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Title: Confessing Our Sims: The construction of gender and sexuality among women ages 18-22 on MySpace.

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MySpace is a social network phenomenon with over 100 million profiles

and a strong presence in over 24 countries. As digital media become more

commonplace, social networks are becoming sites where women create and

manage relationships and identities. This thesis is a study of how women

ages 18-22 are constructing their gender and sexuality on the social network

site MySpace. By using a rhetorical analysis of 58 MySpace profiles, this

study identifies several themes, including the strong presence of horizontal

hostility. Rather than functioning as a forum for women to challenge

conventional gender roles, MySpace gives women an opportunity to

perform femininity. These women are reinforcing the values associated with

traditional femininity by competing for both social and romantic attentions

in their autobiographical writings and profile photographs.

Confessing Our Sims: The construction of gender and sexuality among
women ages 18-22 on MySpace.

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Confessing Our Sims:

The construction of gender and sexuality among women ages 18-22 on MySpace.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

> MySpace is a Sunset Strip for virtual boulevardiers, a hall of mirrors for fame seekers, where the shy, the neurotic, and the desperately run-of-the-mill go to become exhibitionists and tarts. You cannot peruse the site for long before coming upon hordes of would-be models in thong bikinis and tweens posing in their underwear. Their comments and biographies, open for all to see, are composed in a syntax-challenged, !!!-riddled new argot of desire and frustration. It is a place where lonely songwriters, brooding would-be thespians, reality-TV personalities, millionaires' kids, drag racers, drag queens, religious nuts, D.J.'s, rock stars, stalkers, wrestlers, Marines, gangsta rappers, recovering addicts, active addicts, porn stars, fashion designers both talented and horrible-and legions who are just pretending to be those things-go to be seen. There are also plenty of seemingly well-adjusted users, fascinating if only for their normality, as well as successful musicians, artists, and authors. For all of them, it is a stage and a confessional, turgid with the promise of sex and as omnivorous and refractory as pop culture itself.
> ~James Verini

MySpace

Visiting MySpace, the social networking powerhouse, is a monthly activity for more than 110 million active users across the globe (Owyang, 2008; Stelter, 2008). The demographics shifted dramatically in the last two years from a teen driven market to a market dominated by adults ages 18-54 (Lipsman, 2006; Cashmore, P. 2006). This shift in population began in 2005 shortly before Fox Interactive purchased Intermix Media, MySpace's parent company. Regardless of ownership, MySpace continues to dominate as the most recognizable social network site generating massive revenue and media attention by connecting people and advertisements across continents.

I have been a member of the MySpace community for over three years, and my familiarity with how the site is run, its features, and demographics makes the study of

this site a natural choice for my research. Social networking sites like Friendster may be older than MySpace, but the sheer volume of participants in the MySpace culture makes it fertile ground for academic study. While accounts about MySpace's creation and inspiration differ, the economic growth and financial capabilities of the site remain consistent.

MySpace was not the first social network site, in 2002, Friendster was the original mass marketed social networking site (boyd, 2004; 2006). Friendster was billed as a dating website where users could see the friends of their friend's friend's friend's (for a total of 4 degrees of separation). The belief was that people were more likely to like and be able to develop relationships with the people their friends liked. Friendster enjoyed moderate success as a dating site but their users rebelled and began to use the site to keep in touch with each other rather than just meet potential mates (boyd, 2004; 2006).

MySpace entered cyber-consciousness in 2003 as the brainchild of Tom Anderson, Chris DeWolfe, and Brad Greenspan. Before MySpace, Anderson and DeWolfe worked together on ResponseBase, an email-list brokerage service made successful by selling email accounts to advertisers (Hansell, 2006). Brad Greenspan, CEO of the online entertainment service eUniverse, purchased ResponseBase in 2002 (Lapinski, 2006). Together the triad worked on launching a site similar to Friendster (Bosworth, 2005). The stories diverge at this point. The first story began with internet rumors implicating MySpace employees, who worked at Friendster for a short time, of stealing and replicating Friendster's website strategy. Other stories, including the

version told by Brad Greenspan, the founder and previous owner of eUniverse, acknowledged Friendster was a good beginning for social networking sites, but his crew replicated only the basic code and then improved upon it (Greenspan, 2007; Lapinski, 2006). Either way, the basic structure of MySpace is eerily similar to Friendster's format and continues to assimilate user amenities found on other social networking sites, primarily Friendster and Facebook.

The collaboration between marketing strategies and entertainment services culminated in a profitable partnership. Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe are the most recognizable of the three entrepreneurs; Greenspan resigned in late 2003 due to reported federal tax issues. In 2004, after Greenspan's resignation, eUniverse underwent two major changes: MySpace was launched as a "Social Network Site" and the company was renamed "Intermix Media." Within one year Fox Interactive Media, owned by Rupert Murdoch the media conglomerate behind News Corporation, purchased Intermix Media and MySpace for an astounding figure between $580 million and $649 million (boyd, 2006; Hansell, 2006). Perhaps what is more interesting than Murdoch's acquisition of another media company is the speculation that the little over half a billion dollar selling price was a steal.

Current projections estimate each user on the site is worth $5-7 dollars a day. Revenue from advertisers is on the rise. MySpace shows over a billion advertisements daily. On average, there are nine advertisements per page rotating sponsors and sell for $100,000-$750,000 dollars a day (Sellers, 2006). TechCrunch, a website following

the news for and about the Internet estimates MySpace's total worth to be over 12

billion dollars in 2007, two years after Murdoch's purchase (Arrington, 2007).

The news media both demonizes and celebrates MySpace especially in the

last two years. MySpace does not carefully police profile images, and profiles with

sexually explicit content can stay up for weeks without sanction. Two other blogging

sites, Facebook and Friendster, monitor their users' content more vigilantly. MySpace

has been careful to maintain the perceived anonymity of its users by cultivating an

elitist attitude about other blogging sites. The owners of MySpace have been

publically critical of other sites whose policies about policing for bad behavior treats

their users as misbehaving children. Most users of MySpace are aware of the

potentially explicit content they may see but remain loyal to a site that treats them like

adults. Parents, nervous about the information their underage children are giving out

or receiving, rage against the lax security measures protecting underage users from

mixing with the older and more mature community (Barnard, 2008; Medina, 2007;

Stone, 2007). Social and sexual harassment are affecting thousands of girls online.

Cyberbullying has become an issue for the developers to address to protect users from

the slanderous and malicious behaviors of their peers (Maag, 2007; Belluck, 2006).

Another exposé on MySpace reveals users selling steroids off their sites (Kaplan,

2007). The negative reports continue to target MySpace's format and are inspiring

innovative changes to the site.

With such a battery of bad publicity, MySpace has made public commitments

to fixing some of the problems and improving the system (Richtel, 2006). MySpace

has joined up with 50 attorney generals to brainstorm solutions to verify ages and

identities of MySpace users (Barnard, 2008). MySpace is also working with Facebook

and state legislatures to develop programs banning registered sex offenders from the

site (Lee, 2008).   They hired Photobucket, an image sorting web service, to weed out

pornographic images from profiles (Angwin, 2006). The improvements will continue,

but it is likely that 110 million monthly users will continue to create new problems to

solve.

Aside from security improvements, MySpace is currently undergoing major

renovations. Programs are in development to customize advertisements shown to each

user and MySpace tv.com, a video hosting service for professional videos, launched in

2007. MySpace is expanding into 24 countries under Murdoch's tutelage with an

unlimited number on the horizon (Hansell, 2006; Stone, 2007; Stone, 2007). The

growth potential of MySpace seems endless as the empire expands into new markets

while the old markets have not lost their steam. Bands, comedians, personalities, and

celebrities still use the site to connect with their fans. Individuals continue to

socialize, check out hot new bands, and check up on their friends. MySpace has

become a social institution: people go to work, go to school, shop, pay taxes, and

MySpace.

Virtual life has become a common theme of analysis for economists, scholars,

reporters, and researchers. Internet communities are often transient with fluid

memberships that include or exclude individuals on a whim. Scholars are researching

the "reality" of the interactions in online communities and the experiences people

bring back into their "real lives," generating theories to explain the behavior of internet relations, how people are constructing their online identities, and what does all this mean? The postmodern explosion of Web 2.0 has created new and accessible visual and textual culture that changes with the veracity of a mutant meme.

Due to the popularity of MySpace, scholars of popular culture are beginning to turn their attention to this social network site. Thus far, most academic research focuses on why social network site are so popular and who are using the sites. My study adds to this initial body of literature by utilizing feminist lenses to examine 18-22 year old women's construction of gender and sexuality on their MySpace pages. I have identified common themes that indicate some of the ways these women are utilizing social network sites to explore, express, and construct their gender and sexuality.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

After a brief introduction to social network sites, I have organized this literature review into three categories: Feminism and the Construction of Gender and Sexuality, Didactic Confessional Culture, and Visceral/Visual Culture. Each section will define terminology, explore the history of the subject and recent scholarship, and examine how these theories complicate identity and gender online.

Using theories from Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway, the first category identifies the construction of a gender and sexual identity from a feminist paradigm and summarizes contemporary research supported by these theorists. Writings by Elias Cashmore deconstructs the social influences of popular and celebrity culture, while Katherine N. Kinnick analyzes the saturation of porn culture into popular culture. Lastly, works by Ariel Levy link identity construction, celebrity and porn cultures to popular culture at large.

The second category focuses on the development of confessional culture as a method of blurring the distinction between the personal/political, public/private, and individual/community. Journalists report widely on confessional culture, the culture of "hyper-communication and self-revelation" (Allen, 2007); however, academic circles do not focus on this specific phenomenon; rather, scholars focus on autobiographical culture. In confessional culture, individuals chart their lives using a mixture of images and writings, often commenting on day-to-day inertia, common frustrations with parking spaces, and urban rants about work and love. Primary

theorists include Dean Blevins, Joanna Gill, and Moira Burke whose works locate confessional culture as an avenue for identity making.

The third and final section will examine visual culture as an analytical tool to deconstruct the visual messages in MySpace. Foundational research by John Berger and Laura Mulvey will locate visual culture theory as applicable to the visual performances of MySpace profiles and provide interpretive tools. Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken locate the internet as a new visual culture medium where identity construction occurs.

Social Network Sites

The availability of Internet communications and unlimited space creates a need for individuals to manufacture online identities. To combat persons getting lost in cyberspace entrepreneurs create Internet blogging sites or social network sites (SNSs) to replace scrapbooks and diaries. According to boyd (2006) social network sites and social networking sites have a primary difference in research: social network sites indicate a preexisting group membership while social networking sites represent the introduction of new relationships. The profiles on social network sites exist as foci for interaction.

Beginning in the 1990's people used social network sites to make connections between like-minded groups of people. Often these sites were private, shared within a corporate setting to facilitate business connections. Classmates.com, a mid-1990's startup and one of the first public social network sites, connected students, alumni, and faculty for educational institutions across the United States. As the sites become more

commonplace, the dating websites began to use the communal format to connect potential matches while sites like MySpace used them to connect friends.

In the age of confessional culture, women 18-22 years old are flocking to social network sites to create individual online identities. Social network sites have become part of the monthly activities of over 110 million active accounts on MySpace; the average receives over 30 hits or visitations per day (Verini 2006). Approximately 117,000 new accounts are started daily which leads to an estimated worth of $90-$120 million dollars in 2006 (Verini, 2006).

Scholarship on social network sites ranges from identifying and analyzing constructs of individuality and performativity to gender difference (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008), race (Byrne, 2008), immaterial labor (Cote & Pybus, 2007), and literacy development (Perkel, 2006). The majority of research focuses on the information adolescents share online (Bremer & Rauch, 1998; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Pierce, 2007) and the construction of online relationships (Goodings, Locke &Brown, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

The impact of social network sites and identity development is a topic of much research as scholars interrogate the impact of digital relationships on "real life." Patti M Valkenburg et. al (2005) analyzes the relationship between digital communications and adolescent identity development. Her research finds that adolescents perform alternative identities by varying some aspect of their online identity, often age. According to Kaveri Subrahmanyam and Patricia Greenfield (2008) these changes

facilitate "self exploration (to explore others' reaction), social compensation (to make up for shyness), and social facilitation (to form relationships)" (139).   Furthermore, the type of feedback left in response to an individual profile influences both adolescents' self-esteem and their well-being (Valkenburg, 2005).

Research by boyd (2006) suggests users develop these identities using a "process of performance, interpretation, and adjustment;" this "impression management" allows users to create their profiles based on the "contextual cues from the environment around them" (p. 12).   The customization of users' pages with images, colors, music, 'about me' sections, and blogs fits into boyd's model of conscious identity construction. Individuals are creating the image they want to express. Phillip Sloan (2005), Jenny Sunden (2003), and Mark Amerika (2007) describe the idea of writing oneself into being as a process of creating a written representation of the self.   boyd suggests users create and maintain these identities for an "imagined audience" (2007 p. 14). One problem with an imagined audience is the presence of "publics" rather than a singular public; profiles do not exist as a point in time but exist forever as multiple publics have access to the digital footprint (8). This issue repeatedly surfaces in "real life" as employees, job candidates, and students are held accountable for photographs or writing that *is* on or *was* on their web pages (Chan, 2008; Pappano, 2007; Du, 2007).

Research suggests social network sites are as much a part of "real" life as a part of online (boyd, 2006; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005) and the definition between the two is no longer separate, although there is a cultural distinction between those who

divide experiences online from experiences offline. Marc Prensky (2001) defines

digital natives as those who are fluent in digital language while digital immigrants are

forever translating. Digital natives do not translate their experiences from "real life" to

the digital life but experience them simultaneously.

Each social network site typically focuses on a different demographic but,

again, users often have blogs on multiple sites. Specifically, Friendster, Facebook,

and MySpace cater to different demographics. Friendster is marketed as a dating

website. Until 2006, college students were the only population allowed on Facebook,

and MySpace was for everyone in between. Many users have profiles on more than

one site. I, for example, have a profile on each site constructed for different

audiences. All three sites allow their users to customize their experiences,

applications, or WebPages. There are no limitations; this is a self-produced, self-

promoted, and self-regulated form of mass media.

Friendster

boyd's research on Friendster provides many of the foundational texts on

social network sites. boyd (2004) finds the population on Friendster is predominately

made up of 20-somethings; a recent demographic shift, however, locates the dominate

population as between 35-54 years of age (comscore.com, 2006). boyd (2008)

stipulates Friendster's intended audience is adults looking to date, but their users also

use the site for keeping track of friends. Users create identity on Friendster through

images and text by performing socially appropriate and digitally acceptable behaviors

including personal advertisement (boyd, 2004; 2006; Hendra, 2003). A rapid decline

in population occurred when Friendster began policing users' profiles (boyd, 2006).

Research on Friendster has slowed although as other social network sites like

Facebook and MySpace have dominated the publics' interest.

Facebook

Mark Zuckerberg who was, at the time, a student at Harvard University, launched

Facebook in 2004 as a social network site for college students. Originally, students

needed a university email account to sign up for the service. Facebook went "public"

and discontinued this practice in 2006 (Rosmarin, 2006). Stories of Facebook's

creation mirrored the conflicting accounts facing MySpace; stories of theft challenged

intellectual property laws before they were able to cope with such claims.

Facebook is the subject of very few academic studies. The most recent writings

about Facebook are critical of the "news feed" (Comp, 2008). This feature provides a

running commentary on changes made to friend's profiles so users always know what

information their friend's have changed (boyd, 2006). Another criticism is

Facebook's unprecedented move to open its doors to developers and marketers

(Samavati, 2008; Shaheen, 2008). This move situates Facebook as a marketing tool

and as a free trade economy. boyd (2007) analyzes the implied social and class

differences between MySpace and Facebook users and found Facebook's population is

typically more educated and of a higher socioeconomic class. This result is somewhat

expected as Facebook's original marketing strategy was aimed at college students.

Anne Hewitt and Andrea Forte (2006) focus on the presence of professors within the

Facebook community found student users are concerned with issues of privacy and

hierarchical interaction. Many of the images on MySpace and Facebook feature underage drinking or illegal drug use and students fear professors prejudging them or using the information against them.   In addition, Joy Peluchette and Katherine Karl (2007) study the implications of informal information sharing practices on social network sites and found users are concerned with employer's perceptions of them. Peluchette and Karl called for additional research on employer's who are concerned with possible complications between confessional culture and corporate confidentiality expectations.

MySpace

Previous research on MySpace closely resembles research conducted on Friendster and Facebook. Community on MySpace is grounded in a "relationship to place" connecting individual to the larger MySpace publics (Goodings, Locke & Brown, 2007). boyd's (2007) research examines the motivations of users and finds that MySpace provides a space for personal and social development through impression management.

It is through trial and error users construct their identity (boyd, 2007). For example, users list their favorite films, but will then visit their friend's sites to see if they forgot any important films. Ryan Guy (2007) follows this vein by examining rhetorical strategies that reinforce sexual identity politics. Rather than emulating textual cues, users are replicating sexual acts such as fellatio with inanimate objects or displaying piercings to generate attention and community acceptance. Profiles on MySpace normalize heterosexual sexual behaviors and imagery. Users post and

update profiles with regularity (Pierce, 2007) although disclosure of personal

information happens with less frequency than previously reported (Hinduja & Patchin,

2008). The MySpace community sustains and reinforces traditional gender

performance and heteronormative discourses (Arca, 2007; Magnuson & Dundes,

2007). These practices reinforce the dependency of women on outside sources for

their "sense of self" (Magnuson & Dundes, 2007 pg. 239) which results in the use of

rhetorical questioning to garner responses and horizontal hostilities to provoke

interest.

Feminism and the Construction of a Gendered and Sexual Identity

Feminist theorists have long analyzed the construction of a biological female

or social feminine identity (Beauvoir, 1993; Butler, 1990). Much like digital natives

who grew up with digital culture, femininity is a performative act maintained and

imbedded in societal values. Feminine natives do not differentiate their experiences as

'other.' Rather they integrate their experiences as 'normal.' Establishing fluency in

'femininity' begins at conception, as parents expound on the strength of a fetus' kick

or marked passivity. By benefit of biological sex, society transmits social roles to

guide and maintain this construction.

Simone deBeauvoir (1972) establishes it is not 'femininity' in which women

are fluent but 'masculinity.' Women are marked in society as deviant and as the

'other.' Women, without the benefit of a male companion, lack agency and identity.

As identity is constructed, one becomes a woman, marked by her birth into a

phallocentric culture. The immanence of women maintains the closed and passive

construction of women as objects. According toBeauvoir, women's immersion into themselves is in direct contrast to the transcendence males' experiences in which their creativity and actions are valued as subject positions.

Judith Butler (1990) recognizes gender performativity as central to theories of identity development and advocates for women to make themselves the subject through a "process of signification" (183). By consciously challenging hegemonic constructions of gender, identity, feminine/masculine, women can reflect their own choices. Butler (1990) and Taylor & Rupp (2005) examine "drag" as a subversive performance from which women can complicate or cartoonishly emulate gendered characteristics. Butler also challenges sexuality as an unstable construction, functioning in duality with performance and against gendered essentialism.

Donna Haraway (1991) continues the argument against essentialism by locating the Cyborg as a "post-gender" construction not limited by biology. She cites affinity as an organizational politic rather than the singular identity politics that has dominated feminist group formation. Haraway's affinity politic complicates the belief that "woman" or "women" are as much of a construction as gender and sexuality. Haraway also introduces the Cyborg into a "virtual" environment of physicality and non-physicality, where the blurring between public and private discourses and boundaries is subverted in favor of an integrated circuit approach. Haraway redefines institutions of power (religion, government, or school) as nodes or nodules on a circuit rather than as static and isolated locations.

The interconnection between Beauvoir, Butler, and Haraway focuses on identity as a construction influenced by self, society, and a bad faith belief that identity is the same as autonomy. Identity is a fluid construct rooted in the transmission of values. According to Haraway's integrated circuit approach, individual nodes are constantly receiving and transmitting cultural values. Media, functioning as an institution within the closed circuit, reflect and reinforce societal desires of gender construction and sexual identity (Cashmore, E. 2006). The internet, with its geographic and cultural flexibility, serves as a method to transmit institutional values directing the performance of gender and as a possible method of subverting feminine immanence into masculine transcendence.

Celebrity

While media disseminate societal expectations, only select individuals or celebrities represent the ideal. Popular culture and celebrity culture represent the media and publics' obsession with power and distraction (Cashmore, E. 2006). Although media imply the method of transmission (print, screen, or monitor), media primarily include the materials present in those spaces. Celebrity culture requires identification with the idolized figures. Elias Cashmore (2006) and Rojek (2001) point to the similarities between religious worship and celebrity worship, effectively situating "celebrity" as a social institution. A primary difference between the two: celebrity culture does not pass through three-dimensional interaction, as one would experience in a church, but through interpretation of "mediated, two-dimensional images" (Cashmore, E. 2006 p. 255). Users interpret the images without the benefit of

societal cues like facial movements, body language, or the ability to ask clarifying questions.

Capitalist interests finance celebrity culture. Hyper-consumerism locates celebrities as marketable products or as methods of value transmission (Cashmore, E. 2006; Grossberg, 1992). Celebrity culture encourages its residents to indulge in all possible stimuli including shopping, drugs, partying, and recently, rehab (Cashmore, E. 2006). Celebrity idolization transmits the importance of instant gratification to the public. The perception of wanton hedonism and celebrity indulgence propels the ideal consumer to share in the consumption of high-end products indicating the celebrity lifestyle (Dyer, 1979). Rahman (2004) submits celebrity culture has two distinct functions: to transmit a "system of meanings and values which is supplanting traditional resources for self and social identities" and to advance product consumption and capitalism (223). Scholars have identified that media transmit gendered and sexual values to children (Marie, 2007) and adolescents (Durham, 1999) and reinforces gender, sexual, and identity values in adults (Gauntlett, 2002).

boyd (2007) further argues the focus on celebrity distorts expectations of privacy and public information. The intimate lives of celebrities are featured on prime time television (Access Hollywood, Extra, and Hollywood Insider), in most magazines (Cosmo, Maxim, and Vogue), and online (TMZ.com, OMG.com, and PerezHilton.com). US Magazine features a section entitled "Just Like Us!" with photographs of celebrities participating in mundane chores like grocery shopping, digging through their purse for keys, or picking their nose. Celebrities such as Rosie

O'Donnell, John Mayer, and Arianna Huffington have their own blog sites to give

their fans glimpses into their daily lives. Elias Cashmore most thoroughly explores

the influence of such intimate connections to celebrity in his text *Celebrity Culture*.

According Katherine N. Kinnick's (2006) analysis of cultivation theory, the

repetitive nature of the meanings and values in media culture maintain traditional

gender roles for women. Media are cultivating beliefs that "sexuality and gender roles

[are] more similar to media's version of reality than reality itself" (18). She further

submits that desensitization will occur as viewers of mainstream media adapt to the

sexualized content through a habituation effect and need more explicit content to

maintain interest. Finally, Kinnick argues that once viewers have become habituated

to sexualized content they are less likely to "rate the material as offensive,

pornographic, or in need of restriction" (22).

Porn

Hundreds of newspapers and news reports document yhe prevalence of

pornographic materials on the internet. Concerns for social welfare, the degeneration

of family values, and children's access to lascivious content dominate these headlines.

Early scholars of the internet paid particular attention to cybersex practices (Carnes,

1999) and (Miah, 2003). Contemporary researchers spend much of their time

analyzing how people use porn, gender differences in reaction to porn, and non-

solicited sexual materials, and porn's influence on identity development. Women are

typically less receptive to unsolicited pornographic images (Nosko, et al, 2007), and

the images negatively affect their body image (Attwood, 2007). Attwood's research

found sexualized images of women on the internet are generally more acceptable then sexualized images of men and maintain mainstream heteronormative practices.

Kaarina Nikunen and Susanna Paasoonen (2007) identify the blurring of boundaries between popular culture and porn culture and further stipulate that pornification, "the expansion and success of the porn industry and play with hard-core representations in fashion, advertising, and other fields in popular culture," is changing the cultural perception and status of porn. Pamela Paul and Ariel Levy have written extensively on the infiltration of porn culture into mainstream culture. Levy (2006) asserts that pornographic imagery infiltrates mass media and mass media is disseminating the habituated content. Repeat exposure to sexualized and oppressive gender roles is desensitizing girls, adolescents, and adult women. They are now creating their own visual culture focusing on the "post feminist" belief that they control their gender and sexual expression. Many "post feminists" believe women have gender equality after all-we can vote and own property…just like men. This false consciousness maintains and perpetuates traditional feminine roles under this bad faith belief; post feminists rationalize that equality means patriarchal culture no longer influences their behaviors. They hold the ability to redefine themselves without a societal masculine influence.

Didactic Confessional Culture

Researchers study independent components of confessional culture but there is no foundational body of work detailing its impact on society nor has there been an

overwhelming amount of work written defining, theorizing, or expounding on the subject.

Dean Blevins (2007) studies the commonalities between blogging and storytelling and finds that the "narratives remain deeply influenced by the media/discourses that [shape] the stories told" (261). He further submits that blogging "provides both cautions and opportunities for a renewed, pluiform, investigation into identity construction" as the "'virtual' autobiography exposes the depth of possibilities in the mediated word" (262). Joanna Gill (2001) examines confessional non-fiction novels as products of intense design. Confessional texts "knowingly, and skillfully, anticipate, engage with, and finally assuage the anxieties of their readers in order to ensure their own successful reading" (82). The veil between confessional non-fiction novels and blogging culture is thin; for both texts there must be a "listener/reader/confessor in order for the speaker/penitent's confession to be realized" (Gill, 2001 p. 82). Finally, Moira Burke et al. (2007) maintains that "successful socialization into an online community requires learning both norms and politics" (16). Rhetorical strategies in online communities are used as "self-disclosing introductions and [to make] requests" and assist in easing the transition from online outsider to an accepted community member.

To date there have been no studies examining MySpaces's relationship to confessional culture, the construction of the confession, or rhetorical questioning. Michael Clark (2007) summarizes that the culture of confession "by becoming the

universal norm, has become mere imitation, one-upmanship, narcissistic aggrandizement, and seemingly endless repetition" (5).

Visceral/Visual Culture

The examination of visual culture allows us to explore how we process visual texts, images, and patterns. John Berger's foundational text, Ways of Seeing (1972), examines how, why, what, and when society "sees" visual images. Berger suggests reproductions of art lead to a "recontextualization" of the image, especially if removed from its original context (P.). Viewers interpret the meaning of images and art and then translate and apply their interpretation to larger cultural meanings. His exploration of gendered differences in visual portrayals inspires Laura Mulvey's work on the male gaze, gazing politics, and the objectification of women.

A key component to the objectification of women in media is Laura Mulvey's concept of "the male gaze" (1989). This style of viewing or representing women through the lens of the male maintains active patriarchal dominance by restricting women to passive or receptive roles. While Mulvey uses this theory specifically for the visual images created in cinema, researchers apply the concept to gazing politics and anticipatory responses on college campuses (Calogero, 2005), masculinity and femininity in advertisements (O'Barr, 2006), television as confronting the gaze (Crowder, 2008), and in cyberculture (Sullivan,1997). The research suggests that the male gaze is present in most products of visual cultural. The development of a sexual and provocative identity indicates the internalization of the male gaze; women as objects are replicating the gaze of their oppressors.

The internet is changing gazing politics. There is more to the process of anticipating the gaze, creating visual culture in response to the gaze, and interpreting those images. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2001) state that

> we live in an era of media convergence To speak of images apart from sound, dimensional form, and other modes of representation is to overlook the crucial fact that media convergence is key to the Web's appeal as a global communications system…It is the hope of many communication and technology theorists that this convergence will collapse distances and democratize knowledge. Key to this idea that image, text, sound, and objects can no longer be studied in isolation…the movement of cultural products and visual images throughout the world is always about the production of different kinds of cultural meaning (344-345).

Meaning is not limited to the visual, especially on MySpace where contradictory messages abound. Furthermore, researchers who isolate one component of a website, for example, are not examining the entirety of information presented.

Conclusion

On social networking sites, a user's profile has a mix of written material and images to express online identity. This blending of confessional and visual cultures complicates the scholarly study of social network sites since they allow users to post a conglomerate of text, images, and third party materials. How can a researcher examine only text on a website dedicated to blending the connections between images and writing, identity and society, private and public? This research aims to explore the interplay between textual and visual on MySpace and in no way means to represent an exhaustive study of the site; rather I seek to add my research to the nascent but growing academic pool of knowledge.

Chapter 3 – Methods

MySpace is the most widely recognizable social network site in America. People flock to the site for the opportunity to create their online identity and begin exploring the pages of their friends and favorite media personalities. Research about MySpace often addresses parental or societal concerns about children and identity development, personal safety, or consumer culture but little research exists using content and rhetorical analysis of public identities on the internet. My research addresses the broad issue of confessional culture and body representations. This rhetorical work explores the ways 18-22 year old women are expressing their gender and sexuality on the social network site (SNS) MySpace. In particular, it provides a rhetorical analysis of the written and image-based texts these women produce. I reviewed over 50 profiles for this study. Specifically, I analyze user profile images and blogs (web logs or on-line public diaries), which function as online journals.

Each MySpace profile included self-produced and self-promoted sections that consist of "About Me" sections and "Blogs" (on-line public diaries), but to date, there is no information, outside of demographics, analyzing the values and information transmission from the MySpace user to the MySpace viewer. Users are confessing their innermost secrets and desires to their online community. This "confessional culture" gives all users an opportunity to have a voice and to share their unique perspectives of the world around them. As "people are simultaneously shaping the conditions of their lives and are constantly recreating themselves," taking a snapshot

in time of individual profiles and examining their contents provides detailed

information about confessional culture (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005 p. 892).

Since the images that "[represent culture are] partial, or incomplete because culture

itself was not precisely boundaried and continually evolves," then a limited analysis

captures a precise time in the lives of my 58 MySpace users (Harper, 1998 p. 30).

Their commonalities are their gender, student status, and time they logged in to alter

their MySpace profiles.

Some of the questions that led to my examination include: What messages

does a user's MySpace page transmit to viewers? Is there a correlation between the

images users post and the themes in their writing? How are women constructing

gender? What does this gender look like? Are women using blogs to define and

construct their sexuality? How do images interact with the text? Are blogs and the

women who participate with them maintaining traditional constructions of gender or

providing a space for resistance? Finally, how do users construct gender and sexuality

in the ways they write about themselves and the images of themselves they post?

In her article "The Methods, Politics, and Ethics of Representation in Online

Ethnography," Annette N. Markham asserts that the internet has

> similarities to many earlier media for communication, such as letter
> writing, telephone, telegraph, Post-It Notes and so forth. At the same
> time, the capacities and uses of Internet communication are unique in
> configuration and shape a user's (and thus the researcher's) perceptions
> and interactions. These influences extend beyond the interpersonal;
> outcomes of these communication processes have the potential to shift
> sensemaking practices at the cultural level (794).

MySpace is a forum for the public to create knowledge and identity and share that creation with others. To begin the making sense of the sheer volume of material, I read the profiles looking for themes that emerged in the textual and visual sections. I then reread the profiles to code them. Informed by Laura Mulvey's research on women and the gaze, specifically the internalization of the male gaze and the re-creation of desirable and socially acceptable images, I compared and contrasted online writings from user profiles (including a survey of terms, themes, and types of communication) with the images they included in their profile.

Blogs

Unfortunately, the best working definition for "blogs" comes from Wikipedia. Wikipedia and those who contribute to making its meanings define blogs as a website

> usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (artlog), photographs (photoblog), sketchblog, videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog), audio (podcasting) are part of a wider network of social media. Micro-blogging is another type of blogging which consists of blogs with very short posts. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 112 million blogs. With the advent of video blogging, the word blog has taken on an even looser meaning of any bit of media wherein the subject expresses [their] opinion or simply talks about something (May 25, 2008).

This working definition of blogs, blogging, and blog culture remains the most up to date and thorough explanation.

This study situates MySpace as a blogging site where users express their opinions on a variety of topics. The rhetorical analysis examines reoccurring themes in the interest sections. While users may ultimately choose to post information, each MySpace site shares a number of "interest sections": general information, music, movies, television, books, heroes, about me, I'd like to meet, summary sections, and blogs. Images and references from popular culture, image hosting personal photo albums, inspirational sayings, and personal reflections dominate these pages.

Images

The saying "a picture is worth a thousand words" is apropos for the use of images on MySpace. Images represent a user's areas of interest. Users post images as both a shorthand for English and as representations of a specific item, quality, person, or identity. Rather than write about their favorite musicians, celebrities, television shows, or products users insert images of them. Users post images to reference a specific event although personal image are more likely to include a caption explaining the context, relating an inside joke, or drawing attention to a specific detail in the photograph.

Captions

Captions are the textual accompaniment to images the users post. On MySpace captions represent the link between image/text and individual/picture. They represent the intent and message the images should communicate. Although captioning falls under the textual examination I have moved them into a separate category as they situate and reference specific images.

Participants

At the randomly selected date and time of 11:00 PM Wednesday, May 6 I drew

my sample.   I selected the first 60 of the most recently altered MySpace profiles for

women ages 18-22 who were in college. Of the 60, two profiles were private and

removed from the sample. Two profiles included in the study had limited access to

their photographs but provided both text and images in their blog.   Each MySpace

profile was public, with unlimited access to personal writings and images. Of the 58

evaluated profiles, 26 had blogs while 30 had extensive writing in the autobiographical

sections. Only two profiles had limited biographical writings but both profiles had

over 50 images with captions and were included in the study. The sample was

predominately single (46.55%), straight (84.49%), of Black/African descent (36.20%)

and White (32.75%), Christian (46.55%) women who wanted kids someday (58.62%),

who do not smoke (43.10%), but drink alcohol (43.10%). MySpace users varied in age

from 18 to 22: 6 were 18, 29 were 19, 32 were 20, 13 were 21, and 7 were 22.

For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to users by their chosen profile

names. This includes traditional names like Jessica or Ashley but also includes

untraditional names or phrases like "Hatin A** Hoes Makes Me Sleep Easy" or

"Ashley is Gangsta."

Procedure

This study consists of the three stages of research: identifying demographic

date; identifying themes and coding individual profiles; and comparing written and

visual data. Stage one began by collecting individual demographics from the profiles.

This process drew from demographic information each user provides outside the initial sample criteria.

In stage two , I read through the profiles, noting commonalities or dissimilarities in profile construction, themes of discussion, pop culture references, and images.   During the second reading specific themes, categories, and avenues for inquiry in the textual fields. In the third reading I identified and categorized themes in the images. Based on the traditional/progressive scale proposed by Pingree, et al (1976) these categories were redefined using the language of the MySpace demographic rather than the language of academia. Pingree asserts that "traditional" images often describe stereotypical feminine roles can include sexual body positioning, kissing, or touching. I included images of children, romantic couples, or sexually provocative images to Pingree's original scale. Users whose images isolate the reproductive core (breasts, torso, buttocks, and pubis) but no additional features ranked as "traditional." According to Pingree "progressive" images describe imagery suggesting gender equality, domination role reversal, and women as whole persons rather than as caricatures (Lambiase, 2003 p. 64). Progressive pictures also include of full body images of women in active roles or with friends in non-sexualized positions. Full frontal face shots with the user looking at the camera rather than to the side (without sexual indicators) were also ranked as progressive.

Traditional	Stereotypical images of feminine roles which can include sexual positioning, kissing, or touching. Sexual innuendos, sexual performances, or women performing domestic labor. Women as partial persons, in "sexy" performances/drag, or dismembered (reproductive core: breasts, buttocks, pubis. Images of women performing child care, romantic couplings, or sexual provocation.

Progressive	Full body shots or with friends in non-sexualized positions. Frontal face shots with the user looking at the camera rather than to the side without sexual indicators. Gender expressed as equal, gender role reversal, women as whole persons (physically) rather than caricatures or dismembered components. Women performing activities including larger themes of sports and theatre or individualized activities including swinging on a swing set, hiking, or skateboarding.

After compiling a list of themes and materials I analyzed each of the 58 profiles as individual entities, encoding the data and noting how each user discussed the themes from previous stages or which of those themes were not included. The fourth, and by no means final, reading was to extract specific examples for the discussion.

In stage three, I conducted a comparative analysis of the written and visual texts to examine the ways these young women constructed gender and sexuality online and to determine the consistency or disconnect between words and images. Reading the materials produced by the MySpace users and surveys posted on their blogs as "personal narratives," I then compared and contrasted the language they used to describe themselves in their profiles, how they structured their narratives, and the content included in their writings (Chase, 2005 p. 633). We know that "different people have different personalities, educations, interests, values and beliefs and they see… (other texts) in different ways" but are there similarities or themes between their personal interpretations (Berger, A. 1991 p. 67; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003)? Was there a connection or a disconnection between profiles manufactured by the users and MySpace's societal profile norm? How was this connection/disconnect constructed; was it based on perception or assumption?

Limitations

While my study offers preliminary findings about how young women construct gender and sexuality on MySpace this initial research is limited by several factors. The MySpace sample is limited by users' access to computers to update their profiles; this limitation is constant so the sample should be indicative of general day of the MySpace population. The relatively few profiles examined were not conducive to making broad generalizations about the entirety of the population. This study only looks at college students who are women and between the ages of 18 and 22. Consequently, the research does not address MySpace's total demographic, which consists of men, women who are not in college, and many users over or under the ages specified for this study.

This sample underrepresents several populations. Women who identify as Asian American, East Indian, Middle Eastern, Native American, and Pacific Islander are not present in this sample. Women who identify as gay or bisexual comprise only 3% of the sample while women who identify as "not sure" are absent. Women who identify as Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, Other, Protestant, Scientologist, Taoist, or Wiccan are absent from this sample.

MySpace is dependent on its users to self identify based on limited categories of race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and gender. This limits users to defining themselves within strict dichotomies. Individuals who identify as biracial, transgender, or spiritual but not religious must either identify as a listed option or

choose "other." Many users choose not to answer these demographic questions while others change their demographics on a regular basis.

During stage three as I read and coded my sample pages, six themes emerged in the participants' writings:

- Horizontal Hostility
- Relationships/Love
- Rhetorical Questioning
- Popular Culture
- Sexuality
- God

Themes were exclusive and did not overlap in definition although content often spanned more than one theme. Horizontal hostility as a theme included aggressive language towards other women and life lessons that alternated between deriding a specific characteristic ('whorish' behavior) and a specific person. Discussions about dating, partners, friends, or family dominated the theme of Relationships/Love. Rhetorical questioning was defined by positing a question (I'm awesome/hot/sexy, right?) within their interest sections. References to pop culture, primarily television shows, films, and music constituted the theme of popular culture. Sexual proclamations including specific details about sexuality or sexual preferences (being on top during intercourse, pro/cons regarding fellatio, or French kissing) defined sexuality as a theme. Finally, God/Jesus positive language including the desire to meet them or to be guided by divine hand resulted in the God section.

The visual rhetorical analysis examined themes in participants' images and photographs in the profile. From these sections, four recurring themes arose including:

- Traditional Representations of Women
- Progressive Representations of Women
- Popular Culture
- Porn Culture

The traditional category included photographs of women in sexy poses or clothing, heterosexual relationships, images of inactive mothering (pictures of children without a fully present mother; often an arm or breast but no body), images of romantic couples. Progressive pictures included women participating in athletics, acting goofy, in active duos or group photographs without sexualized posing, or images of mothers interacting with their children (as complete human beings rather than as dismembered fragments). Popular culture emerged as a theme due to the high repetition of images based on television shows, characters, films, music, and celebrities. Porn culture included photographs of women in Playboy Bunny costumes, pole dancing, stripping, giving lap dances, or imitating sexual intercourse or fellatio in their images.

Three recurring themes emerged in the captions including:

- Rhetorical Questioning
- Popular Culture
- Sexuality

As a point of clarification is necessary to define the differences in usage of the terms "rhetorical analysis," "rhetorical questions," "rhetorical strategies," and

"rhetorical intent." First, "rhetorical analysis" is the method I used for this research. It is a method of understanding and interpreting texts by examining content, context, and the intended audience. I use the term "rhetorical strategies" to include both rhetorical questioning and intent. "Rhetorical questions" are questions that "provoke" a response from the audience ("I'm hot, right?") while "rhetorical intentions" or "rhetorically intent" statements are not questions but nonetheless are constructed to elicit a response from the audience.

As a theme, rhetorical questioning in the caption section was a problematic label as "rhetorical questions" were often statements, exclamations, or followed by ellipses. Users only used the implied and requisite question mark in 50% of these occurrences. Therefore, sentences that did not follow traditional rhetorical questioning sentence constructions were labeled as "rhetorically intent" and included in the category of rhetorical questioning. Users applied quotes from popular films, television shows, music lyrics, or celebrity jargon as descriptors in their captions effectively connecting their images to the larger societal value of celebrity and popular culture. Finally, sexuality emerged as a category. Captions coded with this theme included language riddled with double entendres, explicit requests, or implicit suggestions.

Chapter 4 - Results

In this section, I analyze the predominant subjects that emerged in the analysis of the MySpace profiles, separated into textual and image based categories. Several themes emerged during the analysis of blogs: horizontal hostility, discussions about love and relationships, explorations of sexuality, rhetorical questioning, popular culture references, and brief mentions of God or Jesus. The image analysis revealed consistent popular culture references, traditional or progressive photographs, and porn culture. Finally, an analysis of the captions explained the user's intention of the images providing an intertextual link between the images and writings. The quantity of writings by users varied dramatically between prolific and paltry. Some users do not include any writing outside of demographics and photograph captions while others blogged on a regular basis.

Feminism and Confessional Culture

Blogs

MySpace capitalizes on popular culture and the desire of users for an identity separate from their peers. Users are confessing their innermost secrets and aspirations to their online community. This "confessional culture" gives all users an opportunity to have a voice and to share their unique perspectives of the world around them. As blogs are part of confessional culture, the more than 20% of profiles that do not supply personal information or blogs are surprising. These users only provide the basic or

part of the basic demographic information and general writing. JOJ!E, for example, marks all of the possible demographic categories but does not blog or write anywhere else in her profile. She does, however, provide captions for all but one of her photographs.

I observed that the profiles have an eerily similar structure. Beginning with self-affirmations ("I'm awesome"), most users then defined their femininity ("regular girl" or "girly girl") followed by a requisite warning that although they are cool they should not be pushed ("trifled," "fucked," or "messed" with) or they will respond ("snap back," "fight") in an aggressive and retaliatory way.   Their relationship status is mentioned with a dedication ("to my love") or an exclamation about their time together ("greatest two years of my life"). A brief explanation of their career pursuits or educational goals followed this warning. Finally, the introductory paragraph invited other "cool" people to introduce themselves through email or comments.

More than 90% of the writing in blogs focuses on the self. Narcissism on blogging sites is inevitable as young women focus on the existence of their identity without a relationship to the larger external culture. P. David Marshall identifies Hyperindividualism as the consuming and innate focus on the self (Marshall, 1997 p. 36).   On MySpace, hyperindividualism and its implied social narcissism or self absorption have changed the how these women give and receive emotional and ego support. The women in this sample are no longer dependent on the affirmations of their family, friends, or church. Strangers, not biased by personal relationships,

validate the user's worth. According to the profiles these women posted they have become distant islands to themselves, sustained by their own egos (Twenge, 2006).

To sustain the popularity and maintain their egos users must keep their blogs "fresh" by updating or overhauling their profiles on an ongoing basis. Blogs are written and rewritten. Women visit their friends' sites for information they may have forgotten to include in their profile. Users evaluate photographs and if the images are not generating sufficient attention or comments, it is a reflection that the images, therefore the user, are not 'good enough.' The user will produce more images to replace them. Wikihow, a web site dedicated to "how-to-dos," recommends taking 100 photographs for every single image online (Roy, 2007). Women in this sample are "othering" themselves under the assumption that this is feminine "individuality" rather than an isolating component of a masculine society (Mulvey, 1989).

The "othering" of femininity is an innate and an acceptable characteristic of a narcissistic user. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses the link between feminine narcissism identification only with a woman's physical self. She asserts that the women is "convinced that she is not understood; her relations with herself are then only the more impassioned; she is intoxicated with her isolation, she feels herself different, superior, exceptional; she promises herself that the future will be a revenge upon the mediocrity of her present life" (Beauvoir, 1972 p. 340-1). This fundamental theory converges with the construction of online profiles on MySpace as these users create a future using digitalized and reconstructed photographs to represent her future self, her new identity, and her freedom from interaction with inferior others. The

assignment of "other" as a desirable characteristic is moving away from negative connotations. Users do not want to be "another" woman; they want to be the "other woman" or the symbol of what the evolution of "woman" could be.

Unfortunately, the writings are perfunctory as most of the information in profiles is vague. Blogs "are built around the idea that everyone wants to hear your thoughts" (Twenge, 2006 p. 89). Yet, women are not using the blogs to discuss news worthy topics; rather they are reiterating how daily life is disappointing, who is derogatory to the user, and why their life is better than the lives of their haters. The focus of these profiles is not on overcoming obstacles, improving their lives, or achieving goals. Women are using an open forum to discuss their perceived societal victimization.

Horizontal Hostility

Horizontal hostility, "the result of people of targeted groups believing, acting on, or enforcing the dominant system of discrimination and oppression" (Texas A&M, 2006) is present in more than a third of the 58 profiles. Instead of providing a space for women to define themselves, to write themselves into being, MySpace provides a forum for women to compete against each other. This horizontal hostility often includes warnings to stay away from boyfriends, stop gossiping, or a call to reduce the "drama" in their lives. According to the profiles these women posted they no longer use horizontally hostility to express displeasure about one's lot in life. They have become so accustom to expressing dissatisfaction or hostility at other women that it now is a method of communicating. These women use horizontal hostility to "build"

relationships with women, to "protect" themselves from other women, and to "attack" any perceived slights.

In several of these profiles, the women are sharing their relationship experiences. Using a narrative structure the women in this MySpace sample are writing about their lives, daily trials, and interpersonal interactions. While writing can be a process of self-discovery, internal dialogue, or thought processing in some cases writing is about building relationships. Users are writing about conflicts in their lives (usually about other women) and then invite their readers to comment or to share their experiences.

This process of exchange increases the strength of the online relationship much in the same way talking and sharing with friends strengthens the relationship although without contacting the sample, there is no way of knowing the structure of the off line friendship and how those ties affect online relating. Nonetheless, friends who respond on the user's blog most often comment on other sections of the profile, usually in the comment section. Responses always include support for the user in the form of sympathy or advice reinforcing the usefulness of blogs to build community around conflict.

An example of horizontal hostility as a protective method is the "life lesson" seen in Meagan's blog. She expresses irritation at other women who complain about difficulties they face and denies their experiences as an excuse to "run the rest of [their] lives" while offering "get the fuck over it" as her empathetic advice. Most of the women in this sample participate in this "straight talk" where they "give it to yah

straight." Compassion and empathy (traditional feminine characteristics) are missing and by minimizing and dismissing the experiences of other women, the user becomes the focus of the blog. Meagan uses herself as an example of someone who experienced troubles and overcome those obstacles. Meagan is protecting herself from identifying or reliving her misfortune by suggesting that she got the "fuck over it" and it no longer affects her.

Another example of protective behavior includes users who name horizontally hostile women as "hatas" or haters. The user experiences horizontal hostility and explains the other woman's behavior as a product of jealousy. These profiles often focus on thanking the hatas in their lives for motivating them to be the best they can be, suggesting the haters "get a life." Usually messages to haters include a tribute image of the user in an aggressive pose or a blog entry. Several users, including Running From My Past and Hatin A** Hoes Make Me Sleep Easy suggest the hostile woman is infatuated with them and is using anger to cover their feelings. They also offer the haters an opportunity to respond to this assertion.

Another method of protecting oneself against horizontally hostile women is seen in Nakeshia's profile where she uses it to assault her haters with all her successes. She then credits them as the reason she created her page

> I made my page public 4 a reason…See I got hater hoes. And its kinda
> sad cuz I was always the type that stayed to myself..well still do, but
> they all started coming when I met Steve, now these hoes look me up
> and down and don't say shit or will giggle…see…but I salute scary
> hoes. Ima real chick…I do real things. Im in school getting mines…I
> wonder can half these hoes say the same!! LOL…

Nakeshia uses her relationship with Steve and her education as markers of success suggesting again that on MySpace men and education are forms of social capital. Nakeshia and the other 36% of users who are overtly horizontally hostile often relate these stories as triumphs against other women. Their success weighs against the reactions of other women; if women are aggressive and angry towards the user then the user must be inspiring jealousy with her lifestyle.

Finally, women are using blogs as weapons to attack each other. Over 20% of the women who are horizontally hostile "named" the woman they were addressing; by giving the proper name of the woman their attack is more personal and her friends know exactly who is giving the user a difficult time. Often users are defending their relationships by telling a specific woman to stop a negative behavior. Chantel Danieals [U Niggas R Silly] give a broad "welcome" to her haters. She begins her About Me section with the assertion that "a lot of people are seriously jealous of me." She lists her attributes and suggests that "4 NE 1 that don't like me simply 'Fuck You.' You R a hater..so y do you come to my page sooo much. Im pretty, huh bitch? I know." Several of the women in this sample give specific examples of how they will physically "fuck a bitch up" if the haters are inappropriate or rude.

While there are specific examples of one technique or another, many of the blogs use a combination of build, protect, and attack in their writing. Jesse's Lil Firecracker, a 20 year old woman living in Idaho, uses all three techniques in her blog section and writes

> Lately I seem to be having this problem with a certain someone trying to
> break my boyfriend and I up. She has told like 3 lies in the past couple

> weeks to make him think that I'm being unfaithful to him…However the person that is telling these lies has cheated on her current boyfriend, lied about talking to her ex that she cheated with and she's also possibly cheated on her boyfriend with him AGAIN…If I lose him over this stupid bitch I'm going to be so fucking pissed. It has taken me all of 19 years to find someone who treats me as good as he does and I've done everything in my power to make our relationship successful, and I'm afraid that all of that is going to go down the drain because of this stupid girl who thinks she can screw with me just so that she doesn't have to go down alone.

She maintains it is the responsibility of this unnamed individual, her "hater," if her relationship fails. To prove her point she publically "outs" the other woman's negative behavior. Explaining the woman spreading "lies" is a liar focuses on issues of her hater's credibility. Jesse's Lil Firecracker is questioning the liar's integrity in a forum open to millions of other women; she is using this blog to build community support, to protect her relationship, and to attack the other women's character.

Leora Tanenbaum explains the horizontal hostility in most of these exchanges as "covert competition" (2002, p. 17). Women, rather than openly competing over self-improvement, are competing in a more "underhanded and personal" way (p. 26). Women write about negative experiences and respond to each other's blogs. They are simultaneously supporting and participating in horizontal hostility; to succeed on MySpace there is no alternative to participating in this competitive verbal backlash. This surrender to hostility explains why none of the users in this study uses rhetorical practices to call attention to the bad behaviors; rather it shows that horizontal hostility has become more than anger about one's position in society.

Women in this sample communicate with other women using horizontal hostility; on MySpace, horizontal hostility is how women relate to each other. Their feminine gender expression is dependent on negative interactions with women. The internalization of horizontal hostility is evident in the consistency of interactions. Horizontal hostility is a distinct communication technique with a separate vocabulary than other forms of communication on MySpace. Appropriate topics include commiserating over "drama," defending themselves or their relationships against their "hatas," and using the open forum to "snap back" at the other women who offend them.

Most, if not all, of the language women use in horizontally hostile exchanges on MySpace stem from popular examples of Black culture. The Combahee River Collective Statement states, "Black women's style of talking/testifying in Black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political" (1986). This suggests that when White women use this language they do not recognize the social or cultural importance; they are simply mimicking the language popular culture uses. Scholars argue about linguistic fluidity including the construction of a "standard English" (Samy, 2004) and while it is assumed the women in this sample "style shift" (Alim, 2004) or base their linguistic style on their intended audience, the dominant language on MySpace represents Black cultural dialects.

Regardless of race or ethnicity demographics, users employ Black linguistic styles to communicate horizontal hostility on MySpace. Primarily White women use Black language in positioning themselves as the "other" woman on MySpace. By

using aggressive and culturally shocking language, they can rebel against the blandness of White culture. Users identify with women on reality television shows who "don't take shit" and, most often, those women are Black. This also suggests White women value blackness as "other." Associating blackness with a strong, angry, and powerful character, the opposite characteristics found in the roles White women have traditionally held. Using Black language in a method of "borrowing" those strengths without the social difficulties.

Women unconsciously use hostility to build stronger relationships with other users, to protect either themselves or others from harm, and to attack those who attack them. Horizontal hostility is the standard form of communication between these women, it has become a feminine form of communication and without it, there would not be much to discuss.

Relationships

Relationships are the secondary focus of these blogs. Almost all the profiles in this sample have writing about their families, friends, or love interests. While users mention family and friends in the About Me and hero sections, writings about love interests took place throughout the profile.

Women who write about their families list the positive attributes of their mothers, fathers, siblings, and children. Mothers are most often the hero for being a single parent or saving her from daughter injury, real or imagined; three users thank their mothers for saving them from abuse. Women in this sample use family as an

identifying marker in the same way they write about their employment, school, and

hobbies

     The primary focus of the relationships and love theme is intimate love.

Intimate love is at the forefront of concerns for women in this sample. They worry

about love they have, love they want, the quality of their love, and the potential they

have as mates. Women write in their I'd Like To Meet section that they would like to

meet a man, partner, or a lover. They also write at length about their partners in the

About Me section. In a surprising twist of events, some of the women who write

about their intimate relationships dedicate the entirety of the About Me sections to

their partners.

     Women, who write about relationships, use blogs to claim ownership of their

partners, defend their loves from other women, or to attack "how" women "do" their

relationship. More than half of users spent a large amount of their writing discussing

relationships with friends or romantic partners. Information about relationships is

present in the blog section whereas declarations about loyalty to both family and

friends are included in the Heroes section of the profile. Celebrating the individual

qualities of partners is present in all of the profiles who identify as in a relationship,

engaged, or married. Users claim ownership of a relationship using the build, protect,

attack model found in examples of horizontal hostility.

     Users built a story about their relationship either by extolling the virtues of

their partners or by giving details about their daily lives. For example ?bRI offers a

detailed explanation on why she loves her boyfriend while Mrs. Sheena Neseth

provides a numbered list of Brian Neseth's qualities. Users implement lists dictating relationship qualities; however, the qualities they list are rarely independent from the person listing them. Out of the 20 qualities Sheena lists, every bullet indicates how Brian's qualities influence her. There is not one quality about Brian separate from how "who he is" affects Sheena.

To protect their relationships from outside threats, users use horizontal hostility and outright threats against the encroaching woman. Women compete for relationships and, for the 98% of this sample who identify as heterosexual, the most recognizable form of social capital, boyfriends (Tanenbaum, 2002). In the previous section, Jesse's Lil Firecracker gave an example of protecting her relationship from perceived danger by "outing" the perpetrator and denying her credibility. Other users talk about their relationships and suggest other women "step back" or "step off" from initiating contact with them. The lauded security of their relationship, a common assertion, is questionable based on the woman's need to defend her partner from other women.

While much of the writing about relationship and love is sentimental, not all relationship sentiments are positive. Reyna = Good Rumpiz dedicates two blogs entries to berating the "fucking sperm donor" for not fulfilling his domestic and parental responsibilities. On a more positive note Hate On Me uses her blog to ask men to stop "degrading…disrespecting…[lying]...physically and emotionally [abusing]" women. In the same blog, Hate On Me derides women for investing in what men think and valuing it so much that they betray each other. These discussions

give women the opportunity to relate to other people and vent their frustrations about

relationships.

Life lessons are also present in writings about relationships. Women,

frustrated with their treatment generally by men or their treatment by women over

men, write extensive directions or pleas to improve their condition. Get Off The Swag

Bitch, uses her I'd Like To Meet section to appeal to other women about personal

responsibly when entering into relationships:

> I think its time I address them unreal bitches. Them bitches that want to
> be number one in two people lives. Them bitches that think some of us
> got dumb written on our faces. Them bitches who love you, but in love
> with another, also like another. Them bitches that lie to themselves to
> make themselves look good. Them bitches that don't know good from
> bad or right from wrong. Them bitches that act hard, when the key is to
> be tough. Them bitches limit you, when they can't limit themselves.
> Them bitches that fuck friends, yea we got them to. Them bitches that
> just don't know what to do….

Get Off The Swag Bitch names specific behaviors that sabotage relationships and

"calls out" people who treat their partners with callous disregard. She is not the only

user who expresses anger about their treatment, more than half of the women in this

sample would like more respect and kindness in their relationships. Out of all the

blogs, no user analyzes how they behave in relationships; they only critique how

others behave and opportunities for improvement. This calls into account the

narcissistic belief the user is separate from the people they write about. They are

"other;" they would never treat someone they love poorly, never cheat, and never lie.

Sexuality

Users primarily discuss or refer to their sexuality inside relationship discussions, while only a few users explicitly detail their sexual exploits in surveys or questionnaires. Approximately 15% of profiles explore their sexuality online using surveys, blogs, or "About Me" sections while 99% of the profiles use sexually direct language to communicate with other women. In this sample, sexuality serves two functions including the reinforcement of heteronormative culture and the use of sexually explicit language as a communication tool.

First, all the profiles express identification with heteronormative culture. By concept of MySpace's design users strictly adhere to male/female identifications, leaving no room for anyone outside this binary construction. The black or white, male or female culture of MySpace reinforces gender roles. Stories about nurturing are short and users do not write about mothering at all. Comments about sexual availability are another traditional feminine characteristic but one that is far more popular in the MySpace community. Users also write about themselves as being "more like a man," denying their femininity all together. These gender constructions speak loudly about the values of the MySpace community.

Nurturing and mothering receive little attention on MySpace. About half of the women in this sample write about caring for their boyfriends, friends, or partners through difficult times. They write about caring for their mother while she went through chemo; they write about raising their siblings, or about the last time the flu went around and they brought their partners soup. These blog entries are shorter,

usually only a few lines, and receive fewer comments than the horizontally hostile blogs. Users write narratives about nurturing while motherhood is invisible, users literally do not write about it.   Women in this sample who identify as mothers do not write about themselves; they write about their babies or their partners as fathers. The mothers in this sample express no identity outside their children. The community in this MySpace sample does not value writings about feminine characteristics including nurturing, mothering, and motherhood as evident by the limited availability.

In contrast to nurturing, mothering, and motherhood, (hetero)sexuality is a popular subject. Many of the writings about sexuality took place in informal surveys. Questions focus on types of sexual encounters, sexual positioning, and sexual acts the user prefer. Users who post surveys on their site write candidly about their experiences, professing interest in blowjobs and extolling their partner's sexual talents. While some users list physical features like breasts, stomachs, and "azz" as favorite features, others describe in detail "wat a female wats" from a man during sexual intercourse in an erotica novella. Women who explicitly write about sexuality are18 and 19 years old suggesting the older users have less interest in publically discussing their sexuality.

Women often position themselves as more like a man or a "cool guy with long hair" in an effort to distance them from qualities they associate with femininity. One user goes so far as to claim she can burp louder and ride four-wheelers better than her male friends can ride thereby earning a male centered identification. These users position femininity as weak and frivolous, as an act creating "drama" and reinforcing

"stupid" girl behavior. These profiles suggest that these women fail to recognize that by embracing masculinity they are effectively rejecting femininity.

Second, users employ derogatory language of a sexual nature including "ho" or "hoe," "slut," and "bitch" to insult other women. This language contributes to the overall environment of horizontal hostility on MySpace. The language is not as effective as expected; desensitization changes the impact of these words. While "slut" was a label to avoid at all costs in my mother's youth, now it is standard practice to call other women sluts.

Sexuality on MySpace is based on a heterosexual model. Women are predominately straight and use sexually directed language to criticize other women. Heteronormativity reinforces the strict gender divide between male and female, masculine and feminine behaviors. Women often state they are "more like a man" in an effort to mitigate the negative feminine association of creating drama and part of MySpace's homogenized feminine culture. Sexuality is an acceptable topic of discussion among younger users but heteronormative behaviors span the sample.

Rhetorical Questioning

One fourth of all users use rhetorical questioning in their profiles to reaffirm personal beliefs and insecurities. Users employ rhetorical questions for three primary functions including positive affirmations, "crisis" support, and horizontal hostilities. While rhetorical questioning is an effective strategy to garner support from the "imagined audience" of friends and family, it also has the quality of appealing to spectators (boyd, 2007 pg. 14).

Users, seeking connection with visitors to their site, make use of questioning to garner responses to simple questions. Most users, like Karina, prefer to use this technique to reaffirm that she is "flipping awesome, right?" and even "sexier than ever." Blog entries with this type of information consistently garner more comments than blog entries without questioning strategies. While this study does not seek to evaluate third party responses all of the people who replied to Karina's blog answered with positive feedback. The six responses list Karina's qualities and respond that anyone who does not agree is a fool.

Rhetorical questions are also present in relationship discussions. As previously discussed, the women in this sample do not use discussions about love and relationships to celebrate their partners. Many of the writings about relationships and love became a rhetorical forum. In a lament of the types of men Karina attracts she posts a blog "Start acting like you want me"

> Jerk magnet, ahh yes that's me! i must have a big 'ol fucking stamp on my forehead that reads "hi, i'm Karina and i love to be treated like crap. step right up." ☹ i seriously don't get it. i mean, it can't be me because i'm flipping awesome. right? maybe everyone i meet is just lame. maybe all guys are jerks. yeah that's right i said not "most" or "some". all. you make me sick. barf.

Karina focuses on posing rhetorical questions, which other users, presumably her friends, use as a jumping off point to support her through this difficult time. Jesse's Lil Firecracker uses rhetorical questions to obtain sympathy after she had her wisdom teeth extracted by asking "Wanna talk about pain?" Three people respond with advice or well wishes.

Another primary function of rhetorical questioning is an opportunity for horizontal hostility in the form of one-up-womanship or competition. Karina Marie uses her blog to complain about a friend who came to her for advice. Her friend ignored the advice, got angry with Karina Marie for offering the advice, and then came to her to "have a friggin pity party and whine" when the problem came back. Karina Marie then suggests that had her friend followed the "common sense" advice the problem would already be resolved. Karina Marie poses her advice or way of dealing with an issue as the correct although unsolicited technique. She assumes she knows best because she is "realistic" which implies her friend is unrealistic or "stupid." Karina Marie, by her own admittance, is a better problem solver.

Other users like My Mom Is My Life!!! God Please Keep Her Wit Me!! include rhetorical questions to express anger at other women. An apparent betrayal prompts her to leave a message for "all my fake ass!, Hating ass!, Two faced ass!, Bitch ass!, Hoes that's supposed to be my damn friends! Hoes Like "U" who needs enemies!?!?!" My mom is my Life!!! God Please Keep Her Wit Me!! writes this in her "I'd Like To Meet" section and received eight comments in support of this message.

Rhetorical questions link the user to the spectator by asking them to participate in their online lives. Users who ask rhetorical questions have more comments; more people participate on their WebPages than on the pages of other users. Users will have a public dialogue with people who respond to their questions by incorporating their writing, the comments of others, and a "holla back" to the user

who left the comment. Since women are more likely to change a statement into a tag question rhetorical questions reinforce traditionally feminine ways of speaking in their writing.

Popular Culture

Popular culture represents the cultural ideal of beauty, attitude, and success. MySpace users relate to celebrities in popular culture and incorporate celebrity into their profiles as an easy way to show affiliation, identification, and group membership. Written popular culture references are found in over 60% of the profiles. While most profiles provide Music and film interests, this statistic only represents users who quote, discuss, or theorize about popular culture topics. Users reference Dane Cook, Nicole Richie, and Lil Wayne with direct quotes from comedy shows, interviews, or song lyrics. Users do not analyze popular culture, but the information they provide in the profile sections is detailed and extensive. Only a few of the users list more than a couple books or authors in the Books section of their profile; according to the reported interest in books, *Cosmo* and *Glamour* magazines are the most popular works of literature.

Popular culture has so saturated the lives of these women that they cannot develop or express identity without using it as a representation. Often, users would incorporate popular culture into several sections of their profile. The I'd Like To Meet, Music, Movie, Television, Blog sections, and introductory captions are rife with popular culture references. Quotes, lyric, videos, and songs represent popular culture from favorite and usually male celebrities.

Rather than creating a written log of their interests, users post popular culture references to represent them to the MySpace community. Karina, Becky, and Honey all use quotes from The Office, Hollywood Squares, and The Notebook in their introductory captions. In Karina's blog, she exclusively quotes Dane Cook, a popular "everyman" comedian. Like many of her peers who include celebrities in their profiles, men are the focus in over 85% quotes.

Women in this sample are using a culture predominately created, run, and controlled by men to represent their identity. Users do not use images or quotes from women who have "made it" in a male dominated industry for example Oprah, Drew Barrymore, or Alisha Keyes.   Profiles featuring celebrity women focus on "celebutantes," women famous due to their lineage and lifestyle, including Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie. Femininity and the female are not valued as "realistic" representations of the user's identity; male celebrities and male focused culture is closer to the ideal gendered construction of a female MySpace profile.

God

An unexpected 20.68% referr to God or Jesus in their profile writings as a person they would like to meet or as a hero. Like blogs about family, God or Jesus references act as social locaters rather than topics of discussion. Ashley is Gansta professes she loves "jesus" but includes videogames, Zac Effron, and bumper stickers as other important loves in her life. One user posts an image of Jesus with the crown of thorns on his head in her profile and in the next section asks God to "fuck with 'em

hata hoes." Aside from the initial interest in meeting God or Jesus, users ignore religion.

Feminism and Visual Culture

Mirzoeff, 1999, defines visual culture "as any culture that is concerned with visual events through which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology" (3). In this case visual technology refers to equipment designed either to be "looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to Television to the internet" (3). MySpace culture, like visual technology, is designed to be looked at. The similarity of images suggests users are anticipating danah boyd's "imagined audience" (2007 p. 14). This audience expects a certain type of image, a certain type of profile. This would account for the similarities in profiles across such a wide demographic represented in this sample.

The quantity of images on these profiles suggests while textual information is important, it is the visual information that users value above all else. On average users have 85 images in their profiles, not including images referencing popular culture or photographs on image hosting sites like Flickr that rotate pictures from another cache.

As MySpace users become more accustom to the site and its applications, the quantity of time spent altering their online identity increases. Users spend a great deal of time managing the photographs on their site using photograph-altering applications, including Adobe Photoshop, HP Image Zone, and Element to "perfect" their images. They even reference images they alter using this software as "photoshop perfect."

These applications can modify the original picture into a new product that may not represent the original creation. The image, for example, becomes a simulacra; an image beginning as a copy of the original user and only function as a "reflection of basic reality" but as the picture is distorted and manipulated, it evolves into a new and unrelated product. It is a product that "bears no relation to any reality," in effect: the images become virtual (Baudrillard, 2007; Harpold, 2000; Matrix, 2006). The copy is a hyperreal representation, a virtual body, and an image whose actuality has been improved independent from the original.

While users do not write extensively about sexuality, they take enough photographs to compensate for the lack of textual material. Sexuality in user profiles is widely accepted by young women and the availability of products encouraging sexual behaviors has expanded into the social networking market. If the user's images portray her as skinny and pretty, then it is likely she gains popularity (Tanenbaum, 2002 p. 121). Examples of sexual imagery riddle MySpace despite lukewarm efforts to control sexually explicit materials. Images reproduce and sustain sexualized content, position, and imagery.

With few exceptions, the sexualized virtual images of women on MySpace are not exhibiting a progressive display of bodies; instead, women are recreating and reinforcing the male gaze. Baudrillard (1998) discusses how as simulacra, the images no longer represent reality and are interpretations of the desired traits of women constructed by male dominated consumption. Whereas, Beauvoir (1972) argues women often mimic culturally popular images of beauty and desire to gain acceptance

and that mimicry has become naturalized. Women are showing off their bodies using the mimicked male gaze in created images; women are effectively "projecting [their] existence into an image, the reality and value of which others will establish" (Beauvoir, 1972 p. 269). Women are not creating images emulating a particular celebrity nor are they consciously exploring their sexuality; women are generating copies of the socially expected/accepted images they see every day.

While creating these images is active process, men are still actively gazing while women are the passive objects to be gazed at. Women in their socially acceptable untouchable (Madonna) exhibitionist (Whore) roles are gazed at and are simultaneously a spectacle and an object in these manufactured representations of self. Women are performing for the male gaze and taking "hot" photographs makes the user believe they are intrinsically more desirable.

Images

The male gaze directs the construction of imagery users post on MySpace. Users borrow the male gaze to interpret "hotness;" reinforcing the stringent guidelines of female sexuality, availability, and acceptable images. According to Kinnick (2007) following these guidelines or pushing the (s)explicit envelope is the basis for success.

Users construct images with a focus on appealing to an "imagined audience" (boyd, 2007 pg. 14). The audience expects the users to look good at all times and looking good or looking "hot" require projecting a sexual awareness. Users have "photo shoots" where they change outfits and locations to generate images for their profiles. Clothing or lack thereof is an indication that suggesting sexual availability

and knowledge is an important component of construction. For users who take semi-nude photographs covering the breasts, pubic area, or buttocks with a hand is one method employed to get past MySpace's sexually explicit content clauses although these filters are ineffective at best.

MySpace has strict content rules for images stating

The following are examples of the kind of Content that is illegal or prohibited to post on or through the MySpace Services. MySpace reserves the right to investigate and take appropriate legal action against anyone who, in MySpace's sole discretion, violates this provision, including without limitation, removing the offending Content from the MySpace Services and terminating the Membership of such violators. Prohibited Content includes, but is not limited to, Content that, in the sole discretion of MySpace:…contains nudity, excessive violence, or offensive subject matter or contains a link to an adult website

Although MySpace's list is extensive, MySpace often contradicts its own content rules. In February 2007, KIRO 7 in Seattle produced a story about MySpace and its sexually explicit content (2007). Photographs of a mother breastfeeding constituted an explicit act according to MySpace and they actively removed the images from the user's profiles. However, MySpace did not modify or remove an image of a topless teenager (her nipples obscured by 1" strips of tape) bound and gagged simulating a hostage situation or its preceding image of a simulated gang rape. These exhibitions of submissive sexuality are the acceptable forms of objectification on MySpace. The images are violent and sexually charged; the images are conclusively less offensive because desensitization and internalization have tainted our perception of overtly sexual behaviors. In explanation, Kinnick asserted that breastfeeding a child remains

a distinctly non-sexual, "offensive," and private act. Her statement supports the traditional sexualized content included and even encouraged on MySpace.

The male gaze is an act, a way of viewing the self, and a belief that gazing is a voluntary manifestation of identity. According to the profiles these women posted they are not just internalizing the male gaze; the male gaze has colonized them as they unconsciously reenact or mimic its characteristics. These women are mistaking internalized colonization with sexual freedom and liberation. As the male gaze becomes commonplace women are failing to recognize the gendered and male directed performance. For example, the video series Girls Gone Wild represents the sexually liberated ideal woman who is not afraid to be sexual or a spectacle (Kinnick, 2007; Levy, 2006; Paul, 2005). MySpace women want to be spectacles for the male gaze since it represents the co-opting of privileged male power and influence.

The women in this sample who are engaging in this new "sexual autonomy" are internalizing and promoting spectatorship. These women are users within "computerized screen culture; in order to 'enter' and 'play' with the realm of virtuality, the spectator/[user] must become immersed in it" (Matrix, 2006 p. 17). Once a real image or text (object) is inserted into the virtual domain, it becomes a relic or a counterfeit representation of an evolving being. The profile (subject) represents a spectacle but it is also an expression of past culture and past identity. The binary between "subject/object and real/counterfeit" no longer can define a person as the boundaries separating the two are synthesized in the immersion of the virtual world. Virtual sexuality becomes as equally relevant as tangible sexuality (Matrix, 2006).

Images are used on MySpace for a two primary purposes. First, they give other users insight to the user's personality and activities and second they express popular culture interests. Personal images show the user posing for the camera, participating in activities, or socializing while popular culture images include album covers, movie posters, and celebrities. Predominant themes and objects in photographs are the users, their friends, their significant others and celebrities. Images posted by young women on MySpace are perpetuating celebrity, porn, and raunch culture as it influences the normalization of women as objects and the internalization of the male gaze (Kinnick, 2007; Levy, 2006).

Progressive and Traditional Imagery

Personal photographs are present in all the profiles, even if they are private and only have a profile image. Most often users have between 1 and 400 profile images with the average at 85 images. Traditional imagery, including photographs of women posing for pictures in sexy positions or clothing, is present in over 85% of profiles (over half of the profiles are exclusively traditional). Progressive imagery is found in over 30% of the profiles (with under 20% as exclusively progressive) and images of women playing sports, hiking, bowling, and goofing off with friends define this category. Users consistently include alcohol and suspicious looking "cigarettes" in traditional and progressive pictures suggesting the importance of drugs and alcohol to facilitate a good time.

Traditional imagery is the dominant category for the profiles in this sample. Self-portraits are the predominant form of traditional images as women photograph

themselves panning for the camera with "different" looks. Women are inactive, sitting or posing for the photographs, changing outfits, and taking more pictures of themselves in mirrors with the flash and camera visible in their outstretched hand. Several users provide examples of serious, sexy, intense, thoughtful, questioning, sleepy, horny, and "thinking of you" faces. Traditional imagery includes pictures of babies held by dismembered arms, women posing in provocative positions, and partial body shots.

Feminine gender norms are encouraged on MySpace. The women in this sample use traditional imagery as a performance of their femininity. Flirty, fun, and feminine images garner the most comments. Women who take these types of pictures generally have more friends on MySpace than women who take progressive pictures. Traditional imagery assimilates all the stereotypical images from media into neat intertextual packages of personality.

Progressive images are less frequent and scattered among the more traditional images. Progressive shots move the user from an object in the image to an active subject by showing her as dynamic. Images in this category are less often taken by the user but by a third party holding the camera. Only two profiles have almost exclusively progressive images although the traditional "pole dancing" photograph and the requisite Halloween photograph are present in each. Some of these women may have interests outside of boyfriends, lovers, and sexy picture taking but the relatively few profiles ranking exclusively "progressive" would indicate otherwise.

Progressive and traditional categories are not independent; overlap between both categories is present in more than 10% of profiles. Users spanning both rankings have on average 12% of their pictures fall under the second category. Primarily progressive profiles have 15% traditional images while primarily traditional profiles have between 7% and 10% progressive images. Tina Marie ranks as primarily progressive but includs several pictures of herself in burlesque fishnets, panties, and sexualized Halloween costumes. Similarly, over 99% of **Yada, Yada, Yada**'s photographs rank progressive but includes pictures of herself pole dancing (fully clothed). On the other end of the spectrum, Honey includes 62 shots of herself in traditional settings and one progressive picture of her on a road trip with friends.

The sexualization found in many of the self-portraits is also found in popular culture and parodies of popular culture (Townsend, 2007). Several users took pictures of themselves in partial drag wearing neckties or unbuttoned dress shirts. As, Butler, 1990, discusses, drag "[mocks] both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" but unlike "drag" there is no parody involved in this traditional raunch representation of gender (p. 186). There is no sense of playing with gender in these images; its users take the feminine identity and its visual manifestations seriously. Images of women in faux-drag are acceptable so long as they are sexualized by wearing ties without shirts or dress pants unbuttoned to the waxed pubic bone.

Users emulate images found in popular culture where women dress in male clothing posing in sexually suggestive positions. Issues of beauty arise both in these drag representations and in general imagery. Attractive women can assume masculine

characteristics in photographs with positive feedback from their fans (both male and female) while they label unattractive women who use the same techniques as lesbians, dykes, or "fugly"-a cyber-hybrid of "fucking" and "ugly."

Popular Culture

Popular culture images are present in over half the profiles and in almost every section. For example, Pull Up the People's Music section incorporates textual and visual materials by listing her favorite Musicians and inserting their videos from YouTube into her profile. Hate on me includes photographs of celebrities in her I'd Like To Meet section including Bob Marley, Tupac, and Jimi Hendrix. Bethany Joy's profile includes poster images from her favorite films and YouTube clips of scenes from three of the movies. Finally, in Karina's Television section, she includes images from The Office.

Celebrities are the focus of popular culture images on MySpace and users recreate celebrity poses in their personal photographs. The imitation of images found in mass media points to a dilemma: who is worthy of reproducing? Often profile images emulate popular advertising campaigns found on Television and in film where celebrities mime sexual appeasement over a beautiful diamond ring, feign predatory interests in a nice smelling man, or reenact the bouncy cheerleader stereotype. This celebrity culture relies on the acknowledging and valuing of a group of people "significant and interesting enough that disconnected people follow their exploits and lives" (Marshall, 2006).

Many of the photographs representing the user emulate the poses found in contemporary celebrity and porn culture and are altering the concept of individual expression into a hybrid of mimicry and sexualization. The concept of "celebrity" is important to the development of a user's profile. Often referencing the celebrities users wish to emulate, the users change their image by using make-up, poses, or clothing styles hoping "the glamour can rub off" onto their construction (Tanenbaum, 2002 p. 89). Celebrity culture determines the beauty ideal and young women can mold, design, or manipulate their images, as an extension of their selves, to resemble the icons of the media (91).

An example of the relationship between celebrity culture and MySpace is Tila Tequila. Tila Tequila became one of TIME Magazine's People of the Year in 2006 solely based on the persona she created online (Grossman, 2007). She accumulated over two million friends and became the most visited person on MySpace. Since her celebrity debut, Tila Tequila has released a self-produced Music CD and video that she hawks on her site along with posters, calendars, and autographed photos. The website for her reality Television show "A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila" boasts,

> Although Tila has racked up more than 2 million MySpace friends, she still hasn't found "the one," and she's ready to do anything to find him -- or her! This self-proclaimed "bisexual freak" has had her heart broken by men and women, and she's tired of being alone. With our help, she's inviting 16 luscious lesbians and 16 sexy straight guys over to her place for A Shot of Love With Tila Tequila. Yes, it's time for Tila to unfurl her freak flag and find true love...Going where no dating show has gone before, A Shot at Love With Tila Tequila pits men against women in a number of romantic challenges, all in an effort to win Tila's attention and affection. But just because Tila can't decide which sex suits her best doesn't mean the girl doesn't know what she wants. In fact, she knows exactly what she's looking for in a partner, and she'll keep kicking out

potential suitors one by one until she finds Mr. or Ms. Right. May the best sex win! (MTV, 2007)

The unification of celebrity and sexuality, raunch and porn, sex and competition exemplifies the values of the MySpace population.

Tila is an example of society's "celebrification of the ordinary" (Holmes & Redmond, 2006 p. 28). Since celebrities (before they reached celebrity status) were "us" and are just like "us" then it is reasonable that "we" could be one of them (Foster, 2005). The association and closeness of "celebrity" encourages hopeful young women to pursue the attention leading to a celebrity discovery. Nouveau celebrity status is believed to be a possibility for any woman with the right combination of photographs, hotness, and the "it" factor (Tanenbaum, 2002).

Pornography

Pornographic imagery, including semi-dressed pole dancing, sexual performances, and raunch culture is present in over 15% of profiles. Photographs of women using sexual gesturing (indicating cunnilingus, fellatio, intercourse, or masturbation) are present in all of the profiles under this category. In an extreme profile the user, F*** A Hoe And Her Nigga, only poses in bikini bathing suits, on all fours, and "getting wet" under a shower.

Porn culture escaped the seedy stereotypes of the 1980's and moved into more fertile and financially stimulating ground. Commercials featuring Paris Hilton, a cheeseburger, and a carwash replicate images once limited to soft-core porn magazines (Kinnick, 2007). Kinnick further states that media portrays "consistent

representations of women and human sexuality that is molded by the codes and conventions of pornography—codes developed around the exploitation, objectification, and domination of women" (9). As the images become standardized the intrinsic link between popular culture and porn culture strengthens.

Porn culture uses the sexualized images and performances of women to forward the consumption of women in society. Women emulate pornographic imagery more often as it enters the mainstream through media, advertisements, and even on MySpace. Some of the women in this sample decorate their bodies and web pages with Playboy, Hustler, and other porn centered merchandise, adopting and emulating the pornographic lifestyle. Rather than showing outrage at the use of women to promote consumer culture, women are celebrating with "I love porn" t-shirts and the "masculinization of sex" (Paul, 2005 p. 112-3). They embrace masculine sexuality as sexual agency rather than the reproduction of an existing system of objectification. In addition, the inequality common in "much of pornography enhances and supports men's sense of entitlement to look and objectify women's bodies" marking a common theme in the adoption of porn culture into the mainstream (114).

The influences of porn culture are evident in this manifestation of raunch culture. Christie Hefner, Hugh Hefner's daughter and current chairwoman and CEO of Playboy, believes young women "[have] just a more grown-up, comfortable, natural attitude about sex and sexiness that is more in line with where guys were a couple of generations before" (Levy, 2005 p. 39). In other words, for women to have a "grown-

up" attitude about sex and sexuality they have to emulate the sexual attitudes of men popular 20 years ago. This attitude about porn culture suggests that objectification celebrates women rather than exploits them (Kinnick, 2007).

The ability of young women to post images of themselves as sexual beings is new to the internet and they are flocking to express their sexuality. Some users have over 400 photographs of themselves on their website with descriptive captions, rhetorical questions waiting for affirmation, or descriptions of their hotness. The availability of images in popular culture for amateur photographers to imitate is unlimited and women are discovering their bodies are appealing and performative.

The body as a commodity is a theme prevalent in porn culture as the male gaze consumes the female body as a product. Professionally constructed and pornography influenced images have become a commonplace occurrence in contemporary literature, magazines, internet sites, advertising, music, and television (Kinnick, 2007). The images have a commercial and fiscal value, which is a legitimized by the consumer driven desire for more. Young women are expressing their co-optation of porn and celebrity culture online; they are panning for the gaze. They are in effect the entrepreneurs of their own bodies. Women on MySpace are using the images to express their "liberal identities" effectively commenting, "[she] is post-feminist. She is funny. She gets it. She doesn't mind cartoonish stereotypes of female sexuality, and she doesn't mind a cartoonishly macho response to them" (Levy, 2005, p. 93). Women are anticipating and eliciting the arousal of the viewer.

Porn culture also reminds women of the importance of appealing to the surrounding culture. While women are preoccupied with views and "hotness," they are also attending to the domination of women (Wittig, 1992 p. 132). This focus reduces women as a whole person to inanimate pieces of reproductive function or as an "other" object (Mercer, 2006 p. 157). Friends and strangers judge, rank, and evaluate the exhibited reproductive core, the area between the pubis and the breasts, much in the same manner as ranchers inspect cattle at a county fair (Dworkin, 2003 p. 387). The core needs to function for the pleasure of the, often male, audience. These profiles suggest that these women accept the challenge and, in an effort to outshine each other, perform to the gazers all the while believing it is for and about their development as an autonomous sexual beings. When women are the gazers they adopt an assessing gaze, a horizontal gaze, or perhaps a gaze of competitive assessment. They are inspecting the other "cattle" for indicators that make their competition more attractive. The prevailing attitude seems to be if you can't beat them, then assess them, emulate them, improve upon them, and criticize them all the while attacking them as "hoes."

The chosen identities, their performed representations, become a new "unreality" mimicking both the techniques and images found in society, popular media, and porn culture. Women are thin, sexual, sexually available, and hot (Tong, 1998). Many of the self-proclaimed "sexy" shots emulate those found in Playboy and in other soft-core pornography. In their analysis of college fashion performance Harvey & Robinson (2007) state that the label "porn chic" has allowed consumers to

"understand, reconcile, and condone fashions 'flirtation' with pornography as just that: harmless flirtation, not all-out debauchery" (69).

Clothing is not the only expression of porn chic behaviors. In MySpace users perform for the camera, borrowing techniques from popular media culture, which has in turn co-opted those methods from porn culture. In this style of body positioning photographers use visual angles to highlight the breasts, buttocks, waist, eyes, or some combination of these features. The women in this sample contort their bodies while wearing lingerie or limited clothing articles. They are either facing the camera head on or looking listlessly to the side, effectively inviting or passively condoning the male gaze. The photos taken by the user are limited in range but limitless in accessibility as camera phones and handheld digital cameras do not need another photographer.

Margo Varadi, from the Toronto Star writes "teens, especially girls, have become self-portrait obsessed. Some of them have 100 or more pictures of themselves stored on cameras, cell phones and computers ready to be sent into the world with the click of a button" (p. L06). They take these images with the arms raised, the head tilted coyly, and the tops of breasts visible. Other variations include the headshot and the full-length body shot taken in a mirror. This multitude of photographs contains repetitive themes of materials including the "finger in the mouth," the "cheek suck" (for a thinning effect), the naughty "hand over mouth," and the seductive "no-smile but come hither" (Varadi, 2006 p. L06).

The images on MySpace indicate that porn culture has become commonplace and soft-core porn images are no longer recognizable as pornographic. To the users on MySpace these images are normal, predictable, and conventional although inappropriate and suggestive societal standards. Soft-core porn culture has become uniform and women on MySpace are raising the bar on explicit content.

Raunch Culture

These images represent the raunch culture that Ariel Levy (2005) discusses, and further problematizes this culture by addressing the images as a product of mimicry rather than a consciously constructed online identity. Raunch culture is evident in a social gluttony of popular culture. Reality Television shows such as "The Search for the Next Pussycat Doll," "Dr. 90210," and "The Girls Next Door" advertise the hypersexual, hyper feminine roles our society currently values for women. Print media, once reserved for Cosmopolitan rants about "How to Please Your Man by Pleasing Yourself," continues their trend of cultural introspection with books entitled *The Good Girl's Guide to Bad Girl Sex* and *So You Wanna Be a Sexy Bitch: Raise Your Game from Overlooked Nice Girl to Skilled Chick Everyone Wants to Get With.* These texts encourage women to get real and get "into" themselves by living out their fantasies or recreating their lives. Moreover, women are living the fantasies of their voyeuristic pursuits within the mass influx of "chick lit" books where the heroes are inclined to strip for their birthdays (*Four Blondes*) or flash the bouncers at a private club in exchange for entry (*PS I Love You*). Bad girl behavior is popular and associated with false freedom from the confines of traditional feminine roles.

Raunch culture has become synonymous with liberation and sexual autonomy. sexually charged materials fill the pages on MySPace. Users pass sex tests from user to user posting the results as proclamations of sexual prowess, the banners (online advertisements) promote Playboy, and "Spring Break On-Line" directs users to celebrate the end of school with other like-minded folk on another website with less rigorous content policing.

For all the excess on MySpace, the user's images remain the most explicit or implicit messages. Amateur photography has escalated to amateur porn as the demand for harder core images increases. This exceeds the parameters constructed by raunch culture, including the Girls Gone Wild videos in which women masturbate with each other in a "celebration" of pleasure, into a hybrid of objectification and internalization of the male gaze (Levy, 2005). Some women are producing photograph vignettes while they are imitating masturbation or intercourse for the visual pleasure of their audience thus inviting the gaze to participate in more tactile viewing.

These links to porn culture, along with the *Playboy, Hustler,* and *PornStar* jewelry, tattoos, and clothing that are present in many images on MySpace has a dual effect: women are dismembered from their bodies and the objectification of women is, again, related to pornography and the male gaze (Levy, 2005; Mulvey, 1989; Paul, 2005). If these techniques are not explicit enough, users befriend porn stars with profiles on MySpace who have crossed over from hard and soft-core films into popular media like Jenna Jamison, Bridget, Holly or Kendra of The Girls Next Door fame, and Stormy Daniels.

It is suggested that women participating in raunch culture are merely celebrating the feminist ideal of sexual freedom. Can this act be subversive if there is no consciousness of sexual autonomy? The women on MySpace are acting out traditional gender roles as a response to the assumed new sexual independence because they are "free" from the social constraints of their gender. Women producing the most traditional self-portraits and marketing those images as "true" feminine sexuality develop this sense of faulty empowerment. This sexuality does not threaten the male gaze because it so closely mirrors its foundational belief that women are objects. The male gaze has been internalized, popularized, and perpetuated by women under the soft-core guise of hip and sexy. Male defined identities and sexualities view women on a needs-based system as products to be gazed at and discarded.

Women participating in raunch culture have adopted the stance that "raunch culture didn't mark the death of feminism…it was evidence that the feminist project had already been achieved" (Levy, 2005 p. 3). Looking "hot" is tantamount to acceptance. This "hotness requires projecting a kind of eagerness, offering a promise that any attention you receive for your physicality is welcome" (p.33). Users are taking sexually suggestive photographs of themselves for the viewers of their sites. The images they produce are homogenized, similar in format, and content. Similarities in the angles and postures of the photographs are consistent with professional photographer's advice to avoid certain angles, create a nice backdrop, and look "ten pounds thinner" by angling the head and torso (Derrick, 2006). The

hypersexual nature of the photographs directs the viewer to the implied invitation of lascivious overtures, and femininity is redefined as perceived sexual availability.

Captions

Captioning complicated many of the images as it links visual culture with textual expression. Captioning is used for four purposes on MySpace. First, captions are used to respond to horizontally hostile comments left by haters. Second captions are used to clarify images that may be confusing to the viewer. Captions also give viewers textual cues describing the image. Finally, captions project a fantasy the users have of themselves. Captions include rhetorical questioning, popular culture references, and sexual humor, innuendos, or invitations. Again, images with rhetorical questioning strategies in their captions garner more comments from their friends and strangers than images without the invitation to respond. Captions referencing popular culture are present in almost all profiles and, with one exception, have little overlap in content.

Leaving cutting remarks on other women's images is standard practice and rather than deleting the offending remark, the users jeeringly respond to it in their captions with statements like "don't you wish you wer this pretty?" Women in this sample create captions responding to an "imagined audience" that is hostile, judgmental, and competitive (boyd, 2007 pg. 14). Women also objectify themselves by integrating sexist comments from celebrities into their captions. Six users have images of themselves posing with their middle finger extending to the camera and

referencing the street slang salute "one finger up and I'm out, 'cause you ain't worth two."

Captioning provide clarification for some images. Skinny Minnie uses captioning to separate pictures of her emulating a celebrity shying away from paparazzi from photographs of her in her "freakum dress." Captioning for images with kids identify them as biological children or relatives. Often the captions indicate how sexy the child is, is, or will be in the future. A set of captions from $k!nn!3 Grul$ F@ll Back B!g Gurl$ R !n Styl3 N0w (Skinny girls fall back, big girls are in style now) includes pictures of six men who are incarcerated with the captions "Let H!m Go Cr@ck3r$," (Let him go crackers) and "mi boi them whte ppl got'em n need 2 let em go" (my boy them white people got them and need to let them go). Finally, many captions drew attention to drinking and drug related behaviors. Melanie includes several images with captions explaining that "her drunk ass" is not attractive.

Captions give the viewer to tools interpret user images. The user can offer a fantasy like F*** A Hoe And Her Nigga's image of her "getting wet" in a bikini under a shower and then add "sike!" to negate the offer, making it a joke rather than an legitimate invitation. Captions also direct the viewer's gaze to a specific aspect of the image. Like many of the women in this sample, In Time I Will Get Over It uses captions to draw attention to pieces of her anatomy. In an image of her bent over with one arm against the doorframe and the other holding a camera, her caption reads "I look like I gots me a donkey," suggesting she has a "badonky donk" or "nice ass."

Women often refer to images taken at a time when they felt more attractive. These past images represent the fantasy identity, the ideal against which they rate themselves. Bethany Joy uses captions to tell viewers about her state of dress (she has "nuthin' but a t-shirt on") and her body is not meeting the beauty ideal (she wants to be "this tiny again☹"). Many of the fantasy photographs indicate they would most like to change their body size, shrinking to a pre-pubescent state.

Feminist Shadows

While the majority of profiles are visual and textual boxing rings, a few profiles are subverting the hegemonic structures of traditional gender roles and heteronormativity. These profiles indicate that the women behind them are interested in pursuing more than boys and popularity even if the rest of their profile performance is traditional. Although none of the women in this sample identify as feminists, after reading the litany of angry, hyper-feminine, and raunchy profiles three blogs stood out as subverting the traditional discourse. Three themes emerged in this section including future goals, people they admire, and introspection.

Although the three users mentioned in this section have the most overtly positive profiles, many of the women in this sample discuss (in two sentences or less) their career goals after college. Ashley is Gangsta writes about herself in the "About Me" section and identifies future goals, activism, and contributing to society.

> I am 20 yrs old and I am a junior at Missouri State University. I am majoring in Spanish and Biochemistry and minoring in Biomedical Sciences. I am going to become a surgeon, and when I retire I am going to work in under-developed countries to give the people there better medical attention. I am very involved at MSU and in the community. I believe it is important to give as much of yourself as you possibly can. If you live the rest of your life for yourself your life is pointless.

She is aware of her future goals and Ashley's focus on public service suggests that she is conscious of greater societal needs. Eventually she will advocate for change (after she retires). Ashley identifies future goals and community involvement as important values in her life.

Glimmers of a feminist consciousness are present in Lindsay's profile.

Lindsay does not look to the future with the same candor as Ashley but rather

acknowledges an important woman in her life as a role model

> Many ppl that I admire through my life my 2 fav ppl my parents ☺ and the only person that I will always admire the diplomat of Hondura Vivian Panting She to me is what a politician should look like ☺ She strives everyday for society tohave a better life..For her it has been a struggle why?? Cuz being a women in politics its hard but she somehow gets her voice hear she is trully an amazing woman who I want to one day be ☺ Ive work with her in the past and she has trully thought me tah life is about taking chances and making adifference she is my idol ☺

Lindsay identifies "taking chances" and "making [a difference]" as the characteristics

passed to her after working with Vivian Panting, the Honduran Consulate to the

United States. She values these lessons and wants to emulate Vivian Panting's

success.

Finally, Karina, amidst very traditional images locates herself with honesty and

optimism. She states an interest in helping people but more importantly, Karina uses

writing as an opportunity to locate her as important, complicated, and motivated.

> Well..I have an open mind and tend to be level headed for the most part. I love to be around friends and family (they are the best things that are ever gonna happen to you so consider yourself lucky to have them…I do anyways!!!) I love to laugh (mostly at myself)…but I usually make it the point of my day to cheer people up…I hate to see people sad or upset and will do almost anything to make'em feel better (even if that means making an ass of myself…which is usually the case!) I dislike people who are mean, hypocritical, self centered, stuck up, arrogant, two faced, and just plain stupid. I always try to treat people the same way I would expect to be treated and I'm not shy about telling people if they piss me off. Life is too short and precious to put up with all that drama!! I am a very determined person although I find it hard to get my shit straight sometimes! As far as my future is concerned I want to travel the world and possibly help some people along the way, so I guess we'll see what

happens!!! I'm also engaged to a great/crazy guy who I love VERY much…other than that, I'm definitely ready to get out of RN school so I can start to have SOMEWHAT of a social life again…Thanks to everyone who has stuck around even though I haven't had much extra time..it's pretty interesting to see who is still in your life even though you may not have the opportunity to chill out with them anymore..really lets you know who your true friends are. Well, enough of that. If ya wanna know anything else just lemme know!!!

Karina is important enough to herself to write about her feelings, attitudes, and characteristics. She is blogging about her life and writing herself into her profile. Karina's MySpace page and blog focuses on her interests, women who have been nasty to her, and "boys," but in the About Me section, she writes about herself.

Only eight users rank exclusively progressive in the image evaluation although a few images overlap into the traditional category. Becky, also known as **Yada, Yada, Yada**, uses her image section to display interesting images of GPS devices, her friends wrestling, and interesting landmarks on a road trip. Melanie, Sarah, and Stacy post pictures of them dancing, laughing, and making goofy faces at the camera. Finally, Doin The Do and Hate On Me posts images from track meets where they are competing, with several images of them running towards to finish line.

These three women do not exhibit straightforward feminist traits. In their profiles these women do not have calls to action, criticisms about oppression, or details about activist projects they are working on. Rather, they focus on the effect they could have on the world around them, who they would like to emulate, how other users should view them as complete beings with interests they love and activities they

perform. In these profiles, the feminist voice is watered down but the ideas are still

swimming around.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

MySpace is functioning as both a forum for women to create visual and textual personal narratives and as a mirror that reflects, distorts, and assimilates societal values back into the culture. The primary rhetorical function of MySpace in relation to gender is to give the illusion of independence and autonomy while maintaining the construction of traditional femininity. While a small percentage of women are using MySpace to create profiles independent of the hypersexual, hyper-feminine, and narcissistic status quo, most users embrace this formula for MySpace success.

MySpace users create these visual and textual materials without physically present, but implied, peer pressure. Gazing at women for pleasure is not a uniquely masculine characteristic as women become more competitive for attention on MySpace the quality and quantity of sexual content increases. Objectification of women has become a two-pronged assault: the male gaze sets the stage for objectification just as the comments of users reinforce the dominant beliefs of "sexy," but the women who are consuming the images are pushing the raunch and porn agenda as well.

The internalization of the male gaze, porn, and raunch culture are most evident in the images of MySpace users. Kelly (2003) contends that media culture manufactures images of desire. To compete with the saturation of available and attractive women on MySpace, users are carefully constructing images with sexual undertones while their blogs advocate for autonomy and independence. Kelly further states that the internalized belief that a "desire embodied in the image [is] equated

with the woman who is reduced to the body which in turn is seen as the side of sexuality and the locus of desire" (Kelly, 2003 p. 72). Laura Mulvey (1989) argues the images are created to attract and maintain attention. This is clearly happening on MySpace as users, in a desperate appeal for confirmation that they are indeed objects of desire and not just objects, produce homogenized images of celebrity and femininity. Women are literally acting out feminine gender scripts, internalizing their objectification, and reinforcing the images with provocative text.

Women who use internalized objectification as empowerment are often expressing their invitation with the text attached to their photos. The captions reference the active viewers, inviting them to gaze, comment, or fantasize about the images representing the user. There is no oppositional gaze. bell hooks finds that 'liberated' women are not gazing back at the viewer and confronting their oppressor, nor are they examining the cultural values that posit women as objects. Instead, women are appropriating and focusing the gaze in a self-referential direction. Women believe acting out this "free sexuality" is empowering; however, an outside source (usually men) defines their sexuality while the women embrace it as new and unique.

In the profiles these women posted, class markers are conspicuously absent. Name brand clothing, accessories, and web page designs are present in most of these profiles, which would indicate the entire sample is affluent. Even the demographic section for income provides no solid indication of the class status of these women. According to this sample, their average income was $108,000 a year. The location of their computer usage or type of computer used to update their profiles is not available

either. Home computers and laptops would indicate a higher class than school or library computers. Class is indistinct on MySpace unless the user honestly claims their income in the demographic section or and posts images or blogs about extensive traveling to foreign locales. The lack of class markers suggests that class passing is an important piece in the construction of the profiles in this sample.

The profiles in this sample suggest these women are using MySpace as a performance based form of raunch and porn culture. The internalization of the male gaze assists women in objectifying themselves for social recognition under the guise of sexual autonomy. These profiles suggest that women are unaware of the problematic nature of confessional culture as it positions the body as the ultimate representation of self, a self they can alter and manipulate to conform to male dominated ideals of beauty, sexuality, and femininity.

The information transmitted while interacting with blogs is evidence of the social construction and continual transmission of popular culture to maintain the profile status quo. The manufacturing of profiles does not imply a uniform feminine profile; rather it suggests that MySpace culture has reinforced widely accepted expressions of individuality. To combat the critical evaluations of their peers, women are not challenging the commoditization of their bodies or the internalized objectification. Women have embraced the caricatures of femininity and sexuality.

MySpace is brimming with potential research projects for scholars. My research focused exclusively on how women construct their gender and sexuality on MySpace; a similar study for men would be beneficial. I have worked on this research

for over three years and in that time I have developed more questions about the MySpace community than I have answers. How does horizontal hostility affect the self-esteem of women on MySpace? Are women aware of the messages they send or are they unconscious of their presentations? Is the level of internalized objectification consistent between online and offline behaviors? Finally, what impact does MySpace have on women offline?

Due to the limited presentation of the women on MySpace, it is difficult to assess fully their personality or life outside their chosen online content. I recognize these women are complete beings who are more complex and multifaceted than the content on their two-dimensional MySpace profiles. This research is complicated by the limited analysis of user's profiles, face to face interviews would likely reveal a broader explanation for the material presented online; they may also reveal that the intention or construction of their profiles is in contrast to the results of this research. In some cases, the performance in their MySpace profiles may not accurately represent the user in her offline life.

MySpace provides a forum where women can construct an identity separate from their offline life. This identity can be fiction, fact, or a hybrid of both expressing who the user wants to be rather than who the user is. While women maintain they are original and unique, the homogenized content on MySpace suggests that women are not as individual or as autonomous as they imagine. These profiles suggest that women are performing traditional gender and sexual roles without knowing they are

on a virtual stage where everyone simultaneously functions as the audience and the

star of the show.

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