as a way to study the "beliefs, languages and

behaviors" of a culture (Creswell, 2007, p. 70). Arguably, Facebook is a new culture of communication in an online environment has its own beliefs, languages, and behaviors—particularly when it comes the use of digital images to convey impressions of identity of users. As noted before, it is because of a cultural shift in our relation to snapshot photography that we even find ourselves questioning the impression management of our social roles online. Additionally, ethnography is "concerned with the collection and analysis of empirical data drawn from 'real world' contexts rather than being produced under experimental conditions" (Lillis, 2008, p. 358). In an online environment this form of study is still considered participant observation because the ability to interact with the site of each user requires permission from the user to view the images available. Participant observation is characterized by the ability for a person to interact with and observe a culture, which on Facebook, can only happen through accepting a friend request. While I may not be directly interacting with the user (writing on their wall, commenting on status updates, etc) this is more than just observation in that a friend request places both myself as the researcher and the participants in the same social network wherein we can view each other's profiles and pictures and are integrated into each other's newsfeeds. By engaging in participant observation of Facebook profiles as opposed to simply asking participants about their use of the site, the goal is to reveal the most organic uses of impression management by directly, and at a micro level, observing their behaviors in relation to their use of images in action over a period of time.

Participants and Setting

Prior to the recruitment of participants, I received permission to engage in the study of individual's online and their image by obtaining approval from the International Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving this approval, I began my recruiting. Participants were recruited from a

large Midwestern university. To qualify for the study, participants had to be a "regular user." A regular user had to meet two criteria based off of norms outlined by Facebook about their users (Facebook Statistics, 2009.) First, the participant had to have been a member of Facebook for at least one year (this showed the participant was familiar with the site and the ability to alter information and images at will). Second, the participant had to use the site (log onto the site) a minimum of five times a week; using the statistics provided by Facebook (2009) on their average user to recruit participants for the present study ensures the most accurate group to study from a wide range of users. In an effort to reduce similarity effects with snowball sampling, individuals were selected using a random number table that pulled their names from a list of users within the university's network. A total of 20 participants was the anticipated amount for the study, and after four rounds of requests to a total of 200 users, 16 agreed to allow for their Facebook page to be followed for the two month period outlined to them. As an incentive for participation, a drawing for two $25 gift certificates were offered to the participants at the end of the ethnography, which lasted from November 1, 2009 to January 1, 2010. Engaging in observation for two months rather than just a few weeks served a dual purpose. First, participants in research can often be aware that they are being "studied", and as a result of the "observation effect" change their behaviors. On Facebook, it is impossible for the participants to be aware that I was following their profile on a daily basis. To ensure this, I limited my interaction with each profile to viewing, not commenting (making myself at best, a background presence that might on occasion appear on their newsfeed, but, after a period of time, was likely forgotten). The second benefit of a study that lasted over a longer period of time was to check consistency—holidays, life events, etc. could alter the amount to which a participant uploaded pictures to Facebook, therefore the longer the study, the more consistent observation of impression management of

images for an average amount of time. Arguably, the length of observation could have been too short or conducted at an untypical block of time. This critique will be covered in the limitations.

The setting for the research was the main profile page of each participant, the profile picture photo album (which is generally separated from all other images on Facebook), any and all photo albums uploaded to the site by the user prior to and during the course of the study, and the "photos" section of the profile that allows friends of a Facebook user to view all images tagged of that user, again, prior to and during the course of the study. Participants agreed to allow access to all images during the course of the study to be used as needed.

Procedures

Beginning the first of November, and continuing until the end of December, I engaged in participant observation of the Facebook profiles of the users who agreed to participate in the study. At the start of the study, I spent a considerable amount of time familiarizing myself as best I could with each participant and their profile page. My goal was to get to know them as best as possible as to be able to notice any and all permeations to their site. This amounted to, on average, forty-five minutes on each participants profile over the first few days as I familiarized myself with the profile and images (the more images, the more time spent on a profile), and an average of twenty to thirty minutes a week per profile from there on out, the number rising in relation to increased image use on a given day (uploaded or tagged pictures appeared) or changes in profile pictures were made. While not every profile was analyzed in depth on the first day of study, numbers relating to images (e.g., how many profile pictures, how many tagged pictures, how many photo albums?) were recorded for each profile to ensure that if changes did occur from that day on, it would be noted. In addition, each profile picture was observed and noted for

each participant on the first day, should changes occur when I had the opportunity to go back and spend more time on the profile.

My observation process consisted of several steps, and as noted, lasted about 45 minutes for each site. First, I noted the overall number of images the used had tagged on the site (in order to note future differences) in addition to flipping through not only those pictures, but also the profile picture album, and photo albums uploaded by the user. Second, I examined at the rest of the site of the user closely to consider fidelity questions; this meant reading about the person and who they portrayed their self to be through the site, so that when analyzing and looking at the images I could get a better idea of the roles each participant portrayed. The initial coding of the profile was by far the most time intensive for each participant's profile, for at times participants may have included over six years of images (over 1,000) of a user in able to better understand who they were and their particular life roles. For the duration of the ethnography, I observed and took copious notes (totaling 46 type-written, single-spaced pages of text and copied and pasted images) on the image use/selection process of participants, saving the document to a protected folder on my computer to use through out the coding process of the research. Over the course of the study, all participants changed their profile picture at least once, with a final tally of 42 new profile picture images added for 16 users over the two-month period. Users ranged from 12-31 self-created photo albums online, with only six participants adding a new photo album to their profile page during the study. Finally, participants gained images rapidly over the course of the ethnography, some adding upwards of 50-75 images during the two months. The notes taken on these images sought to consider behavioral changes/differences in presentation of the profile over time through images. Within ethnography "the investigator collects descriptions of behavior through observations, interviewing, documents, and artifacts" (Creswell, 2007, p. 131). This

meant acting not only as an active participant within the site by viewing the profiles daily, but that the note taking I engaged in was important to comment on the behaviors/beliefs that seemed to be held by participants, while maintaining a variety of artifacts (in this case, images) to illustrate the cultural norms that surfaced as forms of identity management over the course of the study. Given that the environment being studied was online versus a physical location, it is important to address the nature of digital ethnographies.

Previous research has shown that the adaptation of ethnography from a concrete location to a versatile, online environment is one that can be easily done, given the sense of community and relationship created, especially in regards to social network sites. Given that ethnography focuses on a specific place or setting within a cultural situation, researchers have broadened the definition to show that it can include the Internet: "[place is a] constituted and maintained [area] through cultural definition and social strategies with boundaries that are not fixed but shift" (Leander & McKim 2003, p. 213). In this case, the maintained and constituted area was the main profile page of participants. Another area called into question when ethnography is online versus offline is the concern with being termed as a "lurker." In this case the researcher is unknown to users, viewing their actions at any given time (Leander & McKim, 2003) from any given location. For this study, lurking was a preferable position, because the actions taken by the participants needed to be as natural as possible to ensure accurate/representative data, having received approval from the participants to view their behaviors and image use also accounts for the disadvantages of being "hidden" in the environment. Areas of the profile that were analyzed included: How often do participants change their profile picture? What do they change it to? How often do participants create photo albums? What are the albums of? Do participants tag/untag themselves in images of photo albums both self created and created by others? All of

these together were used to help in the understanding of the use of images for impression management purposes on Facebook. At the end of the two months, all 16 participants were invited to meet for an interview to clarify choices/establish fidelity with their profile and the notes taken. Six participants were requested for an interview, with three of them agreeing to meet and discuss their image use.

Data Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the ethnographic data. More specifically, constant comparison coding (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002) was used to make sense of the data as well as make theoretical conclusions of this particular form of human interaction (digital images) and online impression management behaviors. This approach was ideal given that "one of the great strengths of qualitative studies is what happens in the field can directly feed back into the process of analysis" (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002, p. 223). Specifically, the grounded theory approach was valuable given the nature of the prior study (Pennington, 2009) that led to this point of the research process. Additionally, the constant comparison between incidents allowed me to draw conclusions based on the connections between the data as it was recorded (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002). This particular process consisted of viewing the number of images that were uploaded/tagged of each participant daily to discover if there had been an pictures added or removed from the site since the last time I had visited the profile on the previous day. Additionally, images were looked at to consider both physical and emotive changes in the profile picture when new images were added (i.e.: considering whether the participants looked particularly different, or if the image has a tone shift from previous photo choices).

For two months a daily observation of each participant's profile occurred. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect his or her identity within the computer files saved. All of the data was transcribed into separate word documents for each participant, with one holistic document to keep notes on overall impressions on a daily basis. The subject of study was the images found online connected to profiles—either through the profile pictures, photo albums uploaded, or tagged images from other users. The unit for analysis being coded then was both the grammar and meaning by action of the images; that is to say both what the images represent and what was happening in them. Through out the data gathering process, the data was read through comprehensively at the end of each week, to get an idea of what commonalities existed, and to begin to analyze and note consistent trends/ideas in the holistic document. Early in the study, based on the notes and images gathered, an initial set of codes (Appendix B) was created as a result of the constant-comparison *open coding* (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002) where in trends were established through participant use and management. In the initial open coding, 13 codes/trends were found in management and use of photographs on Facebook. Once this was complete, the field notes and codes were assessed again, focusing specifically on the 13 codes produced to consider similarities and congruence. This series of focused coding led to 10 final codes that were representative of the initial 13 categories produced. With these codes in mind, participants were then contacted in regards to follow up interviews, to check congruency between what was expected to be true of image use online, and what participants were saying about image use and impression management.

The only participants from the online ethnography (*n*=16) to agree to a follow up interview were females (*n*=3), three additional participants were asked for an interview but declined for various reasons. During the interview, participants were asked a short series of

open-ended questions (Appendix C) regarding their photo use online, as well questions crafted to account for the most recent set of codes established from the data gathered during the participant observation of profiles. The interviews ranged from 20-30 minutes each, taking place on a neutral on-campus location. The interviews were audio recorded, so they could be transcribed at a later time for additional coding, which resulted in an additional ten pages of text to contrast against the codes from the observation process. The triangulation of data from both observation and interview proved successful. The transcribed text was coded in relation to the data codes from the two months of observation, finding many consistencies and clarifications that resulted in the final codebook (Appendix D) of trends in Facebook image use.

CHAPTER 4 - Findings: Only if it's Trendy

RQ1: What is the relationship between the use of photographs and impression management on Facebook?

Initially, the idea of being a "lurker" on the profiles of people I did not know on a daily basis felt awkward. Although I was familiar with Facebook, being a member for almost six years myself, I had always distanced myself from actually spending large quantities of time simply perusing the personal sites of my friends, family, and acquaintances. I used Facebook to post photo albums from parties, tournaments, and other events I attended so that people who were not there could have a glimpse of the event, or those who attended could reminisce about the fun times shared. Additionally, I would write on the "wall" of friends I had not spoken to in awhile, or send messages to see if someone was free to get together some time, treating it largely like another form of email/way to communicate with people that I knew. Prior to this study, I gave little attention to the inordinate amount of photos or even the changes to the photos on friends' sites, regardless of the frequency. It may even be fair to say that prior to this study I too was acculturated into the photo phenomena that is *Facebook photo posting*. And although I was initially uncomfortable with "watching" for photo updates and changes, over the course of the two months, I not only became more comfortable with the process, I also experienced an unexpected outcome, a realization that the time spent on each participants' site allowed me to get to know them all in a way that when it came time to meet face-to-face for interviews, I felt like I had forged some kind of remote, yet real, connection, that not only could I pick them out of a crowd now and call out to them, but that having looked at pictures from their childhood, graduations, parties, family gatherings and day-to-day life, that I had a better understanding of who these people are; I had in fact, been relating to them throughout the experience.

Nevertheless, I was still a stranger following these individuals, watching as their pictures changed, watching as the number of images grew over the months, and this observation and removed participation became a focal point of the study. Were these images that I was seeing who that person really was? Could I really say that I felt like I "already knew" the participants simply by looking through photo albums of them with their husband or wife, at parties, traveling the world, or simply attending school functions? The blurred distinction of lines of social roles—of family, friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and so on—that Facebook creates sets a very awkward stage for the Facebook user that was I seeing unfold as I attempted to understand who these people were. Do they upload all pictures of them from events? I can think of times where I have left pictures off of the "upload" option to Facebook, because I did not like how I looked in them. Do they always remain tagged in pictures of everything that they do? Who they perform their self to be can no longer be segmented into "friend", "son", and "classmate" the practiced social roles being taught to the digital native is being pushed together rather than segmented apart—they are simply one person on a profile page viewable by all, with a multitude of pictures that are not always consistent with the multiplicity of social roles that they choose to identify with.

Over the course of the study it became overwhelmingly apparent that the participants focus was on the glut and frequent addition of profile pictures rather than a management of what was already there. In tracking these individuals, I found that the same image would be uploaded sometimes three or four times, however changing in size, where the final product being one that zoomed in closer to the face, cropped out the body, and often presented that user in a fun or quirky. Participants were having fun with Facebook—taking their time to craft an image of their

various social roles to tell their social network a variety of details (which gave off impressions) about their self.

Findings showed that participant's primary focus of impression management through images resided in the profile picture. This included the frequent use of the same image to represent them on the profile page, the use of "angled" images, uploading images that made a statement, changing the profile image to one from when they were a baby, and finally, engaging in common Facebook trends that dictated what the image would be. Outside of the profile pictures, findings suggested a variety of images being used to support the social role of being a college student, this is illustrated through sexually suggestive images, every day image use, and images that showed participants engaging in (by social standards) unfavorable acts. Finally, gender differences were noted by participants in their tendency to have images that were either staged or natural, with women tending towards staged images, men towards natural. Below are the main trends that were documented first of profile pictures, and then of image use in general.

Old Faithful

Figure 4.1 Old Faithful Profile Pictures

Every participant had an "old faithful" photo. This is the profile photo that reoccurred; an image that, regardless of its recency (for most, in fact, the picture was well over a year old) that

after a few days to a week of a new picture, they would revert back to that image. There was

nothing particularly special about that picture that I could tell just by looking at it, that made me

say, "ah ha—this is how they are similar!" In fact, the only relative feature of any of the images

was that they were always of that person alone; a cropped picture of just them from a variety of

events—bright, vibrant, and almost always smiling directly at the camera. 13 of the 16

participants in the ethnography had pictures that they started with, changed, and reverted back

to—so what is it about these pictures that make the user want to stick with them? I could only

assume that when this process of posting, replacing, reposting, replacing, and reposting again

suggested a fondness for that photo. There was just something they "liked" about that photo that

participants must have felt they wanted to portray. Rebecca explained in her interview that she

just liked how she looked in the picture—she was happy, carefree, and it was a time of her life

that she looked back on fondly. This idea of having an "old faithful" image can be likened to an

"old faithful friend you like"—that person you has known you for a long time, you do not have

to explain yourself to, and lets you be you when you are with them. This is that image: the

picture that you know and like of yourself, that you have posted before, you are certain and

happy with how you look in it, and are comfortable with sharing to the rest of the world.

The Angled Profile Images

Figure 4.2 Angled Profile Pictures

In her interview, Alicia provided me with the name for a type of picture that I would often see crop up on a number of profiles—both those being studied, and of friends—she called it "the angled" picture (originally coded as "abstract images" in Appendix B). These are those profile pictures where a user has a close up of their face, and they are positioned in an unnatural way, or the image is not entirely of them, that creates a more flattering (albeit abstract) image of the user for the rest of the world to see—cutting away the features they do not like (perhaps they turn their face so their nose looks smaller than it is, tilt their head to hide ears, hide their body because they do not like their size, etc). It is worth noting that only female participants engaged in this practice, with only one image out of hundreds of a male participant that was of himself that could be viewed as "abstract." A picture of his chest, that image was coded within a different category of images discussed later in this study.

One thing is certain, and that is that these cropped, angled images (referred to as "artsy" by Rebecca in her interview) proliferate the Internet, and certainly Facebook sites, at a rapid pace; the kind of picture someone can easily take with their own webcam and upload in a matter of seconds to their site, seemingly candid shots that are perfectly posed to illuminate an attractive image of the user. The person is never smiling in the picture—they seem to want to appear "thoughtful" or prolific in the pictures; as if they were unaware that the image was even being shot of them in the first place—which, in the case of the images shown here, is not the case (each participant interviewed had one of these images as a profile picture at one point, and admitted that they themselves snapped these shots—and that there were several shots taken to get to the final image selected to be uploaded and used as a profile picture).

This is consistent with the idea of self-construction online as put forth by Gonzales and Hancock (2008) wherein they suggest that participants in SNS actively engage in creating and modifying an image of an "ideal self." Self-construction occurs in the context as a way to mask parts of the person; while in every day "real life" the people they encounter will see the nose they wish they had the money to fix, the ears they hide behind their hair, these pictures allow the user to hide those features to present an idealized view of who they would like to be to the rest of the world, communicating a false, but hopeful image of the user through their profile; while the angled image is a distorted perception of self, many users felt that these pictures showed a better idea of who that person actually "is" absent their physical concerns that keep them from being seen beyond the image shown—our society has a tendency to let physical looks dictate social roles that lead these participants to make a choice to accent or hide a feature to fit that mold (Berry, 2008). One context that researchers have discussed when it comes to image use online is the advent of digital cameras as moved us beyond simply "taking pictures" but instead towards a frame of "making pictures" (Strano, 2008) this would likely account for the creation of "angled images" as profile pictures.
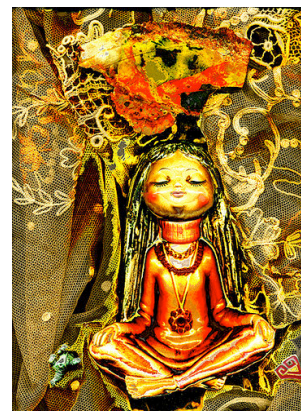
The Statement Profile Image

Figure 4.3 Statement Profile Pictures

Another common image type found through out the course of the study was the picture that made a statement about something in that user's personality, rather than a photo image of the person. Images ranged from an advertisement for a school event, to a scene from their favorite movie, or an image of a piece of art. Participants in this research seemed keen on taking the opportunity to say something about who they were with a different visual twist; showing an image of things they liked or cared about for people to see, rather than a picture of themselves. These pictures often catch the eye of a user simply because they are unanticipated—hey, that's not that person, what is it? From there, you cannot help but investigate the picture to understand more about why it is there, fulfilling the intentions of many of the individuals' that choose to include a profile picture of this type.

While a new photo of your friend might cause you to pause and check out the image for a manner of seconds, it is the statement image that holds the attention of the profile viewer, which in turn, allows the statement to sink in further. The use of these images showed that participants were cognizant of the profile picture and its status as representative of their self. Alicia, also engaged in this trend, explaining that she included a snapshot from her favorite movie because it was reminding people of a great old movie that they have either never watched, or have not thought of but should. Another participant, James, who was not interviewed, was the most common user of statement profile pictures; with 15 of the 53 profile pictures posted to his profile being flyers or posters for a variety of events, this can be seen as a form of advertisement through Facebook, making his profile the focus for the event and the organization's that they were representing, which included the Special Olympics and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity events. The genius then, of the statement picture is that the viewer goes to his profile to get a better look at the image that is not of James, and then stays longer than they would have had it been an

actual photo, because of a level of interpretation that would necessarily occur to understand the meaning or purpose of the statement image posted.

The Flashback Image

Figure 4.4 Flashback Pictures

The next trend to find a home on Facebook was images of the participants long before Facebook was invented, and in some cases, before the Internet; this trend I call "Back in the Day"—the pictures of the user as a baby, hardly discernable from their twenty to thirty year old self to date, these pictures originally served a different purpose for a different generation. Our parents took these pictures in sense of creation of memories—but now we use this pictures to show people who we once were, to elicit the "oh my god, you were so cute!" from our friends. I asked Rebecca why she chose to use this type of picture as a profile image, to which she responded: "It made me smile, it made me think—wow, I was that little once?" She further indicated that she liked the idea of sharing not only with her friends a side of her they had never known or seen before, but that it did serve the memory function for family members who were Facebook friends who got the opportunity to see the picture and remember what the participant was like "back in the day."

The interesting thing about these pictures is that they are images taken by the Kodak Culture as illustrations of growth within the private family life (Chalfen, 1987). These pictures were not meant to be shared with anyone outside of that circle, yet it is the popular thing to do on many social network sites. Outside of Rebecca, many of the participants of this study engaged in this trend by uploading a baby picture to Facebook. Looking to the male participants in particular, James had two different baby pictures set as his profile picture, with comments from girls pronouncing how adorable he was in the comment section below each one. In addition to the idea that we can use these pictures to elicit the "how cute!" response that is often attached to baby pictures, the role these images can play is showing that growth that Chalfen (1987) speaks about in his discussion of snapshot images. In a way, these pictures are posted and shared by the user *for the user*, as just another reminded of how far they have come.

Trends of the Week, Pokémon

Figure 4.5 Trend Pictures

In the final weeks of observation, I awoke, logged onto Facebook, and was confronted with a newsfeed of images that were not simply the smiling faces of my friends, family, and participants—interspersed with these old pictures were animated shots of creatures I had never seen before, and it took clicking on a small handful of profiles to finally determine what I was dealing with: Pokémon. This trend was fueled by a television show that gained popularity with the Net Generation in their youth, it can not come as a complete surprise that the creation of a

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Facebook group called "make your profile picture your favorite Pokémon!" would lead to the proliferation of images of the characters from the show within a matter of days. Five of the sixteen participants changed their picture to a Pokémon creature in alignment with the Facebook group in question, showing that simply establishing that a trend ought to exist is enough to make it happen on a broader scale. Having never watched Pokémon myself I was confused by the transition to these images, but can see how once again, drawing a connection between a favorite and the profile gives off yet another impression about the person in question; favorites tend to be representative of what you would be if you had to choose a Pokémon to represent you—creating an association between that character and your self.

Since the study ended, other popular "trends of the day" occurred, including "Change your profile picture to support Conan over Leno", "Change your profile picture to your favorite power ranger", and most notably the "Change your profile picture to be your famous doppelganger!" Facebook group that led to images of young celebrities like Zac Efron, Vanessa Hudgens, and Miley Cyrus, as profile pictures of users, who, most of the time, looked nothing like the aforementioned actors. This trend can be likened to the age-old question, who would play you in the movie of your life? Once again, an idealized image of self via a celebrity is displayed an answer. These picture trends however, occur simply as a result of the social nature of Facebook, this profile pictures are looked at not simply because it is a new image of the person (because it is not actually of that user) but instead because the image answers a question; whether that be, who is your doppelganger or what is your favorite Pokémon character, the function of this trend can be related back to social interaction that is inherent in Facebook and other social network sites.

All together, these themes show how we can communicate a variety of impressions about our personality and self through the simple use of image—that participants actively chose to partake in these trends and frequently updated their profile picture online shows that participants recognize the ability for an image to convey a message, making each decision to update, change, or revert back to an old picture and action worthy of study. Moving beyond just the profile picture trends, we see the management of images and conveyances of identity through those images suggest even more about the culture of the current generation.
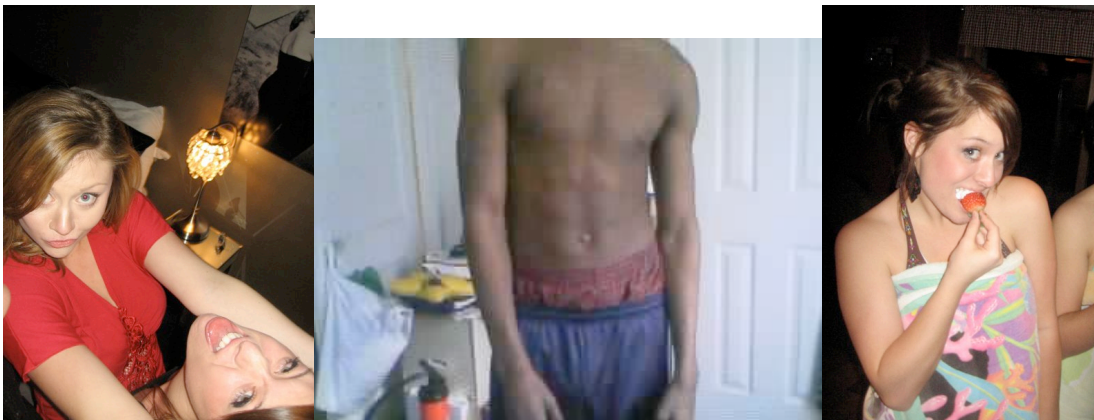
Sexually Suggestive Images

Figure 4.6 Sexually Suggestive Pictures

Sexually suggestive photos not only provide viewers with an image, but also a very specific managed impression. Although these were not generally the profile image, a quick search through the tagged images of participants brought up shots like the ones illustrated above; two girls at a party, one giving the other a lap dance in a series of images, another of just a male, focused on his shirtless chest, the final of a girl wrapped in towel, biting into a strawberry with cream on it, smiling at the camera, fully aware of the picture being taken. All slightly different shots, they all take on a seductive, suggestive tone in the impression they give off to the viewer, none of which can be construed as accidental; not only were the images actively uploaded and

tagged of each person online, but they participated in the actions that led to the images, or in the case of James, focused the camera on taking just a picture of his stomach to highlight his (assumedly self-proud) chest. What is it about these types of pictures that make them proliferate through the online-tagged photographs of people?

Christina (pictured in the third image) suggested that it was not so much a question of overtly being sexual, but was related to the need to convey a free-mind, or a open-spirit, someone who might be "willing to try anything" in a visual representation to the viewer. "I like to have fun," she said, adding, "If some creep takes it the wrong way, then who cares? I wil just defriend him." I found this explanation to rationalize photo choice as freedom of expression and the need to be viewed as fun or whimsy as both interesting and quite common. Each of the three interviews suggested that the images, while admittedly sexual to some degree, were, more importantly, showing that they were just "having a good time" and that that is "what college kids are supposed to do."

The larger question then—what is it about sexually suggestive images that scream "fun" to college students? Society wants us to be sexy—we want to be viewed as attractive, even though Facebook is not a dating site, we are concerned with being liked, and according to the amount of photos permeating the sites and supported more so by the interviews, these kind of a photos make people feel liked. Perhaps this desire is more overtly be connected back to the emphasis on physical attractiveness in society that by and large can really only be communicated through photographs in an online forum, earlier research having shown that users trust pictures over text when it comes to looks (Pennington, 2009). Social stratification tells us that there is certain look/image type that is attractive (and thus sexy)—women want to see a male with a body that has "six pack abs" as James attempts to display on his Facebook, with Christina and Gina

take the approach of showing not only that they are physically attractive, but that they are "fun-loving" and "care free" which are considered to be qualities that would make a person more attractive to the person they are interested in (Berry, 2008).

These pictures hold, much like the angled profile picture, that the power of looks and the desire to communicate this via photographs is not to be underestimated, and that our culture is not so advanced that it does not preoccupy itself with physical appearance as an important impression to give off as college students seek to fit the role of the perfect, good-looking, fun-loving youth that they all desperately wish to be; certain that it is that image that will make them happier people.

Self-Presentation in Everyday Life through Images
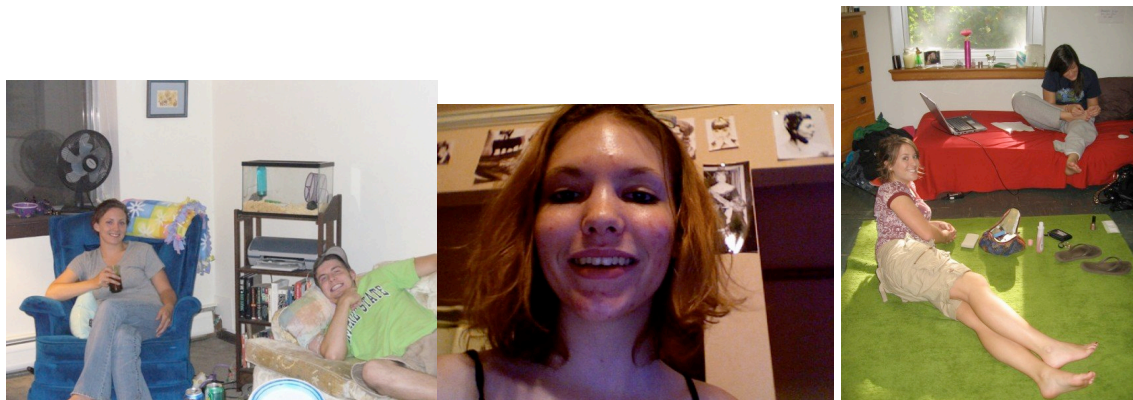
Figure 4.7 Everyday Pictures

Demonstrating enacted life through photos was particularly important. Chalfen (1987) always pointed to the importance of life events as documents of growth in life; yet we are seeing through the above images that is no longer just these major events (prom, graduation, first job, etc) that are getting documented in an online environment—it is moment of every day life, sitting around with friends in the dorm, in class, at home, doing nothing at all, but having a camera available to provide entertainment. It seemed that participants, rather than actually going out and

finding an activity to do, were simply turning the camera on themselves as a form of activity. The disclaimer that was almost always present on the albums of "I was bored, so I made this photo album" or "I was bored so I took some pictures" was used as their justification when they uploaded or added more images to the website for day-to-day activities. Our continual obsession with adding more pictures—developing more images from every moment of every day is the answer. We are drawn into developing a full "document" of our life—the massive collection of images uploaded to Facebook on a monthly basis is more than the entire world population.

Our desire to document our lives comes from two desires. First, Rebecca believed that these pictures were a way to illustrate that you have friends, you do things, that you are not just "sitting at home, alone, doing nothing in your free time." These photos were used as a suggestive friend meter. For Rebecca, it became another way to gain social capital and fit into the ideal role of the college student; a person with friends, who have fun, who does things, even if they are not really doing anything at all. She adds that, people may use the "I'm bored" line, but she admitted that the process and goal of adding more photos was not related to boredom as much as it was an attention-seeking tool. What is happening, is that the more images uploaded, the more often participants profiles are likely to be viewed, making them more likely to add pictures so that other users will look at them.

The second reason for the inordinate amount of photos documenting everyday life activities was suggested by Christina, who often referred to Facebook specifically as a "*living document*" of her life (which was a common trend for many of the participants in the study based on their image use). Christina suggested that the reason people (including herself) put pictures on Facebook from "boring" every day life, was that it helped to document her own change on a daily basis to those who were not always around her. Going to class, or sitting around at home

may not seem like "major life events"—but being away at college is. The role then of what a

parent believes a college student should be doing on a daily basis, can be illustrated through

those pictures of the student sitting outside at campus, or hanging out in their dorm room or in

class. In some ways, this fulfills their parents impression of what the role of a college student is,

that "yes, my child is being productive and doing what college kids should do" through images,

while documenting the time spent away from the home life.

This combination of living through the images to illustrate a social role to those who do

not get to see you in a face-to-face environment with a desire to convey very specific social roles

(such as being popular, having a lot of friends, etc.) is what leads to the glut of every day life

images that proliferate Facebook; we simply want to be seen.

Exposing The Other Side of Life through Images
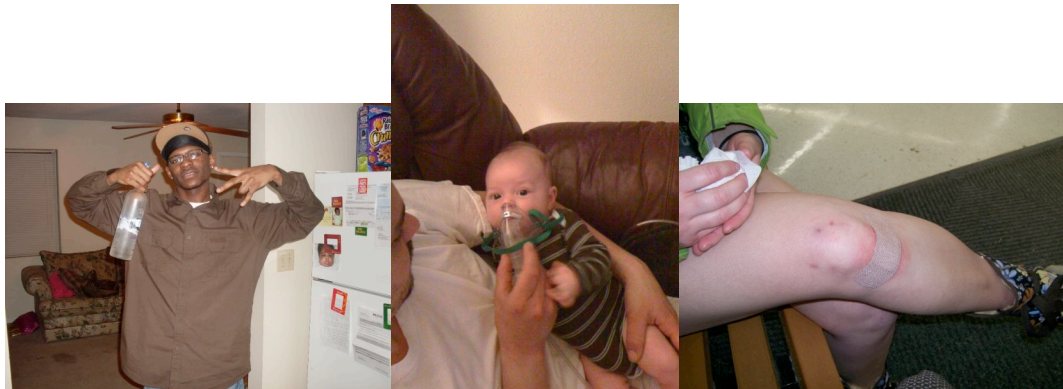
Figure 4.8 Private Life Pictures

At first glance the above pictures have little to nothing in common. A young male

holding a bottle of vodka, a baby with a breathing mask, and banged up knee are certainly not

pictures that would be grouped together into one photo album. These images represent the

private side of life that is often considered inappropriate for the public sphere. While the Kodak

Culture of the 80's and 90's shied away from sharing pictures that would expose unfavorable,

unhappy, or otherwise potentially harmful life events, participants in this study seem to be embracing life in all its glory, both the good, and the bad.

The first image, of James holding up a bottle of vodka smiling, is representative of a growing number of images on the Internet that have older generations in a fit of uncertainty—why would you take pictures of yourself with alcohol, or when you have obviously been drinking, particularly when a good number of these images show individuals engaging in underage drinking? Christina explained: "We take pictures [at parties drinking] and post them because Facebook is a living document. For [us] it's a way to remember the nights we may otherwise not," adding "it's also a way to show other people on the internet that we have friends, we party, we have a good time." The images then are not considered "unfavorable" to the person taking/participating in them—they are another part of life, of their image, helping them gain social capital with their peers around them as they navigate social networks online—Rebecca suggested that "Drinking is seen as cool, it is seen like you have friends, you do something on the weekend, like a status for college kids, it shows that you are having the college experience and fitting in."

More alarming about these types of pictures, is they are the very ones that many participants insisted they "untagged" themselves in because they could reflect upon them negatively to parents, potential employers, and outsiders (Pennington, 2009). Yet over the course of the two-months, not a single image by the 16 participants was untagged, despite an obvious and stated concern for viewer perceptions. Rebecca explained that she did not really care that these pictures were on Facebook; although she drinking, she was of legal age, and they were simply illustrating that she knows how to have a good time. She further explained that if someone did not get that, then perhaps it was not s person she would/should be a friend with on

Facebook anyway. The role and portrayal of college student via images seemingly trumped any desire for a greater (or long-term) social appropriateness or potential concerns with negative evaluations by others.

In the second image a breather mask is being applied to a small infant baby. The picture included a caption explaining the two-month old child is in need of treatments at home due to breathing issues resulting from illness. What interest do users have then, in uploading images that are of sad (or, unfavorable) events in their life? The same can be said of the final image that we turn to in this group of pictures. The third and final picture experiences partial overlap with the idea of taking pictures of "every day" things—in this sense though, the picture of the banged up knee is representative of a growing number of images that are of different injuries faced by participants ranging from falling, fighting, or accidents.

Other images that supported this theme included pictures from the effects on homes from natural disasters (tornadoes, hurricanes), a series of images from a get-together following a funeral, and images from a (what appears to be) a real fight that broke out between friends at a party. These images, from events that generally have a negative connotation, further support the idea of our desire to share and communicate all aspects of our lives. It is not just the positive events (like the Kodak Culture) or the every day life events (that show what we are up to on a daily basis) but there appears to be an interest in sharing photographs that are that "private" "under-side" of life that was previously frowned upon.

This is supported by Chalfen (1987), who believed that the Kodak Culture of the 1980's and 90's avoided these types of pictures altogether; that pictures from negative (or private) life events were discouraged from being shared because they illustrated that something bad or inappropriate had happened—there is rarely a positive relationship to an injury, a funeral, or a

drunken night that you may not even remember. The previous culture was primarily concerned with showing perceptions of pleasantness and "normal growth" in the family life, and when a child is sick or hurt, the family does not want to step outside the ideal role and admit that something is "wrong." Therefore, the "unfavorable" image online shows a shift away from the "only positive", "only good", "only happy" mentality of the previous culture. As a result, images from dancing drunk on a table, a black eye from a fight, a home destroyed by a tornado, a family torn apart by a death, are rapidly surfacing in an online capacity.

Natural versus Staged Image Use by Gender

Figure 4.9 Natural and Staged Pictures

Gender staging was uniquely different. While it is clear in looking at the above pictures which of them are "staged" and which is "natural"—it is worth noting at the start that *all* three are staged in that they are images chosen by the participants (all from their own uploaded photo albums) to share with the rest of their social network.

Beyond that point, the similarities end. In the images of the two women, we see that they are alone, that it is close up, and that, for all intensive purposes, they are "staged." By staged, I mean that these are not images of the user participating in an event, activity, or other routine action that could demand a photograph for memory, these pictures come instead from photo albums of average days where the participants either were alone, or with friends, and decided to pull out a camera. When I asked Alicia about this phenomenon, she laughed, suggesting that it

was an event, which her and her friends enjoyed getting together to take hundreds of pictures purely for the sake of putting them up on Facebook to share with everyone else. Yet even though they admit to being with their friends when the pictures are taken; why are the pictures still of just the user alone, and not with friends? This points to the desire for women with their profile to focus on their self, rather than their friends, even if the event that led to the picture being taken was not of them alone. Tara had two different albums that in the description explained it was just "her and her friends hanging out" yet the images showed photograph and photograph of girls dressed up in nice clothes, primped hair, and vast amounts of make up. Kelly had three albums of just herself taken with her webcam on her computer of her in dresses with props like an umbrella or a pair of sunglasses, smiling at the camera from a variety of angles and shots. Altogether these images are showing that the women in this study tended to have images online that were of just them that were staged to accentuate the physical, while providing less insight into the social or other life roles that they engaged in.

We can turn away from these two images for a moment then to second the middle example shown, of another user, Chad playing soccer with his friends. Without knowing who Chad was from another picture, it would be hard to point to which male he is in the image, which shows four men on a soccer field in action. This appeared to be a common trend for many of the male participants in the study: images of them in "natural" (non-staged event) settings, with their friends, having fun. Another example of this type of image is seen on James profile, where multiple images of him at events hosted by his Fraternity for local charities constitute the majority of his 905 tagged images. There is also Tom, who predominately has Facebook pictures of him with his friends at sporting events, bars, and camping. What appeared to be heavily important was that these pictures showed *activity*. The male participants were concerned not as

primarily with making sure that the impression they gave off was they were outwardly, just by looking at them, "attractive" because of their looks, but that they were attractive and liked because they had friends, and they did active, sporty things with those friends, showing a distinct difference in the role of impression management between males and females in the general use and taking of pictures uploaded to Facebook. The decision to focus on image as showing an image type versus image as showing physical attractiveness appeared heavily between the profiles of male and female participants, supporting the idea that society places a heavier emphasis on physical attractiveness for women that leads them to enact images that support that desire, whereas males tend to want images that show personality through action and their friends to show their networks.

All of these trends together show a shift in snapshot photography towards the every day and underside of life; a distinction in photo use and management that did not exist for the Kodak Culture that now flourishes on the Internet, and more specifically, Facebook. In analyzing the image choices made by the participants of this study in relation to the literature presented, we see the growth of a generation and change in culture through the mediated-communication of images online.

CHAPTER 5 - Discussion: The No Consequences Generation

Over time individuals in the United States become grouped together on the basis of birth date, and even given names that hint at important events in history that those individuals collectively experienced. For example, the Baby Boomers were born from 1946-1964.The are the children born following the years post WWII; wherein the world saw a booming population following the return of soldiers from war. These names for the different generations help to identify individuals as a collective and in relation to the way the world was as they were growing up. For Generation Y (individuals born between 1982 and 2001) the presence of the Internet has offered a unique opportunity to learn and grow at an early age, as a result, information is more readily available and connections are more easily made then ever before (Tapscott, 2007). It is no wonder, then, that many people prefer the name the "Net Generation" or "digital natives" over Generation Y when it comes to characterizing this group of individuals; these so-called 'digital kids' cannot remember a world pre-internet or what high school was like without cell phones, texting, digital cameras, Google, and Facebook (Tapscott, 2007).

What we are witnessing for this generation is an interpersonal world dominated by SNS (e.g., Facebook) that has created a space where the boundaries of privacy have changed, blurring the lines of the social roles that so many youth are experimenting with. Although it is fair to say previous generations were not particularly "more mature" than today's net generation, they (fortunately) did not have a tool that allowed for it to be so public and thus create an even more dangerous consequence to mistakes of the adolescent and young adult. The combination of deviant behavior with a desire to snap photograph after photograph of their self to document online is what has created this communication phenomenon. The digital native is forging a new

path, forced to confront conflicting social roles and patterns that generations before could keep neatly tucked away courtesy of audience distance, while also confronting the very real world practical implications of a living document of their life online.

Some research suggests this particular generation has enhanced critical thinking skills as a result of the constant scrutiny over the validity of information presented on the Internet, but outside of that, fewer researchers had considered the generational differences that exist in relation to identity and growing up in a digital age. Though critical evaluators, this group are also referred to as "narcissistic" and "lacking a sense of privacy" (Livingstone, 2008) by those who study them, often concerned with the disregard for privacy that many appear to have. However, Livingstone (2008) found that when meeting with participants from her study that they cared a good deal about privacy—it was simply a question of what the researcher operationalized as private versus what the user did. For the digital native, they relish the ability to tell people about the microscopic details of their lives—their likes, dislikes, their comings and goings, their hardships as well as regular accomplishments.

Older generations simply fail to grapple with the idea that this information is being shared willingly, and this was skewing the findings in many earlier studies. It is this lack of regard for privacy that most heavily impacts the digital native: privacy not in the sense of "we should not be sharing that information with strangers" but the concept of privacy has been transformed as a result of technology. In a sense, the ability to share information so easily and so often has created a context that allows for the merging, the blurring in fact, of the variety of social roles we have as a person, which to those who are not privy that social relationship, *are* private. Perhaps it should be noted that the lack of concern about the sharing of details about their lives to be all that intimate could be rise for concern, it is when we consider the sharing of

images from all aspects/roles of their lives with everyone from their mother, to their best friend, to the person they just met the night before at a party, that the nature of the behavior of the digital native emerges.

This study reveals that a particular mentality was exemplified during the course of the ethnography; the pictures that were tagged (in vast quantities) to profiles combined an earnest attempt to meet social standards of attractiveness with changing view for (what was previously considered) privacy. While social standards were previously attributed to be values that society holds dear—"When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35) in the context of image use online, the users are choosing picture that are illustrative of what society as a standard holds to be "attractive" both in a physical and social sense. When examining the pictures many of the female participants had tagged on the site I was surprised at the nature of the images—I would never upload pictures of myself scantily clad or in a suggestive position visible to my father, brother, teacher, or boss to—yet flipping through the pictures of participants turned up countless suggestive images of the users, several of which were former/current profile pictures—one of the most prominent trends found over the course of the study.

The images selections illustrate a growing tendency to disregard the boundaries of relationships—the managing of impressions is no longer contained within the context of our relationships (our family members, our coworkers, etc.) but are instead primarily contained in the context of a general, assimilated internet site and as a result, participants are not only interested, but feel quite comfortable in using Facebook to impress upon our friends, potential romantic

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partners, and acquaintances a specific personality, that from the above images suggests a care free, friendly, open individual.

Research on internet dating sites shows that it is an implicit (active) choice being made by the user where they choose characteristics of their personality (or wanted characteristics) that can be conveyed through image rather than text (Strano, 2008). While the primary purpose of Facebook is not to get a date, these images align with the picture types that most dating sites see listed to showcase the person in the profile wherein it is noted that: "women tend to display themselves in more seductive poses and wear clothing that emphasizes their sexuality" (Strano, 2008, p. 2). Additionally, the decision to use pictures that showcase sexuality helps the user gain social power—physical attractiveness plays the role of opening on additional roles and social networks to an individual who is seen as attractive and open (Berry, 2008). This is the social capital that the Ellison et al (2007) study suggested was important to users online—the intentional adaption of profiles is occurring by participants to show an impression that is consistent (working towards an ideal) of a role that they want to fit into (college student, attractive, etc.)

People are always striving to be better than they are (Goffman, 1959) concerned with showing the world a perceived ideal of themselves within a certain social role (in this case, college student); but in a digital world where those social roles conflict, it can be at a great cost to the individual. This is particularly true in college where individuals are still navigating and coming to understand the social role they would like to take on in the "real world", making it important to understand how users of SNS are communicating social roles online.

In some ways, the decisions made by today's young user can be attributed to the need to privilege and characterize the college student experience as something they embrace, but perhaps

more importantly the images on Facebook appear to be suggesting a more fateful implication that occurs with a much greater magnitude because of the reach of technology. Arguably this age group has always been (to some degree) characterized as a "no consequences" generation, but the Internet makes this a more serious concern.

As digital natives, these participants live lives that are socially constructed differently; although like generations that came before them, they may not consider the consequences of relationships and behavior. But now, because of the Internet, they must consider new components of *extended accessibility and public documentation*. The mere fact that I, as a researcher, not only regularly viewed their sites, but also downloaded their photos for this paper alone serves as source of support that prior to the advent of Facebook either did not exist or existed at a very difficult level.

Anderson (2008) suggests that these behaviors come as a result of cultural shifts in how we deal with impression management as compared to earlier generations:

> Today's college students (the Me Generation) are more self confident, assertive, open and direct than previous generations. They are much less concerned about privacy (perhaps because they recognize the impossibility of it in such an intrusive age). They value and appreciate genuine self-presentation and disdain blatant impression management. They don't appreciate that some topics might be taboo and they have little patience for explanations that hide information in service to cultural politeness norms. They are not very audience centered but instead value individual expression. (p. 12)

It is not that the user does not care; the digital native not only cares about their construction decision, but they are also fully aware of the decisions they make online. They are just not aware of the possible repercussions of the two new components of impression management of photos

via Facebook—that of accessibility and documentation and, as Anderson suggested, lack the patience and ability to learn how to use the privacy settings available to them to prevent everyone from seeing images. The idea that privacy is impossible supplements the view point of the digital native fueling their lack of patience with the mask of "they would just find it, anyway."

As a result, the digital native does not see the possible ramifications of actively contributing to a growing database of information/images of a fully constructed identity at all times; they make the choice to upload the photos, tag a picture, and make it their main image on a profile. So why is that they do not seem to care that those images could create a conflict for their life? It is not for lack of knowing—conflicts created as a result of images on Facebook abound. Allison Meyers' was the Young Eagles Director for the RNC before images of her and other members at a Hollywood Strip Club surfaced, forcing her to resign her post (Mooney, 2010), photos of eighteen-year-old Dan Hurd posted to his profile of him drinking beer at a family holiday party cost him his position of Student Body President at his High School and faces further punishment for under age drinking (Ciardelli, 2010), while seventeen-year-old Jonathon Belton will have pictures he uploaded to Facebook of handguns that he owns used against him in court for the alleged murder of a policy officer in Detroit (Brasier, 2010.) The consequences that can be associated with image use online, and a lack of understanding of privacy is hurting this generation—costing them their jobs, family and friends, and sometimes their lives. These are simply a few of the most recent harms caused by images on Facebook, with the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2010) offering this simple advice to Facebook users:

> It may go without saying, but prospective employers or clients don't want to see pictures
> of you chugging a bottle of wine or dressed up for a night at the bar. Beyond the pictures

you wouldn't want your grandparents to see, seemingly innocent pictures of your personal

life will likely not help to support the persona you want to present in your professional

life. (p.1)

There is an argument to be made on behalf of digital natives however, in that the way they view

things is simply different from the predecessors, and that this behavior and relationship to new

media and images can become problematic. Chalfen (2002) explains that when we ascribe

images as "evidence" (as many earlier generations do when flipping through Facebook pictures)

that we attribute a level of truth or certainty to a single second snapshot that could be completely

unrepresentative of the whole of that person and their behavior in that experience.

As illustrated in an earlier example of Dan, the picture simply shows him with other

young people around him, drinking a can of beer. There was a context behind the photo that was

not conveyed to the general viewer. The viewer of the image who turned it into school officials

did not know was that Dan was at a family function, and was given permission from his parents

to have the beer (Ciardelli, 2010). This simply is suggesting that perceptions developed from

images is about the receiver creating the fuller narrative. As the numbers of images on Facebook

are generally of social setting situations, it is important that as we move forward that we question

the images as much as we put credence in them.

Gender differences and picture use in this study also raises some interesting implications

and concerns. The gender differences found over the course of the study were inconsistent with

previous research (Strano, 2008) that also found gender differences, but the inverse of what was

documented during the two-months these profiles were followed. Once again we can consider

images uploaded by males to their Facebook:

Figure 5.1 Male Natural Pictures

Images were active (not staged), and consisted of only males in the pictures Consistent with the

images above, these images were about hanging out with their friends, goofing off in relaxed

social settings. Now consider these two images from female participants:

Figure 5.2 Female Staged Pictures

Here we see just the participant, and they are smiling directly aware of the camera. The tendency

for women to smile and look at the camera in a picture is consistent with previous research on

profile pictures on Facebook (Strano, 2008) the fact that the male participants are the ones who

have friends in their pictures, and the girls are alone, is an inverse to what earlier studies showed.

Additionally, it was only female participants who engaged in the "Angled Profile Picture" trend,

while males made no attempt to disguise aspects of their self. These behaviors are indicative of buying into gender and sex roles within society. The female must be feminine, the male masculine. Masculinity is shown through action, the images conveying the strength of the male as a sign of physical attraction, while femininity is shown through the staged image, the perfectly put together female smiling at the camera. The most likely reason for why the management by female participants was so much more pronounced and related to physical attractiveness lies in the impact of stereotyping in society. Patzer (2006) writers that:

> People believe that more physically attractive people possess more socially desirable traits, live better lives, and have more successful marriages and occupations than less physically attractive people. (p. 66)

While this is true of both genders, the tendency for female participants to rely on their face as a way to convey attractiveness is consistent with earlier research on the matter. Studies have shown that both men and women remember and regard a female as "physically attractive" based on her face more so than any other feature, especially in relation to males (Patzer, 2006). It would reason then that female's photographs online would focus on the face as the feature to show they are attractive to those who view the profile, while men would focus on providing an impression of being active (i.e.: masculine) and strong as an indicator of attractiveness. Although digital natives challenge gender and sex roles more so than earlier generations, the constant message of the sexual woman portrayed by society still permeates the roles that many young women take on, illustrated both in the angled images to hide flaws, the staged images to accentuate a happy mentality, and sexually suggestive photographs to attract the viewer to their profile image.

Altogether what these results have shown is that images on Facebook while consciously altered and managed, are not being considered by the participants in the context of a couple of new factors. First, the fidelity between the various social roles that they engage in within the vast array of social networks is not discernable on their sites and these roles are definitely distinguished in a face-to-face environment. Recognition that these roles are now overlapping with each other is incredibly important. As Wesch (2009) writes:

> …And although the individual takes an active role presenting, preserving, and sometimes adjusting his or her face, it is not an object of sole authorship. Face is not simply defined by the person's actions, but how those actions are perceived and judged by other participants in the flow of the encounter… [it] is a complex collaborative dance in which all participants in their every word, wink, gesture, posture, stance, glance, and grunt take part. (p. 3)

What we come to understand from this is that every action, every image, every change in image, has an impact and influences the relationships we have with the people around us. There are a number of teachers who lost jobs because of images on Facebook where they were drinking (despite the fact that they are of age), of workers losing their jobs (because a Facebook picture showed them at a party when they claimed to be sick), of parents grounding their kids for finding out they engaged in reckless behavior (because someone at the party posted pictures), and even images of illegal behavior used by law officials as evidence—all of these are reactions to active choices made by participants of Facebook that, despite widely publicized, continue to occur on a daily basis. For every college student concerned that a picture of them holding a beer can or near a bottle of liquor could prevent them from getting hired for a job, there exists a dozen more easily searched images such as these from participants in this study:

Figure 5.3 Drinking Pictures

One possible (and likely) explanation for the behavior lies in the logic of social roles and individual development. Flanagan and Syvertsen (2005) believe that the very nature of being in college, away from home, but not yet in the "real world" illustrates this difficult balance in chosen social roles:

Indeed, although young adults face certain developmental imperatives, those who are unmarried and childless and not in permanent careers are less saddled with responsibilities than they will be a few years down the round. They are free to explore different ideas, values, lifestyles, religious and cultural traditions, and political views. And they are often in settings like college campuses where they are exposed to more alternative perspectives on social issues then they were in high school and also are less influenced by their parents' views. (p. 16)

What research shows, and has always shown, is that regardless of the generation, youth tend to experiment with the roles that they will later fully identity and come to associate their true self with later in life (Goffman, 1961). What the digital culture has changed is that youth are forced to deal with inconsistent experimentation of roles in a very public and frequent manner that could have varying degrees of negative impacts on their life in the long-term. While the

behaviors they are engaging in (drinking, taking time off from work, activism, etc) are not negative in and of themselves, the perception that these activities are inconsistent with the image of a contributing member to society that has so many people on edge; yet these behaviors and activities, to many digital natives, are not viewed as problematic, and this view is not inconsistent with how earlier generations felt with they were young, too:

> In general, youth are more tolerant than their elders of different lifestyles and of deviant behaviors. This tolerance of deviance…and the fact that deviance peak in the late adolescent years, all contributes to the popular and negative stereotype that youth have no self-control and could pose a danger to society. (Flanagan and Syvertsen, 2005, p, 17)

These stereotypes are made legitimate in the eyes of older generation by pointing to the glut of images of youth engaging in deviant social activities available online. The negative implications of this generational divide is what is at stake for the digital native: not only are they being asked to police the boundaries of the social roles they are trying to navigate, but they have to be addressing a growing number of images online that cast them in a negative light to those outside of their age group. The loss that can accumulate for the digital native as they search for a job in the real world post-college is enough to get a few users untagging images where they are holding a beer, but those images still exist online, a document of behavior of the user that can be found by anyone willing to search hard enough, which many companies looking to hire are more than ready to do.

Digital natives are not increasingly different in their behavior than the generations that came before them; they are just as tolerant and just as experimental at this age as their counter parts were back in the day. But an important advent has changed the consequences of this

generation—much unlike, and at a more serious level than generations before them. This ethnography is an indication of how users are managing (or not managing) their impressions.

Preemptive action is not a behavioral tendency of the no consequences generation who embrace their deviance, test their identity, and continue to grow in an environment that allows them to do just that. It is when they leave the protection of college that this generation must truly confront the digital footprint impressions they left behind over the years, for better or worse.

CHAPTER 6 - Conclusion

The degree to which users of Facebook manage their image in an online environment is not to be underestimated. Over the course of this study I witnessed a variety of behaviors that, while considered "normal" of any youth, were made unique by the nature of them occurring online. While every generation of youths is considered to operate in a "no consequences" mindset (Flanagan et al, 2005) it is the digital native that consumes their days with constant impression management via an online forum. Certainly the behavior patterns and activities that involve taking chances and experimenting with social roles is an inherent part of belonging to a younger age group; but it is the digital native who is forced into confronting their conflicting social roles on a daily basis as these roles are blurred together through the sheer glut of images that the user makes available for their social network to view. The consequences then, are greater than ever before: the accountability even higher then previous generations for their youthful mistakes and action, thanks to the commonly held societal belief that pictures do not lie. The very real practical implications associated with these choices are headlines daily in the news, yet the behavior of the generation remains unchanged as day after day, hundreds of thousands of images are uploaded to Facebook, documenting every moment of the users life from the good, the bad, to the boring. While Goffman was correct that individuals play a variety of social roles in life and that audience segmentation can alleviate the disconnect in those social roles; he could not possibly account for the change that CMC would bring in communication of social roles. The merging of networks in an online environment has forced the individual to confront difference in self in a way previously unheard of; and more importantly, at an age where experimentation with social roles is at an all time high.

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between the use of Facebook and the use of images/photographs as a form of impression management of the social roles we have in life. It sought to understand if participants were tagging and using images as profile pictures in a particular context to convey specific personality characteristics both consistent and differing from the roles that they associated with. If Facebook users were consciously choosing to disclose or alter personal information on their profile, then it stood to reason that this form of impression management would lead to inconsistencies in a participant's perception of self, as well as how other's perceived them. At the start there were three primary goals outlined for this research. First, that examining what the images suggest about a person would allow us to understand how the current generation engages in public impression management through images, second, that in addition, it would provide a link to the field of visual communication and the belief that individuals have come to share images as experiences, not simply as objects. Third and finally, this research would draw on Erving Goffman's analysis of self, to consider how the use of photographs in an online platform becomes a new stage for individuals to manage impressions in ways not previously studied.

In the context of the first goal, it is evident that the digital natives, the Net Generation, whatever you choose to call them, are fully aware of their ability to manipulate impressions, but, at a young age, are still isolated from understanding the larger impact of having conflicting images online and in what ways they can manage those images to lessen the negative impacts from those behaviors. Do young adults drink, get drunk, and make mischief? Statistically, engaging in deviant behavior is a common trend of youth through out generations, what makes it a unique issue for the current generation is the decision to have increased visibility of these behaviors for older generations to view at will. Where in the past parents might suspect their

child was "up to no good", they can now have proof through Facebook, where there could be several hundred photographs of their child engaging in behaviors that are inconsistent with the impression the youth want their parents to have of them as a studious, law-abiding, hardworking individual. In that same vein, have people in the past called in sick to work, only to really be fine and just want to go out with their friends? Again the answer is yes, but before the chances that your boss (who you are now Facebook friends with) would ever see pictures of you out and about were slim. The existence, of what Wesch (2009) refers to as the little glass dot (the digital camera) forces us to rethink our actions in that pictures of us engaging in behaviors and giving off impressions that are inconsistent with who we portray ourselves to be are becoming a larger and larger issue for the every day citizen, and especially the digital native who continues to experiment with a variety of social roles to determine their place in society. We are now documenting our lives not only verbally, but in the text and images we post to the Internet, leaving behind impressions of our selves through out the years.

This flows into the second goal of the study, to understand how visual communication exists on the very mundane, every-day life level. We are taking pictures every day, all the time, sharing them with others not as artifacts to be hung on a wall, but to show lived experiences that we have had that say something about what we are doing with our lives and where we are headed. This transition from the Kodak Culture to the Nokia culture is clear in the literally hundreds of snapshots of every day life that exist on Facebook. Visjick (2009) explains that this culture shift to document every moment, to share and experience through image rather than text or word of mouth is the primary drive for the explosion of mundane (every day) images that we see on the Internet. In the past we would only take pictures of Events: weddings, graduations, holidays. Now we take pictures of everything—a nice dinner we made that we are proud of, a

camping trip, a pretty day on campus, or maybe a lazy afternoon in the dorms. Accounting for these images and the effect that they have in forcing us to manage our identities becomes a primary focus for future research on the topic of visual communication of the mundane.

Finally, this research was concerned with understanding the transformation of impression management through images based on the research of Erving Goffman. What we find is that while Goffman did not have Facebook, all his theories and perceptions of human patterns of impression management within our various social roles still hold true today: we are at all times aware of the impressions we give and give off, creating this perfect balance that Wesch (2009) speaks of, a collaborative dance where in the end we must make a choice of who we want to be seen as at any given moment foregoing one role for the sake of another. In doing so we are accepting the consequences of those actions at every turn, adapting, growing, and changing to accommodate them in a digital age. What Goffman couldn't account for, and is thus the change in communication of social roles, is the convergence of roles into one networked presentation that Facebook allows for.

Limitations

The participants of this study are all part of a generation whom I generally refer to as "digital natives"—by only studying this type of user the scope of the study is drawn to only encompass this group of individuals. Individual's over thirty years of age remain the fastest growing demographic on Facebook, but without being able to compare their behavior (as they were not a part of this study) to those of digital natives, it is difficult to assess their online impression management choices via Facebook images.

Another drawback came late in the study wherein two participants asked that their images not be used as examples within the text of the research, though they allowed me to continue the

use of the images to analyze for the study. While this cut the number of exemplary images down to a list of just fourteen participants, neither participant had images that could not be represented by other participant's image use that was a detriment to the study as a whole.

An additional limitation to the research resides in the method; the very nature of participant observation sans interview can have its limitations in that I can only infer what I believe to be true from observing the profiles of participants, but without additional interviews to triangulate, this remains a one-sided view of the findings. That some participants did agree to interviews and confirmed what was believed to be true from the participant observation suggests this limitation is minimal in nature.

Finally, the timeframe for the study as limited in that the research was required to be completed within a certain frame; studying the Facebook profile page of participants over a longer time (6 months, 12 months, versus 2 months) could very well of led to different discoveries or merely supplemented what was already found. That no participants in the two month time period of the study untagged images of themselves was found to be contradictory to early statements of Facebook users that "untagging" was one of the primary management techniques, suggests a longer study could have accounted for behavior. Many trends and impression management decisions were discovered over the course of the study however that is consistent with previous research.

Future Research

What this research has shown is a consistent pattern of use of images on Facebook by college students. The trends may change over time, perceptions of what is attractive adapting to fit the latest Hollywood "It" Girl; but it is clear that the social standards offline are still impacting impression management decisions made online. Whether that is a Pokémon image, the

use of baby pictures, or self-shooting an up close photo, it was the behaviors and beliefs held by their social network to be appropriate, effective, and attractive that dominated how participants in SNS managed their identity online. What makes this generation different is the role that technology has come to play in adapting to fit the social roles that youth grow into.

It is often suggested that new communication technologies do not replace older communication, but rather augment them. SNS have created a place where previously private (or at the very least personal) information is glaringly public—our ability to perform a specific identity in a particular environment becomes threatened when that identity is inconsistent with the images that exist on these sites. This is likely because the Net Generation does not view their communication patterns (and the disclosure of information) as problematic since the use of technology to communicate with various others is the norm. For example, often many of these individuals equate going to college and having a Facebook account as a simultaneous set of events since a growing number of youth have had an account since high school; so they see their uploading of images of the things they do in college to the site as normal, and non-unique. When communication is publically documented, (and leaves a foot print), at an age where experimentation and expansion of the individual is prevalent (Tapscott, 2007), understanding the forms of impression management that users of these sites engage in becomes of particular interest. Additionally, technology creates vulnerability for many youth, who post a variety of personal information while meeting new people online daily (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Future research can continue to assess the strengths and weaknesses associated with this trend, and the effects that it has on youth as they leave college and enter the "real world."

While this study revealed that digital natives are engaging in impression management techniques through image use, a broader understanding of why the social roles that dominate and

dictate that use is needed to better understand the communication strategies in play. Future research, without a time constraint, would do well to consider then the long term strategies used by digital natives as they move forward in life; with previous research indicating shifts in relationship to social roles when youth leave college for the "real world", research to show the adjustment that this generation deals with, now with technology in play, would answer many of the questions left unresolved by this study.

Future research must address generational differences, if any do exist. A limitation explained to this research was that it could only be generalized to college students (digital natives); but are the behaviors of older and younger generations different, and if so, what is the driving force behind that? Much of the research in regard to SNS rests in the belief that there is something about the current generation of youth that will dictate our continual growing relationship to technology, it is important then to study that relationship in its fullest; which means understanding the comparison and contrast between the digital native and other generations when it comes to communication in an online environment.

Finally, we must understand that the use of images to communicate identity is, as Visjick (2009) puts it, a cultural shift towards individualization and intensification of experience; another outlet for experimental youth of society to use as they grow in society, finding their place and developing the social roles they will embrace for the remainder of their lives as an adult. While we may live in a community that is more interconnected than ever before, we find ourselves, especially through a website where we primarily interested in our self image, concerned with who we appear to be within society more and more, and as a result are involved less and less with the interaction to others. This study was merely a glimpse into the world of digital photography as a tool of communication for the every day life of the digital native, it is crucial

that we continue to reach and understand on a deeper level the relationship that exists between our use of images in an online environment and impression management, as users across the globe add image after image to their online accounts, documenting their lives for the rest of the world to see.

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Appendix A - Informed Consent Form

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE:	Saving the Show: An Analysis of Images and Impression Management on Facebook

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: 10/21/09   EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT: 10/21/10

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):	Nicole M. Laster, Natalie R Pennington
CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:	417-766-5611
IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:	• Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224. • Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
SPONSOR OF PROJECT:	Communication Studies Department
PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:	I (Natalie Pennington) am conducting research on Facebook and the impact it's had on the formation of our individual identity/self concept. While the primary role of taking photographs in previous generations was for the sake of memory, current research shows that the advent of the digital camera has led to pictures being taken as a form of "live communication". Instead of the typical "family photograph", camera phones and pocket cameras have allowed almost anyone of any age or social background to snap an image of any given moment they see as worthy. This research seeks to look at the management of images and the types of images employed on Facebook.
PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:	I am asking you to participate in a two-month long study of your personal Facebook profile. This will require nothing out of the normal for you as a participant, only that

you allow access to the images of you on the website for study and possible use in my thesis. In addition, at the end of the two months you may be asked to participate in an interview to clarify choices made through out the period of study. A laptop will be provided for the duration of the interview for you to log into your Facebook account in order to view your profile. All answers should be provided in general terms so as to avoid use of personal information that could be used as an identifier.

I foresee minimal risks to any participants. In order to minimize risk to you, you have the option to skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering. You also have the right to terminate the interview at any time. Your name will not be associated with any information; data will be viewed in the aggregate. I will record the interview; after tapes have been transcribed, all audio recordings will be destroyed. The interview will take most participants approximately half an hour to complete if necessary.

As a form of compensation for participation in the research, there will be a raffle at the end of the two months for three (3) $25 gift cards for Amazon. If you have any questions about this study, you may ask them now or contact me, Natalie Pennington, at natpen@gmail.com.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:
N/A

LENGTH OF STUDY:	2 months
RISKS ANTICIPATED:	None
BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:	None
EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:	If an interview is necessary, I will record the interview with an audio digital recorder; after tapes have been transcribed, all audio recordings will be destroyed. Additionally, names unassociated with each participant will be ascribed to any images/statements used within the results/findings of the study to protect personal identity.
IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT	No

AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS:

PARENTAL APPROVAL
FOR MINORS: Yes

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Witness to Signature: (project   Date:
staff)

Appendix B - Initial Codes with Definition

Code	Definition/Description
1. Special Pictures	Any images that keep getting made the profile picture
2. Provocative Pictures	Any image where the user is behaving in a sexual manner
3. Abstract Pictures	Any image where the user has either changed the angle of the camera or distorted their body to provide an abstract look of their self
4. Active Pictures	Any image where the user is active/not aware of the picture being taken
5. Staged Pictures	Any image where the user is aware of and smiling directly at the camera
6. Party Pictures	Any image where the user is engaging in drinking, partying, smoking
7. Injury Pictures	Any image where the user is showing a specific injury/harm to their person
8. Old Pictures	Any image where the user is significantly younger (ten years) then current self
9. Negative Life Event Pictures	Any image of the user during what would be considered negative life events, times of hardship
10. Every day Pictures	Any image of the user that is not from a major life event
11. Advertising Pictures	Any image that is not of the user, but advertises with text on the image for an event, activity, holiday
12. Object Pictures	Any image that is not of the user, but is of an object, item, event (without the intent of advertising)
13. Pokémon Pictures	Any images where the user has used a picture of Pokémon instead of their self

Appendix C - Interview Questionnaire

Questions to ask all interviewees:

1. What are the reasons you had for changing your profile picture in the past two months?

2. What made you choose the pictures that you chose as profile pictures?

3. What motivated your decision to change the pictures available online of yourself over the past two months on Facebook?

Questions to ask depending on participant use during two-month ethnography:

1. Why did you/did you not tag/untag images of yourself on Facebook as they were uploaded?

2. Do you believe that if someone looked through the pictures of you tagged on Facebook, they would get a proper/accurate impression of who you are? Why or Why Not? Please Explain.

4. Did you upload photo albums to Facebook during the past month?

    - If yes:

    - What made you decide to put those particular pictures up?

    - Did you tag you and/or your friends in the images? Why or Why not?

Appendix D - Final Annotated Codebook

Code	Definition/Description of Images	Units
Old Faithful	Any images that keep getting made the profile picture (i.e.: pictures of users that is of just the user, usually cropped, always smiling and coming across as happy)	16
Angled	Any image where the user has either changed the angle of the camera or distorted their body to provide an abstract look of their self (i.e.: tilted head shots, close up of eyes/face, view of just a part of the person)	276
Statement	Any image that was not of the user and served the purpose of either advertising for an event, activity, group, or of an object/person/item that the user likes (i.e.: advertising for Fraternity events, pictures of religious figures, snapshots from movies, shows, sports events)	304
Trend of the Week	Any image of the user that was posted as a result of Facebook request for a particular type of picture (i.e.: Favorite Pokémon characters as profile pictures as a result of a Facebook group suggestion to do so)	5
Flashback	Any image where the user is significantly younger (ten years) then current self (i.e.: pictures of the user as a child, baby, or very young adult, all of these images are scanned analogue photographs, not digital)	160
Every day	Any image of the user that is not from a major life event (i.e.: pictures hanging out at home, in the dorm, in class, not indicated by the user as from what would be considered a major event)	2278
Natural	Any image where the user is active/not aware of the picture being taken (i.e.: play fighting with friends, dancing, running, working out, sports activities)	970

Staged	Any image where the user is aware of and smiling directly at the camera (i.e.: standing in a line with friends, positioned to face the camera in a picture, any pictures where the sole purpose of the event was to take pictures)	3249
Sexually Suggestive	Any image where the user is behaving in a sexual, provocative manner (i.e.: pictures of the user in suggestive positions, whether that be with another person or alone, generally showcasing physical features considered attractive)	387
Unfavorable Acts	Any image of the user from events or moment in life that could negatively effect them in the future, or has negative connotations in the present (i.e.: injury pictures from fights, falling or accident, funeral pictures, pictures of the user engaging in drinking, smoking, or behavior considered socially unacceptable)	781