

WHO YOU CHOOSE TO BE ONLINE: NETWORKED PUBLIC SELVES

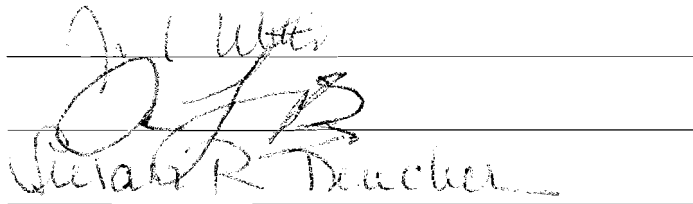
by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Sociology

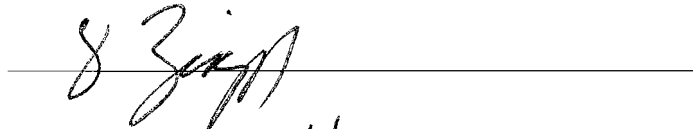
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May 2, 2012

Spring Semester 2012
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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Spring Semester 2012
George Mason University
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all those college students who wasted endless hours on Facebook and who continue to do so now. Without you, I would never have gotten here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank Dr. Karen Rosenblum for being the most encouraging and insightful committee chair! I also would like to thank the other two members of my committee, Dr. Amy Best and Dr. Jim Witte, for their added support and expertise.

A special thank you goes to two of my college roommates, Susan Norton and Ginger Boggess, and our neighbor, Aaron Harkness, for convincing me to join Facebook my sophomore year. I also must thank those who too often were subject to endless discussions regarding my thesis, but who supported me throughout the process nonetheless: my mother, father and sister, Cyndi Rowan (my thesis guru), and Emily Noonan. Finally, I send a heartfelt thank you to all those who participated in my thesis for their candidness and general excitement to talk ad nauseam about Facebook of all things!

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines how members of the original Facebook generation changed their performances of identity as they moved from college to professional life. Young professionals between the ages of 25 and 30, who joined Facebook when it was predicated on the college-network design, were interviewed in individual or focus group sessions. These interviews revealed that Facebook users often believe their current online profiles are bound to the context of their collegiate virtual selves, so they control how and to whom their personal information is disseminated. Thus, they create idealized selves for audiences whom they think should be viewing their profiles. Facebook users understand that they have no way to know their actual viewing audience and limited ability to perform impression management in virtual spaces. They are aware that audiences ultimately control how any online performance will be understood and assume that critical judgments, especially about relationship status, will prevail. Users believe written text is easily manipulated and inauthentic, so pictures express the self more

accurately and fluidly. Though the Internet was once thought to be a space in which people could develop multiple and unlimited identities, users treat Facebook profiles as reality rather than representations of a reality.

INTRODUCTION

If we accept that current American society has set the institutional conditions to guarantee its youth a means for creating a culture set apart from adults, adolescents exist in a “youth-based social world” in which they are encouraged to develop their own system of behaviors and values (Furstenberg 2000). Yet, so much of the research concerning adolescents and their transition to adulthood is marked by concerns for risky behaviors that these youth practice while living in socially-sanctioned spheres separate from adults. In particular, students who attend traditional four-year colleges are being pushed to create their own space, only then to be castigated for acting as they wish while in it.

In 2004, college students across America gradually were being introduced to a new social space existing on the Internet. Facebook, a social network site (SNS), was exclusive to college students at its inception. At first, it allowed students to connect to others at their specific college and then to students in other collegiate networks. Within four years, Facebook opened its platform to the general public, regardless of an individual’s network affiliation. Having grown up online in a space that was guarded from adult intrusions, early Facebook users did just what American society had taught them to do – create an adolescent culture separate from adults and navigate it as they saw fit.

In America, as in many other Western societies, adolescence is defined culturally as a period when a young person's life is characterized by full-time education as opposed to employment (Furstenberg 2000: 897). As college students left their universities and entered professional realms, how would they handle this transition from adolescence to adulthood online?

Citing 845 million active users at the end of 2011, Facebook has become one of the most popular, if not dominate, SNSs on the Internet ("Facebook Newsroom" 2012). As a virtual site that helps individuals connect with others, Facebook has undergone numerous transformations, suggesting, among other things, that meanings assigned to it as a space and to whom it belongs have under gone concurrent transformations. Characterized by their affinity and aptitude when using the Internet, the original Facebook users, more so than any preceding age group, have embraced virtual venues to explore and develop themselves socially, academically, and professionally. Now as independent young adults who are given the opportunity to develop their identities in both physical and online spaces, this group has been forced to consider how changes to this space affect their online performances of self.

As evidenced by its historical timeline, Facebook originally was not created with the consideration that eventually adults would be accessing it so as to scrutinize college students' lives; but as the reach of networks expanded, these young users' assumptions regarding their online privacy were challenged merely through the addition of non-collegiate demographic groups to the pool of users. The issue may not be that this group, while so technologically savvy, is naïve when it comes to privacy issues, but that for

them, SNSs, as spaces, originally meant something different than it does nowadays. In traditional undergraduate college settings, adolescents live in “a youth-based social world that is age segregated, partially buffered from adult control, and relatively turned in on itself” (Furstenberg 2000: 897). As danah boyd (sic), a prominent SNS researcher, notes, youth “have always tested boundaries,” the only difference being that “they are now doing it online, in full public view” (Kornblum and Marklein 2006). Youth culture is encouraged to distinguish itself from adulthood and simultaneously is upbraided for participating in what adults may view as “self-destructive or socially destructive behavior” (Furstenberg 2000: 897).

This research will focus on how the purposes of SNSs have changed for this group of users as they have aged and left the collegiate sphere. Within current American culture, the transition from school to work marks significant “changes in lifestyles, responsibilities, and autonomy” (Gauthier and Furstenberg 2002: 154). So as they enter professional arenas, will the considerations they once gave when creating their collegiate online identities differ from their professional ones, and is it possible that online identities mature like real-life ones do?

To examine how the original Facebook generation now as young professionals understands the purpose of SNSs, this study will explore various theories regarding the social construction of identity as well as the social construction of space. From those theoretical examinations, this study will examine the theoretical implications of technologically-mediated identities. These three areas of analysis – the social construction of identity, the social construction of space, and technologically-mediated

identities – are crucial in understanding how online performances of self continue to evolve due to the expansion and inclusion of the Internet into everyday, lived experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social Construction of Identity

Forms of Interactions

Published in 1959, Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* remains a critical tool for sociologists who examine how individuals present themselves to others in ordinary situations. While Goffman relied exclusively on face to face (ftf) interactions and even though Internet technologies did not exist during his time, his project of examining the individual in everyday circumstances serves as this project's primary theoretical groundwork. Goffman's analysis of "performing the self" when applied to the notion of unbounded virtual identities and the fluidity thought to be attached to them, which will be discussed more deeply in a later section, is a connection that has inspired many new media scholars who study technology's social implications to view Goffman as a pioneer in the sociology of technology (Pinch 2010; Zhao 2005). Though his publication solely chronicles the intricacies of ftf interactions, his findings are applicable to the virtual world in that participants, who attempt to control the impressions they both give and give off, are subject to similar dramaturgical variables as those that Goffman named; and although online interactions are different from ftf ones, they are not wholly dissimilar. Both forms of interactions hold that "many crucial facts lie beyond the time and space of interaction" (Goffman 1959: 2) and the participants (those whose

profiles are being viewed and the audience who is doing the viewing) must come to an agreement as to what the self is expressing.

Since the actor and audience are not face to face while online, interactions, as Goffman defines them, are not possible. Writing prior to the creation of the Internet, Goffman viewed an interaction as contingent on “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence” (Goffman 1959: 15). Though the actor and audience are not continuously in one another’s physical presence, performances still can be conducted online in order to project a self. When an individual creates an online profile, she attempts to replicate an “impression of reality” that an audience cannot only access but accept (Goffman 1959: 17). The crux of this impression is not necessarily how the audience receives it, but what the actor thought her attempt would serve.

Although online identities allow for fluidity over time, the actor is incapable of adjusting her online performance at the point of observation. While many online platforms offer instant messaging and video conferencing services, an audience only can view an actor’s virtual profile during a specific moment; the actor has created a visual impression that at a later time may be manipulated, but at the time of viewing by an audience is unable to be modified by the actor in real time. All performances are “socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented” (Goffman 1959: 35). Thus, if an actor puts care into creating a virtual identity, she most likely will represent whatever identity she finds most appropriate to be communicated in the online forum for the audience she expects to view

her profile, though she definitively cannot know who that audience will be. Therefore, the intended and imagined audience for the displayed identity is a crucial component when determining the kind of standards the performed situation requires. After deciding to which audience one will play, the actor must “sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one’s social grouping attaches thereto” (Goffman 1959: 75). A performed identity is not a tangible unit, but an ongoing process that requires maintenance and purpose.

Studies in the sociology of knowledge and phenomenology also identify actors as dependent on established types during performances. In his examinations of the *other*, which he depicted as the intersubjective character of the self, Alfred Schutz explains that during an interaction, “the other is seen as an analogous ‘typical’ being” who inhabits the same world of the self but does not act towards the self (Perinbanayagam 1975: 505). The *other* serves as a corresponding identity that the self may come to be like, or an alter ego as Schutz describes it. Berger and Luckmann’s (1966: 73) research into typifications, which they defined as prevailing schemes of meaning that divide the self into various objectifications based on situational and interpersonal variables, speaks to Schutz’s thinking that a person can consume alter egos. During a performance, “both the acting self and acting others are apprehended not as unique individuals, but as *types*” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 73). Identity types are established social products based on one’s general stock of knowledge, while identity is a “phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 174), suggesting that the self cannot be understood outside of the social context. As social products,

identity types evolve from social processes that “are determined by the social structure” (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 173), and different identity types require different social processes.

Goffman (1959: 106) divides social spaces in which these processes described by Berger and Luckmann will take place into regions, which are “bounded to some degree by barriers to perception” and will differ “in the degree to which they are bounded and according to the medium of communication in which the barriers to perception occur.” The front region, “where the performance is given,” requires specific sign-equipment to appropriate the proper rules of decorum for the region (Goffman 1959: 107). In contrast, the back region, or backstage, is the space in which the real-world self is at rest and the actor can cease performing for an audience. In terms of the virtual self, the Internet may act as the front or backstage, or a combination thereof, for performers. The determination of its location will depend upon the particular performance a person executes online in relation to a specific audience.

Language

Examinations of language as it relates to performativity should reveal in which region online identities exist due to the need to textualize the self: “Throughout Western society there tends to be one informal or backstage language of behavior, and another language of behavior for occasions when a performance is being presented” (Goffman 1959: 1288). Elevating language as the most important sign system in human history, Berger and Luckmann (1966: 38) assert that it is capable of making “more real” an

individual's subjectivity through conversation with others and also through the process of talking about oneself. Language typifies identities and situations and makes presents those "crucial facts" that Goffman cited as lying beyond the here and now of an interaction. As users textualize their identities, their linguistic strategies should align with the performance best suited for those whom they expect to be viewing their profiles.

As the prevailing argument in *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann analyze the social stock of knowledge based on the belief that all reality is socially constructed; hence, individuals subjectively interpret everyday life in ways that will best match their understanding of the world (1966: 19). The reality of everyday life is one that is shared with others, and Berger and Luckmann maintain that face-to-face interactions are the most compelling means for understanding that reality. Shared language is the tool that allows an individual to take for granted her reality as the paramount reality, and it is through signs that an individual comes to know others. However, not every individual has access to all others, and therefore, schemes within language will differ based on one's position in society; and, those with whom an individual regularly interacts in everyday life will share a common social stock of knowledge. One's social stock of knowledge, often expressed through common customs and interpretations, both defines and limits her place in society and "[her] knowledge of everyday life is structured in terms of relevances" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 44), making knowledge subject to social stratification.

By using the *other* as a means for understanding oneself, Schutz illustrates that an actor's intersubjectivity "is said to take place through the language, pictures, and

expressive and mimetic signs” (Perinbanayagam 1975: 504). Like Goffman, Schutz proposed his understandings of the self in relation to another individual based on ftf interactions. However, Schutz’s claim of the *other* not acting upon the self combined with his claims about intersubjectivity can serve as evidence that virtual interactions are similar, though not identical, to ftf ones. Online performances utilize both written language and pictures, so when constructing the self, actors rely on their imagined audiences who occupy the same online community but cannot act upon the self in real time with the actor.

Performance Constraints

The actor has the choice as to what acts she performs. If a performed identity is based on the facts an actor discloses within her self-presentations, then information control, defined by Goffman (1959) as the actor’s attempt to manage the expressive elements of a performance so as to remain in the role intended for the audience, is a crucial component of performance. However, the medium or setting – or what Goffman famously referred to as the situation – through which an actor performs is of utmost importance in determining what aspects of the performance on which the audience will rely: “During a performance we may expect to find correlation among function, information available, and regions of access, so that...if we knew the regions into which an individual had access we would know the role he played and the information he possessed about the performance” (Goffman 1959: 145). For Goffman, the structure of the social encounter is most crucial. To reiterate, the process of self-presentation is not

exclusively driven by the actor, but is executed through a tandem effort between actor and audience as based on the structure of the social encounter. Each setting has information constraints, and “the performer who is to be dramaturgically prudent will have to adapt his performance to the information conditions under which it must be staged” (Goffman 1959: 222). Goffman’s explanation of the entire structure of a performance – actor, audience, region, setting, communication methods, and perceptual barriers – constructs how an actor can perform and how a performance can be received, and his formulation is wholly applicable to performances on the Internet.

Again, though he is known specifically for his scholarship on ftf interactions as a means for understanding social life, Goffman also noted that although a technology may be mundane, it can remain crucial to everyday interactions. Not specifically writing about Internet technologies, Goffman witnessed “the *staging* of the interaction, the *mediation* of the interaction, and its *performance* depend crucially on the detailed material and technological arrangements in place” (Pinch 2010: 413). Though he drew these conclusions while explicating the use of merry-go-rounds and surgical tools, modern scholars should afford the same cruciality to the Internet as Goffman did other mundane technologies. He noted that machines and instruments, such as the merry-go-round and the scalpel, can transition from being considered technologies of influence to commonplace objects once their purposes lose their technological novelty (Pinch 2010: 414-6). The technologically mundane is critical for all social interaction since it is everyday actions that Goffman found so salient. In the West, the Internet has lost much of its novelty and has entered the realm of other commonplace technologies. Hence,

whatever identity a person performs online should not be privileged based solely on the location of that performance. Rather than have their performances be restricted due to the technology through which they move, actors have modified their tools for ftf interactions so they can continue to perform the self in virtual spaces. Online interaction is not special because of the technology; it is special in the ways that users take advantage of the technology to develop identities.

The Social Construction of Space

Networked Spaces

In order to determine where SNSs are located and in what fashion they are designed, the term should be unpacked into its individual parts: social, network, and site. The first two terms – social and network – necessitate some form of human qualities, while the word “site” signifies a geographical plot on which something – a town, building, monument, or the like – is constructed. While the muddled spatiality of cyberspace complicates conventional understandings of space, historically, social network scholars have named that which they study—social networks and not the space in which they exist—as *the* vital component to all social interaction (Monge and Contractor 2003; Castells: 2004).

The term “space” is still crucial to the understanding of SNSs because the virtual communities in which people move are characterized by “less bounded social network[s] of relationships that provide sociability support, information, and a sense of belonging,” components that sociologists have come to use to define communities as opposed to

relying on former territory-based definitions (Wellman 2001; Wellman and Hampton 1999). Social exchanges can typify communities both on- and offline. If we accept contemporary American society as a network society, then we can conclude that it has been witness to the virtual world continuously complicating and redefining the meaning of space. “A society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies” (Castells 2004: 3) provides a landscape in which individuals must exist on a binary of inclusion and exclusion (Castells 2004; Monge and Contractor, 2003); simply put, one is either in or outside the network. First and foremost, participation in a technologically-mediated network is predicated on access to the appropriate technology, but such access is not sufficient to determine inclusion. Instead of examining the technologies themselves, researchers should study its users so as to unveil how the technology and network work together and how ties between a network’s members characterize the social structure (Fischer 1992; Wellman 1983). By improperly marking the technology as the point of reference – a type of technological determinism – analysts imply that the only direction of action is from the technology onto the users, while in actuality, its users are both acting through and with it. As an object of “material culture” (Castells 2004: 8), technology exists without social values, so its users must operate through the technology with regard to specific social contexts and the limitations of the technology at hand (Fischer 1992).

Virtual Spaces

Technology, in short, is the tool through which individuals navigate a network society – a society in which each user or group of users is a point of connection to another. The network is comprised of various entities, known in technical terms as nodes, and lacks a central point; each node’s significance is predicated on “its ability to contribute to the networks’ goals,” rather than on its own discrete attributes, since users who are not actively connecting with other users cannot serve as active nodes for the network to function as a whole (Castells 2004: 3). Within any network, the goals of the nodes are determined by the patterns of behavior within the ties that link its members; network analysts tend to avoid assigning normative explanations for these social behaviors and seek “to study regularities in how people and collectivities behave” as opposed to how analysts might expect people to behave in network designs (Wellman 1983: 162). Without a cohesive network, the nodes have no purpose, making social interaction vital to the continuity of online forums.

Even though users may be participating in communities constructed on geographical scales beyond their vision, they still operate at individual levels, making imagination an integral component of virtual communities. Regardless if the user has had prior ftf interaction with her audience, she must imagine the online audience in a material sense as they interact in virtual communities, allowing her to create affective and intellectual bonds with these incorporeal connections. By imagining the type of person or group with whom she will be interacting, a user designs a profile she believes will be

most suited for potential interaction; and, in no way do these virtual bonds have to translate into any offline communities or to other imagined ones online (Gajjala 2003).

If not contingent on physical boundaries, virtual space is something that must be produced. “When computer networks link people as well as machines, they become social networks” dependent on social interaction for survival, which is ensured by continual activity and exchange between users (Wellman et al 1996: 213). The production of space is ongoing and spatial relations are subject to change depending on the movements of society: “Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among the products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity” (Lefebvre 1991: 73). Through this continuous consumption, social space constantly is being defined by the social through its incorporation of the “actions of subjects” (Lefebvre 1991: 33).

Too often, virtual communities are viewed as separate and privileged spaces of interaction. To assign distinct boundaries to these online spaces denies the potential for on- and offline communities to build upon one another. As stated above, computer networks become social networks once they are used to help connect people. Human-computer interaction within these networks not only links individual people, organizations, and knowledge, but “the Internet increases people’s social capital” by connecting users with friends and relatives both geographically close and far (Wellman 2001). Hence, relationships that are formed online can translate into offline interactions just as existing friendships and connections can find further support in online spaces. This

tendency to separate online interactions ignores its parallels to and replications of more traditional offline interactions and the everydayness of the Internet.

Many critics of cyberspace base their critiques in regards to the social attributes assigned to it. What features make a space social? If the social is something that is constituted through practice, what processes are needed to maintain the existence of an online social space? Geographically, the Internet does not have boundaries, but it spatially belongs to cyberspace. A pioneer of unpacking the features and constructions of social space, Lefebvre assigned “physical, mental, and social relations” (1991: 11-2) as the effects of spatiality, begging the question of how online identities interact with offline ones and vice versa.

Technologically-Mediated Identities

Textualizations of the Self

A recent shift in how individuals present the self in regards to the public and private is evidenced by the inclination of people to use SNSs to perform their online identities in relation to other users. As previously stated, networks consist of nodes, “and in the Facebook society, every person is a node” (Dalsgaard 2008: 10), though as of late, Facebook nodes can consist of individuals, groups, or companies. For a user’s profile to flourish and remain vital to the cohesiveness of the network, an actor must sufficiently interact with others. Of course, profiles do not die if left inactive; they merely are abandoned and do not trace the development of its owner’s online identity. In contrast, a user’s vitality can easily be translated into measurements of relationships. Friends are the

general names of nodes in one's immediate network and can be quantified based on the number of connections and frequency of interactions, as determined by posts, comments, and the "like" option.

Some analysts of social media contest that some SNS researchers elevate the status of technologically-mediated identities as "more authentic, genuine, and compassionate than the public self" (Illouz 2007: 74). When the body does not constrain social interaction, language is the means for one to express subjectivity. In her work *Cold Intimacies*, Eva Illouz (2007: 78) argues that through its textualization online, the self is divided into "discrete categories" and the creation of a profile is akin to any other public performance of self, and equates online identities with public performances of the "private psychological self." Though Illouz' analysis focuses on dating sites, boyd (2008: 94) notes that most modern SNSs mimic the design of online dating sites since the latter were the first form of online social network platforms.

While the Internet has been thought to afford a greater fluidity to identity, it actually calls for its uniformity. "The self is externalized and objectified through visual means of representations and language" (Illouz 2007: 78) and is created for a general audience rather than a specific other. Illouz (2007: 80-1) maintains that the postmodern notion that no central self exists is supplanted by the creation of a solidified self by the coming together of psychology and Internet technology, which is represented through the static profile that assumes to represent a multiplicity of real-world identities within a single individual, that is, unless the SNS user has a targeted audience in mind.

Though Facebook itself does not have a central point, SNSs are constructed so that each node views itself as the center of that world. Therefore, SNSs easily replicate social interaction as evidenced in real life by allowing users to develop identities relationally. As Steffen Dalsgaard (2008: 8) explains, “individualism has been the dominant mode in the understanding of social identities and personhood in the West.” Yet, this reigning individualism is expressed differently online. As examined in previous sections, Goffman’s theory regarding the presentation of self is the primary way in which online identities have been studied. Given that these identities are maintained through interactions that are not ftf, online users share a telecopresence that allows users to present the self electronically while being geographically distant (Zhao 2005). In order for a virtual identity to continue to develop, the owner of it must constantly be in connection with others. Currently in the West, we observe another inclination in individuals to form and illustrate their social identities through “material and immaterial consumption” (Dalsgaard 2008: 9). There may be no better forum online than the SNS for people to display such consumption. Without mutual interaction, either the actor or audience can have too much influence on the development of a person’s online identity, resulting in uneven amounts of consumption by the actor or audience. If the actor is absent from her profile, she may believe textualizations of herself too heavily guided by audience members through their posts, and she may feel a subsequent loss of control over the development of her online identity. Conversely, a lack of direct interaction in the form of posts from an audience denies the actor information as to who is viewing her

profile, therefore preventing her from modifying her performance techniques and strategies for the actual viewing audience.

As mentioned above, Illouz maintains that users create generalized online selves that are supposed to incorporate a multiplicity of segmented real-world selves. In networked publics, people are not always aware of the audiences viewing their profiles, making certain online performances appear inaccurate for the social contexts in which unintended audiences are viewing them (boyd 2008: 35-8). Users may employ impression management strategies to prevent such blunders, but may never know if their tactics were successful since they cannot know in what context their audience is operating or who the actual audience is (boyd 2008: 169-70). By textually locating the self, networked publics require users to modify these strategies so that they are not dependent on bodily movements but on linguistic tactics.

Controlling the Private

Not subject to corporeal constraint, individuals can use online social networks to “connect with a large number of social milieus, while decreasing involvement in any one milieu,” a phenomenon known as glocalization (Wellman and Hampton 1999: 652). Understanding this occurrence in terms of email exchanges, Wellman and Hampton argue that online virtual communities are counteracting the declining civic society in the Western world by allowing individuals in local communities to have their actions resonate in global contexts. Viewing communities located on the Internet as rooted in social exchanges, some new media scholars support the notion that living in online

networks as opposed to offline ones can better mitigate “pressures of belonging to groups while increasing opportunity, contingency, globalization, and uncertainty through participation in social networks” (Wellman and Hampton 1999: 653).

SNSs, a genre of social media, are dependent on collective participation and online behavior that often mimics those of the group with which an individual most strongly identifies. As boyd discovered in her dissertation on American teen sociality and online use, teenagers typically spent time on SNSs reinforcing preexisting relationships while adults tended to network, as evidenced by their attempts to make new business or romantic contacts, as well as to reconnect with former contacts (boyd 2008: 108-17).

boyd explains in the beginning of her dissertation that she chose not to define SNS as a social *networking* site since teens use these forums to reinforce real-world connections online rather than to create new ones. (Since this project focuses on users who first started using SNSs in similar ways that teenagers to which boyd found adolescent, her research findings should be applicable.) Though the Internet is a disembodied space, the self that is created online is strongly tied to the body behind the profile “if for no other reason than because [it serves] as a direct digital representation of that person for mediated interactions” (boyd 2008: 128). Rarely are online selves on these SNSs wholly fictional characters, but are often idealized selves or identity types that may often not be performed in unmediated publics. How the offline and online selves are negotiated is dependent on “the intersections of identity and technology” (boyd 2008: 129).

Specific to teenagers, boyd (2008: 144) found that they constructed their online selves based on audiences who they thought *should* be viewing their profiles rather than those who *actually* might be; not surprisingly, adults were not considered during construction. Additionally, teens designed their privacy settings around these intended audiences, and while privacy concerns may appear at first to be related to issues of safety, boyd (2008: 165) discovered they were used as “mechanism[s] to bound context. By controlling access to their profiles, teenagers can define what online conduct is appropriate for whom they know to be present.”

As is evidenced by this paper’s reliance on SNSs as the intersection of Internet technology and identity, those sites, and in particular Facebook, will be considered the prime arena in which personal social networks are chronicled, and in turn, are most easily accessible. Through our “engagement with social media,” we are “all collectively creating culture” (boyd 2010). This culture, as it will be argued, is contingent on the deconstruction of the boundary between the “public” and the “private.” With the pervasiveness of the Internet, this binary can no longer account for virtual spaces and their implications. By loosely defining the public as that to which others have access, within this binary design, the private is all that is not public. Through this contrast, responsibility appears to lie with the SNS user so as to maintain her privacy while negotiating public virtual venues.

Yet, as boyd (2010) highlights in a speech she delivered on unpacking the contentions of the public and the private in cyberspace, people not only hold individuals accountable for maintaining their privacy but also expect them to understand the security,

or lack thereof, in the spaces through which they move. Though we may be able to assess the relative safety of offline areas based on perceivable architectural designs and their ability to protect us from eavesdroppers or bystanders who should not be privy to our private interactions, online spaces are not as protected since they are subject to “persistence, searchability, replicability, [and] scalability” (boyd 2010). Even though individuals toggle between on- and offline settings, these transitions do not imply that they rely on different repertoires for evaluating and handling social situations.

With every expansion of networked sociability on Facebook, its privacy settings continue on a trajectory that champions the public as the default in order to increase the accessibility, and in turn, the connectivity of its users. Though no one is obligated to join an online social network, once she has, she is compelled to disclose personal – often identifying – information about herself, such as city of residence, birth date, and occupation. Acquisti and Gross (2006: 3) name Facebook as a particularly interesting site of study due to it being “a mass social phenomenon in itself...[and] as an unique window of observation on the privacy attitudes and the patterns of information revelation among young individuals.” Also, unlike some other SNSs, Facebook offers its users a lot of options in terms of control over their profiles’ visibility and searchability. Though privacy options are available, Bilton (2010) explains that to remove completely one’s information from public view on Facebook, she must work her way through more than 50 privacy buttons. Despite the troubling amount of effort one must make in order to remove herself from Facebook’s public eye, boyd (2010) maintains that “privacy is not dead” in cyberspace. Though users may display information on public sites that is considered

private by cultural standards, those actions do not indicate necessarily that the user is marking herself so as to gain exposure. Often, privacy is not about hiding, but is about control. Though they post personal information on a public site, Facebook users desire to maintain control when and to whom that information will be publicized, making privacy an issue of control of access and not just disclosure.

While many SNSs are moving their default privacy settings closer to the public side of the divide, this move does not mean that technologies guarantee others' attention. There is a significant difference between making information publicly available and wanting that information to be publicized. By "making something that is public more public," SNSs compromise their users' rights to privacy (boyd 2010). When users actively negotiate the appearance of their private information in public online venues, ownership of private information is maintained while being publicly disseminated but not necessarily publicized.

As outlined in this review of literature, Internet technologies provide tangible means for understanding the importance of networking. People can be connected with numerous individuals and groups, allowing them to become skilled networkers. With ease, they can make social connections that can benefit them in their private lives, academic pursuits and careers. Yet, these young people are not being asked questions regarding the importance of SNSs and how they make decisions in online venues. As both Pinch (2010) and boyd (2010) propose, a better mode for examining the "Goffmanesque" style of online interaction would be to analyze the specific

technological choices users make and how they are negotiated as part of their everyday social interactions.

METHODS

Sampling

To qualify as a participant, an individual must have first joined Facebook when the site was exclusive to collegiate networks (between 2004 and 2008). In order to meet this requirement, the participants had to confirm that they had to use an e-mail address with the .edu extension in order to create a Facebook account. Additionally, participants had to be employed professionally towards which they believe their college degree provided skills. If enrolled in school (many were also graduate students), they all considered themselves full-time professionals and part-time students.

As a member of this cohort who first started using Facebook when it was exclusive to undergraduates in the United States and who is now professionally employed and continues to use Facebook, I first recruited participants through convenience sampling by turning to my own Facebook networks. Prior to the interviews, I was friends or acquaintances offline with 17 of the 27 participants. Based on the participants' preferences, they participated in either individual or focus-group interview sessions, but not both. Often, recruited participants suggested I include their friend(s) who met the criteria for the study, which is how the other ten participants joined the project. Though I sought to have a more evenly distributed number of individual and focus-group

interviews, this recruitment by some of the participants increased the total number of focus groups to eight and decreased the total individual interviews to four.

Of the 27 participants, 17 were female and 10 were male. At the time of the interviews, their ages were as follows: six 25 year-olds; five 26 year-olds; eight 27 year-olds; six 28 year-olds; and two 29 year-olds. Racially, 20 participants defined themselves as White or Caucasian and four participants listed themselves as Black, Black American, or African American. The remaining three participants listed him or herself as one of the following: Cuban American; Euroasian/Whasian; or White Asian. For a complete list of the participants' professional fields, please see Appendix A.

Interview Methods

All but three of the eight focus groups were conducted in public spaces, either in a restaurant or coffee shop. Two of the three focus groups not held in a public space were conducted in the home of one of the focus group's participants. The other focus group was conducted in my home because the participants believed their own roommates would interfere with the discussion.

I prefaced each session by telling the participants that the interview would be recorded with a digital audio recorder, to which they all agreed. I informed them that the session would last between 30 and 60 minutes, although they often extended beyond that measurement due to the participants' willingness to continue the discussions. Although I did not want them to understand fully the nature of my project, I informed them that as members of the original Facebook generation, I was interested in their opinions about and

behaviors on the SNS from when it was predicated on collegiate networks to the current open design. After turning off the recorder at the end of the sessions, I often was asked what my thesis was *really* examining. I offered the general answer that I was interested in how identities develop online and that all participants were welcome to read the paper upon completion.

I started each session by asking the participants what year they joined Facebook to help them start to recall the mindsets in which they were while in college. I then asked about their general impressions of Facebook when they first joined, typically by asking them what purpose they thought it served. From there, conversations tended to develop organically. During all interview sessions, I had a copy of the following questions for reference:

1. What do young professionals take into consideration as they design their current online identities?
 - a. How do they decide what information to include?
 - b. How does working in a professional environment inform those decisions?
 - c. How have their self-depictions changed over time?
 - d. What topics are appropriate to discuss on SNSs?
2. Who do they include in their online social networks?
 - a. Who do they think should be viewing their online identities?
 - b. For what audiences do they see themselves building SNSs?
3. How important is it to have an up-to-date online profile?

- a. How active are they in updating their online profiles?
 - b. For what reasons do they update their online profiles?
4. How important is language to these online identity constructions?
 - a. How do they decide on the design of their profile (including but not limited to text, pictures, external links, music, and video)?
 - b. What style of talk (i.e., colloquial, formal, etc.) do they use to communicate on SNSs?
5. Does the Internet act as a front or backstage for identity performance?
6. How do their online and offline identities interact?
 - a. Do relationships online with other users affect their offline relationships and interactions?
 - b. How do they think online and offline interactions of users differ?

While I did not ask any of these questions verbatim, I relied on them to bring the discussion back from tangential topics, in the event of a lag in conversation, which rarely occurred, or to try to incorporate less talkative members in focus groups.

Though I had hoped for a more even distribution of individual and focus-group interviews, I believe that the focus groups proved to be most helpful because participants were able to converse amongst themselves rather than in an interviewer-interviewee design. The small size of the focus groups allowed for what I thought was more dynamic and intimate conversation (4 groups were composed of 2 participants each; 2 groups were composed of 3 participants each; and the remaining two groups were composed of 4 participants and 5 participants, respectively). No participants ever appeared embarrassed

or reluctant to speak, possibly due to the fact that the interviews did not resemble traditional focus groups. The places in which the groups met were familiar and shared by other people with whom they were comfortable, adding an everydayness quality to the overall setting.

The interview sessions flowed much like casual conversations rather than a back and forth of question and answer. In focus groups, participants often followed from others' stories and opinions to compare and contrast their own experiences and thoughts. This is not to say that the individual interviews were not helpful. They allowed for great conversation as well since the participants often used similar story-telling techniques to answer the questions I asked. Altogether, I tried to keep the sessions as casual as possible.

Prior to the interviews, each participant signed a consent form (Appendix B and C), allowing me to audio record the interview and to use all material for this project. At the end of the interview, I asked each participant to complete a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) that asked for their age, gender, race or ethnicity, and professional field. Finally, all interviews were self-transcribed and each participant was assigned a pseudonym by the researcher.

Limitations

As stated above, to qualify for this study participants had to have first used Facebook when it was exclusive to colleges, possess a college degree, continue to be active on Facebook, and have full-time professional employment. Other than age, no identity constructs, such as gender or race, were taken into account. However, gender was

referenced in many of the interviews, begging the question, how is cyberspace a gendered space? Though race was never mentioned in the interview talks, the racial diversity among the participants was limited as was the gender diversity. Additionally, when issues of sexuality were explored, all discussions were heterosexually oriented. Though this study did not seek to examine online performances and how they may be influenced by one's gender, race, or sexuality, an added diversity among the participants could have allowed for different topics of discussion and viewpoints.

FINDINGS

This section examines five major themes that were discovered to be woven throughout the interviews: Performances (Mis)Understood; Control Subsumes Privacy; Nonreciprocal Relationships; Self Critiques; and the Textual and the Pictorial. Each theme is discussed in relation to the theories upon which this research is based and the dialogue participants had between each other and with the researcher.

Performances (Mis)Understood

In comparison to ftf interactions, online socializations are guided by telecopresent others. As an individual views another's profile, neither participant can gauge the other's immediate reaction. The space in which profiles are located allows for intangible connections that cannot be manipulated by the performer in real time. The actor can only structure her impression she will give off up until the moment the audience examines her profile, at which point the actor is unable to manage the impressions she gives off and how she thinks they will be perceived.

On Facebook, users may vary in the way they believe their profiles speak to the kind of self they wish to display, and such beliefs often are dependent on the life stage in which they reside. Admitting that while in college it was easier to exist on Facebook,

Jane, a 26 year-old female, expresses her opinion regarding role play both on- and offline:

I feel like what happens when you have so many roles and so many people that know you in different ways, it's difficult to...it was easier in college. I was either somebody's child, and my parents weren't on Facebook so it wasn't a big deal. So it was just my friends and people that I knew from college and they were also in college so we had similar lifestyles.

Jane then continues to explain now that she is out of college and in the professional world she confronts similar problems with her colleagues as she did with her parents. Wishing to maintain a social distance, Jane opts to censor her posts, perhaps hiding the fact that she is hungover on a workday, so that her colleagues and other less familiar online connections are not privy to what she considers to be private, social behaviors. She fears the potential backlash she may receive from those who do not agree with her offline actions since in their eyes she should always maintain the role of responsible, employed adult. She does not know how to balance that fear of scrutiny with her desire for self-expression, and therefore, "end[s] up not posting most of what [she] comes up with." Her comment that existing on Facebook was "easier in college" and the fact that she now regularly does not post what she would like suggests that her profile was once a place where she could express herself as she wished, much like Goffman's explanation of a back region. At present, Facebook has transformed into a front region in which Jane must tailor the language she uses so as to give off an impression that is not necessarily the self

most aligned with her self concept, indicating a discontinuity between her collegiate and post-college online self.

Additionally, Jane's hesitance extends beyond posts regarding her social life to include those about her state of mind. With "this whole Facebook thing and it hanging over [her] head," Jane wishes she could "talk more about [her] frustrations about work...[and] be more honest about how [she] hates [her] job." Describing the current open design of Facebook as being in an "extreme stage," Jane admits to putting "wholesome things" online and keeping "a lot of information to [herself]." Comparing Facebook to an ocean and the information users post as waves that travel through it, she is "afraid of [her] future self regretting something that [she] was doing at the time" and does not "want to start being that open and putting everything out there, and then apply for a job in two years and them be like, whoa, we saw you posted about..." Her wave and ocean analogy speaks to Goffman's deduction that facts that exist beyond the time and space of an interaction affect how audiences will perceive performances. Though Jane may have posted something that would not impress a potential future employer, the time that passes between her making the post and her application may have no lessening effect on how the employer views Jane's current self, regardless if she has changed her views or behaviors significantly in that time in between. Hence, Jane would rather create "wholesome" impressions that she believes future audiences would accept as opposed to trusting that future audiences would allow for her identity to mature over time.

As Jane stated above, parents were not part of the original Facebook population. Originally belonging to college students, Facebook was a space that barred authority

figures, including but not limited to teachers, employers, and parents. Even after access was opened to populations beyond the college sphere, Courtney, also a 26 year-old female, relishes in the boundaries she places on her Facebook account:

To me, Facebook is my social scene and my family scene is way different from my social scene because I'm a different kind of person to my family than I am to my friends. I don't want the two to mix at all...It's my space where I can be myself. It's where I'm not being responsible, being like the older sister. I can be whoever I want to be and say whatever I want to say.

While on Facebook, Courtney assigns her behavior to a back region, in that she does not need to act in accordance with behaviors that others, in this case her family, expect of her. Instead, her performances align with a self that corresponds better with her self concept.

Though she may be acting in what she considers her personal space, Courtney later expresses the desire not to divulge all aspects of her private life. As part of a discussion regarding the relationship status aspect of a Facebook profile, Courtney informs her fellow focus group participants and me that she currently lists her status as single. If she were to enter a relationship, she would remove the status entirely rather than change it to "in a relationship" due to the potential reactions from others if the relationship were to fail: "The worst thing for me for a friend is to see their relationship status change from 'in a relationship' to 'single,' and then everybody feels sorry for them. It's ridiculous." Both Jane and Courtney plan their online behaviors in relation to future events that they have no means of knowing will come to pass. Jane restricts her expressions on Facebook so

that in the event she chooses to change jobs, future employers will not judge her potential as an employee negatively as based on her past online behaviors. If Courtney were to enter a romantic relationship, rather communicate that on Facebook through the relationship status, she would opt to remove her status entirely to prevent comments from others upon the potential end of that relationship. Such tactics speak to the actor's choice to control the information she reveals – a crucial component to any performance. Hence, as Goffman deduced, performance is not solely guided by the actor but is influenced by the audience, and in this case, by potential audiences.

So as to prevent any confusion among employers, both real and potential, two participants admitted to having two profiles – one personal and one professional. Working in the social media world, Eloise, a 28 year-old female, claims to have reached a place in which she believes she could merge the two profiles without experiencing negative repercussions:

I am considering merging because, because I have become so conscious of my personal life that I have been thinking I'm at the place where I can control it. At first, on Facebook and that whole world, it's not necessarily that I didn't trust myself or I didn't trust other people. It's not negative. You just never know what somebody's going to write or post or whatever.

Eloise's concern revolves around how a potential audience member would interact with her online profile in the form of posted material that she would judge inappropriate to be on her profile. However, she relies on the trust she has built between herself and those online friends with whom she interacts: "I've built myself to a level and I think people

know what profession I'm in that I can trust people, and if not, they know what I'm going to do with the information, like get rid of it." In the event that the trust was broken, Eloise's monitoring of her profile would remedy any infractions of that contract.

Though she does not feel the same pressures as these other participants do in regards to monitoring their Facebook performances, Madison, a 27 year-old special education school teacher, thinks most if not all responsibility lies with the user. She and her coworker, Abigail, a 26 year-old female, are both adamant in not friending parents of students or their students, even though their students are not a functioning level to be able to participate on Facebook. They believe that online spaces exist as a part of their personal lives, which helps to reinforce their rule not to connect with parents of students. Madison, wholly admitting that teachers are allowed to have personal lives separate from their work, states that:

If you're going to be a stripper on the weekends, regardless of if you think it's wrong or right, the society that you live in does not think that it's appropriate for you to be a teacher. If you want to make a change or start a movement, but don't get caught and be like, that's wrong! You knew that people wouldn't like that.

You're an idiot if you didn't know that.

The user, in this case a teacher, has the choice of connecting those two circles – personal and professional – through Facebook relationships; and with that connection, the responsibility rests with the user with the greatest potential for negative repercussions stemming from the connection.

However, Edward, a 26 year-old male who works in the tech sector, finds no purpose in having online connections with coworkers: “I personally don’t like the idea of coworkers being able to see or get a glimpse of my private life, perhaps without my knowing it. I just don’t see where it’s being a benefit, certainly to myself, since the way that we get to know each other predominately is at, is in the work place, or maybe outside of it at a function.” The way in which users view Facebook as a space certainly determines how they will interact with others who do or may influence their offline lives. This group of Internet users who transitioned from adolescence to adulthood while on Facebook come to define the space as it has gone through transformations based on their own meanings they assign to it. Those definitions are not determined exclusively by the actor but are done so in tandem with who the actor believes now is sharing the space. As Schutz (c.f. Perinbanayagam 1975) explained, an intersubjective relationship exists during an interaction, and in this case, a Facebook user must consider the audience who is viewing her profile in order to know what potential self she can display online.

Numerous participants noted differences in the levels of importance that online profiles can have in relation to one’s position and length of time at a job:

- Elliott: When I’m looking for jobs, that’s when any picture I take now I will detag if it has alcohol in it usually, unless it’s a really good picture... Now I don’t care as much because I’m in a stable job, but in between jobs I would try to make sure, well you know, holding a glass of wine, if it’s a good picture, fine.
- Samson: Seriously, if a job, and I’m in a stable job, or if somebody were to try

to judge my personality today based on the pictures that I took 4, 5, 6,
7 years ago...

- Elliott and Samson: I wouldn't want to work there.

- Walker: My project manager is my friend on Facebook, and I don't really care. I think it's funny. Honestly, if he's going to fire me for something I put on Facebook, then I don't want to work there. Life's too short to censor myself.

- Sonny: I think that when you, and really it doesn't come up with the issue of the security and what is out there, it doesn't really come up until you start looking for a job. So it doesn't become a real, like, if I'm comfortable in my job, I don't particularly, I monitor what goes up, like you know, some ridiculous picture from my freshman year in college pops up on the Internet, you can guarantee the first thing I do in the morning is untag it and make sure it cannot be traced back to me. If you're in a comfortable position professionally, it's not something that you necessarily think about.

- Garrett: I don't censor what I put out there a lot. I'm not worried about. I'm not trying to find a job or anything.

These four accounts indicate a mutual understanding between employee and employer in regards to the employees' virtual presentations of self, suggesting that employers may be relying on typifications of their workers. Congruent with how Berger and Luckmann (1966: 73) defined typifications, the employers of these participants are able to separate the kind of persons their employees were during college – in this case, students who may have displayed virtual representations of inappropriate behaviors – from the current projections of their adult selves. Describing their employment situations as stable, the five males quoted above believe they are afforded leeway from their employers in that the latter know their employees' online selves do not necessarily affect their performances in professional settings.

For participants who explicitly want to hide their online profiles from certain online connections, typically those with their families and coworkers, limited profiles create boundaries between the various groups in which users may categorize their friends. While Goffman (1959) concludes that language is the great sign system that could differentiate front and back regions from each other, and while Berger and Luckmann (1966) state that language has the power to solidify one's understanding of the self through conversation with others and through explanations of oneself, the advent of limited profiles introduced users to a linguistic strategy of inclusion and exclusion, reiterating the binary of inclusion and exclusion in networked spaces. Rather than changing the kind of language they use with others, users opt to set regulations of access. The limited profile allows a user to post all that she wants while authorizing her to restrict

her profile's viewership, a setting that many have found useful after Facebook transitioned from a closed network design to a boundless platform:

- Elliott: I hated it. I didn't want my parents to be on it. My parents are on it. My sister is on it... I would think twice before posting on my wall. Now I'm pretty sure, I haven't checked my privacy settings in a while but I think they're pretty secure. I have a group of my family members and people I work with.

- Lori: My pictures are hidden... I did that when I started job hunting, I think. As a whole, we do go out a big deal. It's just the young, professional lifestyle, and just to save myself any embarrassment because I am friends with coworkers, not that I take tons of inappropriate pictures, I just hide them. My parents are on Facebook, too, and I don't want them to be like, so Lori we saw that...

- Martha: Yeah, I'm posting everything I want and I'm putting limits on it, but when I apply [to med school], I'm not actually in med school yet, but I'm planning on applying. I'm either deactivating the whole thing or, I don't want to. I think I'm going to have to change my name to my name and a middle name or something.

Though the network design has since become a thing of the past, users still differentiate between those they include fully into their Facebook world and those they

only allow to participate partially. Despite their ability to place limits on their viewing audiences, many participants expressed anger through ageist comments, constructing parents and other members of older generations as interlopers who have joined what was once a collegiate space:

- Garrett: An older woman, probably the age of 38, 40, posted, “What are your pet peeves on Facebook?” And she got a lot of replies from other old women, and I just wanted to write, old people on Facebook. So in that sense, and as I get older I probably won’t stop using Facebook, but uh, when it became a lot less exclusive. And the young kids, they have no right being on the Internet... Nobody under the age of 16, nobody in high school should have a Facebook account. I guess that goes back to it always used to be for college kids.

- Paul: Worst part is old people. Even my coworkers talk about it. And I’m like, you’re 50, why the hell are you on there? And, they’re all doing it because they’re divorced and miserable, and they go and find their high school romance and stuff, and that’s why they go on Facebook.

- Martha: But I really hate just the random 10 year-olds or 60 year-olds, and I mean, my mom has Facebook.

Though this group of users has the ability to create in and out groups online, they still feel a sense of loss. At its inception, Facebook, as a space, belonged to college students, and

was blocked from the view of people whose evaluations could affect their life trajectories. Participants in this study consistently use words such as “exclusive” and “elitist” to express how they viewed Facebook during their undergraduate days:

- Kelly: That’s exactly I think that why, it was only people that were in college. It was only your peers and you didn’t really have to, well you were being judged or whatever, but it wasn’t on all those different levels. It was just, like, a coolness or whatever factor. You didn’t have to think about all these extra things.

- Hester: It was nice at first when it was so exclusive, especially us being in college. You couldn’t join prior to that. Now you don’t get that exclusive feeling.

- Abigail: I remember the one thing about Facebook when it first came out was, it was *only* for people in college, so there was that. It felt more protected than it is now. You felt like, ok, all these other people are in college and so are you, and you really didn’t think about it at the time where it was going. But you know, I mean, I didn’t think of the future.

- Sonny: When you first started nobody thought about what employers would think. No job, no professor was on there. Nobody was on there that mattered to you other than the people you’d go drink with or the people

you knew in a previous social circle. It was inconsequential what you put out there. It didn't matter.

- Mark: Authority figures that could have an impact on more than just your social scene.

The original users of Facebook appropriated the site as a social space to satisfy their collegiate social needs. The technology did not just act upon users; the users worked through the technology so as to uphold the binary of inclusion and exclusion. However, as the technology developed, without the original users' requesting those modifications, this population witnessed the value they assigned to the space change without any concern for their desires. The goal of the network, which had once been to create connections among a specific population in a guarded space, evolved so as to include other communities, thus stripping Facebook of the value it was originally thought by early users to possess. Though they appear to blame the older users themselves and resort to ageism to express their anger towards older populations for joining Facebook, participants did not recognize that the decisions behind Facebook's expansion were influenced heavily by economic reasons. By expanding its user base, Facebook is able to generate more revenue, particularly through advertisements. The technology was developed so as to better Facebook as a business as opposed to a social space.

So as to prevent negative repercussions in their offline lives, the first Facebook generation takes additional measures to acculturate to the new design. In order to accommodate this once safe and guarded space in which they could behave in ways they

thought were exclusive to the eyes of their peers, users modify how they work through Facebook as a networked technology:

- Tori: I have a profile but I don't want...I'm more protective of my privacy now, so if I didn't actually know somebody, I wouldn't want them to know me from my profile. I wouldn't want them to be able to feel like they knew what I was into or what I did or who my friends were from my profile... Mostly because I have a job and I need to protect, especially because I work in a school. I don't want parents knowing what I do outside of school. Just how I am as a worker.

- Eloise: I am more selective with what I post. I would rather have a bigger network, meaning I would rather connect to people... I am happy to sacrifice being ridiculous on my Facebook page for a few laughs just to be friends with [my friend's dad].

Though the space has changed, not all users choose to change their online performances on it. Like Eloise who is quoted above, Brenda, a 26 year-old female, views her non-collegiate friends as valid relationships into which she entered voluntarily, much like the online ones she made in college; hence, she does not feel the need to modify her behavior: "I don't really censor my Facebook profile all that much... My friends are my friends." Others, however, see themselves as having matured and as having abandoned their collegiate uses of Facebook:

- Lana: We're all older and have responsibilities... Obviously my posts are going to be different than what they were in college, but my Facebook page is now just super private.

- Edward: You start removing things where you might be a little inappropriate for your new age.

- Mark: I think that Facebook went through college just like us. What happens after college? Facebook had to become something different. Obviously the key is to identify who your crowd is. After college it had to change. Facebook couldn't be in college forever.

- Ariel: I guess there's the whole argument that you don't want to be nailed to your college self for the rest of your life.

As Facebook has evolved both spatially and technologically, so has its users. Original Facebook users have created strategies and beliefs in order to combat the restyling of both Facebook's design and its population base. On Facebook, these users are given the opportunity to develop a self in an online platform. Depending on what kind of self a person finds to be most ideal to display on Facebook determines the kind of tactics one will employ when negotiating her online connections. As is evidenced by the participants' varying reactions to how their virtual performances may be interpreted, both in the present and the future, Facebook does not attempt to elicit a specific ideal identity

from its users, which adds to the argument that it is more important to study how the technology and user act upon each other rather than in the single direction of how technology can influence expressions of the self. Even though over time virtual identities are fluid and are granted the opportunity to evolve, the actor cannot actively adapt her profile displays at the point of contact, requiring the user to determine what kind of self she wishes to perform for the audience she assumes is watching.

Control Subsumes Privacy

Within interview discussions regarding online performances and the behavioral strategies tied to them, participants often express their concerns and understandings of privacy in virtual spaces. As stated in the literature review, SNSs are the intersection of Internet technology and identity. Users are held responsible in regards to being knowledgeable of their privacy settings and the structure of the online venues through which they move. The line between the public and the private in virtual spaces has increasingly become obscured; yet, while users choose what to display online, they do not always aim to publicize that which they display, making privacy concerns directed more towards issues of control rather than concealment (boyd 2010). They want to believe they control the personal information they choose to make public in terms of when and to whom it is displayed.

Though Facebook belongs to the realm of cyberspace, certain Facebook wall tags can connect users to physical locations. The check-in feature, with which a user may tag herself and/or another person to a venue that will then be posted on each user's profile

wall, creates concern among some of the participants. Brandy, a 27 year-old female, found it “creepy” for people to know when she was not at her house and she does not want that information to “fall into the wrong hands.” Paul, a 28 year-old male, dislikes the check-in feature for two reasons, one personal and one legal. Claiming to “like to lie to people and tell them that [he] can’t hang out with them because [he’s] doing something else,” Paul worries he might “have stupid people tag [him] or post ‘I’m with this person’ on Facebook, so clearly [he’s] not doing what [he] was lying to others about.” Both Brandy and Paul would rather not have their online selves linked to a specific geographical location so that their respective Facebook friends cannot connect them to places beyond cyberspace.

Within one’s privacy settings on Facebook, an individual has the opportunity to request that she must first approve posts (such as check-ins) before they are added to her wall and the newsfeed. Aware of this setting, Paul explains his second concern regarding the check-in feature:

I should block mine because I don’t like people knowing, first off, your insurance company, if you post that you’re not in your apartment or not in your house, they can say, hey ok, you were advertising that you weren’t home so that’s why you got robbed. Your renter’s insurance won’t cover that... Yeah, so I don’t like posting always when I’m not at my place.

In all of these instances, the participants perceive a widespread risk in regards to how online displays of their offline actions could affect their real-world safety. Though privacy is of the greatest concern, Paul’s claim sheds light onto the fact that online

privacy is tied to issues of controlling one's information. Ultimately the actor is the person who should decide what information is made public and to what extent that information is publicized.

As boyd (2010) explains, privacy not always is linked to hiding something and can be understood in terms of controlling information. Abigail expresses particular concern regarding ownership of her online information. As Facebook expanded to include non-collegiate populations, Abigail saw Facebook lose its "naivety," at which point she became dissatisfied with the site. Expressing that she has often toyed with the thought of deleting her account, Abigail all but admits defeat to those she believes are in true control of Facebook:

The legal ramifications of it...now I know that technically, even if you delete your Facebook account, which I've thought of several times, it's always there and they own your pictures. That's the other reason why I'm not posting any pictures of myself because I don't want them to own my pictures because they're mine.

Joining when it was a private site shared between college students, Abigail alludes to the fact that as Facebook's design became more open so did the information of its users. She once belonged to a community in which she shared her information with others, and has since seen that community change. While she still has the opportunity to share her personal information as she pleases, that information also is shared with third parties, such as advertisers, without her consent. In contrast to Wellman and Hampton's (1999) belief that glocalization through technologically-mediated communication has enhanced

the meaning of community, Abigail laments that her online community no longer is composed of a more tightly-knit group, particularly because her information is being shared with members beyond her view.

Issues of access not only include other individual users but also entities that may use Facebook to gather information about its users. As discussed in the section “Performances (Mis)Understood,” employers are known or are thought by users to search Facebook for information regarding current and potential employees. However, many participants offer insight into how Facebook’s wealth of stored data has become an incredible tool for business. As Sonny, a 27 year-old male marketing consultant, explains, in college “it wasn’t viewed as a resource for businesses or organizations to find out more about you. It was absolutely more social than it was professional. I would even argue there was not a professional component to it.” As seen with the incorporation of a marketing aspect on Facebook, Sonny correctly surmises that the personal data on Facebook has become a virtual storage unit with immense potential business value.

Based on information listed on users’ profiles and the content of their posts, businesses target users through advertisements along the sides of the site’s pages. After some discussion, Betty concludes she must have been targeted with ads for AARP and 60+ dating sites because at one point she “posted on [her] sister’s wall something about being old and then [she] changed [her] status from being in a relationship to single. So [she] guess[es] they combined those two things and put the ads up.” The other two participants in the focus group with Betty express similar frustrations with misguided marketing. Walker, a 29 year-old male, explains:

I always get ads for beer. I get ads for Coors Light. They want me to like Coors Light all the time because two of my asshole friends like Coors Light. I want to punch them. I use it in reverse. You just told me who I need to not like.

Courtney, who has both undergraduate and graduate degrees in sociology, is annoyed with marketers' confusion between sociology and social work: "I always get social work stuff. Like, get your masters in social work. And I'm like, don't you know that I already have my masters in sociology! It's not social work."

Though it may appear that marketers mistakenly target users based on their online information and behavior, Martha, a 27 year-old female, believes that the marketing connection may actually be the best aspect of the current Facebook design. Though she admits that it is "creepy" how Facebook has become an entity that appears to know each individual user, she admits, "I guess the best feature is probably also the creepiest feature. It does kind of tailor things to you. It knows what you like. It knows what you read." Additionally, Martha offers insight into how much personal information of hers is stored on Facebook: "If the FBI wanted to know what I was doing, all they'd have to do is look at my Facebook for five minutes. It's all there." However, as the line between public and private continues to be obscured online, Martha understands how and why her profile contains such revealing information: "I do think that I did that on purpose. I wanted the little capsule of my life, because like I said, I don't have anywhere else that I do that."

Much like a chronology of one's life, the new timeline design of Facebook, which is optional at the time this paper was written, narrates a person's online behavior as never

before. After expressing her hatred for the new layout, Lana, a 28 year-old female marketing researcher, explains to her fellow focus group participants that, “it makes everything more accessible. You can click on a year, it starts when you were born, but obviously they can’t fill in that information. So say you started Facebook in 2008, you can click on 2008, 2009, 2010 and so on, and once you click on it, it will give you a highlight of that year. Like pictures, posts.”

Many participants agreed that the timeline forces users to guard their profiles’ privacy settings more vigilantly due to the intensification of accessibility for one’s personal information. Some such worries regarding the ease of access the timeline offers include:

- Earl: With the new design, what I hate about it the most is that it’s scary that you can type something and if you don’t have all our privacy settings locked down tight, somebody could probably search you and fire you about it or something like that.

- Hester: Just stuff that I haven’t looked at for years upon years. Just old stupid jokes or comments that people wrote on my wall that don’t apply to us being in the professional scene now. I haven’t looked into it too much, but I hear you have to go through all these steps to delete things and I’m not going to know how to do that. I don’t really want to take the time to go back through back to 2005 and have to remove all this stuff.

- Brandy: It makes it a lot harder to hide things.

- Tori: [My boyfriend] heard about it, so he deleted his entire profile and started anew.

Only one participant, Martha, views the timeline positively for offering such convenient access to a user's online history. She enjoys being able to access readily her former posts because she relishes in examining her life as depicted on Facebook. Again, comparing the timeline to a neatly organized capsule of her life, Martha does not feel the need to delete old posts "so that a future person doesn't see *one* person who said something asinine on my wall in 2005." She is not concerned with future individuals viewing her profile because it contains parts of her life that have since passed that she believes should not reflect on her current self – a belief that is in stark contrast to other participants' anxiety over future audiences' opinions of them as based on their past online behaviors.

However, the majority of the participants who made comments about the timeline portray it in such a way to conclude that it is designed to help others view a chronicle of a person's life, and hence judge her by it, and not as a means for individual users to trace their own online development. Consistently throughout this study's interviews, participants discuss the distance that may or should exist between their current and college selves. They all agreed that their behaviors while in college, both on- and offline, vary greatly from that in the present and many express a concern that their past will

weigh more on their audiences' judgments of them in online venues than any current virtual performances do.

Nonreciprocal Relationships

While Facebook profiles serve as a catalog of one's life as expressed online, they also allow for interactions between users. When understanding SNSs, not all media scholars are in agreement with which features define the importance of network societies. While some view the network as the critical aspect of an SNS (Monge and Contractor 2003; Castells: 2004), others uphold that the space in which these networks are located are just as crucial (Wellman 2001; Wellman and Hampton 1999). Within computer-mediated networks, the nodes must have a cohesive network through which to move. For virtual spaces to survive, its nodes must connect, a fact that is highlighted in Facebook's mission "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" ("Facebook About" 2012).

Facebook users are always made aware when others interact with them through a notification. To name a few, interactions consist of a wall post, a comment or "like" added to an existing post belonging to the individual or another user, or a tag. However, many participants claim not to interact with other users often, claims that contrast with the belief that social interaction is necessary for the survival of social networks. Curiously, only female participants admitted to enjoying the one-sided nature of their Facebook relationships:

- Ariel: I mean it's not really fair but I don't really want anybody else to know

about me, but I want to know about everybody else. But I mean, you choose what you share, right? If these people are sharing these things they're obviously interested in having someone read them.

- Betty: I don't want people to know what I'm doing. It's my life. I don't want it out on the Internet, but I like to watch what other people do because it's interesting.

For both Ariel and Betty, their reasoning behind not wanting to share their own information online while still wanting to consume others' profiles rests in a desire to control the spread of their personal information, a desire which often is tied to safety concerns as mentioned in the previous section.

Though users are made aware of Facebook interactions that occur while not being in the physical presence of others, they are unable to know when they merely are being observed online. Facebook does not offer a service for users to track when and by whom their profiles are viewed. While many participants claim not to interact regularly with their Facebook friends, many of these same participants discuss their observational behaviors of others online, or in Facebook terms, stalking.

In every interview, both individual and focus group, participants introduced some version of the word "stalk." Ariel, a 25 year-old female, compares the act of Facebook stalking to Internet browsing: "You go to a website and you click on the articles that are interesting and you do that too. I'll look at my newsfeed and click on the profiles if something interesting has happened or if there's a good picture." Betty and Courtney

admit that they thought Facebook's original purpose was congruent with stalking behavior:

- Courtney: So you pretty much just went to read other people's profiles.
- Betty: Yeah, a stalker website.
- Courtney: That's exactly what you did. It was there to stalk people.

Though some participants agree that gender plays a role in how and why a user may stalk another on Facebook, they explain that the targeted audiences of stalking behavior are not necessarily influenced by gender. For Eloise, gender did not affect whom she chose to stalk online while in college:

Everyone was up for grabs. I feel like it was the first thing that we had, at least our generation, that you could anonymously find information out about somebody else without, like I know [my college] was pretty big, 17,000 kids, so you went to this class and say there were 100 kids in this class. To find out this one boy, or girl for that matter, who they were you'd have to find somebody who sat near them. So then when Facebook came around it was so easy.

Martha also confesses to stalking "everybody," including herself, so that she could "go through and be like, does this make me look bad?"

Garrett, like most participants, finds himself exhibiting such behavior more so in college than in the present, with his reasoning being time constraints. However, much like Courtney and Betty, Garrett believes Facebook is designed to promote a culture of hypersurveillance expressed through this kind of undetected, observational behavior: "I think it's a way to stalk people. And we set ourselves up for it because we have these

profiles that have all these personal, um...I'm trying to think. Back in the day, back in college I did a lot more, just look through everybody's pictures, like of a cute girl or whatever."

As she has aged, Eloise finds herself not only modifying her actual behavior but also the ways she describes it: "I definitely use it as a way to keep up with people – see how I'm adapting my word "stalk?" Keep up with people and see what they're doing, their photos, and communicate with people." Eloise, unlike others, explains that of those friends whom she would and does stalk on Facebook are ones with which she often communicates or would if she thought it appropriate to connect with them in ftf interactions. Like all other participants, Eloise explains that while she would never interact with some users who she chooses to observe on Facebook, stalking grants her the ability later to communicate with others with whom her Facebook friendship extends into real life because her information gathering will provide her purpose for connecting with them.

In a focus group consisting of three females, the participants explain with whom and under what circumstances a person may use personal information consumed through online observation:

- Hester: I feel like once you've established that you're friends on Facebook, then you know that you've granted that permission, that person permission to go through all your stuff. I guess maybe it's really only people that you talk to on a regular basis that you'd mention it. I guess even if you have

extended friends that you don't talk to everyday, and you're like, oh, I saw that you're going to this thing that I'm going to too. It's very situational.

- Lori: Like if somebody gets married or engaged or has a baby. Big life events are completely acceptable to talk about. It's almost like a connecting thing. But small things that you probably shouldn't know unless you talk to them on a daily basis, that would be really weird to bring up.

As boyd (2008) explains in her dissertation regarding teenagers' behaviors on SNSs, users often use these spaces to reinforce preexisting, offline connections. Some users may choose to stalk Facebook friends with whom they do not regularly interact, but then will not use the information they have gathered as reasons for contacting them. Only when a friendship has been solidified offline to a point where the user feels comfortable using this information either in an on- or offline context do the three females quoted above think it is appropriate for the user to make that connection. Their reasoning helps them reinforce the relationship and also adds clout to boyd's understanding of SNSs as spaces in which users may bolster current offline relationships as opposed to networking for new or less familiar online connections.

Referenced in the literature review, Lefebvre (1991) maintains that in order for a social space to survive it must constantly be reproduced through the mutual consumption of actors' performances; social performances and the interrelatedness between actors and audiences define the space as social. With many participants in the study claiming to exist in one-way relationships with others on Facebook, the survival of Facebook as a social space comes into question. Recent data from a Pew Internet & American Life

Project report (2012) suggests Facebook, as a social space, is driven by “power users” who contribute an inordinate amount of activity to Facebook in comparison to the typical user, thus allowing the site to thrive despite the disproportionate exchanges of online material.

To their dismay, Abigail and Madison both feel that due to their infrequent activity on Facebook, their online experiences are not tailored to their online personalities like others users’ experiences on Facebook are. As Abigail expresses:

Unfortunately for us, I feel like we may not be like your typical Facebook users. They get a variety [on the newsfeed] because they stalk a shit ton of people when we do not have a lot of people that we stalk. If we happen to click on somebody, Facebook is like, holy shit, she really must like them!

We got to keep posting that.

Since Madison does not post often on Facebook, she is “bothered...because if [she] does post something amazing, most people aren’t going to see it,” because her infrequency of posts deter people from going to her profile regularly, and therefore, she assumes she is not consistently listed on her friends’ newsfeeds. Though both of these females admit not to relying on Facebook as a valid means of communication, they praise Facebook for existing as a form of entertainment. If and when they choose to enter Facebook’s realm it is so that they may be amused by others’ posts. However, the infrequency of their visits prevent the algorithms, which Martha previously described as allowing Facebook to know its individual users, from customizing their Facebook experiences to their liking.

While Abigail and Madison compare their Facebook experiences to guiltless means for amusement, other participants detail their entertainment from Facebook as arising from judgment of others. Some of the female participants believe it is acceptable to stalk boyfriends, current and past, and those boyfriends' girlfriends, also current and past. Shelly, chronicling her online behavior towards her romantic partners, claims, "We all used to do this in college all the time, I would have a friend of mine friend someone with an ex-girlfriend or a current girlfriend of someone, and I would get on her profile and I would, girls are just curious. You want to see what they're doing, where they go out, if they look cute." Hester, Shelly's fellow focus-group participant, agrees that girls want to "scope out the competition," with the competition being ex-girlfriends. As Facebook lost its novelty and became a staple in many college students' lives, Hester affirms that, "I think that's socially acceptable now. Before Facebook you could just call up your friend and be like, oh do you know so and so? What have you heard about him? But now, it's the standard go to. To literally go page by page, photo by photo." Hester describes a behavior that only came to pass due to a new technology that now has become commonplace since that technology has gained a mundane, everyday status.

While Shelly and Hester admit to wanting to learn about any potential competition in their romantic pursuits, other participants choose to watch the bad fortunes of their past partners and acquaintances unfold online. Earl, a 27 year-old male working as an intelligence analyst, enjoys "seeing all the people from high school and all the people who used to be so awesome and cool, and look at them now, they're all like burger flipping." In a similar mindset as Earl, Sonny rhetorically asks of his fellow focus

group participants, “How good is it to see an ex demise?” Additionally, Sonny admits that this sort of critical behavior is tied to the superficiality attached to the word “friend” as used on Facebook: “Just because you know someone and you’re friends with them, friend is such a relative term on Facebook. I knew you once, I want to see how your life either peaks or falls or stays the same or you never get out of the town you’re from. It’s just the status more than it is anything else.” By classifying them as less than a friend with whom he shares a relationship offline, Sonny attempts to justify his behavior. Though they may not actively connect with people from their past or feel any true bond with them, some users relish in the fact that Facebook allows them to watch former acquaintances’ misfortune from a safe and undisclosed distance and place.

As it was explained in the first section of the research findings, many participants express worry regarding how their virtual performances may be received, and they do so rightfully. Lana admits to using Facebook as a tool for judging people because “that’s what it’s there for.” The nature and content of one’s posts make a person vulnerable to judgment. Most commonly, participants express frustration with users who post what they consider to be trivial or overly emotional comments:

-Lana: There are people on Facebook who are like, worst day ever. That is my biggest pet peeve on Facebook. When you say worst day ever, you’re like, oh was it? You’re doing this for sympathy’s sake. Tell us why it’s the worst day ever. I have to say, that makes me so angry. People are like, sitting here alone by myself. Shut up! Obviously you’re posting because you want attention. I hate that.

- Shelly: I see some people that post *way* too much. This girl posts like, I decided to grab a piece of gum with so and so. This isn't Twitter.
- Lori: Or people that post things about their lives...
- Hester: Super emo.
- Lori: Super emo kids. We have a family friend and she posts the weirdest things, like, I'm lost, blah, blah, blah. It's just too much.
- Hester: When people say uncomfortable things when they're upset, like about breakups.

If users are creating online selves they believe to be ideal for that venue, then their posts should reflect the kind of performances they think will best display those selves. Clearly, the females quoted above do not think Facebook is an appropriate site to express extreme emotional states. Not only do users want to determine the self they project, they also want to control which aspects of other selves are displayed online as based on the social norms they believe guide Facebook. Without the ability to know who is viewing their profiles, users are not afforded the opportunity to conduct impression management techniques in response to audiences' receptions of their performances, thus allowing the audiences to define the nature of the performance, and in turn, the nature of the online self.

Not only can users be deemed to post inappropriate material, but they also may be thought of as sharing too much, either through the frequency of their posts or the number of their Facebook friends. Garrett claims females typically are the Facebook users with an extraordinary number of online connections, which he likens to sexual promiscuity: "If

you have 1000s [of Facebook friends], I probably don't know you. They're just a bunch of, at least in my eyes, party girls who, you know, are probably the neighborhood bicycle. Everybody got a round." While she knows it not to be fair, Hester also admits to judging girls she does not know well via their Facebook posts. While she stalks potential romantic interests online and sees that they are connected to females who, as she believes, are "scantly clad" in pictures, Hester's reaction is usually an assumption that those females are "skanky," thus demeaning the females in her eyes. Not once in any of the interviews did participants confess to judging males' sexual statuses via their displays on Facebook, indicating Facebook may be a gendered space in some respects, as most spaces are. If a female actor displays herself in ways interpreted as immodest or promiscuous, those displays are connected to a full impression of reality as expressed through her profile. Since the audience chooses which online projections are most important, it may fixate on the projections most closely tied to gender, thus heightening the importance of gender on SNSs.

Self Critiques

Judgments made through online observations are not exclusive to the audience unto the actor but also includes evaluations of the audience unto itself. Designed so that each node is the center of its own world, Facebook allows its users to develop their virtual identities in relation to others, much like how real-world identities are developed (Perinbanayagam 1975; Dalsgaard 2008). Through comparisons, users can situate their

own lives in relation to their peers – peers that may or may not play roles in their offline lives.

Gender reappears when participants discuss ways in which they compare their own lives to their Facebook cohort. In today's American society, it is not unusual for women in their mid to late 20s (a part of the population of interest in this study) to explore their options in marriages and families. Many female participants admitted to feeling a kind of social pressure from Facebook due to the nature of the posts they saw listed in their newsfeeds or on individuals' walls. Some females express extreme reactions to these posts while others offer more tempered ones.

One of the more moderate respondents, Madison, communicates:

There's definitely a pressure. I'm not even trying to sound like I'm too cool for school and I don't care what people think. Obviously I do...I think it all comes to the people you don't like anymore, and you don't want to be like, I'm doing really good, but not enough that I actually act upon it. It'd be great if I had a shit ton of people posting on my wall about how amazing I am or all the pictures people tagged me in were of me really skinny in a bikini...I like people to know I'm doing good or think I'm doing good, or maybe they're a little bit jealous. Great...I guess I'm not going to force it. They'll find out in other ways... And I feel like I'm lucky that I don't need it.

Madison recognizes that Facebook is a venue in which users can show a virtual world the status of their lives, however, though she would like online audiences to take away from

her profile a sense of admiration for her, she does not expect it nor need that affirmation. In contrast, Abigail, who was part of the conversation with Madison, concedes to the pressure to perform well online much more so than Madison does.

There is a lot of peer pressure from Facebook to be like, shit, I'm not married, I actually don't have a fucking boyfriend. It's shoved in my face every single day that I'm not with someone, and I think that's part of the reason why I'm trying to rise above Facebook...I don't want to post that I'm single because I don't want to post that on Facebook. I don't want to have a relationship on there because I don't want to post it if it fails...I don't ever want to post on Facebook but if I get engaged, you bet your ass I'm putting that on Facebook. It's like, Abigail is validated. She's got a man. She's got a ring on her finger and we're good to go.

Without having discussed in more depth why Abigail feels validation will come once she is connected to a man through marriage, I cannot know for certain whether these beliefs extend beyond her Facebook relationships and if they are a feature of age and not just gender, but I would estimate they are. As Facebook has become commonplace for many Americans, its newsfeed, in particular, acts as reminders to Abigail that she, unlike many of her online peers, is lacking in something, both in her real life and through the relationship status connected to her profile.

In contrast to Abigail's reactions to posts by her Facebook friends who are in committed relationships, some other female participants express a kind of pity for those users who host representations of their marriages and families on their profiles. In

conversation with each other, Lana, Etta and Kim express their differing reactions to these kinds of posts:

- Lana: I don't want to be married and buying a house and living like that. That's not the kind of life I want at all, so when people post stuff like that...I feel better about myself knowing you are married to some ugly dude with eight kids and your life sucks.

- Etta: The pressure that you, I know you guys said you don't feel pressured, but I do feel pressured...There is a sort of pressure that you do feel from seeing all of that. [To Lana] It's fine for you, but I have a really good friend who is a guy and he's like, I see all my friends getting married, and I want to settle down. It's something that I want. It's an underlying pressure that you do feel, because you're like, is [my life] adding up to everyone else's?

- Kim: [Agreeing with Etta] Even though you're happy with the state you're in.

Similar to how Lana demonstrates that she does not feel pressured or inadequate regarding the state of her life via Facebook posts, Courtney also expresses much of the same sentiment, barring a momentary lapse of inadequacy that is soon supplanted by similar feelings of pity:

I feel like, for a few short ten seconds, I feel like, oh my god, I'm going to be left behind. You see people that you do stupid shit with and black out with and stuff like that and they're getting engaged and having kids...It makes me feel sorry for them. You haven't found yourself yet. How can you be someone else to someone if you haven't found yourself yet? And I

take it from my personal perspective because I haven't found myself yet. I have no idea who I am. I know bits and pieces of what I like and what I don't like. It's not there yet.

In contrast to Lana's rejection of that kind of lifestyle, Courtney links her distaste to identity development. Courtney previously was quoted as saying she uses Facebook as a space in which she can act as her true self. As evidenced in her statement above, since Courtney does not feel as though she has reached a point where she can define herself in a succinct manner, she assumes that when others do they are not using Facebook as a space in which they may let down their guard and not portray an idealized self they believe others want to observe. In their sociological examination of speech, Scott and Lyman (1968: 47) describe the linguistic device Lana and Courtney use as justification, or an "[account] in which one accepts the responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it." Though they themselves disapprove of others' life choices, the two females must decidedly convey they purposefully selected their own paths and are required to defend those decisions.

Betty, who participated in the same focus group as Courtney, defines the self in relation to a reference group. She thinks Facebook is "very much like keeping up with the Jones" in that "maybe you feel like you're behind someone because they have two kids and are married, and it seems from the outside it's this perfect little life where you maybe feel like you're not to that point yet." What Betty says is perhaps what these users, who feel inadequate due to their relations on Facebook, do not always recognize – Facebook

allows for idealized representations of the self that do not permit the audience to verify the offline veracity of these representations.

In contrast to the other female voices, Martha offers an explanation as to why a person should not feel inadequate when comparing her lifestyle to others as displayed on Facebook. While she has no desire to have children and is uncertain as to whether or not she would like to get married one day, Martha is annoyed by posts of that nature due to her “disinterest” in the subjects. However, she recognizes that in Facebook’s public design, users inevitably are going to encounter others who do not adhere to the same normative notions bound to posts:

I post when I travel. I post what academic achievements I’ve accomplished, not like, bragging, and they probably don’t give a flying fuck that I do that. So that’s fine. Everybody deals with the other.

As a space, Facebook no longer belongs to any one population, and therefore, no universal social guidelines exist to determine what material should be posted and also how it should be interpreted. The actor attempts to post information so as to project an ideal self, but the self that will be observed ultimately is decided by the audience. In deciding how to project the ideal self, the actor acts in relation to reference groups; these groups can both align with her current self concept and also reject it. Comparing Facebook to a house of mirrors, Johnson and Regan (2011) explain that a user’s initial entry into Facebook appears as a self-reflection. Upon further exploration through the connections made with friends, that reflection of the self bounces from mirror to mirror,

or user to user. Like mirrors, users highlight certain aspects of the reflection while minimizing others.

The Textual and the Pictorial

Once believed to allow for a multiplicity of self presentations, the Internet was thought to be the ultimate vehicle through which the postmodern self could be displayed. Not bound by constraints of geographical space, the self could split into a multitude of versions as it moved through cyberspace. As explored in the literature review, language is believed to be the most accurate sign system for understanding performances of self, thus allowing it to be the great revealer of the virtual self since text was necessary for the original Facebook users to communicate their personalities to others. From her research on dating websites, Illouz (2007) concludes that online profiles force the user to textualize the self, creating a static representation of an identity at the moment when an audience observes a profile. As Facebook continues to advance in its technological capabilities, actors and audiences are given numerous ways to develop their online linguistic strategies. At its inception, Facebook was a site on which college students could express themselves through words and photographs. Today, users still have those options along with other mediums such as videos and applications. However, participants indicate through conversation that the textual aspects of one's profile have become less necessary when trying to gather a sense of a person's online identity.

Samson, a 27 year-old male, believes "you can manipulate what you say a lot more easily than in photos. The photos tell a more true story. You get a more rounded

view of their personality.” Agreeing with Samson, Elliott, a 28 year-old male and a member of Samson’s focus group, expresses a similar distrust of the written profile: “They’re like, oh, I’m a fun-loving, outgoing person. So they say that but that doesn’t mean they necessarily are.” For those users who actively use their online personalities to connect with others, one would assume that as they mature in real life, those developments will be reflected in their online displays, but for many participants, this was not the case. Kim, a 26 year-old female, admits that “a lot of that information is really old. I actually updated it recently, but I don’t put a lot of that personal information... You don’t need to know my relationship status or my religious preference or my sexual preference. I don’t think that that’s anyone’s business.” Rather than omitting that information like Kim does, Lana makes the written portions of her profile humorous: “Mine’s mostly joke. My About Me says, I know I’m better than you. My whole thing’s a joke. I have that I like Simmel and Marx on there, but then also fur and handbags.” If Lana is still on Facebook in ten years, she assumes that her profile will still say that she likes “Marx and fur.” The decrease in importance may be due to the fact that users do not believe written language is the most appropriate means of communicating the self to others in virtual spaces.

Another possible reason for the decreased dependence on textualizing the self could be due to the transition of Facebook from a network design to an open forum. While in college, Garrett states, “I had this really long list of, like it was quotes. I recently went and edited it. Shortened it up because there were just drunken conversations really, drunken short conversations really and I was just like, I just really don’t care about this

one anymore.” Editing his profile so as to remove part of his collegiate, textualized self, Garrett may not feel the need or desire to replace those quotes he treasured while in college so as to better express his current online self. Much like Garrett, Mark, a 26 year-old male, discusses removing “all the favorite quotes when [he] was a freshman” over the past few years and how much of his time on Facebook is spent removing information about himself “because who really cares what [he] think[s].” Both Garrett and Mark express a lack of interest in updating written information about themselves now that they no longer find their textualized college selves as appropriate representations of their identities. With this maturation, they indicate that language they once used no longer captures the performances they wish to display online, but they do not offer explicit reasons as to why they do not update the text portions of their profiles.

Similarly, Hester has removed much of her written profile, but for a more direct reason:

When I was first on Facebook I put my favorite quotes, my hobbies. Now it’s just my contact information and where I went to school... I think the concept of job hunting and keeping it as professional and minimalistic as possible.

Her choice to do so is linked to her moving from the collegiate sphere to a professional realm. Expressions of self are contingent on the life stage in which a person is and how that person thinks her identity attached to that life stage is most appropriately conveyed.

In contrast, Edward’s removal of information was guided by a desire not to display an accurate representation of himself online and to conceal the self:

I really want you to know a lot less about me than before. I put a lot more stuff out there, had a lot more quotes and personal affiliations. Maybe just looking at some of the movies I liked, the books I liked or some of the quotes. You could kind of guess at my personality type or if you didn't know me, and now it's like you pretty much have to go into my Facebook profile knowing who I am in order for it to...it's purposefully so vague that once you met me in person, you might have had a completely different preconception of who I was going to be.

Not only does Edward wish to disconnect himself from his collegiate identity as expressed through his former profile, he too wants to disengage his real-world self from the one he now displays online. However, Edward was different from many participants in that he predominately uses Facebook for direct communication through private messaging and for following up on real-world plans, such as getting coffee with a friend, via wall posts. He claims not to use Facebook as a tool for consuming information about others or for expressing an online personality, but just as a supplementary form of communication.

In regards to questions about the process of choosing profile pictures, most participants offer the generic answer of selecting photos in which they look attractive. Some stated they prefer more artistic representations of themselves, such as their silhouette in a shadow or a reflection of themselves in a side mirror of a car, but nonetheless, they seek to display a flattering picture. Much like their main profile

pictures, participants only want to be tagged in photographs that compliment them in some way, either in regards to their physical attractiveness or character. Madison, who was adamant about her concern with the artificiality of Facebook identities, says:

If I'm going to post a picture, I want to look good in it or I want to take it completely not seriously, but I also don't want to post pictures of me like, again it goes back to the superficialness of it...I don't like what other people do, like, get another really adorable shot of me taken and you just had to post it. I'm not a fan of that. I like taking pictures but I want them to be ridiculous, like actually memorable and not, look at me here and look at me there.

For Madison, pictorial representations online should not be staged so that one looks physically attractive in them. Of course, attractiveness may be a secondary result, but primarily, photos should indicate something more substantial than what is on the surface.

Photographs also allow users a means for chronicling moments in their lives that text, as evidenced above, cannot. During a recent overseas trip, Walker and his friend both took upwards of 500 photos each. While his friend posted all of his photos on Facebook, Walker was much more particular in how he crafted the representation of his trip: "I posted the 200 pictures that I think tell the best story and I try to caption them intelligently for the most part, so people kind of get a sense of what we did. For posterity, down the road, I look at them or my children look at them or my wife looks at them, it's interesting." To borrow from the old adage, a picture is worth a thousand words, and on

Facebook, it is not necessary to express those words if the photos adequately capture the stories their owners wish them to tell.

To again quote Facebook's stated mission, the SNS aims "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" ("Facebook About" 2012). Coinciding with this statement, Elliott concludes that through pictures "you can see where people hang out, who the people are they associate with. You have the friends list obviously, but you can see who they spend most of their time with." Pictures are the immediate snapshots of people's offline lives that most easily translate into an online forum. While users are able to choose which photos of themselves are displayed and who can view them, the pictures themselves speak words that no user or audience could ever properly communicate.

Though many participants conclude that pictures better reveal the self than textualizations, they could be ignoring the fact that the devices on which most participants admitted to accessing Facebook – their smartphones – are better suited for uploading pictures rather than typing textual descriptions. Uploading a mobile photograph to Facebook requires less time and the use of less buttons than typing out one's profile information. Though not discussed by any of the participants, perhaps as smartphones continue to advance, such as through talk to text features, users again will rely on or at least be more willing to edit and add textualizations of the self on their Facebook profiles.

DISCUSSION

Performances of Networked Selves

In order to study how the original Facebook generation handled the transition from adolescence to adulthood while in an online space and from a perspective principally rooted in Goffman's theories of the performance of self, participants were asked to reflect on their behaviors on and opinions about Facebook, both past and present. Through individual and focus group interviews, 27 participants ranging from the ages of 25 to 30, of all of whom had belonged to Facebook during its college network design and who now continue to use the site while being gainfully employed, expressed their beliefs about and practices on the site.

While discussing their networked identities in this virtual space, they revealed many concerns regarding their online selves. Most obviously, participants consider how their past collegiate online identities could potentially influence how their current virtual identities are viewed by different audiences on Facebook. While in college, many participants understood Facebook to be a community composed of their peers in which they could behave in ways that would not hold negative repercussions in their offline lives. However, as the site became open to the public, the once isolated space now was open to scrutiny by various other adult populations who could view their online behaviors as risky and inappropriate for their current adult lifestyles. In order to prevent such

misunderstandings, participants take measures to control how their personal information is disseminated to various Facebook populations, often limiting their current activities so as to prevent any misconceptions about their offline selves, particularly among current and future employers and family members.

Externalizing the Self

Through language and visual representations, users externalize the self for general audiences (Illouz 2007). So as to control for the anonymity of their viewing audiences, users create idealized selves for audiences they believe *should* be viewing their profiles. While all participants use Facebook in a way that is congruent with boyd's (2008) definition of an SNS as a social network site as opposed to a social *networking* site, in that they are reinforcing offline relationships rather than creating new ones online, users still must rely on their imagination when preparing for any online interaction. In the real world, performances require certain strategies so as to best interact with the audience, regardless if the audience is well known, less familiar, or unknown to the actor. On Facebook, users must take into account how their close offline connections would react to their online behaviors while also considering anonymous audiences. Such considerations help a user determine what general audience would most value her online performances without potential negative repercussions both on- and offline.

Though many participants worry about having their online performances being misinterpreted by audiences for whom they cannot practice impression management tactics in real time due to the lack of a physical presence during these interactions, they

also use Facebook as a space in which to pass judgment, both on other users and themselves. Due to the lack of ftf contact, users are not afforded opportunities to manage their performances for their audiences. Though online identities allow for fluidity overtime, at the point of contact with an audience, the actor is unable to adjust her profile displays as based on audience reaction. Interestingly, Goffman's claim that all interaction is affected by facts beyond the space and time of the interaction is brought into question by audiences' judgments of a user's performance of the online self. As evidenced by discussion with participants, audiences view users' virtual performances as one-dimensional. Rather than understanding that those performances are representations of reality, audiences appear to accept them as reality and thus do not allow for other facts beyond the profile page to affect how they judge a user. Rarely, the real-world reality of the user is taken into account when an audience criticizes a Facebook profile and its actor.

Ultimately, audiences hold the true power in determining the nature of performances of self in online venues. As understood from the interview discussions, participants often judge others' Facebook behaviors when the performances are not congruent with the personal values that they, as both users and audience members, place on Facebook as a social space. Others' behaviors online, much like with ftf interactions, allow users to learn about themselves in relation to other individuals through telecopresence and intersubjectivity. Often, when participants admit to judging others on Facebook, they do so in a way that places them in an elite position. As part of the first Facebook generation, they helped determine original online norms, so when other users,

usually those belonging to older generations, do not act in accordance with such norms, those users are evaluated as inept interlopers and as working incongruently with the network's goals. However, early users seem not to recognize that with the development of Facebook's business model, the site continues to create new sets of norms to which users are expected to follow.

The female participants in the study discuss dissatisfaction with their lives as determined by online comparisons with others. Based on other users' posts of status achievements as relayed through representations of marriage, offspring and property ownership, many female participants feel as though they are behind schedule in their current stage of adulthood as based on comparisons with reference groups. Many of the female participants are single, all were not married nor did they have children, and all but one own their own homes. The constant reminder of others' achievements via online posts made some of the female participants feel inadequate or lacking in status. However, as some participants recognize, online performances are idealized representations of the self at the time of observation, and so the audience has no means for determining the sincerity of these posts that display others' happiness and pride. Yet, this last realization only holds true when an audience member is judging herself and not another user. When criticizing another user, participants do so in a one-dimensional way. They appear to accept Facebook profiles as reality rather than representations of a reality, and this misinterpretation denies the fact that a user exists both on- and offline and the space in between, allowing for a three-dimensional understanding of the self. Behind that online representation is a real-world reality that is not subject to the same constraints and

affordances online platforms provide a user when performing the self. Due to the current public design of Facebook, the technology does not appropriate idealized identities for its users. While the technology certainly influences how expressions of the self are conducted online, it does not guide them. Users must work through the technology so as to determine the kind of portrayals they deem befitting of cyberspace.

As mentioned previously, online profiles are composed of textualizations and visual representations of the self. As Facebook has evolved so have the means by which users display their online identities. Seeking to make their virtual selves more fluid and accurate and what they view as more authentic at the point of contact, users rely more on the visual representations, photographs in particular, to understand the kind of person a user is when offline. Some participants argue that written language could be manipulated too easily so as to give off these idealized impressions and pictures are not bounded by crafted words; therefore, the latter better speaks to the true nature of the self. However, based on the testimony of participants when they serve as online audiences, the virtual self is viewed as a bounded identity since audiences ignore those crucial facts that lie beyond the space and time of the online interaction. Ultimately, all interview discussions were held together by the reoccurring theme that when online, the audience is the entity that ultimately will decide the nature of the performance.

Effects of Professionalism on the Self

The user and audience work to create virtual identities that they each believe are ideal for users. As a networked space, Facebook allows users to perform various aspects

of the self, including the social, professional, and academic. To participate in this study, all participants were required to possess a college degree and currently be employed in a professional realm. These requirements stem from the theory that in most Western societies, individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood once education is supplanted by work as the principal priority in a young person's life (Furstenberg 2000: 897).

As based on this study's interviews, participants believe American society continues to attach a moral purity to professionalism. A culture of professionalism was created in America in the 19th century as professionalism and the American university came to share a symbiotic relationship: "Most professional education occurs in universities, and Americans in fact define universities by the presence of professional schools" (Abbot 1988: 195). As Americans came to restructure the meaning of the middle-class citizen, education became the venue for the development of a new class, who possessed "a vertical vision that compelled persons to look upward, forever reaching toward their potential and their becoming, the fulfillment of their true nature" (Bledstein 1976: 105). Higher educational institutions were cultivated to serve as the hubs of this upward vision specific to the middle class. After attending these regulated institutions, a person exited not just with a profession but a career, "a pre-established total pattern of organized professional activity, with upward movement through recognized preparatory stages, and advancement based on merit and bearing honor" (Bledstein 1976: 172).

Randall Collins (1979: 128) estimates that "universities had realized a self-fulfilling prophecy" by continually relaying to the public the importance education plays

when seeking the most noteworthy positions in society, both professionally and socially. With an impetus placed on education credentials, universities were able to increase their enrollment rates during the 20th century, thus opening their doors to populations beyond those fitting the traditional mold of the moral middle-class citizen. The trust and authority once afforded to professionals by greater society no longer was attached to cultural standards of morality rooted in character, but rather had metamorphosed into a societal confidence in expertise. Students no longer represented the elite of society; and rather than attend these institutions to find their “true nature,” they sought an education that would translate into a set of credentials to serve a specific professional position in society rather than acting as the liaison between the individual and society at large (Brickman 1972). Ethics still played a role but specifically to the one’s expert knowledge and not to the public good.

Yet, participants recognize that now as young professionals they must uphold a certain demeanor and conduct befitting their roles as educated professionals. When the participants were adolescent college students, they admitted to practicing risky behaviors and acting in ways of which authority figures would disapprove, but their decisions to do so were based on the assumed social contract between American youth and adults that allows for the former to explore and experiment within a youth-based social space. With the advent of Facebook, those collegiate behaviors and performances were chronicled in an online space to which employers and other adults eventually would have access.

Though many participants express leaving those less than morally upright behaviors to their college years, they suggest that employers still have moral expectations

for an employee's character and those former behaviors affect how those expectations are met. Despite believing that they have disconnected their post-college selves from their collegiate ones, participants remain anxious in how their collegiate selves will continue to affect their futures. If we assume as correct Furstenburg's (2000) claim that current American society has set the structural conditions for allowing its youth to create a culture separate from adults, then youth should be able to disassociate from their adolescent life stage once they enter adulthood. Yet, as young professionals, the original Facebook population finds itself bound to the context of how audience members view the solidarity of one's college self and one's current self as represented online.

A Social Cyberspace

Cyberspace provides a space in which individuals may perform the self without bodily constraints and fit influences. Once thought to be the great democratizer in which individuals could express their true selves without limitation, the Internet has come to be understood as a space that allows for the extension of offline performances through the intersection of technology and identity. In the space of SNSs, users expand upon their offline selves rather than creating new identities. Online performances are guided by many of the same rules as offline ones, with the major difference being the actor's inability to perceive immediately reactions of the audience, thus preventing her from adjusting her performance so as to better please the audience.

As one of the most popular SNSs, Facebook has transitioned from a virtual space for college students to an open forum in which any population may act. The development

of Facebook's design coincides with the original Facebook population's transition from adolescence to adulthood as marked by the shift from education to professional work as being their primary undertaking. By examining how this group of individuals recognizes and negotiates this transition of a life stage when online, researchers can come to understand how the self matures in virtual spaces and whether that maturation is congruent with how the self evolves in real-world settings.

APPENDIX – A

Complete list of participants' professional fields (unless a number is noted, only one participant listed the field)

- Consultancy
- Defense/Telephony
- Education (2 participants)
- Engineering
- Entertainment Industry
- Environmental Nonprofit
- Fashion
- Government
- Government relations (4 participants)
- Healthcare
- Healthcare Nonprofit
- Higher Education
- Home Design
- Intelligence
- Marketing (2 participants)
- Marketing Research
- Psychology
- Publishing
- Social Work
- Special Education (2 participants)
- Tech Sector

APPENDIX – B

Individual Interview Consent Form

Who You Choose to Be Online: Networked Public Selves

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand the uses of social networking sites, like Facebook and LinkedIn, among young professionals (ages 25-30) in the DC-metro area, who first began using Facebook when it was restricted by collegiate network and who still actively use social networking sites. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to partake in a one-on-one interview that will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

RISKS

The only foreseeable risks or discomfort in participating in this interview include sharing personal information regarding online use and activities.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the field of Sociology.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your interview will be recorded on a digital audio recorder, which will only be accessible to the researcher. The recorder will be kept in the possession of the researcher in a secure location. The transcription of the interview will utilize a pseudonym in place of your actual name, and all other potential identifiers will be omitted to protect your confidentiality.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the interview, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Caroline Shewmaker, Department of Sociology at George Mason University, for her thesis project. She may be reached at 843-301-2311 or cshewmak@masonlive.gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this project is Dr. Karen Rosenblum, and she can be reached at 703-993-1450 or krosenbl@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. Lastly, if you experience any sort of psychological distress due to your participation in this interview you may also contact the Counseling and Psychological Services at 703-993-2380 for further assistance. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to have my interview audio taped.
Name

_____ I disagree to have interview audio taped.
Date of Signature

APPENDIX – C

Focus Group Consent Form

Who You Choose to Be Online: Networked Public Selves

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand the uses of social networking sites, like Facebook and LinkedIn, among young professionals (ages 25-30) in the DC-metro area, who first began using Facebook when it was restricted by collegiate network and who still actively use social networking sites. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to partake in a focus group interview that will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour.

RISKS

The only foreseeable risks or discomfort in participating in this interview include sharing personal information regarding online use and activities.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the field of Sociology.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your interview will be recorded on a digital audio recorder, which will only be accessible to the researcher. The recorder will be kept in the possession of the researcher in a secure location. The transcription of the focus group will utilize a pseudonym in place of your actual name, and all other potential identifiers will be omitted to protect your confidentiality.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the focus group at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the focus group, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Caroline Shewmaker, Department of Sociology at George Mason University, for her thesis project. She may be reached at 843-301-2311 or cshewmak@masonlive.gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this project is Dr. Karen Rosenblum, and she can be reached at 703-993-1450 or krosenbl@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. Lastly, if you experience any sort of psychological distress due to your participation in this interview you may also contact the Counseling and Psychological Services at 703-993-2380 for further assistance. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to have my focus group audio
Name taped.

_____ I disagree to have my focus group audio
Date of Signature taped.

APPENDIX – D

Demographic Sheet

1. How old are you?
2. How do you identify your gender?
3. How do you identify yourself racially or ethnically?
4. What is your professional field?

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Caroline Shewmaker received her Bachelor of Arts in both English and Psychology from Clemson University in 2007 and her Master of Arts degree from George Mason University in 2012.