THE FACEBOOK PROJECT

GENDER ROLES AND GROUP DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

The coming of the information revolution has brought numerous changes to everyday life that involve technology. Today many youth spend large amounts of time on social networking sites (SNS) where they can create digital versions of themselves and interact by sharing media, information, and expressions of their identity. One way students show and construct group identity is through membership in Facebook groups. This paper investigates via limited ethnography the happenings in one particularly large and active Facebook group, "There Are Some Things Guys Should Always Do For Girls. Period." As the analysis here will show, this group holds implications for the perpetuation of gender inequality through the cyberspace medium. Educators must take heed and learn to understand the new arenas of discourse surrounding gender if they are to effectively reach youth audiences today.

This paper presents a glimpse into this discourse by accomplishing three tasks. First it gives a background picture of Facebook with statistics and limited substantive analysis. Second, it presents a literature review pertaining to digital architecture (describing the differences of cyberspace) and some complications surrounding gender. Third it explains the beginning steps of a corresponding digital ethnography project and its contributions to understanding the perpetuation of gender inequality online. The author finds that while this study is really just the beginning many valuable insights into user perspectives can be unearthed.

KEYWORDS AND TAGS

Facebook, gender roles, gender stereotypes, sexism, ethnography, interface, digital architecture, group identity, feminism

INTRODUCTION

Over two hundred thousand people in one place. Imagine it—a massive and colorful crowd teeming with bodies, intellects and identities. Surely such an assembly of individuals would be found at epic marches, buzzing about their business in city streets, or perhaps attending a colossal concert. And yet this two hundred thousand is just one group of many in cyberspace. The old visionaries once posited that the internet could be a realm where communities could span time, distance, and transcend their physical bodies to form communities and commons on an unprecedented and tremendous scale. Even they would have not been able to predict the magnitude to which this has been realized today. We as a people are yet in the moment of the Information Revolution and may not even know it. This time the revolution isn't bloody and may not even heavily involve governments—it is instead global, and fundamentally interlaced with cultural and economic change.[1] Production and consumption, exchange and ownership of information, and even our perceptions of identity and community have all experienced paradigm shifts with the coming of the information age. The availability and specialization of knowledge has skyrocketed as the internet has come to claim a near-ubiquitous role in the first world. Just as people of the past came to depend and thrive upon electricity, the developed world now embraces instant and easy connection. For most in the U.S. computers have become directly associated with the internet, and many other devices such as cell phones, TV's, and mp3 players have begun to follow suit. The new forms of media embedded in and enabled by the internet open up a new world of innovations, expressions, relationships, and communities. Perhaps more than ever before, the heterogeneity evident in the U.S. (and international) social mesh calls for new potentially revolutionary and anti-disciplinary models of epistemology and analysis.

Just as computer mediated communication has formed new social contexts and altered the fabric of others, revolutions and evolutions within the world of the web have experienced transformations in kind. *Social networking services* (SNS) are social software systems focused on creating social networks online, where pre-existing and new connections are enhanced, verified, and even built. Though their roots are independent from the internet, they have taken on a new form and life far beyond their previous existence outside of cyberspace. Internet based systems of SNS have vitally reframed and reformed computer mediated communication (CMC), interaction, and even the

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[1] This notion is put forward by Benkler, Yochai (2006) and Neff and Stark (2002), to name just a couple.

potential and opportunity for productive human agency.[2] Studies have shown that these tools offer numerous benefits for both the work place and in social contexts (Wellman and Haythornthwaite 1998, Haythornthwaite and Nielson 2007, to offer just a couple) and have undergone assimilation into daily use as extensions of most social processes including personal communications, expression, and relationships (Haythornthwaite and Nielson 2007). Indeed, with the coming of Web 2.0 most scholars now agree that the internet and CMC have reached a point of ubiquity and merit increasingly thorough and specialized studies (Lievrouw 2004, Haythornthwaite and Nielson 2007).

The impact of SNS on the US (and increasingly international) high school and college student populations is nothing short of monumental. Students have grown up socialized into a world shaped by the internet and brandish native and latent intuitions and understandings of internet technology unknown to previous generations (Mcmillan and Morrison 2006). Just like our parents grew up with the TV as a part of their childhood, and our grandparents with the radio, youth gain skills and comfort with on the web from the start. Social networking services are a natural extension of life for youth, one they can easily explore, partake and shape. As the business and academic world (and perhaps non-institutionalized social norms) inspire a life progressively filled with more multitasking many youth are challenged by perceptibly limited time for face-to-face interactions. Online meeting places and social networks facilitate opportunities for the development of personal relationships in parallel with (and beyond) their offline counterparts.

ACTIVITY, ROLES AND INEQUALITY ON FACEBOOK

Social networks must credit their impressive success, in part, as a result of convergence and network effects. They thrive on viral propagation and provide a plethora (perhaps too many) of functions and have at the same time managed to almost fully saturate the college student population. Those such as Facebook and MySpace were originally deemed an entirely youth-exclusive public and private space for kids to inhabit and shape. SNS enable users to present and investigate virtual profiles (digital representations of people), browse and post pictures, observe, join, and create events and groups (purely digital, cultural or corresponding to ones offline), post journals and multimedia (such as music, videos, and art), view the latest news on their friends' online lives and link to a myriad of advertising and marketing. What's more is that SNS systems represent opportunities for entertainment,

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[2] It's really something to think about. Yochai Benkler even sees collaborative participation and production as representative of the next as the next stage of human organization. http://www.ted.com/talks/view/id/247

social movements, new forms of expression, enhancement of social capital and previously unknown thresholds of information. **The cyberspaces found in SNS mediate, thus become a new terrain for, everyday activity and the performance of roles**.

The internet, however, is far from the egalitarian utopia once pitched during its conception. Many individuals do not have physical access and others do not have the skills to operate web technologies (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001). Still others do not have experiential access[3] and perceived barriers to access (or usefulness or ease of use) play just as much of a role in preventing people from getting online as actual barriers (Porter and Donthu 2006). As a result, group identities belonging to marginalized or disadvantaged populations could be setback or hindered in the world of the web. Even once people are established online studies demonstrate that gendered, sexual, classed, raced, and age-based identities and corresponding conflicts continue to be salient factors in determining the character of online relationships (Kendall 1998). Women, in particular, have had a long history of oppression and the battle for equity between the sexes still rages on fiercely today. Though often institutionalized or covert, sexism pervades many aspects of society and continues to shape the everyday activity and roles of individuals. This process is increasingly taking place in the digital theater (as it becomes routine and banal) and spaces such as Facebook enact as the underlying series of stages. This paper's task is to explore the way the **interface, environment, and discourse** within a particularly large and volatile Facebook group affect the perpetuation of gender inequality.

SUBSTANTIVE SOCIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

One needs only to talk to any given undergraduate student to unearth tangible, substantive cultural impacts of Facebook. Everyone has a story, or in all likelihood a whole manifold of experiences, narratives, and interpretations of the system. In some ways it's like a social local newspaper—only you can play with it. If language is a signifier of pertinence, then just as 'to Google' and 'to Photoshop' have become verbs in the vernacular, 'to Friend' and 'to Facebook' have risen to this status on account of Facebook[4]. Students have assembled extensive investments in the system and many have developed dependencies in varying forms—communications and news, extension of personality, community

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[3] Not an item addressed in this paper, experiential access refers to comfort, experience and association with the internet. Many know it as thinking with the web—not only accessing it for information and conceptualizing it as a place for the extension of real-world organizations but also envisioning it as a technology of the self; a place to extend and articulate personhood and identity and arbitrate self-awareness.

[4] The terminology of course varies by social networking service. Users might "MySpace" one another or "Friend" one another there too. Other SNS are more formalized, like "adding contacts" on LinkedIn.

awareness and involvement, and initiation and continuance of both personal relationships as well as group membership. Indeed, many students are learning to visit Facebook as much as email and update their Facebook status like they do instant messenger away messages. These high usage patterns are a logical consequence of the dialectic between offline and online connections (Ellison et al. 2006) and the relationship between the once mostly separated worlds has become strongly coproducing.

The potential avenues for influence are numerous, especially among youth in the US. Outside of science and technology studies, many subsets of sociology have traditionally considered internet technology as peripheral or incongruous. However, education and research have a great deal to learn from the incarnations, uses, interpretations and social movements of new media. As sociology concerns itself with informing people of the social shifts of the future we ought to pay attention to the influences Facebook will accrue, especially as it becomes nominally interlaced into the everyday life and expands its influences across the globe. Facebook echoes, extends, and may even transform the interactions of the face-to-face world and has implications for the many social groups[5] traditionally of concern to sociology. The ramifications of this claim insinuate that examination of Facebook ought to intersect with all subsets and variations of sociology be they areas like transnational studies and demographics or methodologies such as historical comparatives, content analysis, quantitative data collection, or ethnographies. Studying social networking services and Facebook are imperative to modern Sociological study.

STRUCTURE OF THIS PAPER

The remainder of this paper is structured to accomplish several simple objectives. First, it gives a background picture of Facebook via numbers and limited substantive analysis. Second, it presents a literature review pertaining to digital architecture (describing the differences of cyberspace) and some complications surrounding gender. Third it explains the beginning steps of a corresponding digital ethnography project and its contributions to understanding the perpetuation of gender inequality online.

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[5] Gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, ability and mental illness, class and geography, age and education, and countless others

Arguably one of the two most influential SNS websites on the internet, Facebook.com is a comprehensive and encompassing clustering of networks based on universities and colleges, high schools, work places, and geographic areas. These membership networks are independent of one another but based on the same interface and systems of interaction. Intersections and overlaps between each network are possible but they often have crucial and intentional barriers to access in between. Started originally in February of 2004, Facebook hit its first tipping point in the late summer of that year with the introduction of groups and public posting 'walls.' A second surge in growth resulted from Facebook's introduction to the global public – the site went from consistently hovering around 14 million unique visitors per month to over 26 million (Lipsman 2007c). In the span of a little over 3 years - from 2005 to 2008—the user count has grown over 10 times in size.[6] As of June 2007 collectively Facebook claims over 67 million members (users who have returned to the site in the past 30 days) and remains one of the fastest growing websites on the internet (Wakabayashi 2007, Lipsman 2007b, Abram 2007, Facebook Statistics 2008). Sources vary, but membership saturation ranges between an average of 85% and 95% (Golder et al. 2006, Arrington 2005, Ellison et al. 2005, Jones and Soltren 2005, Facebook Statistics 2008); the last network-based count for the UIllinois Network placed a 92% membership rate among the undergraduate population.[7] Responses from the survey featured in this paper estimate something closer to a 97% coverage though this number may be inflated due to the possibility that Facebook users may be more likely to respond to email surveys as they are quite possibly more intensive users of the internet in general. Regardless, the sheer number of users and level of penetration makes the site a pretty big deal.

Facebook ranks as one of the most visited websites on the internet, with sources claiming as high as the 3rd most visited based on page views, and they now account for at least 1% of all time spent on the internet (Freiert 2007b, Abrams 2007, Alexa.com 2008). Among college students the website is

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[6] Based on comparisons between news reports.

[7] Collected April of 2006. Facebook search queries pass data in the URL query strings – recognizing which variables correspond to each parameter I could set the page display range at a higher index manually, allowing myself to see the last profiles available on the network and gaining an accurate count of UIUC Facebook member profiles. I performed a search for all students listed as undergraduates and divided this number by the total number of undergraduate students listed on the quick facts page on the UIUC home site. Accounting for a 1% inflation rate for students with multiple profiles, drop-outs, transfers, graduated members (at the time a very small number), I came up with the estimate of 92% which I first documented in *Social Computing Phenomena*, a paper written in May of 2006. Facebook later altered search results to display only the first 500 of a given category. I have yet to determine a new inclusive method of counting.

an even more common stop than Google and outpaces MySpace by a significant margin (Anderson Analytics 2007). More than 60% of members log in daily and many sign on multiple times a day while the average visitor spends over three hours of time on the site each month (Holahan, Hof, and Ante 2007, Arrington 2005). The most common activities (based on time spent) overall are in descending order: browsing profiles, interacting with applications, browsing pictures, joining or visiting groups, searching for members and groups, and joining and browsing networks (Freiert 2007a). In 2007 most users were between the ages of 12 and 24, however nearly an equal number amass in the age demographic of 35 and up (Lipsman 2007a, 2007b). The website in its entirety boasts more than 16 million page views and well beyond 600 million searches per month (Lipsman 2007a, Abram 2007). The most recent count of average daily visitors is nearly 15 million, with the vast majority (85%) connecting from the US and Europe (Lipsman 2007b). UIllinois is by comparison to other networks is relatively large, ranking in at nearly 60,000 profiles[8]. Facebook is the most viewed website by both females (69%) and males (56%) ages 17-25 in the United States, even surpassing MySpace.com (eMarketer Survey 2007). Facebook has essentially hit full saturation amongst most colleges and commands a high usage rate in many western nations. It continues to expand internationally and diversify its audience by adding more and more country-based networks.

THE FACEBOOK EXPERIENCE

Facebook has a definitively different feel than most websites, even ones that might be considered similar like dating websites or professional job seeking networks. The entire system is organized around exploring and engaging other participants. The idea is to help you access and display as much information about yourself and others as you want and at the same time pursue connections between the heterogeneous mess of people, components, and ideas. Facebook is a source of information, place of communication and a multifaceted arena of performance. It is fundamentally a socio-technical mesh; a blending between human actors, echoes of abstract individual personalities and social perspectives, and code-powered, semi-automated visual interfaces. Access is mediated by both cell phones and computers of all types.

Upon logging on visitors are greeted with the impression of activity by looking at the newsfeed, their latest application updates and the published shifting statuses of their friends. On some level it's almost comparable to the buzz of a city (Stutzman 2007b) or the front page of a newspaper. One can see

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[8] UIllinois statistics page on Facebook.com March 2008

some of what's going on amongst their friends on the site and do things like track specific recent changes in their friend's profiles or upload new media to share with their classmates. A student might chase down classmates or find that person they ran into on the quad earlier, or seek the social hub of a campus group they've just joined. Often all it takes is an impartial set of information – a first name and a major, a year and a club membership, an email address or AIM handle – to find specific people in the system. In most cases this sharing of media, identities and knowledge is desirable. Students can keep in touch with family members and distant friends, see pictures of someone they wish to take out on a date, or download the latest song their buddy many miles away composed in his bedroom. The process is much easier than it would be to normally accomplish such tasks without the help of Facebook largely because just about every venture in social exchange is a function available through the system. Facebook is notably conducive to one-sided activity and browsing, or 'stalking' as most users refer to it.[9] Surely most of the aforementioned tasks have run rampant throughout programs and websites for years prior, but with such high logon rates, deep integration, and the ability for anyone to conduct them unbeknownst to others as well as in an overt fashion, one can safely say the intensity has changed.

Over the summer of 2007 Facebook spilled into the global scene, and expanded its user base to include many types of people beyond students (Lispman 2007c). Within the US various adult populations began to employ the network for post-college social grooming, such as searching out old classmates and as a sort of dating service, and the Web 2.0 and business community has begun to adopt it as a new job search social networking tool[10]. After all, employers usually check up on potential employees online, why not overtly search on Facebook too? And the group that's probably roused the most ruckus is the substantial number of older adults, such as parents and administrators, concerned with watching youthful users.

Studies have begun to surface showing just how important Facebook can be in the production of social capital. For instance, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2006) have explored the influence of the SNS in terms of both bridging and bonding capital.[11] Results from a multiple regression analysis of a survey disseminated to the MSU undergraduate population indicate that Facebook has a significant impact on students' ability to maintain bridging social capital at college. General internet use, as compared, did

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[9] Insider language as identified in my series of interviews conducted for my research methods course.
[10] Unfortunately I have no publication to specifically back what I'm saying, it's a little compilation of material from one of researcher danah boyd's answers to my questions at the ASIS&T annual conference.
[11] Find out more about social capital (the differences between bridging and bonding) at Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital

not make a significant difference in determining social capital. The social capital scores of students who reported low satisfaction with MSU life and low self-esteem were most positively impacted by intensity of Facebook use. Interestingly enough white students were more likely to benefit in this way than non-white students, which when held in consideration with Mayer and Puller's (2007) finding that social networks did not show a great deal of connections between racial groups, could suggest a new disparity for digital divide research. Eszter Hargittai (2007) echoed this possibility in her work surveying student perceptions of SNS in finding that certain racial populations preferred certain networks more than others. Ultimately having more friends who use Facebook, using Facebook to connect with offline contacts, and using Facebook for fun accurately predicted rates and trends of bridging social capital, but not bonding social capital (Ellison et al. 2006). In short, students who use Facebook actively may have an advantage in regards to social capital, or more properly framed, the very few not on Facebook will be at a relative disadvantage.

As the paper notes in its general discussion, the relationship between Facebook and social capital does not determine causation – students bring with them a plethora of connections and resources to the SNS environment and consequently take away new ones. The point is that the two worlds are interconnected and coproducing of one another – invariably linked and dependent reproducing both weak ties, potential and realized, as well as strengthening social bonds.

Most publications, be they news media or academic articles, fail to accurately capture the essence of these exchanges, nor do they typically bring attention to the positive uses of SNS, just the nightly news doesn't talk about all of the good things happening on the same night of a crime. Yes, as we so often read in the newspaper or in privacy evaluation reports there are mishaps and negative interactions that occur as a result of Facebook. Future qualitative studies will hopefully verify[12] that much of the reason students aren't afraid of the possible consequences is because they are outliers and students feel they have a good measure of control over the system and their presented identity. What's more forthcoming in their usage and interests is Facebook's enhancement of strong and weak ties and virtually limitless set of opportunities for digital social engagement and entertainment.

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[12] Namely, my interviews with the Facebook Project.

Over time Facebook has experienced a complicated evolution of privacy controls and options outside of the initial separation of networks and original educational email id requirement[13]. Participants were initially only able to adjust what types of people (such as friends or faculty) could see their profile but these options were later expanded to include direct control over what areas were released to others, even down to a specific individual basis. The introduction of the 'Newsfeed' wrought a near-catastrophic response when user habits were published overtly for the first time to the general populace (boyd 2006). Users could logon and see exactly who their friend broke up with the night before and the pictures another friend put up five minutes ago. The community rebelled against this change levying all sorts of complaints and threats – many of them even disabled their accounts in response. After a bit of a "calm down" (almost condescending) response by Mark Zuckerberg (2006), the solution came in the addition of more privacy options. Users were given the ability to adjust who saw information about them on the newsfeed and of what type. They could customize their newsfeed to tell them about the Facebook activities they cared about most about the people they cared about most. Despite Facebook's recent focus on addressing privacy concerns and fears in regards to the non-adult user population (Kelly 2007), which was likely in response to numerous complaints accrued over the last year and even a subpoena for information from the State Office of the Attorney in New York (Giannone et. al 2007), a new controversy exploded on the scene right around the time of this paper's writing.

Beacon,[14] a name that will forever live in infamy in the minds of Facebook privacy advocates, was a service meant to be invisible to general users that would keep participants informed of their friend's browsing activities on the general internet (but only for sites that were participating). The main issue with Beacon's deployment was that it was default opt-in, and allowed no ability for users to opt-out globally. This effectively meant marketers, friends, stalkers, and really anyone in between could very plainly see a given user's activities on websites such as Amazon.com. After a slow start MoveOn.org and numerous efforts by groups around the web including bloggers and petitions managed to capture Facebook's attention and provoke an official apology from Mark Zuckerberg (2007). The difference this time, however, is that the effort wasn't just on account of Facebook users – but to a larger media and web community collective (Stutzman 2007a). As Facebook has grown up into a large company they have become increasingly accountable for their actions.

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[13] New registrants were originally required to use an email address ending in .edu, thus keeping the network closed to anyone without a university-based email account.
[14] Which officially dubs itself a business solution that "Enables your customers to share the actions they take on your website with their Facebook friends." http://www.facebook.com/business/?beacon

MY PERSPECTIVE AS A RESEARCHER

I'd like, for a moment, to take a step out of the third person into the first and reconcile my perspective in regards to Facebook research. The purpose of my research is a logical result of a conglomeration of agendas and interests. My role as a natural participant in the system nearly from its beginning bestows me with the benefits typical of insider ethnography. I've been immersed in both face to face undergraduate life at UIUC as well as the Facebook side of it. Without even thinking about it I wield an array of understandings of indigenous meanings and can aptly enact as an ethnographic researcher in an online world. As a social science researcher I have a definitive and distinct interest in authentically describing and understanding the social systems of Facebook, including their benefits and drawbacks, egalitarian aspects and disparities, and other extensions of the face to face world. With my research I hope to inform a sometimes undereducated and misled populace and ultimately aid the use of Facebook for positive social change.

Though this paper is not about my unending ethnographic analysis of Facebook, I employ a great deal of knowledge informed by it in a general sense. Acknowledging bias is the hallmark of the modern day ethnographer, and to be sure I've got plenty of strong opinions. I myself am a very connected individual, subscribing to Malcom Gladwell's idea of connectors and social epidemics.[15] I'm an assertive user of Facebook and do my best to familiarize myself with all of its nuances and intricacies, dealing with everything from interface to user perceptions to types and methods of use. As a result of my personality and undergrad years at UIUC I boast over 820[16] UIUC network friends at the time of this writing and can tell you where I know every single one of them from and the context of our meeting or relationship. I check the site almost as much as I do my email - which is kept up in Outlook 2007 on one of my displays 24/7 – and that effectively means I'm visiting at least a dozen of times a day. I act as an administrator for multiple groups corresponding to student organizations, message my students about assignments, post videos about causes to fight cancer, drop my sister funny wall posts, scope out potential love interests, and have even been feeding this stupid Fluff Friend application lately. Suffice to say Facebook is an important facet of my life.

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[15] To understand what I mean go ahead and check out my essay, The Kevin Bacon Effect (http://jag85.com/facebook/publications/kevinbacon.html)

[16] For fun, go look at this number at the time you read this paper and see if it has gone up. http://uillinois.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1905936

I know many readers are squirming with a foul impression of me—the behaviors I listed aren't supposed to be those of an upstanding studious graduate student who spends his Friday nights reading tomes of Karl Marx and Barry Wellman[17]. How could a PhD student in one of the highest-ranked Library and Information Science schools in the US be playing around on Facebook? And that's' just it – at age 23 I can effectively bridge the world of formal academic research and cultivation of professionalism with the social transformation and identity formation catharsis most undergraduates fall through during college. I'm in touch and I'm motivated.

So where does this leave us in terms of my bias? First and foremost, I have an obvious focus on Facebook and not other systems of SNS. I've found more than enough to study on Facebook alone and comparatives between the different evolving systems of SNS are something I hope to delve into later in my studies. My world of research is also limited to just the scope of UIUC. I haven't traveled the country talking to individuals from all over like danah boyd, nor do I have massive amounts of data on all of Facebook's multiple networks like the HP Information Dynamics Lab did in 2005. Consequently, my examples only reflect Facebook and student life at UIUC.

From a sociological perspective I'm about as advantaged as they come. I'm a white, heterosexual, able-bodied male from an upper-middle class background. I'm an extraordinarily assertive extrovert and aspire to embody the antithesis of apathy. I have few, if any, irrational fears and generally have little to hide from the world about myself or my daily activities. I hail from a westernized, feminist American viewpoint and prefer a multidisciplinary (or sometimes anti-disciplinary) approach to social science. My resultant perspective on feminism, gender inequality, and the importance of digital discourse is at least somewhat influenced by this bias. I don't feel, however, that this invalidates or compromises my lived experience as a researcher or taints the questions of sociological analysis I ask. If anything it provides a great background to contrast them with.

At various times I will slip in and out of the first and third person in this work. I do this on account of my training in traditional writing style, where first-person was outright disallowed. Most of the section on theory is thus written in the third person, whereas my ethnographic analysis and observation will be relayed more often in the first person vernacular. With this out of the way, I'd like to move on to introduce my site of research.

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[17] For those of you who aren't insiders, these two aren't even close to comparable, it's a joke. Professor Wellman has written many great works, just not in the realm of Marx.

GROUPS ON FACEBOOK

The study featured in this paper looks into the happenings within a specific zone on Facebook, known as a group. Groups are essentially web pages that can be created by any user and are used for a variety of purposes. Some groups might be silly congregations, such as those who really liked the videogame Oregon Trail,[18] others might be jokes, like "Eating Babies for Fun and Profit,"[19] and others might correspond to offline organizations, like the College Republicans.[20] Groups can be bound to a specific network on Facebook (schools, geographic locations, workplaces) or span all of them as a global entity. Generally the interface encourages them to be searchable and categorized and group creators are able to invite people to become members. When someone becomes a member they are listed as so in the group members section (with a name and picture) and an entry for the group is added to the group memberships section of their profile.

People use and participate in groups in a variety of ways. Some members are passive, and might just read posts, whereas others may never visit the group again (after joining) and instead consider it to be a quick identifier to convey information about themselves to others viewing their profile (think Goffman (Goffman, 1959) impression management—groups are almost equipment or props in the image of a profile). A few members are very active and post media in the form of pictures, links, and videos. Many members post shout-out statements on the wall (a publicly and easily viewable comment zone) and others discuss topics in the forum area. Activity really varies by group and while the vast majority have few members and only a little activity[21] the lively ones can still be host to a great deal of performance of identity and roles. The average group size on Facebook is yet undetermined, though groups with over a million members are not uncommon, such as fans for Stephen Colbert,[22] and those numbering in the hundred of thousands seem moderately common.

Facebook group web pages feature the same sort of interconnectivity that is found everywhere else on Facebook. Many components are linked and menus are limited to clean easy to read typefaces and separators. They have a main central column and a side column. Upon visiting a group an observer will quickly notice its title at the top of the central column followed by the main information below,

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[18] http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2200826372
[19] http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2205106228
[20] http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204538346
[21] As determined by a paper presented at ASIS&T 2007 by Alla Zollers – it is not available for citation.
[22] See http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7406420086

including name, type (such as common interest, used for categorical searches), description and other contact information. Below this resides recent news in short text format, then photos, videos, and posted items all with potential thumbnail previews, a compressed view of the discussion board with a preview of three topics and post data and then the wall, a sort of simple guest-book like form that users can fill out to leave their remarks publicly on the page. Sitting neatly between the wall and discussion board section is a member listing area, with 6 linked thumbnail previews of random[23] members and the total members listing, which is linked to a search return for all members in the group. Each wall post contains the poster's name, time and date information, response options, and linked thumbnail picture preview, giving a robust impression as users glance about the page. Really just about everything is linked and tied to the face to face world with pictures. The right column has perhaps the most noticeable element of the group profile, its picture, which is generally pretty limited in size. Right beneath this are navigation and action options, such as the ability to view the discussion board, join the group, or if you are an administrator recruit or manage members and edit the group. Officers are listed below this, with linked names and subtitles pertaining to their position in the group. Related groups are found beneath this, with a link listing and category subtitle. Finally at the bottom comes the official group-type information and administrator(s). The layout is both organized and friendly, and adheres to sound principles of graphic design, information retrieval and display, and human-computer interface (HCI). The group architecture is both dedicated to linking people together, but preserves the normal separation of profiles and privacy seen on the rest of Facebook.

ORIGINS

So I'm not exactly sure when the idea for this project came up, but it had been on my mind for some time prior to the actual ethnography. I first noticed the research site when surfing about the profile belonging to a person I had just added as a friend on Facebook. At the time I had this person to be someone fairly progressive-minded… until I ventured down to take a gander at their group memberships. She had a rather strikingly strong one listed, **"There are just some things guys should do for girls. Period."** I thought to myself that perhaps she was just a little bit misguided, being a freshman and all, and that perhaps the group was satirical in nature. I clicked on it to investigate and was rushed with the image of countless almost 10-commandments type rules distinguishing how men should act in

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[23] Well maybe not random. My personal observation has lead me to believe these random return queues give priority to returning people you happen to know. Such a feature would make sense as it would encourage more connective use of the system. I haven't conducted a test on this yet

regards to women. I shook my head in dismay, thinking that it's strange how such sexist people could still exist among youth in this day in age. Then, as I routinely scrolled down and scanned the group I happened upon a number that made my jaw drop. One hundred and fifty thousand some members. Not a few hundred, like I was expecting, not even a hefty tens of thousands like many of the big groups on Facebook boast. No, this concentrated little digital atrocity played home to the membership of one hundred-fifty thousand. My shock was punctuated by initial anger and then mixed in with bewilderment—how could this many people possibly believe in something like this? I may be a feminist, but I thought this sort of thing was by and large on the way out...

After exploring some more I discovered that the sibling group, **"There are just some things girls should do for guys. Period."** was created in response and had only a mere thirty thousand some participants.[24] Immediately I could see that there was a disproportionate set of believers in this sort of sexist extravaganza. I tossed them my sister's way, who also had a similar reaction and we jointly decided that it would be the sort of thing worth a real set of critical eyes... should we ever find the time to do it.

Enter this semester, whereupon when offered an opportunity to pry into a new world with ethnography this group came to mind in a powerful way. I signed on, joined the group, deleted the trail from my newsfeed (in a bout of impression management – we wouldn't want my friends thinking I was suddenly gone crazy), and put my sociology hat on. The description of the site reveals a number of interesting aspects of mediation.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The most immediately striking point of the page for me is the Facebook group name: **There Are Some Things Guys Should Always Do For Girls. Period.** The title is in bold at the top of the page. The word 'period' falls on a completely separate line. Aligned on the right side is the category for the group – it is global and now boasts over 204,000 members, 177 of them being new. It's a rather forward and forceful name –it's clear that the group creator (and presumably group members) believes strongly in the statement. Separating 'period' likely denotes importance. The fact that this is the first item my attention goes to indicates my level of immersion as a user of the site – the interface and navigation elements have become almost transparent to me.

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[24] It has now grown to sixty thousand or so.

The page, like other groups on Facebook, has a sort of boxed layout, with areas of interest separated and organized. The top banner is dark blue with the 'Facebook' logo anchored at the bottom on the left, an area where is actually clips behind the main page frame. The position gives the appearance of layers.

Links having to do with interactions that traverse the network are found up on top. These include profile, edit (for your profile), friends, networks, and inbox. The Facebook logo is linked and brings you to your home page. The upper right includes links to home, account, privacy, and one to log out. The Friends link leads to a drop down containing the options: status updates, online now, recently updated, recently added, all friends, invite friends, and find friends. The networks link has a drop down leading to UIllinois (the UIUC Facebook network), browse all networks, and join a network. Finally, the inbox drop down includes the options: message inbox, sent messages, notifications, updates, and compose message.

A random ad is positioned below the left-side navigation. Since the ads change every time you visit the page it didn't seem useful to describe it in detail. The secondary links on the left are set to a light grey background. There is a search box with a drop down arrow next to it leading to more search options: basic search, find classmates, find coworkers, profile search, and browse. Next to the search box is the 'go button' which looks like a little magnifying glass, set to a light blue background.

Every group, event or profile has the capability of having a picture. This group has a picture of a couple, presumably (what looks to be) a male and female, sitting in the snow. They are positioned in the lower right of the picture frame. The male squats forward facing her as she sits back looking at him. The male is dressed in a dark blue coat and has long black hair. Zooming in reveals he is probably White or Asian, and looks to be pretty young. The female is in a turquoise jacket, with blue pants (or perhaps boots) with a white border around the hood that is likely soft fur-like material. She seems to have short hair and could easily be White or Asian, or perhaps Latina, it's quite hard to tell from the small picture. The background of the picture involves a long stretch of field covered in snow with a wall traveling into the background on the right side. Snowflakes are falling in the picture. A line of trees decorates the top of the wall. The male appears o be holding the female's hands in her lap.

Beneath the picture are some more navigation options. These change depending upon your group membership. Since I have joined the group as an ethnographer my options are as follows: view discussion board, invite people to join, and leave group. There is also an option button beneath these

called 'Share' which allows you to post a preview of the group to your profile or send in a message to a friend or friends.

Below the group operations navigation are officers, which in this case includes two links to profiles whose names are not to be revealed here. The group type is below this, which states "This is an open group. Anyone can join and invite others to join." Administrators are listed beneath this, which are the same as the officers in this case.

There's also a footer section. The footer is at the very bottom of the web page and is a sort of norm among websites. This page has a single link, 'report group' that is part of the self-policing setup of Facebook. Users can click on it to message tech support with issues. Beneath this are some site navigation items: the Facebook copyright stamp, and links for advertisers, businesses, developers, about facebook, terms, privacy, and help.

The massive main frame extends deeply into the page. It includes an information section, which lists group info including: name (stated before) and the group type, which in this case is 'common interest – friends,' which is also linked to other groups of this same category. Underneath this is the description. Posted items follows this up, which at the time of observation was empty.

Then there is the discussion board. It displays the 3 most recent topics out of several thousand (3386 total at the time of the observation) discussion topics. Additional information is given below each topic header, indicating the number and age of responses. Members can click on the 'start new topic' link if they so choose. The Members section comes next indicating the group membership total. 6 random thumbnail pictures of member profiles are shown beneath, with a link option to see all.

Finally there is the wall section, which lists the 10 most recent posts out of a total of 25,175 wall posts (at the time of observation). Visitors are able to choose between writing something on the wall or seeing all of the posts. The most recent post at the time was written while I was doing my observation.

Of greatest importance to this analysis is the 'Description' section of the page. It contains a list of 40 items in sequence numbered from 0 to 39, each stating rules or suggestions that guys should abide by when dealing with girls. The full list is available in the appendix.

The analysis of both this list and the values embedded in the interface will follow in the interpretation and analysis section.

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Of all the different and perplexing social conundrums sociologists have tackled over the years, the notion of identity is perhaps among the most elusive and emergent. Depending on which social science you consult, identity may relate to self-image and individuation or to ascribed and achieved social roles and the process of negotiating one's own place and meaning within a greater societal context. Or, as Abelson and Lessig (1998) define identity, it may be reduced to *"a unique piece of information associated with an entity... a collection of characteristics which are either inherent or assigned by another"* to which he later adds *"the skills that a person possesses can also become part of one's identity."* Identities are fluid, and often times difficult to fit into a simple definition. Two people might share defining characteristics, such as being blond or female and knowing how to fly an airplane, but in practice their identities are never the same. Identity evolves over time and therefore remains in some state of constant change. You may always be identified as human, but go from young to old and naive to wise. This paper does not seek to postulate an all-inclusive definition of identity, but instead situate an understanding of it within two main contexts: the digital environment and gender.

DEFINING IDENTITY

By addressing the perspectives presented by Adam Smith, Mead, Freud, and Lacan[25] one arrives at two primary notions of the self: an internal perception and an external social identity (boyd 2002). We as human (sentient) beings all have a comprehension of self (self-concept), which is often understood through self-evaluations that involve consistent attributes (e.g. "I am enthusiastic"). In other words, one's internal identity consists of physical, psychological, philosophical and moral aspects of self (boyd 2002). This self-concept is a prerequisite (but distinguished from) self-consciousness (or awareness), which is an acute sense of self that is dependent upon context (private or public). No aspect of one's persona is self-evident, however. They are demonstrated relative to other actors who serve as the basis of reflexive measurement. Internal identity is evaluated by history, experience, and interaction, which in turn gives rise to social identity. Both the actor (and their various complexities) conveying a representation and the context in which it is extant form the social ipseity (identity). The incessant and necessary interplay between the two worlds, which is retroactive, perpetual, and heterogeneous, is a fascinating dichotomy. This can be likened to many other classic debates,[26] such as

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[25] And surely others, this is a rather insufficient list.
[26] The two featured here were ones the author ran into on Wikipedia, surely many others exist.

situationism (external situational factors) verses traits and motivations (patterns of behavior, thought, or emotion that remain stable but differ by individual) or to structure (race, class, gender, ability, etc…) verses agency (individual capability, freedom of choice). [27] This paper just explores just two complications. Portions of this work will relate to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective approach to the construction of identity but in order to save space his work will not be explained here.

IDENTITY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

As the internet became mainstream in American during the 1990's many researchers investigated the various possibilities and implications it would hold for the social conception of identity. In many ways identity as we know it in an everyday sense could not immediately port to the web, much like it could not be directly replicated in written form or over the telephone. By the end of the decade some researchers were addressing how the internet had encouraged the vision of identity as a sort of commodity to be valued, verified, and transferred (Abelson and Lessig 1998, Camp 2004). Others sought to dispel the negative associations that had begun to accrue regarding the online interactions that mediate identity and personality. One such pair was McKenna and Bargh (2000) who were among the first to assert (in response to popular opinion and fears) that the internet could have no single, simple effect upon all people, defining who they are in ways such as inducing loneliness or causing introverts. They instead explained that people use the web for all kinds of reasons and motivations and that it was not, like most technologies, inherently good or bad in terms of the kinds of interactive social effects it could have on individuals. Their article, *Plan 9 From Cyberspace: The Implications of the Internet for Personality and Social Psychology*, calls upon the works of dozens of authors to spot four major digital architectural differences that could alter the conditions in which identity works.

First, is anonymity, be it determined through screen nicknames or software to mask ones locations in the world. In many ways one may achieve this effect simply by being unknown to other users – a poster might even use their real name but if they're talking to people half way around the world they have never met (and will never meet) then they are just about as anonymous. McKenna and Bargh go further to explore the implications this has for identity stating, *"When an individual's self-awareness is blocked or seriously reduced by environmental conditions (e.g. such as darkness, presence of large numbers of other people, [the internet]), deindividatuion can occur (Diener, 1980; Zimbardo,*

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[27] Structure and agency is a question that many have weighed in on, including Simmel, Elias, Parsons, Bourdieu, and more…

1970)." The net result of this effect may come in many forms, ranging from flame wars to helping to spread news about oppressive government regimes. Previous to the dawn of the internet anonymous conversations were not the norm, whereas on the early (and even late) web they are common among human to human interactions. By alleviating a sense of self and accountability people become more likely to act on the basis of situational cues instead of internal motivations (McKenna and Bargh 2000). Furthermore, the assurance of an obscured identity facilitates the potential for the construction of personas not ones own, what might be referred to as "Identity Tourism" (Nakamura 2002). Online (anonymous) people might feel safe enough to try out alternative ways of being. This might be good, such as coming out of the closet in the digital world, or might be bad, like the white men impersonating Asian Geishas in online games, as Nakamura describes in her book. Much of this has changed, as of late, however. While general forums and things like response threads to videos on YouTube leave users as (deindividuated) anonymous beings, increasingly more websites do their best to tie identities to agents. Bloggers have profiles, people invest their offline-selves in dating websites and social networking, and countless photographers and artists (trained or casual) transport themselves visually to the digital realm daily. Games like World of WarCraft still offer new spaces where fantastic identity tourism can easily take place whereas Second Life encourages users to reflect their first-life selves.

danah boyd (2006, 2007a), on the other hand, examines another side of anonymity when she explains the forth feature on her list of influences wrought by the digital context. Audiences are in some sense invisible as well; you may never be quite sure for whom you are performing while online. We construct our audiences, both real and imagined, with a certain degree of uncertainty unknown in the offline world. Though she doesn't explore the notion extensively, the role of the anonymous audience could play a very significant role in ones role-taking and impression management. Not everyone really consciously thinks about the invisible audience, and those that do have to anticipate just who they are. In many places in Cyberspace this seems to be more like an art then an analysis.

The second point discussed by McKenna and Bargh (2000) is the lack of a physical self online. In person our identity is constructed, in part, by instrumental physical characteristics and interactions involving non-verbal cues. In many places online this is turned upside down, so much to the point that people who meet online are simply more likely to like one another than if they had met in person. McKenna and Bargh (1999, cited in 2000) found that people who met first online walked away with a conception of the person they had just met that more closely resembled that person's own identified image. With services like Skype and social networking becoming more popular (not to mention those

such as Second Life and 3D games) this disembodiment, as boyd (2002) refers to it, is less and less prevalent. It would seem that many people wish to extend their physical-selves online as much as their intellectual personas. The third and related notion proposed by McKenna and Bargh (2000) is that of virtual space. Offline people often meet one another as a result of their close proximity, but on the web distance and space work come in variant forms. Locations are often conceptualized as web address (URL) or in the context of a specific program, and areas of the web (which may be considered or organized into zones) define groupings (exhaustive or not) of these in various ways (Kang 2000). The distance between these realms becomes more about time and access then it does literal proximity. Other variables, such as language and other skills clearly mediate this process, but on the whole it's possible for a person to engage in frequent interaction with someone very far away from themselves. The web also connects *more* people who might otherwise be physically separated. The extent to which people actually do look up strangers is a point of contention, but surely sites like eHarmony.com have capitalized on this facet of the architecture. Virtual communities have the capability of spanning contents and, perhaps with sites like Wikipedia and YouTube, languages and cultures as well.

Finally, McKenna and Bargh settle on their final point of difference: the temporal context of the web. Online many communications are capable of being asynchronous and users are able to conduct many at once. Even in live chat sessions, such as AOL Instant Messenger, the social norms for native users[28] seem to have adapted to the time management of the web; users bounce from one conversation to another and other distractions without a feeling of heavy or immediate commitment. Online communications are harder to interrupt and easier to think out, and users enjoy other advantages, such as being able to feel more in control and therefore more confident (McKenna and Bargh 2000, Caplan 2003, McKenna and Seidman 2005). Persons plagued with social anxieties or who are lonely might find refuge in the internet temporal context but also run the risk (as they might in other ways) of spending too much time there. Time also finds itself sped up in a funny way online. Since programs, patches, and optimizations come out so frequently the internet almost seems to age in dog years. Publishing books or even reports or articles becomes a furious and eternal exercise in catching up. Users learn to see elements as consistently unstable and never finished, or *Permanently Beta* (Neff and Stark 2004).

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[28] That is those who have grown up consistently using live-chat. This is stated purely from an insider perspective, without having knowledge of any reports of findings that indicate this behavior, but instead having observed it to be universal among people (in terms of culture, gender, class) who've grown up with live chat. Interpretations of emoticons, font decoration such as italics, and the capacity for parallel conversations varies considerably, however.

McKenna and Seidman (2005) follow up on some of the initially noted differences of digital identity in their chapter on *Social Identity and Self Online* included in the book *Cognitive Technology*. Like McKenna's previously mentioned work, this one draws upon the findings of dozens of authors. They note that while boosts to self-esteem that occur as a result of participation in identity-relevant groups only still only happen when participants have high levels of involvement they afford more individuals access via the net. As such there is increased likelihood these groups have more potential when extended online. The chapter also gathers and presents some benefits of social identification online, such as increased self-acceptance, decreased loneliness, estrangement, and isolation, as well as increased social support and the strong potential for the formation of close lasting relationships.

One of the most immediate quandaries of the transition from face to face to digital existence is the essential but connotation-plagued and contrived issue of metaphor. Sociotechnical systems are fundamentally tied to the use of metaphor to make themselves accessible. Interfaces are distributed throughout and indivisible from their systems, monitor and control a reductive oriented, indexical map of separate elements of multiple (potentially infinite) states, and act as an associational structure that permit agents to manipulate, alter, create, destroy, and replicate processes and objects to which they are independent (Fuller 2003). The digital representation of identity, at root, must be tied to metaphor in its manifestation and interpretation. People cannot intrinsically understand the 1's and 0's that make up the operations within a computer; interfaces are designed to make meaning and symbols out of the data to convey information. This introduces all manner of limitations and potential avenues for reinterpretation (or misinterpretation) of identity. Systems are erected to verify or authenticate 'users' (who are also emulations of code) that pay special attention to attributes and authorizations to confirm or shape identity (Camp 2004, Nakamura 2002, Lessig 2006). Naturally this adaption is ridden with deficiencies—the spatial properties of the physical world do not often translate properly in cyberspace, save for virtual worlds like Second Life or World of WarCraft, and even those have substantial discrepancies when compared to reality.

danah boyd (2002) identifies two key variances in the configuration of cyberspace that distinguish social behavior online: The power of architecture (the context created by the digital environment) and the disembodiment (physical presence and space as discussed earlier). Architectural differences are mostly notably elucidated by what she terms "a collapsing of context." Often less information is available about a person (or place) and less is conveyed in interactions in cyberspace than might happen in the face to face world. boyd further expands her explanation of collapsed context to

include Zahavi's (1997)[29] dual regard for signals. The first is an assessment signal, which is implicit and adjourned through observation and typically holds more weight in terms of reliability. The second is identified as a conventional signal, which is explicit and communicated through a medium that may heavily influence reliability. Since it is considerably more challenging to establish an assessment signal in most digital environments, users rely on conventional signals, and thus this restriction may diminish the reliability or authenticity of exchanges. Generally as ICT's have advanced, however, they have brought with them more ways to address disembodiment and more frequent and higher quality opportunities for conveying assessment signals. In some ways they may have even spawned new cues and signifiers in emergent contexts.

boyd also expresses an evolved explanation of the digital context, centered around the properties of mediated publics (boyd 2006, 2007a). Identity performance is couched in a different field of operations in the digital realm because it contains four conditions that determine its demeanor. The first is the attribute of persistence. Communications made on the internet have the potential to remain forever inscribed in logs, web pages, and other forms of storage. Assertions between actors can therefore be asynchronous in nature. This also enables the second attribute, searchability. Permanently (or long-term) stored information means begs for indexing and organization and records of interaction can often be found with relative ease online. Google has created a miraculous front to an immensely powerful and comprehensive database—an increasingly inclusive and collective human mind. Third she highlights replicability, that is the fact that most data is easy to copy with perfection. This poses issues for a multitude of issues, from forgery to copyright and ownership. Finally, as mentioned earlier in relation to anonymity, boyd discusses the role of invisible audiences online.

IDENTITY ON FACEBOOK

The foundational understanding of identity does not change in the Facebook realm. The aforementioned dialectic of internal perception and external social identity remains strongly in place, but may be mediated in new ways. Facebook as a mediated digital public is referred to in this paper as an ecology (more than a system) in order to place emphasis on the heterogeneity of its actors and elements.

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[29] Zahavi, Amotz. "The handicap principle: A missing piece of Darwin's puzzle." *Oxford University Press*, New York: New York, 1997.

The Facebook ecology is a complex mesh of performance because everyone shapes the system and environment simultaneously and it in turn acts on them. As mentioned in the introduction, participation rates are very high and users check in to it daily to dive into the elaborate arena of interactions. The invisible audience is anticipated and in reality is comprised of many different audiences, just like the face to face world. A person might have a stage in a group that corresponds to a real-world group (say a sorority) or their profile itself might be comparable to a stage. Further, with the increased customizability, users have several stages within one big theater of performance, depending on the sections of their profile. The Thomas theorem raises an interesting point of conjecture: even if some students do not take seriously the happenings on Facebook, those that do will help to make the consequences of such happenings real. Talking to undergraduate participants reveals many stories of misunderstandings—everyone seems to have an example of a time relationship status was misinterpreted.[30]

Students take their coherent senses of self with them online, and in some cases may create new ones. The Facebook profile becomes a zone of dramatic realization, mystification, and the epitome of idealized self-presentation for some, and an exorbitant inside joke for others. The terrain of Facebook is mediated by its interface, which encourages, among other values, connection and community (as will be discussed). There are various 'places' available on the system bounded by functions and audience like Facebook pages, groups, events, applications, the Newsfeed, sections of one's profile—all of which may extend into one another. Individual portions of these places might be considered social artifacts or props, to a degree, as they can be manipulated to influence context.

Facebook clearly fits boyd's proposition for a self-awareness enabling tool (2002). It does so by acting as a rather successful bridge between offline and online relationships and as such carries many natural social contexts with it. The automation and organization behind the interface is an impressive feat in information retrieval and sorts data in regards to temporal aspects (most recent news), relevancy to a given user (the information they care about, like their friends, groups, events, and applications), all in a compressed but expandable fashion (just enough to not be overwhelming but with opportunities for delve into any single area). Above all, users can develop an accurate vision of their identity online, visualizing it and custom tailoring their profile to their heart's content. Native users know who they are in the context of Facebook and can regulate their privacy settings and manage their profiles to ensure they create exactly the audience they would like to have. The complexity of the available privacy tools

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[30] As is quickly becoming apparent in the interviews for the 2008 Facebook Project…

even allows for participants to establish profiles for multiple audiences. To top it off, the graphical interface that makes all of this possible is friendly, efficient, and malleable.

Cues can be given (or given-off) in multiple places on Facebook. The profile serves as a representation of both appearance, such as pictures, defined characteristics, and group identities expressed through membership, as well as mannerisms, like posts on walls, status announcements, and chosen applications. Participant actions in applications, on pages, groups, and through the use of events can also overtly or covertly express identity. The Newsfeed might grab information that was overtly expressed (intended) for one audience, and pass it to another entirely. To sufficiently explain the nearly limitless opportunities for communication in the pocket-knife of functionality that is Facebook is beyond the scope of this paper.

Facebook does not fit precisely with McKenna and Bargh's points of a distinguished digital architecture. Anonymity is to some extent possible (makings ones profile contain fake information or avoid divulging much of anything entirely), but strongly discouraged. In fact, Facebook's terms of service require people authentically represent themselves (no one can pretend to be superman) and, as mentioned in the introduction, Facebook's success is largely based on connection to real-world identities and communities. Global groups and pages allow people to enter into a state of deindividuation, however, in the same way that a person can blend into a crowd in New York. In some ways the interface encourages both identification and freedom of speech—many actions on the site result in picture posting of an agent who is free to say what he or she likes. At the same time when participants are members of the audience they remain invisible, like walking around cloaked in the dark. In fact the terms "Facebook creeping" and "Facebook stalking" are perhaps as popular as "friending."[31] Identities are of course revealed when interaction is to be had but Facebook is the kingdom of the passive aggressive and introvert, and still in many ways ruled by the extrovert active assertive (who are able to have the most amount of influence with the viral propagation system). The environment (events, groups, applications, and often connections and initiations) is knit by the assertive people, but yet at the same time is one where passive people can easily operate. Students may easily shift in and out of anonymity in an almost hybrid fashion.

Much of Facebook's success has been induced by its visual interface. Besides being user friendly and aesthetically eloquent, the interconnectivity and interaction between profiles and users is

[31] Insider language noted in the Facebook Project 2008 interviews.

considerably tied to pictorial displays. Users are more likely to check out profiles of others with pictures they find attractive or interesting,[32] often engage with picture galleries on a profile when possible, and easily jump from one profile to another through profile picture thumbnails or by clicking on tags of users in pictures or videos. Indeed, the first thing viewed about a given profile in the return in a search queue is the picture. With its heavy reliance on pictorial representation the creation of a Facebook profile also helps to fight the feeling of disembodiment that afflicts digital travelers as they embark on their journeys through the web. Fragments of real world spaces can be indirectly mapped into the digital space through the use of pictures, audio, and video.

Facebook participants are still able to transcend distance, however. The Facebook system is built to emulate real-world barriers which are incarnated in the form of networks. Some of these might intersect, such as a person who goes to school and is part of both that school's network and the network corresponding to the town the school is located within. Distance in terms of time, however, is virtually non-existent, as Facebook performs quickly wherever access happens quickly—the limiting factor is ones internet connection, not slow servers. The website is simultaneously gives limited access to a massive pool of unrelated individuals and encourages people to 'bump into' ones they might know through functions like 'friends of friends.' Certainly language and culture become ways of creating distance or barriers between 'locations' on Facebook as well, but with the advent of global groups the fact that the system is becoming increasingly enacting as a convergence of all of the functions of the web, more users are brought together on Facebook.

Facebook does seem to match the temporal effects described earlier by McKenna and Bargh (2000), and is built from the ground up as a *Permanently Beta* ecology (Stark and Neff 2004). Facebook also raises further implications in regards to boyd's (2007b) notions of persistence, searchability, and replicability. The entire system is built around search systems which are dependent on dynamic information. A person's profile could easily contain a track record of all of the groups they once belonged to, or it could be the latest and greatest modulation of their persona. Aspects of profiles and groups, as well as their actions are then refurbished and pressed up in the Newsfeed, which is entirely dependent upon replicability. Pictures become jointly owned as others are tagged to them[33] and

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[32] The 2006 FBP data set suggests this; about 40% of users often or always investigated pictures of people who had attractive or interesting pictures, and 77% of people often or always viewed pictures of a profile they were visiting (if available).
[33] Anyone tagged to a picture may remove their own tag if they so wish.

applications thrive on passing media around the network; almost the entire system is built on viral flows of information.

Keep this picture of Facebook's digital architecture in mind for the coming sections.

GENDER IDENTITY

The social construction of gender is perhaps a more traditional point of conjecture in sociology. Gender, in a broad scope, can be considered a group identity, but not surprisingly, it breaks down to a web of cross-hashed intersections between many group identities such as race, ethnicity, ability, class, sexual orientation, and more. To this effect Mary Hawkesworth (1997) captures the complexity and heterogeneity quite aptly in her article *Confounding Gender*:

> *"Gender has been analyzed as an attribute of individuals, as an interpersonal relation, and as a mode of social organization. Gender has been defined in terms of status, sex roles, and sexual stereotypes. It has been conceived of as a structure of consciousness, as triangulated psyche, and as internalized ideology. It has been discussed as a product of attribution, disciplinary practices, and accustomed stance. Gender has been depicted as an effect of language, a matter of behavioral conformity, a structural feature of labor, power, and cathexis, and a mode of perception. […] It has been characterized as difference and as relations of power manifested in domination and subordination." (Hawkesworth 1997)*

Inequalities and power disparities, as they relate to gender, then, are consequentially complicated. For instance, Emily Kane (2000) emphasizes differences between Black, white, and Latina women in their attitudes pertaining to patterns of employment and family, and shows that different racial groups of women see the extent and origins of gender inequality differently. She finds that in many cases Chicanas and black women were more acutely aware of the power differences between men and women in society than their white counterparts. Recent developments in thought pair feminism inseparably with queer theory and LGBT rights, and even the tool of gender examination itself, feminism, is quite contested. As Suzanna Walters relates, *"feminism and feminist theory are themselves the subject of much critical revision and rethinking, particularly in light of both structural shifts (changes in family life, increasing numbers of women in the workforce) and ideological developments (renewed media attacks on feminism, the backlash phenomenon, the rise of right-wing Christian antifeminism and "family values")"* (1996). For all of this opposition and complexity, however, there is value in

maintaining gender as an analytic category and investigating the causal role it might play in determining social relationships (Friedman 1991). In particular gender roles, statuses, and stereotypes that might be associated with gender are one way of measuring inequalities between men and women. Many behaviors interlaced into the social constructions of what it means to be a male or a female help to perpetuate these inequities.

Therefore, if gender roles and relationships take place online then researchers must bring with them diverse mindsets in studying cyberspace. New challenges, like those mentioned above and still yet others undiscovered (or unmentioned here), will likely surface as a result of the digital mediums of exchange. Furthermore if the web provides complications to the representation of identity on the whole, then all of the aspects related to gender identity (race, class, etc…) will invariably find themselves affected. This paper's perspective in considering gender is limited to just sighting face-to-face world inequalities related to gender that manifest on Facebook. Learning to identify these continuations of offline disparities in the digital environment is key to eliminating them in the long run.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

So given this understanding of the impacts of digital architecture and gender how might a researcher move forward to study a group such as "**There are Some Things Guys Should Always Do For Girls. Period.**"? In this case it is best to start with introductory and inductive exploratory questions. For the extent of this study I asked the following:

1. What types of people join this group?
2. How does the environment mediate interactions and members, both in terms of the interface and the group description?
3. What sort of discourse is taking place?

The accumulation of this series of questions consequently addresses the final overarching question: how does sexism get perpetuated on and through this digital community?
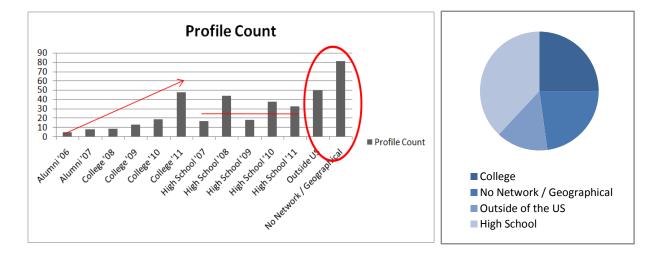
STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research exhibited here is really very preliminary. The ethnographic study was run as a side-project in parallel with a more significant (and unrelated) interview series for a qualitative methods course. The IRB review process for the interview project took approximately 4 weeks to complete and

the ethnography project spanned the time in between. It actually only involved 3 sets of fieldnotes in total. All of the data came from one Facebook group (as previously mentioned) and within that only one discussion post was examined in depth. The information discussed here came from three primary sources: the **interface and design** of the website, observations and description of the actual group **environment**, and the limited **discourse** observed. Since the study was so short (approximately 9 hours of observation) no key informants were really identified—in fact most discussants had only a few posts. In all, it was a very short and very constrained study, not meant to be a long-term ethnography but more a glimpse into an intriguing Facebook group.

THE LIMITATION OF BEING A HUMAN MEASUREMENT DEVICE

All of the data was gathered online, of course, with myself logged in and publicly observing the group. The benefit of a perfectly replicable environment allowed me to capture quotes perfectly and inscribe them in a double-column fieldnote format, noting my analysis as I went along. The two biggest limitations, I feel, were the length of the study and my own biases in regards to feminism. I couldn't help but read down the list and get angrier with each item. The group really seems to be structured around the contention of gender roles and I often felt myself sucked into the debate and feeling far from anything resembling scientific. Autobiography is becoming recognized as a legitimate method but honestly logging on and arguing (in notes or in actual discussion, it doesn't matter) doesn't really feel like real research to me. I tried to expand my entourage of negative reactions by clinging to content analysis and really basic statistical observations at first, in an attempt to avoid losing myself in the setting. It seems like most people who take on ethnography find the most unusual exotic culture they can and jump in head first, here I was poking around a group on a service I've spent the last two years studying that I happened to whole-heartedly take issue with. It seems to implicitly raise the epistemological issue of conflict of interest. Regardless, the exercise did unearth some worthy findings, particularly those related to interface in general that I might take with me into the future. I present this study with full knowledge of its lack of viability and long-term analysis as an opening exploration.

In a Facebook group full of 200,000 thousand people to answer the question of just who resides there with qualitative methods would likely take a lifetime. Certainly there are some key players and consistent posters but explain who's there overall is definitely different then who there is most active or influential. In stride with my belief in multi-method research I actually took to answering this question with a very simple statistical analysis. I used a random number generator to summon up a listing of 38 different page numbers to visit in the group member index and noted exactly 383 different profiles. With each profile I noted its gender (members self-identify on their own profiles) and network affiliation. By examining 383 profiles I could say at a 95% confidence level that my statistical observations of the group were within 5% of the actual numbers. More important than this accuracy, however, is what the observations revealed substantively. In all the group actually has many more women than men, females outnumber males approximately 2 to 1. Assuming that most members believer in the title and rule/suggestion listings on the site (which is as yet unproven)[34] this implies that women are more likely to believe in the founding principles of the group. The next point of interest requires a couple of figures to drive home the relevance:

The group, as it would happen, is dominated by people in high school and contains many people who have profiles affiliated with places outside of the US. In fact the largest single portion of the population is those with no network or who have a geographical affiliation. This actually disrupts the common notion that Facebook is filled with mostly college students—tens of thousands of these

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[34] If one could safely assert this notion in a more global context (which they probably cannot) it raises an intriguing question: are more invested in maintaining specific gender roles than men? This is just speculation at this point but still pretty interesting.

members are younger and from outside of the country. There seems to be some amount of turbulence in membership amongst high schoolers but we can also observe a definitive trend of fewer members as you get higher in age. This might be a function of membership on Facebook in general – the service has only been around since 2004 and with the majority of first joiners coming in high school or college (they had to, your email ID was required) naturally overall on Facebook there may be fewer older people in general. Regardless we can observe two really big things about what types of people join this Facebook group: they are more likely to be female, and they are more likely to be young. They are also more likely to be associated with a network other than a college network. This backdrop of the membership provided an interesting point of contrast for me when it came to discourse analysis.

FACEBOOK AS A DIGITAL SPACE: INTERFACE

In any face to face world ethnography researchers carefully observe their environment and become a sort of unit of measurement. They learn over time to become comfortable and interact with the various people going about their business in the site of research. I did much of this online but was able to do so initially in an invisible fashion, observing without others knowing it. I was, in a sense, their invisible audience, until I revealed myself. I was able to do this because of the interface at hand.

Just like in advertising when sometimes the presentation of a product even alters how customers think it tastes (Gladwell 2007), the interface, layout, demeanor, and interaction mediated by the systems of Facebook play a crucial role in fabricating the space for participant actors. The arrangement of the group and the availability of information there helps to determine the importance of certain elements. Based on my collected observations I identified three key themes at play in the design of the group: **sharing and connection**, **activity and involvement**, and the **mediating factors of interface**; sometimes known as the dialectic of content and form.

In truth there are too many examples to count, so I will present a few here to give a feeling for what I mean. The interface pushes users to share and connect with one another in a variety of ways. In the case of this specific group it literally contained the instructive text reading "This is an open group. Anyone can join and invite others to join." Through this the interface outright says this is an open and welcoming environment. Membership is not determined by investigation or approval, but instead is an open door to all that choose to step through. If there were a listing of related groups beneath this item, as there are in many other groups, users would be able to see ways others in the group are connected. They are encouraged to connect to others by sharing the group. A literal 'share' button exists beneath

the join/invite area that can be used to loop in others who aren't on Facebook. The groups categorization is even listed as a "Common Interest" among friends, displaying a shared perspective or connection. Whether or not the participants believe in these values the interface encourages and applies them.

The same could be said for the portrayal of activity and involvement. Those who find the group in a search queue or check up on it in their groups page are confronted with a report on its latest activity—in my case it was the gain of several members and new discussion posts. The interface gives statistics like this all over the place to relay non-specific interactions that are afoot in the group. When I visit the page I can see the activity that has taken place recently in wall posts and read about the sheer numbers of people who are doing things (discussing, posting, joining) with the group. Photos, videos, and posted items are all presented to me to reflect activity that could (or has) taken place in the group. The search options for the forum are regulated by post popularity and how recently it was contributed (to). All of these elements give a lively picture of the group.

Finally, the interface also mediates the ways the group can be used. There are restrictions, such as the left alignment style of the site (a western setup) or the constrained navigation options, which are emphasized in their priority by listing and location. By placing the terms of use link at the bottom of the page Facebook does not direct much attention to the legal underpinnings of the site, but by putting pictures of members in a highly visible spot they guide them to engage with others. This is not an insidious design necessarily, and in many ways might be functional. It could, however, constrain the ways users can engage with the site. For instance, many appear to use the wall like someone could use a live-chat service like AOL instant messenger, by posting back and forth within the span of a few seconds to respond to the previous poster. Facebook did not design it to be used this way as each time you go to post the form is refreshed; furthermore you can delete your own wall posts, unlike statements made in live-chat. Wall and discussion posts also require that the poster's picture be placed next to them, forcing a verification of identity (even if imprecise). The form fields don't filter out swear words or certain languages, which might imply that they rest upon the value of free speech, and yet at the same time you can only enter in a certain number of characters before your post is turned away. Overall, users have only a limited level of control over the interface – they can dictate how they use many parts of it—such as what content they put up or the way the engage each item—but they cannot alter the underlying boundaries of the code. If the color blue for some reason deeply offended them the best they would be able to do is report the page to Facebook, who would probably brush them off as

out of their mind. While taking issue with the color of the page might be rightfully dismissed, more important elements, like say whether or not a user can list their ethnicity or not state their email address, hold more significant implications.

This debate of course, is to some extent not very new. Old print-media came with interface limits in the size and design of paper or colors available. A reader might have been able to write back to the author demanding a change, or supplying a contribution. The digital architecture of the medium, as discussed earlier, alters this system in regards to time, distance, bodies, and identity.

FACEBOOK AS A DIGITAL SPACE: THE ENVIRONMENT

If this Facebook group were a room, it'd be pretty strange. Over 200,000 some people from all over the place would claim to have a membership to this room, but only a minute portion (at least 145 of them) would visit the room with any frequency. Anybody entering would be immediately confronted with a giant list of instructions stapled to the wall. Some might not read them, basing their membership off the title on the door and others might hang out without reading the list. Regardless outsiders could and would visit and hold the group accountable to the list that describes the purpose of the group. In the case of this Facebook group the list presents a very strong indication of what members (should) believe in. The entire description is contingent on a 40 point series (going from 0 to 39, point 0 was likely added later). A later update to the group indicated that they were taken to be suggestions, but this contradicts the way most of them are written, as will be seen. There were several common themes inherent in the list:

1. Each item was given with **limited rational**, sometimes in a **contradictory** manner; they were **interpretive** because they were vague, but **inflexible** because of the use of strong commanding words.
2. Many items make **assumptions about the audience** reading them (presumably the group members).
3. They were often related to **compassion, care-taking,** and **gratitude**.
4. To a lesser extent they alluded to **tradition, religion**, and employed **condescending language**.
5. And of interest to this study, they relied on many **female and male gender roles and stereotypes**.

The purpose of this ethnography was not to do a mere content analysis of the group's description, so for the extent of this paper I'll only give analysis of a few excerpts from the list. Readers can look at the Appendix and find many more instances if they're interested.

Perhaps one of my favorites in the grouping was point number four, which goes as follows:

"4. Play one of the songs that would make any woman weep like the little girl she once was (but in a good way). A brief list includes, but certainly isn't limited, to:
"You & Me" by Lifehouse
Anything by Frank Sinatra
Any rendition of "Everything I Do, I Do it for You"
"Collide" by Howie Day
"Out Of My League" by Steven Speaks
And MOST IMPORTANTLY "Question" by the Old 97's (if you propose to a girl with this song, she is putty in your hands)."
("Putty in your hands" is not meant to promote "using women" in any way. This group does not encourage guys to be polite in order to get her into bed.)

First, take note of the language used in the statement. Readers are instructed to play. Not 'you might play' or 'you could play' but a definitive command *to play* songs that make women weep and become little again. The rationale given for why a guy should play these songs seems to be so that they can cause her to weep and become vulnerable but it is not understood or explained why a man would want a women in this state of being. Readers are left to interpret when they should play these songs but also know that they *must* play one of them. There seem to be a few contradictions here, too. The list includes, but is not limited to, and yet there is a strong command to play. If it were a set of suggestions likely such strongly commanding language would not be used, there seems to be a conflict of emphasis. The author also inserts several defensive statements within parenthesis. The "but in a good way" seems to imply a shared understanding of what it means to be a crying little girl (and how that's good). It's also interesting to see how the author switches back and forth in using woman and girl. In my own experience the referral is tied to age, as most would expect, but the use of the term girl may extend into adulthood. Rarely would anyone refer to a mother as a girl, but often female youths in their 20's seem to be referred to as girls instead of women. Suddenly age and maturity enter into the question – a woman is reduced to putty child, weakness incarnate, by a man. She is stripped of all of her own agency

and becomes comparable to a moldable form. Remember those countless instance in pop culture (and worse in past paradigms of academe) of women brushed off as irrational beings driven and masterminded by their emotions?[35] The defensive comment at the end only brings in another stereotype about men—it assumes the role of moral regulation, advocating that men not make women vulnerable to have sex with them. The fact that a woman is referred to as an object to be molded, or set into a vulnerable state constructs an image of femininity as weak and emotional. Additionally, if you read over the list of songs you'll notice they're really intended for a certain audience. Women 60 years of age or who are deaf or who live in India and speak English (I observed at least 6 profiles belonging to Indian women) probably aren't going to be reduced to tears from You and Me by Lifehouse. The list is associated with what I would term as a mainstream white, middle-class American youth audience and really constructs a very constrained view of what romantic songs can be.

Clearly my assessment is pretty harsh and comes from a more literal interpretation. Even if I were to take it loosely it feels as if the author is suggesting a guy (not man or boy) should lure a woman into a state of vulnerability and insecurity with the use of a romantic song. Even based on such a loose interpretation I get the impression that the vision is based on an idea of women being weak or vulnerable and men being those who initiate or control relationships.

The list has a number of other good examples, here characterized are two related to casting men into stereotypical roles:

> *"29. Just because you're a guy doesn't mean you are completely incapable of calling when you say you will, it just means you are highly incapable of it. There are few acceptable answers to, "Why didn't you call?", & being male is not one of them."*

> *"34. At least do everything in your power to keep cursing to a minimum while around her. If you can, cut it out period while around her, or cut it out of your vocabulary. Women don't want to hear it, guys don't care about it, adults don't want to hear it, it doesn't impress employers, and you sure won't want your children or someone else's to hear it!"*

The statement "Just because you're a guy" seems to imply that it's a matter of ontology that males are incapable of a fundamentally social action—calling based on a prior communication. To allege that because someone is a male (socialized) they are highly incapable of something is a stereotype and

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[35] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1PrG2p1WDU for an upsetting example.

assumption. The author doesn't state why he believes this and instead lays a sort of condescending smack-down moral regulation on men. Here he characterizes men as insensitive or irresponsible, which I feel is based on gender stereotypes. The next statement hinges on another theme found throughout the list: men as the ones who hold the power (take initiative). The statement makes all kinds of assumptions about the audience here – what women want, what guys care about, what adults or employers wish to hear, and the way the audience would want their children raised. Mostly I just don't think it's fair to assume that only men swear and women don't, and to suggest that women would be bothered by cursing. To me it indicates another instance of implying men are insensitive or irresponsible, and an elaboration of women as weak—men must keep harsh swear words from their meek ears.

And to finish this all off, I'll give just one last set of examples:

"27. When she feels at her worst, tell her she looks her best."

"24. Offer her your jacket/sweatshirt. (Note: you may not see that particular item of clothing for a while, if ever again)"

"6. Find out what her favorite flower is and buy them for her randomly (regardless of the situation you might be in). A simple yet profound truth: a single rose says more than dozens of anything else. (I encourage the women to not allow a guy to "prove himself worthy" through gifts and flowers and such. Trust is a precious thing and it should take a good chunk of time before he gains it back in your heart.)"

Feeling does not match appearance. Our appearance might reflect our feelings and vice versa, but not always. This assumes that appearance is so important to the woman that she will feel better when she looks better – especially in times of great emotional stress. To be honest I don't know that telling a woman she's pretty after her mom has died is going to do anything but feel like an insult. Again, context matters. Moreover the statement implicitly reinforces women being valued by their appearance. It doesn't tell them to tell her she's smart or caring or insightful or funny or any other darned compliment, just that she looks good. The second one is also related strongly to context but I extracted it not to bash its lack of specifics but instead note the way it implies it is permissible for women to steal items of clothing without asking. And then finally point six seems to have some flimsy logic. A single rose may not be worth more than a dozen diamonds, but more importantly it presents women as gate keepers

who determine a man's worth (or worthiness of trust). It illustrates a picture of men as wrong-doers who must be assertive to regain entry or access to a woman.

In total these forty points make several assumptions about the audience. They seem to suggest romantic relations between a man and woman, of those of a heteronormative character. They seem to be geared for youth, and directed and men, and many rest on shared understandings. At root many have compassion, care-taking, or gratitude as underlying values (it's nice to give someone your jacket if they're cold or play a song that reminds them of a joyful childhood) but articulate these values in such a way that they reinforce gender roles and stereotypes that in turn reflect inequalities in society. These include characterizing women as weak or vulnerable, women being gate keepers (in control of reception), and the importance of appearance in women. They also include characterizing men as immoral or in need of sexual regulation, men as insensitive or irresponsible, and men as in control of initiation. Overall the group paints this notion of a gentleman that is overwhelmingly restrictive: a white male of middle to upper class who is able bodied.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Talk in the group seems to take on a few themes. Due to time constraints I couldn't really engage in a lot of discussion or observation of discourse. I only observed the titles of the various discussion posts (remember there are thousands) and amongst them I identified a few themes:

1. Those having to do with relationships and romantics, often started by those seeking advice, complaining about the opposite gender, or indicating desired qualities in one gender.
2. Some dealt with sexuality, such as sexualized traits, like breasts or penis size, preferred sexual actions, the notion of homosexuality as a lifestyle, or virginity.
3. Some significant and hot topic posts discussed religious and political issues, such as the existence of God, the truth behind evolution, abortion, or the upcoming election.
4. And perhaps the largest count belonged to random items, such as post strings where one poster 'rated' the person above or below them, advertisements and music preferences.
5. A few posts featured resistance (discursive opinions) to the list, either addressing single items or the list on the whole.

By the time I got through observing the qualities of the environment my project was already winding down. I only had one week of formal fieldnotes pertaining to discussion analysis. To begin talk I decided to ask the general group what their political views were and read and respond to the results. I did it in part to try to unearth controversial subjects, and also to see if I could tease out the issue of gay marriage, which I feel is very related to gender roles and stereotypes. I got a few bites (gay marriage did come up, but feminism never did) and I responded with a lot of questions and pretty soon the conversation ballooned to 53 posts by 21 people in the span of 3 days. Looking back on it I wish I had asked about feminism instead.

The responses to my series started out with a little variance – almost nobody stated their political in a general fashion but instead broke them down by issue. Others rejected politics and claimed it to be stupid. Most of the people who responded to me were other college students, which was interesting, especially given that the group is filled with mainly high schoolers and those no in college networks. What was surprising was how they responded to me. Many of them, when I asked about their opinions about gender roles and the interpretation of the list, rejected the notion of an inflexible set of regulations. I promised them that I would not put quotes into publication and so won't feature them here but several of the most articulate and extensive responses suggested that respondents thought the list communicated a set of foundational ideals, such as communication, mutual respect, affection, and more. Many also felt that items were reversible on the basis of these founding ideals and that traditional gender roles are irrelevant or outdated. Several assaulted the notion of strict guidelines and literal interpretations. Somehow these individuals could exist in a group like this without a sociological consciousness of the sexist norms it perpetuates with its contextual framing. I don't know if they lurked just to pick fights with people or if the group was the site of their developing perspective, they just thoroughly surprised me. Their resistance led me to reconsider some of my own presumptions (members' perceptions of gay marriage as it relates to gender roles). Out of it all I mostly feel like I ought not dabble in an environment so upsetting that moral judgments might not only mediate scientific ones, but determine them.

I'd be more happy to relate their deviant perspectives if there weren't one tragic flaw: none of them explained why such general ideas (compassion, care-taking, gratitude, etc…) needed to be articulated or translated into such inflexible list statements with limited or no rationale. I related all of this in my final revealing (hopefully not snobby or condescending!) post to the group:

"I actually agree that the underlined ideas of the list (communication, showing respect, affection and whatever blend of the three) are great guidance - but then why not make a list of just those instead of the relatively strict set of pointers here (even the group name states quite harshly that there are prescribed behaviors that men should adhere to). And if it becomes an issue of could vs. should (a list of things you could do vs. should do) then why limited it so? A list of 'could' would span all kinds of types of people and contexts. Simply by making a limited, static list you [advocate] for certain behaviors, even if they're all ideas of things you 'could do.' If anything it ought to be dynamic, emergent, and determined by the collective."

I did reveal at the end of my observations my position as a researcher and assured participants that I wouldn't refer to any of them specifically to preserve confidentiality. I felt a bit obligated to explain what was going on from my end, even if it made no difference to the actors in the grand scheme of things.

This study only really begins to answer my research questions, as three and a half weeks worth of time would not permit enough opportunity to thoroughly investigate such a large Facebook group via qualitative-based study. Nevertheless, it provides some interesting findings. I've found this group to be a site for the performance of identity (gender roles) and social control, the assertion of shared knowledge/culture and group membership, a grounds for both critical and passing whimsical discourse, and even an environment that can forge discursive practices amongst its own members. Suffice to say, stating that all this surprised, intrigued, and disturbed me is, in short, an understatement.

It is the digital architecture that has enabled this group to exist as it does. For 200,000 people to come together in any capacity is an impressive feat, and this group does so on the principle of shared values and understandings related to gender. Users are able to contribute asynchronously and with a measure of deindividuation, disembodiment, and with a disregard for their distance between one another. The interface of the group channels users into certain behavioral patterns (reflexive and proactive) by encouraging connection and sharing, and displaying levels of activity and interaction. As Caplan (2003) and McKenna and Bargh (2000) note the web brings with it a propensity for the enablement of passive individuals or those who would otherwise engage in discourse. This group may provide an optimal outlet of (sexist and dialectic) expression for those who are finding themselves in a world that increasingly problematizes gender roles and stereotypes.

Observations of the description of the group are just the skeleton of the experience and yet they make up the bulk of what I examine here. The real interest lies in the meat between the bones—the wall and discussion posts. Though I haven't had the time to really dig deeply into the discourse the clues are all there. Post titles sprout up relating to an assumed Christian God and advice for all kinds of hopeless male romantics. Women perform submissive or particular gender roles through their expressions in posts. One male dared to defy the list item by item. Half of the responses to his approach were rational and argument-based… and the other half just (assumed and) made fun of him because he couldn't possibly have a girl friend. The atmosphere constructs the feeling that defiance of the so-called suggestions leads to failure in the romantic universe. The place serves as a public forum of sorts, with popular topics that might be considered disconnected, like rating other people in the group based on attractiveness or abortion, and other topics perhaps more apparently relevant, like homosexuality as a lifestyle and desired features in a potential mate.

Really, it's not that far from what one would expect of a group with such a variety of perspectives from a youthful American audience. The digital architecture changes some of the ways people exchange information in the joint but at the end of the day it's the same topics of gender and sex that relate offline-world roles and statuses. The group, if anything, reflects that these issues are still contentious offline and feminists still have their work cut out for them. The variance in perspectives within the group and lack of consciousness in regards to its sexist nature only make this an even more daunting task. Ulterior functions of the mandates are another question entirely. I'd suspect on some level the author probably wishes to affirm his views and values by creating a group and seeing the support for it grow. And on another level he likely poses the rules in such a way so that people engage with them and debate how they should be interpreted.

Gender studies (and feminist sociology) should look to Facebook as a primary performative realm where stereotypes might be influencing greater numbers of individuals than ever before. New avenues to raise awareness and combat sexism need to be developed in response to its perpetuation online. In the scope of Facebook this could be oppositional groups, or resistance movements. In the face to face world it should include expanding the curriculum of gender and women studies courses to include discussion of the digital aspects of and influences on identity. The partial answer to the question of who frequents the group helps to provide a target audience: high schoolers and youth outside of college. The list of items indicates the gender roles and stereotypes they may believe in and the discourse surrounding reveals their interpretation. An educator can find a good road map to assessing and addressing these beliefs.

EVALUATION

As I've mentioned I wasn't completely happy with my research. I felt like I was too steeped in bias and that my measurements and observations were clouded heavily by my feminist perspective. I entered the picture with a little bit of a perception of wisdom and experience and perhaps should not have. I feel that to break myself of these beliefs and biases I would have had to spend more time amongst the participants in the group and more carefully examine my own expositions and interactions. Ethnography can certainly be a valid social science method, but I feel it's only effective (and really qualified as research) when done in the long term. Likely most of the participants in the group would be surprised by my observations, and many might even react in a defensive fashion. In fact to sway them I would have to rearrange the tone and emphasis of this work completely, instead describing more

simplistic theories of feminism and construct a basic need for gender inequality. The text would instead be focused on teaching the reader to perspective take and consider the positionality and characterization of men and women seen in the group—in hopes that they could see the power disparities. Beyond this I think future researchers could dig deeper into my preliminary findings by asking participants more specifically about their opinions of certain items on the list (and the relationships they construct). Others could read more precisely through the various discussion topics and better discern key informants (frequent and intense contributors) and interview them for their perspectives. I found a little bit of this in my discussion about politics but the twenty or so involved were far from representative of the two hundred thousand clamoring about the group.

This project has certainly been a valuable learning experience. It's given me a bit of a chance to debate and rethink gender roles as well as more importantly practice digital ethnography (beyond content analysis) for the first time. It helps to expand the horizons of the Facebook project portfolio a bit and provide readers with some more information about the digital ecology. And finally, for all of its frustration with limited time and a tumultuous subject, it's been an enjoyable endeavor.

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APPENDIX

This is a verbatim listing of the description section of the website at the time of this paper's writing, April 4th, 2008.

DESCRIPTION

I will erase and report ANYONE that posts Yuwie adverts on this board- it is spam and NO ONE wants to read it.

The following is not a list of rules. They're suggestions to encourage guys to be gentlemen. Take 'em or leave 'em.

0. There are always exceptions to this list. The foundational exception is when you actually talk to the her and she says something different than what is included within this list. These suggestions don't provide you with the holy grail of dating or offer you the Ten Commandments for the Ladies Man, they're simply a push in the right direction for being a gentleman.

1. Open doors when possible - whether it be to a building or the passenger car door. the classic example that's stood the test of time.

2. When in a place of worship (or other places that have aisles and pews), if a man is at the end of the pew, when exiting he should stand in the aisle and let all the females go before him. (This seems odd to some people, yet normal for others. If you don't get it, don't worry about it, okay?)

3. A man should tolerate the occasional chick flick, musical, opera, or ballet - whatever her preference is - *without* complaining about it! (Because the guy may just like it.)

4. Play one of the songs that would make any woman weep like the little girl she once was (but in a good way). A brief list includes, but certainly isn't limited, to:
"You & Me" by Lifehouse
Anything by Frank Sinatra
Any rendition of "Everything I Do, I Do it for You"
"Collide" by Howie Day
"Out Of My League" by Steven Speaks
And MOST IMPORTANTLY "Question" by the Old 97's (if you propose to a girl with this song, she is putty in your hands).
("Putty in your hands" is not meant to promote "using women" in any way. This group does not encourage guys to be polite in order to get her into bed.)

5. Talk! The strong & silent bit goes from intriguing to boring quite fast.

6. Find out what her favorite flower is and buy them for her randomly (regardless of the situation you might be in). A simple yet profound truth: a single rose says more than dozens of anything else. (I encourage the women to not allow a guy to "prove himself worthy" through gifts and flowers and such. Trust is a precious thing and it should take a good chunk of time before he gains it back in your heart.)

7. If you miss her, or love her, TELL HER! Even your friends like to hear it every now & again.

8. Re-enact Zales commercials (the ice is nice but certainly not mandatory).

9. Remember: the best gifts you can give are usually free of cost.

10. Leave a note (or send a message) just to say "hi".

11. Ask her questions about herself.

12. Dress nice every once & a while. Any girl likes to see her brother/friend/boyfriend/etc. in a well-ironed button-up with some

nice slacks.

13. PRIDE & PREJUDICE ...that's all I have to say about that (I mean, that should speak for itself). (It's even more impressive if he has read the book.)

14. Tolerate small children as best you can. Meaning, put up with the things that can get annoying. They're children, after all. Show them love and care, teach them how to become a better man than you. (You were once extremely irritating. Get over the obnoxious kids and enjoy getting down to their level - not "for her", but for the good of yourself and others.)

15. Learn to dance! There is nothing sexier than a man who can dance really well. If God did not bless you with the grace of Fred Astaire, at least put forth the effort, it will be greatly appreciated. Always slow dance (even if it's just like you danced in middle school). Also, men, sing to a lady. Even if you're terrible, suck it up! They love to listen to it and will not care what you sound like. It's the thought that counts on this one. Unless you're just downright terrible, nothing sexy about that. Haha, thanks, Jade!

16. Kiss her on the forehead.

17. When she's sick, stay up with her. If you can cook (which is *always* a plus), make her some soup. If you can't cook, there's Campbell's soup at hand for you.

18. Pretend to throw her in the pool (or fountain/pond). If you really do throw her in, you'd better jump in yourself. **NOTE** There are some women who just hate this apparently, so you had better do two things: 1) Never allow your buddies be a part of it if you're unsure of how she feels about getting thrown in and 2) You had better know how she feels about it!

19. Hold her hand while you talk, drive, or just for the heck of it (it's the small things that win you big points).

20. LOOK IN HER EYES, NOT AT HER CHEST!!!!!

21. Stupid jokes = awkwardly adorable moments.

22. Tickle her, tease her, let her tease you back without getting all bent out of shape about it.

23. Don't call her hot, or pretty, or cute; call her beautiful, because that's what she is. (I don't think cute is that bad, but definitely stay away from "hot" [it's so overused and superficial] and step "pretty" up to beautiful or gorgeous or stunning or captivating or...)

24. Offer her your jacket/sweatshirt. (Note: you may not see that particular item of clothing for a while, if ever again).

25. Don't be too proud to apologize.

26. It's not stalking to watch her sleep if you fall asleep watching a movie. It is stalking to watch her sleep if you're standing outside her window with night vision goggles.

27. When she feels at her worst, tell her she looks her best.

28. If you're trying to get more than friendship out of the relationship, take it slow and never rush her.

29. Just because you're a guy doesn't mean you are completely incapable of calling when you say you will, it just means you are highly incapable of it. There are few acceptable answers to, "Why didn't you call?", & being male is not one of them.

30. Don't check out other girls in front of your female friends/sisters/mother, unless you are sincere when you later ask them if you think she could introduce the two of you for more reasons than you "want to get some".

31. Guys - always offer to pay for the date. No matter how expensive it gets, especially if YOU asked HER on the date. [if she is willing to pay now and again, don't let your "man pride" get in the way of her wanting to give back to you. she should understand money can be tight - especially when you're always buying]

32. Always do everything in your power to keep her as happy as you can. And cheer her up in any way possible. [if she isn't

always happy - and i've never met a girl who is - don't be afraid of her and don't be stupid and always, unquestioningly, blame it on PMS. be there WITH her when times are tough and she wants you there.]

33. When walking on the sidewalk, always walk on the outside near traffic. (So everyone has a different opinion for how this started. For some, it's because of the human waste that was getting thrown out the windows when this was happening a century ago. The woman walked under the overhangings extending from the buildings with the guy in the open to take the mess if need be. Others say it's from the guy's scabbard/sword being on his left with the woman walking on the right. As for today, it's the traffic and puddles and what-not. Whatever it is. It's just a courtesy thing, if it seems necessary.)

34. At least do everything in your power to keep cursing to a minimum while around her. If you can, cut it out period while around her, or cut it out of your vocabulary. Women don't want to hear it, guys don't care about it, adults don't want to hear it, it doesn't impress employers, and you sure won't want your children or someone else's to hear it!

35. Sometimes you have to take the initiative. Don't always wait for her to come to you, because if that's how it always is, you're going to lose her.

36. If any lady is walking alone to her car in a dark parking lot/garage, or is carrying a heavy load, always offer to help walk her to her destination and carry things, if not the entire load. **This may work a lot better and come off non-stalkerish if you at least know the girl you're trying to help. Haha thanks to a LOT of people on this revision.**

37. If a woman says no, let that be her final answer with maybe one question of confirmation after her first answer. Do not pressure or force her in any way after that. Don't make her give in to something she doesn't want to do.

38. Always be honest with her. No woman wants or likes a dishonest man. If you can't be honest with her, she can't trust you, and shows you don't trust her enough to be honest. Trust, honesty and integrity are just as an integral part of a relationship and just as important as love.

39. A man should always genuinely listen to women; no matter how bored or busy the man is. Actively listening to the woman will keep him from pain (and bring the man and woman closer together). This works best, of course, when both the man and the woman actively and equally engage in conversation (this includes listening). For the ladies reading this, please talk - always talk - especially if you are having problems with the relationship and to also avoid making bigger problems.

Thanks guys for all the comments and adds and invitations. I just want every guy to see this list at least once, if he can't do it...great! That means there's a better chance for guys to take a step up.

For those of you who want to know where the list for the ladies can be found, check this out:
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2217290964