

BODY-IMAGE-TEXT:

**Exploring Female Adolescents on Facebook and
Concurrent Identity Formation (CIF)**

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It is for you, freaks my loves, I am writing and it is about you.

-- Kathy Acker (1986), *Don Quixote: which was a dream*

Dedicated to E. S.

“Who are *you*?” said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.

Alice replied, rather shyly, “I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”

“What do you mean by that?” said the Caterpillar sternly.
“Explain yourself!”

“I can’t explain *myself*, I’m afraid, sir,” said Alice, “because I’m not myself, you see.”

“I don’t see,” said the Caterpillar.

“I’m afraid I can’t put it more clearly,” Alice replied very politely, “for I can’t understand it myself to begin with ...”

-- Lewis Carroll (1865/2000), *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, pp. 47-8.



-- Tim Manley (Author) (2013) [Cover image]. *Alice in tumblr-land*.

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Abstract

Using a uniquely developed research methodology called ‘feminist virtual ethnography’ this thesis explores female adolescent subculture on the social network site Facebook, looking specifically at a group of four girls who are ‘Facebook friends’ with each other as well as friends at the same high school in a large metropolitan city in south-western Ontario in Canada. The thesis is guided by research questions that focus on how these girls virtually-represent their bodies on Facebook, and develops a theory of concurrent identity formation (CIF) as a way to understand the translatability and conversion between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual.’

Built as a collaborative inquiry between the researcher and research participants, I invited the girls to analyze screenshots of their own (and each other’s) virtual self-representations during a series of virtual conversations and to express their understandings of femininity and beauty as they problematize their identities on Facebook and in ‘real’ contexts such as at school and at home. Overall, findings reveal an interplay of body, image, and text within the girls’ systems of imagery and language. I suggest that the female adolescent body is virtually self-represented in negotiated as well as discursive ways, and that the girls’ identities are always in flux. While CIF provides a good basis for understanding these girls’ identities as ‘in flux,’ further investigation into virtual representation and CIF is needed to understand how and why adolescents display their bodies and articulate their identities in certain ways. Pedagogical implications are also discussed in my concluding chapter, where I call for a reconceptualization of literacies and methodologies, especially when dealing with girls on/and Facebook.

Résumé

Faisant appel à une méthode de recherche originale dite « ethnographie virtuelle féministe », cette thèse explore la sous-culture adolescente féminine à partir du réseau social Facebook, en étudiant spécifiquement un groupe de quatre jeunes filles qui sont « amies Facebook » les unes avec les autres en plus d'être camarades de classe d'une même école secondaire d'une grande agglomération du sud-ouest de l'Ontario, au Canada. Cette thèse procède d'un questionnaire qui cherche à comprendre quelle représentation virtuelle ces filles font de leur corps sur Facebook, puis échafaude une théorie du « développement concurrent de l'identité » (DCI) afin de mieux comprendre la possibilité de transposition et la conversion entre le « réel » et le « virtuel ».

Formatée sous forme d'enquête collaborative entre la chercheuse et ses sujets, j'ai invité les adolescentes à faire l'analyse de saisies d'écran de leur propre autoreprésentation virtuelle et de celle des autres filles à l'occasion d'une série de conversations virtuelles, et à me faire part de ce qu'elles comprennent de la féminité et de la beauté à partir de ce qu'elles perçoivent de leur identité sur Facebook et dans la réalité, à l'école ou à la maison par exemple. Dans l'ensemble, j'ai découvert une interaction du corps, de l'image et du texte dans l'imagerie et le langage des adolescentes. J'en conclus que les adolescentes s'autoreprésentent virtuellement d'une manière à la fois négociée et discursive et que leur identité fluctue constamment. Même si le DCI constitue un bon point de départ pour comprendre la fluctuation de l'identité de ces adolescentes, il sera nécessaire de creuser davantage les concepts de représentation virtuelle et de DCI afin de mieux comprendre comment et pourquoi les adolescentes présentent leur corps et articulent leur identité de telle ou telle manière. En conclusion, je discute également des implications pédagogiques et j'appelle à une reconceptualisation des compétences et des méthodologies, particulièrement lorsqu'on traite des adolescentes sur Facebook et des réseaux sociaux eux-mêmes.

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Chapter 1

Researching Online Female Identities

I know this girl and she's on Facebook like 24/7 always liking other peoples photos and posting her stuff...we're in grade 12 don't forget and there is so much drama and cliqueiness on facebook and its such a drag to deal with at school. But you can't avoid it forever.

--Leila, research participant

Touched by the scanning arm of the fetal ultrasound machine and projected onto a screen in 2D, 3D, or 4D images, the bourgeois baby's life is on display even before birth. This baby is a digitalized *tabula rasa*, a sonographed e-slate prematurely nursed into a culture of technological embodiment. He or she will grow up plugged into a matrix of emergent technologies and plagued with white-wire syndrome transmitted from the iPod, iPad, and iPhone. Without much choice, this echo boomer baby will be cradled into a life of consumerism and producerism, participatory media, and instant identities indispensable to *Generation Y*—known by multiple cohort monikers such as: “The Net Generation” (Tapscott, 1998), “The Dot.com Generation” (Stein & Craig, 2000), “Millennials” (Howe & Strauss, 2000), “Digital Natives” (Prensky, 2001), the “Digikids” (Merchant, 2005), “Generation M” (for media) (Rideout, Roberts & Foehr, 2005), and finally, the “Facebook Generation” (Kitsis, 2008).

Having grown up digital, the “Facebook Generation” is a generation of social networkers obsessed with what others, specifically their peers, think of them (Kitsis, 2008, p. 30). This is especially true of adolescents who engage in various forms of social media on a

daily basis to connect with friends and classmates. However, as O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) explain, adolescents have a limited capacity for self-regulation and a high susceptibility to peer pressure, which presents certain risks as they experiment with social media such as Facebook. Many of these risks are the result of “frequent online expressions of offline behaviours, such as bullying, clique-forming, and sexual experimentation, that have introduced problems such as cyberbullying, privacy issues, and ‘sexting’” (p. 800; see also boyd, 2001).

When it comes to offline behaviours, Owen, Stein, and Vande Berg (2007) argue, female adolescents are particularly prone to acting in disparaging ways (see also, Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002; Curie, 1999; Finders, 1996; Mazzarella & Pecora, 1999; Stern, 2007; Thiel-Stern, 2009; Zaslow, 2009). For Mazzarella (2005), this type of behaviour is a result, among others, of dominant cultural and media discourses, wherein physical beauty, sexual attractiveness, and product consumption characterize a particularly feminized world. These discourses, Stern (2007) explains, have ushered female adolescents into the pursuit of perfection in the eyes of their parents and peers (cf., Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Martin & Gentry, 1997; Pipher, 1994). For Stern, adolescent females “yearn for an unattainable perfection and niceness that is at odds with their desire to simply ‘be themselves,’ whether that may mean letting physical flaws or less-than-nice behaviours prevail” (p. 2).

This unattainable notion of perfection is cast in all facets of the female adolescent’s life, including her social networks (Bissell, 2006; Harrison, 2009; Hinshaw & Kranz, 2009) as well as her social network sites (Harrison & Hefner, 2014). The female adolescent’s desire to ‘be herself’ is truly complicated, and as O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) have

suggested about the translation of behaviours between offline and online contexts, even more so when offline and online contexts flow and intersect. As Thiel-Stern (2009) relays, much of media and technology usage is “tangled up with young people’s notions of what makes up the ‘real world,’” where adolescents are “brought into a patriarchal system of meaning-making that is in large part the effect of dominant mediated discourses surrounding them” (p. 24).

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY

It is at the intersection of ‘online and ‘offline’—or the ‘real’ world and the ‘virtual’ world—that the present study is situated. First and foremost, this study investigates the ways female adolescents virtually represent themselves on Facebook. The primary aim of this thesis is to explore the meanings of these virtual representations, and in doing so, problematize how each student is able to ‘be herself’ within the (dominant) mediated discourses of everyday life. Specifically, this thesis aims to explore how the female adolescents represent their bodies on Facebook, where Facebook is their “site of display,” consisting of more than just *what* is displayed and including the *interaction* between the display and those who use it (Jones, 2009, p. 114). That is to say, a “site of display,” according to Jones (2009), is essentially what Scollon (1998) calls “a watch”—a configuration of social actors in which one social unit (person or group) provides a *spectacle* for another social unit (person or group) to watch (ibid).

In the words of Hoechsmann and Poyntz (2012), and as we shall see throughout the thesis, the girls’ bodily displays on Facebook involve “a rich set of multimodal and textual practices,” where Facebook complements their subculture as a “vital node of youth identity”

(p. 153). Facebook, I will show, ultimately becomes the stage where the girls perform their identities through their bodies, images, and texts, as they negotiate understandings of self, others, and the world in both real and virtual contexts.

While the audience (i.e., she who ‘Likes’ and views other people’s Facebook pages) factor is incredibly important, the actress (i.e., she who ‘performs’ herself on Facebook) and the “sense of ownership” (Sloman, 2011, p. 44) bestowed upon her performances are duly important, especially in considering the flows, tensions, and intersections between her real and virtual identities. These flows, tensions, and intersections are best grasped in the excerpt that follows, wherein a new virtual subject is vividly constructed. As Barnett (2009) writes:

For more than a decade as an administrator, teacher, and dorm parent at a traditional college preparatory school, I have seen adolescents enraptured by the opportunity brought by technology to be connected with friends, yet to be left alone simultaneously. I have seen adolescents spend countless hours crafting their online identities and developing tech-mediated relationships with friends and strangers....I have seen MySpace pictures depicting model students engaged in various forms of criminality. I have watched parents of young adolescents break down in tears over blog entries filled with the most vile language conceivable. As an emblem of the entire lot, one young woman said of a picture of her involved in some illegal activity—“I wish adults at this school would understand that those pictures are not really us.” (p. 202)

The female student in this excerpt is questioning her mediating identity, much like Alice in Carroll’s (1865/2000) *Alice in Wonderland* (cited in the opening of this thesis).

Alice, who vacillates between childhood and adolescence, is unable to explain and understand who she is (and who she is not) while experiencing Wonderland and transforming along her journey. The female student in the excerpt, however—and much like the participants of the present study—is already in the developmental stage of adolescence (derived from the Latin word *adolescere*, signifying ‘to grow into adulthood’), transforming as she experiences a virtual world of hyper-representation.

But this young female student cited in Barnett (2009) is doing more than just questioning her identity; she rationalizes the incriminating nature of her photograph by laying claim to a disruption of her identity. By doing this, she is “texting the body”—a metaphor that Rallin (2000) explains as: “constructing identity/ies, of marking (in)visibility, of offering testimony, of writing as witness, of rupturing language to accommodate disparate desires, to open up tensions and conflicts, to interrupt” (p. 140). In this young girl’s eyes, the display of her body is not a representation of her self. Instead, it serves a social function, implicated in distinct social practices; her “texted” body in the image can be read as an expression of the relationship between the person portrayed and one or more of the viewers. Here, the social and semiotic power of the computer screen speaks to the ways female students text their bodies through image, and the kinds of social actions that can be taken with their bodily displays.

Based on the above excerpt, the identities of this female student are undeniably significant as well as a cause for concern. Perhaps more alarming, however, is her plea for concurrent understandings of her real and virtual identities. Numerous studies have taken up adolescent identity formation in real spaces (cf. Arnett, 2010; Boyes & Chandler, 1992; Erikson, 1950, 1968; Marcia, 1966, 1976, 1980; Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005;

Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005; Sprinthall & Collins, 1984; Waterman, 1986) as well as in virtual ones (cf. boyd, 2001, 2006, 2007a, 2010, 2014; boyd & Heer, 2006; Buckingham 2007a; Davies, 2009; Ito et al, 2010; Kress, 2003, Marsh, 2005; Thomas, 2007; Willett, 2009; Willett, Robinson, & Marsh, 2009). The common denominator bridging identity formation in real spaces (such as malls and parking lots) with virtual spaces (such as social network sites) is the desire to maintain broader communities of peers. As boyd (2010) put it: “They go there [virtual spaces] to hang out” (p. 79).

Yet, there is no mention in this scholarship of a *concurrent* understanding of real and virtual identities. This is because, as Jones (2009) suggests, even though one might be able to think about the “affordances” and “constraints” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) of different media, “it is difficult to know how these ‘affordances’ and ‘constraints’ alter as people strategically mix media and modes in performing concrete social actions” (p. 114). Here, Barnett (2009) is a rarity in calling for “educational researchers and contemporary practitioners to reconceptualize our ways of knowing and representing adolescent identity as it is created *concurrently* in real and virtual spaces” (p. 201, emphasis added). Keeping Barnett’s advice in mind, I formulated my research questions, which I discuss next.

1.2 THINKING CONCURRENTLY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

Empirical inquiry into female adolescent identity formation in both real and virtual contexts is necessary if we want to understand why actions, behaviours, experiences, and representations differ (or remain the same) across real and virtual spaces. Notably, inquiry of this nature calls into question the binary logic that establishes the real self as ‘authentic’ and

the virtual self as ‘other.’ As Barnett (2009) suggests, this real/virtual binary has rendered little meaning into the lives of the adolescents we seek to understand. In large part, he claims this is because spaces such as social network sites “have given adolescents unprecedented power to assemble, disassemble, and reassemble their identities in ways that require fresh ways of seeing and knowing on the part of researchers” (p. 203).

As previously stated, the present study explores how female adolescent virtually represent their bodies on Facebook. I specifically seek to answer the following questions and sub-questions:

1. How is the female adolescent body virtually self-represented on Facebook in a time of hyper- representation?

- a) What does this research teach us about female adolescents in the 21st century, specifically in terms of self–reflexivity, social representations and social implications?
- b) How can an understanding of this nature inform an understanding of (normative) femininity?
- c) How do these self-representations get transformed, cropped, Photoshopped, etc. and why?

2. What do these virtual self-representation and the transformations therein tell us about the ‘real’ identity of the female adolescents?

- a) By reflecting upon their virtual self-representations and the transformations therein, what do these students have to say about the flows, tensions, and intersections of/between their real and virtual identities?

As well, for the very reason that concurrent identity formation has only been speculated upon to date, it is of utmost importance to find practical ways to address this gap in the research. I am thus proposing the theory of Concurrent Identity Formation (or CIF), a

notion I develop in Chapter 3 (also see Appendix G – *Key Terms*). For now, however, by CIF I am referring to the flows, the tensions, and the intersections of and between the real and the virtual. CIF is developed and explored as an *element* of how these girls represent themselves. It is my hope that inquiry into CIF will help guide our understandings of what Kolek and Saunders (2008) call the “seeming avalanche of issues related to all Internet communications,” which spans from online disclosures, to notions of community, to the amount of time students spend online (p. 2), as well as problems such as cyberbullying, privacy issues, and ‘sexting’ (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 800).

To answer the questions and sub-questions above, my research was guided by the following research hypothesis: Inquiry into the body using the social network “site of display” Facebook is an essential act in understanding the ways in which female adolescents virtually represent themselves; it is also essential in working towards an understanding of how virtual self-representations and transformations of these virtual self-representations speak to the ‘real’ identity of female adolescents, and vice versa.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to boyd (2007), social network sites allow people to leverage their social networks to spread information and culture (p. ix). In the context of the present study, this means there is a cultural relationship between Facebook and the research participants in a way that mediates their sociality. This cultural relationship has been explored in the present study using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of specific groups and subcultures (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, &

Namey, 2005, p. 1). The qualitative approach utilized in this research is *ethnography*. According to Taylor (2002), ethnography involves empirical work “with the aim of producing a full, nuanced, non-reductive text, ‘in the ethnographic tradition,’ however that is defined or interpreted by each author” (cited in O’Reilly, 2012, p. 2). For Kozinets (2012), ethnography is based on adaptation (or “bricolage”), and its approach is continually refashioned to suit particular fields of scholarship, methodological innovations, research questions, and research sites (p. 102).

As noted earlier in this chapter, Facebook is the research site where participants virtually represent themselves. With the absence of a physical research site, attempts to make meaning of the participants’ virtual representations is only possible by observing their Facebook profiles and pages. Participant observation within a virtual field like Facebook categorizes my ethnographic endeavours as an adapted version of ethnography called “virtual ethnography” (Kozinets, 2012; see also Hine, 2000), which is essentially the virtual equivalent of traditional ethnographic forms (Gobo, 2011). However, while virtual ethnography adapts to my research site, it does not fully adapt to the feminist tones of my research questions. Exploring female adolescents on Facebook (as well as the social implications associated with their virtual representations) requires an engagement with feminist theory “to challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include” (Hesse-Biber, 2012b, p. 3). This statement has twofold meaning: First, the gendered nature of my research questions requires thinking (a theoretical lens) and practice (methodology) that critically challenges how knowledge is produced and sanitized in relation to dominant forms of knowledge that justify the subordination of underprivileged groups. Second, while the present study explores female adolescents on Facebook, it does not exclude their male

counterparts. In fact, as we shall see, most crucial to this research is the absent presence that is male. In other words, the absence of male participants in this study certainly did not exclude their presence within the research study, by virtue of shared space with the female participants on Facebook. At times the absent presence of male participants during the research study presented a triadic participatory structure: the ‘present’ research participants, their ‘absent present’ male counterparts, and the ‘absent present’ (and actively engaged) researcher.

This intersection of feminist theory and practice with virtual ethnography delineates what I am calling ‘feminist virtual ethnography.’ This is my unique methodology that complements virtual ethnographic approaches to research with feminist approaches to knowledge building in a way to ‘give voice’ to the participants’ experiences on Facebook. While giving voice to women’s experiences is not necessarily a new practice, this undertaking does not have an extensive history. As Kitzinger (2007) points out, it has only been since the 1970s that “the reclaiming and validation of women’s experience through listening to women’s voices has been central to feminism” (p. 113). With issues of voice at the heart of feminist endeavours, methods that capture the voice of the research participants in this study are crucial to feminist virtual ethnography. These methods will be discussed in the next section.

1.3.1 Research methods

In the present study, a number of research methods have been utilized to provide a rich and complex picture of the female adolescent subculture on Facebook. As noted in the previous section, I engaged in participant observation to explore the social life and social

processes of the female adolescent subculture on Facebook. Part of this participant observation included recording all accounts and observations in an anecdotal journal as a means of collecting data. However, the very definition of ‘participant observation’ extends the collection of data into visual methods concerned with the visual dimensions of social life. Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte (1999) define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (p. 91). Within the present study, the absence of a physical research site emphasizes the process of “learning through exposure.” This process has entailed daily observations of the participants’ Facebook pages and profiles by “exposing” observations in a very literal sense: by taking photographic screenshots of the activities observed. However, as a method in and of itself, taking screenshots of participant activity does not ‘give voice’ to the participants.

What this means is that in addition to collecting data by taking daily screenshots of the participants’ Facebook profiles and activities, Facebook was also our meeting place to ‘hang out’ (Ibrahim, 2014) so that we could interact within the very site that circulated the social and cultural meanings of their everyday lives. Specifically, I engaged select feminist participatory action research (FPAR) strategies by partaking in four virtual chat sessions with the participants, scheduled intermittently during the research study, using the Facebook Chat messaging system. As well, I engaged in a number of unscheduled virtual chats with the participants over Facebook Chat, resulting from coincidence of being online and available at the same time. This allowed me to ‘hear’ their voices and ‘listen’ to their perspectives relating to *what* they posted to Facebook and *why* they posted what they posted, as well as the translations of their online and offline behaviours.

The virtual conversations with the girls proved to be crucial to my research, as it was only through the voices of the participants that I have been able to work towards an understanding of their bodily displays as well as of Concurrent Identity Formation or CIF. According to Barnett (2009), collecting data directly from participants in this manner “demonstrates the value in seeing their identity formation” (p. 205). Furthermore, he suggests that participant self-assessment of lived experience reveals a unique type of “performance,” where identities are always “in flux” (ibid).

Keeping these ideas in mind, I started to capture screenshots every day throughout a consecutive five-month period of study that took place between 2010-2015. This range of years is provided instead of documenting the actual year the research took place, so as to conserve utmost anonymity of research participants (see section 4.5 – Methods of Data Collection). Anecdotal notes were kept within a journal, along with transcribed texts from our virtual conversations. These four virtual conversations were scheduled intermittently during the five-month period of study. Unscheduled virtual chats with the participants took place regularly, though always as a result of coincidence. The amount of time spent on Facebook by each participant varied from day-to-day and week-to-week.

1.3.2 Data analysis and findings

To describe the Facebook phenomena associated with my research questions, I searched for “patterns of meaning” (Markham & Baym, 2009) within the data set (screenshots, conversation transcripts, anecdotal notes) and engaged in discourse analysis emphasizing category identification, emergent themes, ideas, views, and roles. In Chapters 6 through Chapter 9, data is constructed as participant narratives, denoting the transition from

“life-as-lived to life-as-written” (Beatty, 2010, p. 432) in the ethnographic tradition. Since the nature of this research has emphasized the visual phenomenon of virtual bodily display (i.e. photographs, icons, images, and written text) my analysis of discourse in these chapters extends to what Iedema (2003) calls “multi-semiotic practice.” Multi-semiotic practice considers not only the semiotic complexities of representation outside of language (speech and writing) alone, but includes in its analyses, for instance, the ways language and image work together (p. 39). In these chapters I also use the method of “visual juxtaposition” (Metcalf, 2013) to contrast the bodily displays of the girls with each other, as well as with other images and texts.

During the present study as well during the writing of the participants’ cases, I encountered a number of obstacles and limitations along the way. As we shall see later in the thesis, these obstacles and limitations proved most useful in developing “fresh ways of seeing and knowing” female adolescents as they assembled, disassembled, and reassembled their identities online.

As we shall also see later in the thesis, my research findings highlight the inseparable connections between Facebook, representation, and youth sociality. The findings suggest there are a number of social implications regarding how the research participants virtually represent themselves on Facebook. These social implications relate to the ways the participants communicate and interact with each other, construct gendered subjectivities, and translate their bodies from a position of embodiment—focusing on the sensuous nature of human perception, emotion and desire, and the corporeal basis of agency, communication and thought (Crossley, 2001). Along with the social implications, there are also a number of pedagogical implications relating to the research findings. These pedagogical implications

relate to understandings of youth literacy practices and the very way that literacy is connected to multimodality *and* embedded in lived experience (Huber, Dinham, & Chalk, 2015).

While research findings are interesting and significant, arguably more significant to the field are the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis. Here, my findings reveal utility and praxis of the theory of concurrent identity formation (CIF) through the participants' embodied performances and lived experiences. This is a formation where research participants reveal their identities as in-flux as they navigate the diversity of their experiences at school, at home, at social functions, as well as on Facebook. Ultimately, the participants exert identities online that mediate their 'real' identities. On the other hand, deploying 'feminist virtual ethnography' as a methodology enabled me to explore female adolescent subculture on Facebook while exploring their off-line identities through that which was performed on-line.

1.3.3 Recruitment and research participants

Access to the female adolescent subculture on Facebook took place through a call for participants using my personal Facebook account, and was disseminated using the Facebook messaging system (see Appendix A). At the time of recruitment, approximately 10% of my 'Facebook friends' fell into the intended demographic. The first eligible and interested candidate responded to my recruitment message—Geneviève—acted as my "key informant" (Creswell, 2007) and helped facilitate the "snowball referral" approach to recruitment (Brooks & Churchill, 2010), to increase the number of participants in my study. Three other participants were recruited within the next month: Leila, Irene, and Nikki.

At the time of the research, the four participants were in grade 12 and either 17 or 18 years of age. As well, these four students attended the same public high school in a large metropolitan city in southwestern Ontario. They were all friends at school as well as ‘Facebook friends’ with each other. It is compelling to note at this point that no study has compared the overlap of adolescents’ specific friends across online and offline contexts (Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012, p. 358). Conversing with the girls over Facebook Chat compared this overlap, and it was most interesting to witness the wavering states of their friendships in both contexts.

1.4 PROGRESSION OF CHAPTERS

This chapter has introduced the problem under investigation, established the need for the present research, as well as discussed the approaches used in conducting the research study. In the next chapter, I review various literatures that inform the directions of this study, within empirical and theoretical frameworks. I provide a general overview of the relationship between youth and new media, and then explore this relationship within the context of identity. Finally, I connect all of these concepts to ‘digital literacies’ at a pedagogical level.

In Chapter 3, I provide a theoretical framework that traces the ‘sociology of the body’ from the Cartesian paradigm into the cyberfeminist landscape. I position myself within the multidisciplinary of cultural studies as well as within poststructural and feminist epistemology that troubles gender relations, femininity, performance and performativity, technology, as well as identity. I also introduce the notion of ‘femininity as masquerade’ (see Appendix G – *Key Terms*), and provide definitions for important terms such as ‘authentic self,’ ‘subjectivity,’ and ‘agency.’ At the end of this chapter I develop the theory of CIF and

present a diagrammatic model that encompasses the linkages between the various terminologies defined within the theoretical framework.

To be further discussed in Chapter 4, my observations of the participants and their subculture on Facebook deployed within a methodology of ‘feminist virtual ethnography.’ This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the feminist methodologies and feminist research practices that inform feminist virtual ethnography. Issues of objectivity and subjectivity, reflexivity, and ‘embodied ethics’ are discussed within this overview. The ‘virtual factor’ of feminist virtual ethnography is then explored in a way to introduce select feminist participatory action research (FPAR) strategies within the present methodology. After this, research questions are re-introduced, and methods of data collection and data analysis are discussed in full detail.

Chapter 5 delves deeper into methodology, and is at this point of the thesis that we finally meet the participants. In this chapter I explain the complexities of building relationships invisibly with the participants by providing examples of the methods used to engage the girls in “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2011, p. 43) of their ‘being on Facebook.’ As we will see, some of these methods were experimental and were not part of the original research design. This chapter also provides terse descriptions of the girls themselves, particularly about their class, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Chapter 6 through Chapter 9 provides the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of each of the participants, whose narratives appear as separate cases in each of the four chapters. The span of these chapters highlights differences and similarities across the participants’ experiences on Facebook. Narratives have been constructed in a way to highlight their voices

from a position of ‘embodiment,’ as well as within the visual dimensions of their social lives. My concern with prioritizing the voices of the girls is located within my theoretical and methodological positionings, as well as my abiding “desire to conserve the subject” (Spivak, 1988, p. 66).

Chapter 10 discusses the “patterns of meaning” across the girls’ case study narratives in a way that emphasizes their experiences of/with embodiment. These patterns are discussed within a framework of four meta-themes that brings together many of the concepts, terminologies, and research presented throughout this thesis. However, in this chapter I also engage various “textual possibilities” so as to not reduce the participants’ experiences to analytic categorization (Lather, 2007, p. 41). As a result, this chapter opens up new methodological prospects of investigating the ways female adolescents virtually represent themselves on Facebook. At the end of this chapter, the theory of CIF is revisited and specific examples from the girls’ narratives are provided to bridge the theory into practice.

The final chapter is the conclusion of this thesis, though no real ‘conclusions’ are made; instead, the theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of the research are discussed in way a way that integrates my findings with my approaches to knowledge building. The implications of the present research for teachers and students are then explored, from a pedagogical context emphasizing ‘multiple literacies.’ While this thesis presents much theoretical and methodological work to be considered, the applications to understanding female adolescents on Facebook and to CIF are embryonic. It is in this sense that I argue for further research in the field of youth identity formation.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature



-- Jeff Stahler/Cagle Post, 2011

The Internet, according to Poletti and Rak (2014), is the site of a “convergence of media technologies,” where many kinds of media abound—such as music, video, print, and imaging technologies—and users are able to utilize of any or all of these technologies at the same time when something is constructed (p. 7). This very convergence is the necessitous trait of what is commonly called “new media,” a term that denotes the intersection of traditional forms of media (books, television, radio) with digital media, specifically, interactive “on-demand” media for social communication (Jenkins, 2006).

Indeed, the popularity of new media is undeniable, and its emergence, unstoppable. A picture can be snapped on a mobile phone using an online photo-sharing application, cropped, filtered and captioned, and, with the click of a few buttons, it can instantly appear on other new media sites that enable the same degree of digital interactivity. These new media sites are often ‘social media,’ sites that reflect the set of new media that enable social

interaction between participants. While some, such as Fuchs (2014), have argued that all media can be labeled as “social” regardless of whether communication with others ensues, “social media” here is taken up with Shirky’s (2008) definition of the term. For Shirky, social media are “tools to increase our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations” (p. 304). This definition draws attention to the collaborative and participative aspects of social media, which in turn cultivate the formation of online groups and communities.

Farrington, Hall, Kilvington, Price, and Saeed (2015) suggest that one of the particular appeals of social media—as opposed to more traditional media platforms—is the potential to connect with hard-to-reach demographic groups, usually younger people (pp. 7-8). The present review of literature focuses on the impact of new media, and social media specifically, in relation to this “hard-to-reach” demographic group. Herein, this group will be termed as either “youth” or “youths,” defined in academic literature as consisting of those roughly between the ages of 12 and 24 (Mazzarella, 2003). Strictly defined, ‘teens,’ ‘adolescents’ and ‘young adults’ are subsets of this category, although these terms are often conflated in public discourses. Nonetheless, ‘youth’ or ‘youths’ will be used, except in instances when the literature refers specifically to teens, adolescents or young adults.

This chapter is broken down into three major sections. First, a general overview of youth and new media exposure is given, within both American and Canadian contexts. Next, youth and new media is taken up within the context of identity. To conclude, the final section of this chapter explores the concept of ‘digital literacies’ and how youth literacy practices have changed in the advent of new media exposure.

2.1 YOUTH AND NEW MEDIA EXPOSURE

For almost a decade, The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project has been chronicling the ways in which Americans use the Internet and how their activities affect their lives. Reporting for Pew, Duggan and Brenner (2013) published a report charting the general landscape of social media users in the United States (see *Figure 1*). With the exception of the figures on Facebook usage, the data seen in *Figure 1* was obtained by means of a national phone survey conducted between November 14, 2012 and December 9, 2012. The figures on Facebook usage, also obtained through phone surveys, were taken from a separate Pew Research Center survey conducted in December 2012. The results as seen in *Figure 1* indicate the largest percentage of social media users take to Facebook (67%), with particular appeal to adult women ages 18-29. Interestingly, the second largest percentage of social media users take to Twitter (16%), a service that enables users to send and read short

The Landscape of Social Media Users		
	% of Internet users who...	The service is especially appealing to...
Use Any Social Networking Site	67	Adults ages 18-29, women
Use Facebook	67	Women, adults ages 18-29
Use Twitter	16	Adults ages 18-29, African Americans, urban residents
Use Pinterest	15	Women, adults under 50, whites, those with some college education
Use Instagram	13	Adults ages 18-29, African Americans, Latinos, women, urban residents
Use Tumblr	6	Adults ages 18-29
Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November 14 – December 09, 2012. N=1,802 Internet users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. Margin of error is +/- 2.6 percentage points for results based on Internet users. Facebook figures are based on Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Omnibus Survey, December 13-16, 2012. Margin of error for Facebook data is +/- 2.9 percentage points for results based on Internet users (n= 860).		

Figure 1 - The landscape of social media usage

140-character text messages. Although no gender preference is specified for these Twitter users, the appeal of the service is once again young adults ages 18-29.

While the above report charts the *overall* landscape of social media users, the Pew Research Center has published numerous reports¹ *specifically* concerning youth engagement with the Internet and social media, again in the United States. Building upon initial findings of Pew researchers Lenhart, Madden, & MacGill (2007), the most recently released survey data sees a marked rise in the number of teens online. Brenner (2012), reporting for Pew, claims that fully 95% of teens aged 12-17 were online as of the September 2012 survey. 80% of those online teens are users of social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. Among these teen social media users:

- 93% have an account on Facebook
- 24% have an account on MySpace
- 12% have an account on Twitter
- 7% have an account on a Yahoo site
- 6% have an account on YouTube
- 2% have an account on each of the following: Skype, myYearbook, and Tumblr
- 1% have an account on Google Buzz

As this data suggests, over 90% of teens ages 12-17 have a Facebook account. As well, activity on MySpace was far less prevalent among teens in 2012 than in the six years prior to the publication of the report; Brenner relays that in 2006, more than eight in 10 teens (82%) said that MySpace was the social media site they used most often, whereas as of July 2011, just less than one-quarter of teens (24%) reported having a MySpace profile at all.

¹ For detailed information about the Pew reports cited in this review of literature, including population sizes and margin of error data (similar to the information found in the subtext in Figure 1), please see specific reports available online and found in the References at the end of this thesis.

² “Cyberbullying,” has been defined in the research literature as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a

While 12% of teens aged 12-17 reportedly had a Twitter account in 2012, a similar study by Smith and Brenner (2012) noted that just over one quarter (26%) of young adults ages 18-29 use Twitter. This report, again based on phone survey data, showed that among the youngest of the young adult Internet users (those ages 18-24), fully 31% were Twitter users.

Mobile phone usage is another pertinent facet of youth and media exposure, since many new media sites and applications can be accessed through mobile devices. According to Campbell (2005), mobile phones are an integral part of adolescents' daily lives, though the device "has turned from a technological tool to a social tool" (p. 2). Lenhart (2012) reports that 77% of teens in the United States have a mobile phone, and older teens aged 14-17 are substantially more likely to have a cell phone (87%) compared than younger teens aged 12-13 (57%). Overall, approximately half (49%) of all teens have gone online using their mobile phones (Brenner, 2012). According to Lenhart, text messaging dominates teens' general communication choices: 75% of all teens use text messaging, and 63% reported to use text messaging as a means of communication with others every day, and 29% of teens reportedly exchanged messages through social media using their mobile phones.

There are noticeably fewer reputable studies regarding youth and new media exposure in the Canadian context; of the limited research available, pertinent data is often more encompassing than the youth demographic alone. The most recent report from Statistics Canada (2013) considers individual Internet use based on a 2012 survey conducted in October and November of the same year. The survey consists of two components: a household component measuring home access, and an individual component measuring online behaviours. Findings were based on a sample of approximately 22,615 individuals aged 16 years and older. At times this data is further classified either by age group or by

provincial region; age group distinctions are included whenever possible in the selected highlights that follow.

Results of the survey indicate that in 2012, 83% of Canadians aged 16 or over used the Internet for personal use from any location, compared with 80% in 2010. Furthermore, the popularity of social media and the Internet as a communication tool increased from 2010 to 2012. Just over two-thirds (67%) of those Canadians who used the Internet visited social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter in 2012, up from 58% in 2010. As in 2010, female Internet users were more likely to use social media sites than their male counterparts (70% versus 64%).

Piliéci (2012), reporting for Canada's *National Post*, states that on a per-capita basis, Canada has the highest number of Facebook users in the world. Despite the average Canadian having approximately 200 'Facebook friends,' recent studies from the University of Waterloo have shown that as many as half of our 'friends' are people we don't even really know (Piliéci, 2012). Although the above average number of 'Facebook friends' does not pertain specifically to *youth* in Canada, Madden *et al.* (2013) at the Pew Center have reported the typical (median) teen Facebook user to have 300 friends in the United States.

With regards to mobile Internet usage, Statistics Canada (2013) reports that more than half of Internet users (58%) accessed the Internet in 2012 via a wireless handheld device such as a cell phone or tablet, up from 33% in 2010. Canadians aged 16 to 24 were most likely to use a wireless handheld device to connect to the Internet (84%). This access rate via wireless handheld device declined according to the increasing age of the respondents and was lowest amongst those 65 or older, at 9%.

Based on survey data from 2009, Canadian research company Ipsos Reid published a study noting that Canadian teens are slightly more likely than their U.S. counterparts to maintain profiles on social media sites: 76% of Canadian teens have profiles, while this number weans slightly to 72% for teens in the United States. In both cases, Facebook is the de facto choice for teens' online activities: 93% of those Canadian teens with a profile use Facebook. The perception that adolescents share more information online than any other age group was recently validated in a Canadian study conducted by Christofides, Muise and Desmarais (2012a) that looked at the Facebook usage of 288 adolescents and 285 adults. This group of researchers sought to specifically explore the differences and similarities in use of information sharing and use of the controls to protect their privacy. The results of the study indicated that adolescents disclose more information on Facebook and use the privacy settings less than adults. In part, and as the authors report, this is simply because the adolescents in the study *spent more time* on Facebook than the adults.

How much time do youth spend online?

Kirsch (2010), who has extensively explored the relationship between youth and media from a developmental perspective, claims that adolescents in particular spend more time surfing the Internet, instant messaging (IM), and chatting online with one another than do adults. In fact, a study conducted by Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) reports that use of Facebook is integrated into the *daily* lives of students by the time they reach post-secondary education. With more than 800 million users accessing Facebook regularly, and roughly 425 million accessing the site using a mobile device, Piliéci (2012) contends that the service's reach has become all-encompassing. As more and more media content becomes available, questions about whether and how the time youth devote to new media affects other

areas of their lives, such as the ways in which they process information or the ways they interact with their peers, is predicated upon assumptions about new media exposure.

In the United States, Correa, Hindley, and Gil de Zuniga (2010) report that social media site users are also regular visitors, with more than one-third checking their profile page daily and almost another 25% visiting every few days. Among teens, these authors report that the numbers are even higher, with almost half stating they logged into their profile at least once a day, and about one-third stating they visit weekly. In Canada, although the percentage of Internet users continues to rise, the proportion that used the Internet intensively—that is, for 10 or more hours each week—was relatively stable at 31% (Statistics Canada, 2013). However, the level of intensity varied considerably when considering the age of the user. In 2012, one-half (50%) of users aged 16 to 24 were online 10 hours or more each week, while 21% of Internet users aged 65 or older reported similar use (ibid).

Given the sheer amount of time youth spend online and with new media, two extremely important questions ground the remainder of this chapter. While it is impossible for this chapter to completely cover the topic of youth and new media, the following two questions relate to two important notions introduced in Chapter 1, namely, *identity* and *literacy*. The first grounding question asks *why* youth are spending so much time online: *What exactly are they doing?* This question will be taken up in section 2.2 and will look at the ways in which youth use new media. Here, the challenge is to draw upon literature to examine new media through the broad notion of identity. The second question follows directly from the first, and seeks to understand the pedagogical implications of all the time spent online: Given that youth are awash in new media, *what are the pedagogical*

implications for the ways in which youth use new media? This question will be explored in section 2.3 and will focus on literature pertaining to the changing landscape of literacy and digital literacies in particular.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to note that while ‘identity’ and ‘literacy’ neatly correspond to section 2.2 and section 2.3 respectively, there will be overlap. As well, while both sections focus on the relationship between youth and new media, at times this focus will be more general (i.e. youth and technology or youth and the Internet) or more specific (i.e. female adolescents and Facebook), providing sufficient breadth and depth in thinking through the two grounding questions.

2.2 YOUTH, NEW MEDIA AND IDENTITY

The move away from the old “monolithic” one-way flow mass media to the new “interactive” environment of Web 2.0 platforms mark a shift in conditions that have enabled youth to have a voice in the public sphere, allowing for an outpouring of youth expression (Hoechsmann, 2008, pp. 60-1). How emerging technology affects modes of expression and thinking was probably first explored by Turkle (1995) in *Life on the Screen*. Framing her work around multi-user domains (MUDs), or virtual role-playing games, she notes that “[users] can play many selves and none of these characters are any less real than what they think is their true self—all are there to be played out and explored” (p. 50). She also notes that “users could adopt any race, gender, or class background, any sexual orientation or political persuasion, any age, height, weight, or hair colour” (p. 59). In this sense, identity comes to be thought of in terms of multiplicity and flexibility, with virtual interaction providing a safe place to construct, test, and transform identities (Turkle, 1999).

Unquestionably, Turkle's (1995, 1997, 1999) early work enacted a cultural reconsideration of the traditionally accepted and unitary notion of identity. The explosion of new media a decade later avouched the seemingly endless possibilities of identity, particularly for youth in the advent of 'social network sites.' While the term 'social media'—previously defined in this chapter as a subset of 'new media'—has been used until now to describe sites such as Facebook and Twitter, these sites are more specifically known as *social network sites* and will be referred to as such from here on end. The present review of literature would not be complete without exploring what this term means and how it has emerged within the social media landscape.

What are 'social network sites' and how did they emerge?

While the nature and nomenclature of social network sites vary depending on interests and audiences, social network sites can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Although the terms "social network sites" and "social networking sites" are often used interchangeably in the literature, the former term is used herein to de-emphasize the 'networking' aspect of the online connections. As boyd and Ellison (2008) point out, on many of the large social network sites nowadays, "participants are not necessarily 'networking' or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already part of their extended social network" (p. 211).

Ironically, this very concept of 'networking' is what helped popularize early "ethnic community sites" such as AsianAvenue (1999), BlackPlanet (1999), and MiGente (2000),

since the original design of these sites was based on networking through matchmaking (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 213). Approximately half a decade later, these ethnic community sites were re-launched as social network sites, with increased functionality and connectivity features as defined in the previous paragraph. Other community sites such as Classmates and SixDegrees also appeared in the late 1990s, the former helping people find past classmates, and the latter focusing on networking friends (and friends of friends) together (Fellow, 2013). However, as Fellow (2013) points out, technological problems coupled with profile censorship issues hampered the development of both of these sites (p. 381).

It wasn't until 2002 that 'Friendster,' also known as "the original" social network site, (Fellow, 2013; Marwick, 2005) was launched. Marwick's (2005) recognition of Friendster as a social network site instead of a community site is based on her definition of what a "community" entails: For her, a community implies "a group of people linked by some shared interest of commonality"; she considers the key element in a social network site to be the network itself, which "may be made up of many communities linked together, or disparate elements that are linked by a single tie" (p. 7). She suggests that although communities may be social network sites, social network sites are not communities (ibid). Semantics aside, as Friendster's popularity surged, the site encountered technical and social difficulties (boyd, 2006). In fact, many early adopters of Friendster left because of "the combination of technical difficulties, social collisions, and a rupture of trust between users and the site" (ibid). However, at the same time Friendster was fading in the U.S., its popularity skyrocketed in the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia (Goldberg, 2007). As of mid-2011, Friendster turned its focus exclusively to online social gaming

within this Asian market, describing itself as a “social entertainment site” and openly stating a goal of “supplementing, rather than competing with, Facebook” (Fields, 2014, p. 93).

It was not until the appearance of ‘MySpace’ in 2003 that social network sites began to grow quickly; this site has been described as “nothing short of a cultural phenomenon” and is still currently among the top social network sites (Fellow, 2013, p. 381). MySpace officially launched in February 2004 and in that same month surpassed Friendster as the number-one ranked social network site—and never looked back (Watkins, 2009). As Watkins (2009) explains, the rise of MySpace was “totally viral,” and the site benefited from “the best and cheapest form of advertising, word of mouth. People joined MySpace because their friends joined” (p. 3).

MySpace was followed by the launch of what is now the largest social network site, ‘Facebook’ (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Holahan, 2009; Marwick, 2005; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Watkins, 2009). Created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his fellow Harvard University roommates, by 2007 Facebook was reported to have more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views each day (Sheldon, 2008). Originally designed as a way for students at Harvard University to connect, Facebook was soon made available to select other universities, all of higher education, and now most everyone worldwide (see Kirkpatrick, 2011; see also Overstreet, 2011). According to Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), Facebook was still the largest social network site as of May 2011, with 500 million registered users; compared to other large social network sites, Facebook garnered 157.2 million visits per month in 2011, well ahead of MySpace (34.9 million), Twitter (27.0 million), and business-oriented social network(ing) site LinkedIn (33.4 million).

This brief history of the emergence of social network sites evinces the growing appetite for digital lifestyles and “anytime, anywhere” media (Watkins, 2009). Although tools available on social network sites vary, most are fundamentally connected to other forms of new media. As well, while most social network sites enable user-driven blog-like posts, comment responses by those with access to the profile page, and the uploading of pictures and videos, features are constantly being added as new technologies emerge and include links to Twitter and other social media applications. However, considering the relative newness of social network sites, it is no surprise that limited research is available about how youth use and interact on these sites (Hart *et al.*, 2008; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Clearly, this emphasizes the need for more research in this field. In fact, there seems to be a significant gap in the literature inquiring into the emergence of technologically mediated spaces as locations of cultural production and literacy practices among youth, particularly in the Canadian context.

The ways in which new media are used by youth have been speculated upon since gaining impetus within the “digital media ecology,” a term described by Horst, Herr-Stephenson and Robinson (2010) as an environment that mediates and constructs the interactions and interrelations of virtual spaces with/in various institutions such as the home, places of work and leisure, the family, and the school (p. 30). While the term can be used in its singular form, it is perhaps more relatable in the plural, especially in considering that new media plays different roles in the formation of youth identity. For instance, the digital media ecology of a student who does not possess a computer or access the Internet in his or her home is likely a very different digital media ecology compared to a student who is more ‘plugged in’ and can access online spaces more easily. Nonetheless, it is the very metaphor

of ‘ecology,’ that should be kept in mind in the following sections because, as the word suggests, the components are not decomposable or separable, and, as the authors suggest, “the flows and interconnections in young people’s lives located in particular settings are also situated within young people’s wider media ecologies” (p. 31).

Within these wider media ecologies are the new media (such as online multi-player games, blogs and video blogs, editable online encyclopedias, chat rooms, IM, and especially social network sites) that afford youth a diverse array of ways to inhabit the changes and variations subsumed in the digital media ecological structures. Three of these ways are pertinent to youth identity formation and will be described in the sections to follow. First and foremost, a number of researchers have speculated that youth engagement with new media allows them to *share space and experiences*. Other researchers claim that youth use new media to *maintain friendships and relationships*, as well as make new ones. Last and most interestingly, a number of studies highlight the *gender differences in new media usage*, speaking to yet another way that youth inhabit their digital media ecologies. These three themes will be elaborated upon in the sections that follow.

2.2.1 Sharing space and experiences

The social desire for students to share space and experiences, once supported by the site of the shopping mall, is now supported by all different types of new media. In its heyday, MySpace was deemed so integral to youth identity that at the time, some teens even claimed: “If you’re not on MySpace, you don’t exist” (boyd, 2010, p. 78). But merely being *on* a social network site such as MySpace—or nowadays, Facebook—is not enough. In the words of Thomas (2007), “[t]o have an identity or presence online, users must interact with others through words. To not speak is to not have a visible identity in this context” (p. 113).

According to danah boyd (2001, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010), arguably the world's leading academic social media researcher, how youth communicate and connect with each other through social network sites provides long-lasting insights into identity formation. boyd (2008a) argues that youth who seek out space in social network sites are doing so "to resolve the social problems that emerge because the constructions of public and private are different online and offline" (p. 132). boyd bases these arguments on ethnographic data collected during her two-year study of youth engagement with the social network site MySpace. She examined more than 10,000 teen (aged 14-18) profiles on MySpace in an effort to make sense of the ways teens communicate with each other, as well as the content that teens shared. She also conducted face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with 94 teens from 10 US states, choosing diverse regions and communities that represented different demographics and cultural makeup. Her analysis of the profiles allowed her to conclude that while what they present may or may not resemble their 'real' identity, "their primary audience consists of peers that they know primarily offline—people from school, church, work, sports teams, etc." (2007, p. 120). Because of this direct link between real and virtual identities, she found that teens are inclined to present themselves by relaying experiences in ways that they believe will be well-received by their peers. This has been echoed in the work of Drotner (2009), who claims that virtual communication of youth is performed in pursuit of the maintenance of their social network.

These research conclusions are significant to the field, yet, the linkages between the 'virtual' and the 'real' are always only stated in terms of how a certain social network "receives" the identity in question. While the audience factor is incredibly important, the actor and the sense of self bestowed upon her performance are duly important, especially in

considering the flows, tensions, and intersections between her real and virtual identities. A more recent study by boyd and Marwick (2011) examines how youth share spaces and experiences in relation to issues of privacy. These authors examined how youth understand privacy and what strategies they take in their efforts to achieve social privacy. They describe both youth practices and the structural conditions in which these practices are embedded, highlighting the ways in which privacy, as it plays out in everyday life, is related more to agency and the ability to control a social situation than particular properties of information. The data used by boyd and Marwick comes from ethnographic fieldwork they collected across 20 different U.S. states from 2006 to 2010. In addition to both online and offline participant observation, they conducted 163 90-minute semi-structured interviews. Sampling was done strategically to work across gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, socio-economic background, political background, and school engagement level. As well, all of the teens that were interviewed were in high school or had recently dropped out of high school. To provoke diverse perspectives, the researchers purposefully rejected the notion of a ‘representative sample’ and instead used a ‘judgment sample,’ which is a non-random sample based on expert opinion. boyd and Marwick found that privacy was the central topic of 58 interviews conducted in North Carolina, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Washington in 2010.

In their data analysis, boyd and Marwick (2011) found that youth understand the notion of ‘privacy’ as it relates to three things: (1) their own abilities to control social situations, (2) how information flows, and (3) the observations of others. While in the interviews the youth spoke about secrets and trust, issues of *control* and *agency* prevailed in discussions. As these authors note, “teens often struggle to assert control over situations,

particularly when technology usurps their control or when their agency is undermined” (p. 5). This lack of control and undermining of agency is usually recognized by youth when authoritative figures (i.e. parents) violate boundaries. For boyd and Marwick, “therein lies the key hypocrisy surrounding teens and privacy” (ibid).

Issues surrounding youth and online privacy are not new; in fact, the sharing of personal information on social network sites started surfacing in 2006 when panic erupted around how youth use MySpace. According to Raynes-Goldie (2010), the panic was largely based on the idea that pedophiles could (and were) using social network sites to “sexually ‘prey’ on teens, who, in turn, were seen as putting themselves in harm’s way by sharing far too much personal information on their MySpace profiles” (n.p.; see also boyd and Jenkins, 2006; Marwick, 2008). In her attempt to explore issues of privacy in the context of Facebook, Raynes-Goldie undertook a year-long ethnographic study commencing in January 2008 of a “small group of socially connected 20-something Facebook users” (n.p). The study took place in Toronto, Canada—noted as the then-home to the second-largest regional Facebook network—and was conducted in both real and virtual contexts. While her methodological framework is not stated, Raynes-Goldie cites the goal of her research was to find out how these younger Facebook users reconciled their use of Facebook with their privacy concerns. She found that all participants expressed concerns about some aspect of their privacy on Facebook, often engaging in subversive practices to mitigate these concerns. She also found that participants were more concerned with *social privacy* rather than *institutional privacy*. Or, in Raynes-Goldie’s own words, “they were more concerned about controlling access to personal information rather than how the company behind Facebook and its partners might use that information” (n.p.).

With the landscape of social media and Facebook in particular developing at a rapid pace, issues of privacy will undoubtedly remain a concern for youth who choose to share space and experiences online. Although opting out of participation on social network sites is certainly an option, it may not be a viable one for youth who are entrenched in the “narrative of inevitability” (Bigge, 2006) that surrounds participation in social network sites like Facebook. Furthermore, the desire to maintain friendships and relationships is likely what enticed users to register in the first place, which is the topic of the next section.

2.2.2 Maintaining friendships and relationships

As far as online friendships are concerned, several studies have found that social network sites mostly offer an online extension of communication with existing (‘offline’) friends and acquaintances (Bryant & Marmo, 2010; Bryant, Marmo, & Ramirez, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Tong & Walther, 2011). Furthermore, the research of Van Cleemput (2010), Vandoninck, d’Haenens, De Cock, and Donoso (2010), and Walrave Vanwesenbeeck, and Heirman (2012) ascertain that the *most* important motives to create user accounts on social network sites are to stay in touch with friends and acquaintances, and especially to communicate with school friends after school hours.

Research conducted by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) suggests that social network sites are used to maintain existing offline relationships or solidify offline connections instead of making new ones. Their study examined the relationship between use of Facebook and the formation and maintenance of ‘social capital.’ Drawing upon Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) definition of the term, social capital is understood as “the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and

recognition” (p. 1145). Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe measured three different types of social capital (‘bonding,’ ‘bridging,’ and ‘maintained’) by administering an online survey to a random sample of 800 students at Michigan State University. The survey instrument included questions related to Facebook usage, such as amount of time spent using the social network site. Questions were designed to assess whether Facebook was used to meet new people or to establish an online connection to pre-existing connections. Through regression analysis, the researchers found a strong association between Facebook use and the three types of social capital, though they could not definitely state which precedes the other. The authors also concluded that Facebook might make it easier to “convert latent ties into weak ties,” since the site provides personal information about others and makes visible a user’s connections to a wide range of individuals. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe claim this “enables students to identify those who might be useful in some capacity (such as the math major in a required calculus class), thus providing the motivation to activate a latent tie” (pp. 1162-3).

While the activation of latent ties on social network sites can be seen as an *opportunity* of youth Facebook use, there are also a number of *risks* in maintaining friendships and relationships in social network sites. Recent research conducted by Keipi and Oksanen (2014) has looked at the effects of Internet risks and opportunities, especially in social media, brought about by user anonymity. Here, the notion of ‘anonymity’ is critical to understanding the study and is defined as follows:

The new capacity toward the creation of new social networks along with access to previously unknowable information and individuals has made youth of today more self-networking than ever before (boyd 2008; Lehdonvirta & Räsänen, 2011; Näsi, Räsänen, & Lehdonvirta, 2011). Tied to these increased opportunities online toward

this social interaction by youth is some level of inherent user anonymity. In the anonymous state, staples of face to face communication including the physical feedback loops (Carver and Scheier 1981; Burke 1991) that have a role in behavioral assessment through observed physical reaction along with reputation effects (Raub and Weesie 1990) of building identifiability from past behavior are significantly diminished or at times even absent. (pp. 1097-1098)

From this excerpt, anonymity is not simply understood as a lack of name, but rather as that which is *diminished* or even *absent* between translations of virtual (online) and real (physical) spaces of interaction. Keipi and Oksanen (2014) study looked at this concept of anonymity in relation to youth behaviour online. Their essay-based study scrutinized 258 youth narratives, written anonymously to maximize disclosure means. Data was collected in the winter and spring of 2012, at a school in Finland; students' ages ranged between 14-18 years (median age 15.4 years; 56% female). The students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

Internet use involves a level of anonymity. Write a narrative describing a situation where you feel that anonymity affected the behavior or treatment of a boy or girl of your age online. What happened and what caused the situation? How did he/she react and how did it make him/her feel? Would the situation have been different without anonymity? How? You may also explain whether the situation was routine or an exception. (p. 1102)

To identify opportunities and risks in the youth narratives, the ‘needs’ category of self-determination theory (SDT) for autonomy, relatedness, and competence was used. The analysis of the data was thematic, using both quantitative and qualitative methods with SDT providing an effective descriptive framework. Quantitative thematic analysis showed that 17% of the narratives included a notion of ‘competence,’ 32% ‘autonomy’ and 30% ‘relatedness.’ Risks were also prevalent in the narratives, with primary themes of ‘cyberbullying² and insults’ (74%), ‘identity theft and risky false identity’ (27%), and ‘sexual harassment or exploitation’ (18%). The qualitative analysis underlines the interaction of both risks and opportunities in the use of social media online by youth. These findings illuminate both the importance of Internet opportunities as a social tool for youth need-fulfillment toward self-determination as well as the social risks that youth Internet use involves.

On the same note of Internet opportunities, Livingstone (2008) claims that social network sites such as Facebook, MySpace and others have given youth a multitude of opportunities to recreate, elaborate, and express a notion of identity “lived through authentic relationships” (p. 12). Livingstone conducted a series of open-ended individual interviews with 16 teenagers, aged 13-16 years old; half were girls and half boys, most were white but several were black or mixed race, and they spanned the range of socioeconomic status categories. All had home access to the Internet and all had their own personal profile on Facebook, MySpace, or a similar social network site, which they had visited at least once per week in recent months. Among her (admittedly small) sample of teenagers, she found that

² “Cyberbullying,” has been defined in the research literature as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Smith *et al.*, 2008, p. 376).

younger teenagers were found to relish the opportunities to play and display, continuously recreating a highly decorated, stylistically elaborate identity. Having experienced this ‘phase,’ she found that older teenagers tended to favour a plain aesthetic that foregrounds their links to others, expressing a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships with others. Livingstone articulates this shift in phases of identity as having serious implications for teenagers’ experience of virtual risks and opportunities.

The formation of *new* connections on social network sites, which can be seen as yet another opportunity for youth using social network sites, has not been taken up in the literature as widely as the *maintenance* of friendships and relationships. However, as suggested in section 2.2, much of the early research about online (ethnic) communities assumed that individuals using these systems would be connecting with others outside their pre-existing social group or location, liberating them to form communities around shared interests, as opposed to shared geography (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia & Haythornthwaite, 1996). A hallmark of this early research is the presumption that when online and offline social networks overlapped, the directionality was online to offline—online connections resulted in face-to-face meetings. The implication here is that relationships that begin online rarely stay online. When it comes to Facebook, Coley (2006) claims that one the three main reasons why college students use the social network site—other than “for fun” and “to organize parties”—is to “find dates” (cited in Sheldon, 2008, p. 69). While the reasons of usage are likely different between college students and those in earlier stages of schooling, romantic and sexual desires often start at this earlier stage, especially when taking into account the sexualized nature of the Internet. This topic will be

taken up in the next section, which focuses on these concepts in relation to gender differences.

2.2.3 Gender differences in new media usage

Recently, significant to note, studies about social media have started to uncover gender differences in usage, an extremely interesting and relevant trajectory of inquiry into youth identity. Rainie (2005) suggests that boys who use social media focus on features and entertainment, while girls seem more interested in the relational aspects of social media; in fact, girls are more likely than boys to talk with friends on the Internet about romantic relationships, secret things, and deep feelings (see also Rideout, Roberts, and Foehr, 2005). As noted by boyd (2008a) per the same ethnographic study detailed in section 2.2.1, gender appears to influence participation on social network sites: Younger boys are more likely to participate than younger girls (46% vs. 44%) but older girls are far more likely to participate than older boys (70% vs. 57%). As well, older boys are twice as likely to use the sites to flirt and slightly more likely to use the sites to meet new people than girls of their age. Older girls are far more likely to use these sites to communicate with friends they see in person than younger people or boys of their age (p. 3).

When it comes to how youth engage in identity experiments per their profiles on social media sites, many studies have found significant differences in the ways females and males present themselves. For instance, a study of teen chat sites by Kapidzic and Herring (2011) analyzed 639 statements from teenage males and 339 from teenage females and found that females adopt a more interactive and interpersonal style of writing compared to males who communicate more about things than people. Furthermore, a study of MySpace profiles created by 25 males and 25 females aged 13-19 found that girls are more likely to

employ self-references, social words and negative words than boys (Pfeil, Arjan, & Zaphiris, 2009). In another study of 23 ethnically diverse participants aged 18-23, 11 of whom were female, Manago *et al.* (2008) found that females present themselves online as attractive and affiliative as opposed to men who emphasize strength and power. One of the authors' conclusions drawn from this study is that females work harder than males on social networking profiles to impress others particularly in terms of physical appearance. Yet, these women acknowledged a certain pressure to negotiate the balance between 'sexy' and 'innocent' in their online self-presentation.

Part of Kapidzic and Herring's (2011) study—which predominantly analyzed gender preferences in the linguistic features and communication styles in synchronous text messaging—also involved a visual analysis of profile images. This part of the study looked at 200 profile images (100 female and 100 male) from chat-site users aged 16-19. Images were coded for whether or not they contained a photograph, and those with photographs were further coded following Kress and van Leeuwen's (1966) established methods of visual content analysis³, defined by six values: *intimate* (head only), *close personal* (head and shoulders), *far personal* (from the chest up), *close social* (from the knees up), *far social* (entire figure visible), and *public* (multiple figures visible). Analysis of the profiles that had photographs revealed that female users were more likely to choose images of themselves at intimate (male 1%, female 11%) and close personal (male 30%, female 52%) distances. In contrast, male users preferred far personal (male 40%, female 20%) distance by a large

³ Kress and van Leeuwen's (1966) method of visual analysis is based on Edward Hall's (1966) ideas on "proxemics," which is the study of how people use and perceive space.

margin (p. 48). The behavior analysis⁴ also showed strongly gender-skewed results. The overwhelming majority of teenage girls (71%) chose to present themselves in photographs with seductive behavior—head tilted, body angled, eyes looking up or sideways at the viewer—in comparison with 28% of male users who chose to present themselves that way. Males were more likely to choose photographs of themselves depicting behavior classified as *offer/ideal* (looking away in the distance), *demand/submission* (looking down at the viewer), and *demand/affiliation* (looking straight at the viewer) (p. 49). The research conducted by Kapidizic & Herring's (2011) led these researchers' to conclude that "[t]he phenomenon of gender differentiation occurs at multiple levels of communication and is relatively stable over time and across media" (p. 52).

In another study by Valkenburg *et al.* (2005), 600 youth aged 9-18 year were recruited from schools in urban districts in the Netherlands. The researchers set out to investigate how often adolescents engaged in Internet-based identity experiments, as well as the motives and types of self-presentational strategies used during experimentation. They found that over 50% of the participants had used online social networking as a conduit for Internet-based identity experiments involving self-presentation. Additionally age, gender and introversion were significant predictors of the frequency with which teenagers engaged in identity experiments and their self-presentational strategies. The study found that 72% of 9-12 year olds more frequently experimented with identity online compared to 53% 13-14 years olds and 28% of 15-18 year olds. Valkenburg *et al.* (2005) attempted to code online activity using Jones and Pittman's (1982) self-presentation strategies. They found that girls, younger teens and extraverts more frequently used self-promotion by presenting themselves

⁴ The photographs were also coded for *behaviour*, based on Bell's (2001) defining values of: offer/ideal, demand/affiliation, demand/submission, and demand/seduction (p. 45).

as an older person. Boys and introverts presented themselves more frequently using intimidation by presenting a ‘macho’ persona while younger teenagers, girls and extraverts presented themselves more frequently as more beautiful than in their offline life by using ingratiation as their dominant self-presentation strategy affirming gender stereotypes. *Gender* did not influence the likelihood of the participant engaging in online identity experiments, however, girls were far more likely to pretend to be older online. The influence of introversion was conditional on the age of the participant: older teenage introverts were much more likely to experiment online by pretending to be older and more flirtatious than offline. Valkenburg *et al.*’s (2005) study points to the subjective nature of attempting to code according to Jones and Pittman’s (1982) self-presentation strategies.

When it comes to self-presentation, women place a greater priority on positive presentations than do men (Haferkamp *et al.*, 2012), and overall, females tend to present themselves as more emotional, friendly, sexually available, and eager to please the opposite sex than do males (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008). Much has been written on the topic of how these sorts of roles are constantly reinforced by adolescents’ exposure to ‘sexy media.’ According to Steinburg and Monahan (2010), American adolescents are bombarded with sexual imagery in television programs, films, and music videos and on the Internet. These authors suggest that some form of sexual content (including talking about sex, passionate kissing, intimate touching, and explicit sexual intercourse) appears in 70% of all television programs, with sexual talk appearing in 68% of shows (at a rate exceeding four scenes per hour) and sexual behavior in 35% of shows (at a rate of two scenes per hour). Further, implied sexual intercourse is portrayed in 11% of all television shows and the presence of sexual content is even higher in prime-time shows (six scenes per hour) and higher still in

the shows most watched by teenagers (nearly seven scenes per hour). Kunkel *et al.* (2005) note that sexual content on television is thought to have increased substantially over the past decade, although comparably large-scale systematic analyses of sexual content in media other than television have not been conducted.

Small-scale research, such as a study conducted by Weber and Mitchell (2008), details a case study drawn from a series of studies of tween⁵ and teen girls' everyday uses of digital technology conducted by the *Digital Girls* research team in Canada. They conducted open-ended interviews with several girls (aged 10-13) from different economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, asking about their activities around social network sites. Before the interviews, they examined a number of prominent features of the social network sites, including but not limited to: (1) a personal page revealing a range of information and opinions; (2) instant messaging; (3) elements of fandom, sharing likes and dislikes—popular movies, sport, music idols, and so forth; (4) declaration of their friendship group, their heritage group, and in some instances, their family (in other words, certain elements selected to show where they fit in, where they belong); (5) a bulletin board ('wall') for friends to leave messages; (6) images—sometimes original drawings, but more often clip art taken from other sites, popular images, and commercial logos; (7) photographs (posed and/or candid shots of oneself, pets, etc.); and (8) use of the prevailing norms for 'cool' language. They also followed their friends' posts and links to their websites, to trace and examine friendship groups.

⁵ The word "tween" denotes a youth demographic referring to the 'in-between' stage of development of pre-adolescents aged 9-12 (Fields & Kafai, 2009).

In this research study, Weber and Mitchell (2008) report that activities of production and consumption on social network sites provide girls with diverse means of constructing and fashioning their identities through images and words. The performance, sexualization, and gendering of their bodies was quite prominent, with many of the girls very intent on posing and dressing their bodies to look “sexy” (p. 31). Weber and Mitchell also found that self-presentation on these sites contains many contrasting, ambivalent, or even contradictory elements of “self” (p. 31). For example, they found that one trend that runs through most of the younger girls’ sites is the nostalgic inclusion of cuddly animals and images that are associated with younger children, right alongside the sexy poses and images more typical of teen magazines. When questioned, they found that none of these girls felt that there was any problem with using ‘childish’ cartoons or clichés mixed with sexual images. In the older girls’ sites, however, content was noticeably different, with fewer nostalgic icons of childhood, more sarcasm, and more critique of adults (especially teachers), with an overall greater awareness or appreciation of the world wide web beyond their own personal page. They concluded that as girls transition from tween to teen, they become more curious about other people’s ways of constructing sites, allowing their construction or posting of self to seem “more deliberate and reflexive,” as well as more sexualized (p. 30).

Similar research by Stern (2007) has also pursued the argument that female youth use technology to experiment with themes of sexuality and selfhood. Stern’s research looks at instant messaging (IM) as a form of new media, asserting that “the social network phenomenon is IM writ large to a mass culture...sometimes the social networks do include close friends who also IM with one another—the overlap between the IM with its buddy lists and social network spaces with their friends lists is apparent” (p. 108). IM is also one of the

prominent features on social network sites, as previously noted in the work of Weber and Mitchell (2008). In her research, Stern focused on a dozen different girls, aged 13-15, of different racial and class backgrounds located in different parts of the United States. She used a combination of in-depth and ongoing interviews with the girls to clarify and contextualize the conversations they sent her; she then discerned a number of themes from the cultural narratives that occurred in each girl's conversations and interviews. Stern found that IM "presents a new opportunity for adolescent girls to more easily 'say' what they are thinking and assert themselves in ways that defy dominant cultural notions of girliness" (p. 68). She also found that IM becomes a virtual space in which "users are able to negotiate and understand sexuality without having to rely upon bodies" (p. 68). Her research subjects often appeared to transgress the social norms associated with "'nice' girls in the past," even if they approach sexuality with a certain degree of playfulness (ibid).

Stern's research suggests that virtual spaces afforded by new media offer a comparatively safe yet private place for youth, especially teens, to experiment with sexual identity. However, considering the changes which have taken place within the digital media ecology and the emergence and rampant usage of social network sites, it becomes necessary to see how "subversive" (Kolek & Saunders, 2008) is online representation and communication. Female youth are *coming to be*, formulating and finding their "identities-in-action" (Weber & Mitchell, 2008) from within the body of communicative and intersubjective actions that 'hanging out' in social network sites permits. Although some, such as Osgerby (2004), claim that the potential for communication, participation, and cultural production in new media forays is feeding into "a wider 'decentering' of identity in contemporary society, with individuals able to articulate an ever-widening range of diverse

identities” (p. 193), what remains left to be researched is how these diverse identities can be understood. Part of this understanding is rooted in what is called ‘digital literacy,’ which the topic of the next section.

2.3 DIGITAL LITERACIES

Twenty years ago, Derrick de Kerckhove, former director of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto, suggested that emergent media and new technologies will have an impact on language and literacy, and that this will not necessarily be a “bad thing” (de Kerckhove, 1995, p. xx). Yes, this was only about two decades ago, but his words ring with a fatidic vibrancy if we recall that the Windows 95 platform had only just hit the market, the Mac was yet to become the apple of Steve Jobs’ eye, and cell phones were brick-sized monstrosities that weighed more than some laptops do today. In fact, if we dare liken technological years to human ones in the old adage of one dog year equaling seven human years⁶, de Kerckhove seemed to have prophesized the changing landscape of language and literacy in what feels like over a century past.

Nowadays, the impacts of new technologies and new media on literacy are far-reaching and practically inevitable (Alvermann, 2005; Buckingham, 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Dakers, 2006; Ito *et al.*, 2010; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2005b, 2008; Martin & Madigan, 2006; Marsh, 2005; Marsh & Millard, 2006; McPherson, 2008b; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Withrow, 2004). Unlike in 1995 when the impact of computers on pedagogical practices was minimal and “computers were barely, if at all, used for instructional purposes” (Reiser, 2001, p. 60), youth are now awash in new media, with computers becoming “basic

⁶ The comparison here is made in jest, to account for what de Kerckhove calls a “techno-lag” (p. 2). One dog year does not always equate to seven human ones in scientific studies of comparative longevity that analyze the effect of factors such as breed and body weight. Although the relationship in reality is non-linear, the 1:7 ratio remains popularized. For further reading, see Patronek, Waters, & Glickman (1997).

equipment for today's teenagers" (Roberts & Foehr, 2008, p. 12). The pervasive nature of technology and new media and its pedagogical implications for students has been explored to a considerable extent in the academy, yet, some, such as Livingstone (2003), assert that "it is problematic that the academy tends to regard 'children' as a special object of study," because by doing so, we are "rendering them marginalized within 'general' discussions of the Internet" (p. 148).

The discussion that follows is neither general nor does it render youth marginal; in fact, the ensuing sections bring youth from "margin to center" (hooks, 2000) of a public sphere that has altered literacy practices as "Generation M" (for media) (Rideout, Roberts & Foehr, 2005) takes the lead in navigating the web of wonder that new media and new technology has to offer. First, the notion of 'digital literacies' is discussed, as per the research literature. Next, its competencies are expanded upon in relation to the pedagogical implications for students, after which the implications for teachers who engage new media and emergent technologies are brought into the picture. As the discussions unfold, the dynamic interplay among youth, technology, new media, and literacy will be emphasized.

2.3.1 What are 'digital literacies'?

The idea of 'digital literacy' has been progressively played with since the late 1990s by a number of different researchers (cf. Alexander, 2006; Bawden, 2008; Bruce, 2005; Buckingham, 2007a; Eshet, 2002; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Gee, 2004; Glister, 1997; Goodman, 2003; Hagood, Stevens, & Reinking, 2005; Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Noble, 2003, 2005a, 2008; Mayer, 2001; Merchant, 2005; Tapscott, 1998; Withrow, 2004). According to Chase and Laufenberg (2011),

Digital literacy is not a new literacy. This is to say, if digital literacy is simply reading and writing in a digital environment, there is no need for new terminology. ... Let us then accept digital literacy as a genre, a format and a tool to be found within the domain of standard literacy, rather than a concept standing at odds. (p. 535)

If taken as a genre, digital literacy can be seen as finding its place among a multiple of literacies, as Bawden (2008) suggests, including information literacy, computer literacy, information communication technologies (ICT) literacy, e-literacy, network literacy, and media literacy (p. 17). He suggests that digital literacy can be used as a meta-framework for integrating these and various other literacies and skill-sets, though “it does not need to encompass them all” (p. 28). Some of these other literacies are present in Eshet-Alkalai’s (2004) framework of digital literacy, through which photo-visual literacy, reproduction literacy, branching (or ‘hypermedia’) literacy, and socio-emotional literacy can be added to Bawden’s list. Given the many types of literacies surrounding ‘digital literacy,’ the pluralized term ‘digital literacies’ will be used in this thesis to reflect the many types of literacies that influence, recombine, and ultimately shape the genre.

Bawden (2008) outlines a number of central competencies relating to digital literacies, most notably: (1) reading and understanding digital and non-digital formats, and (2) creating and communicating digital information (p. 29). Though his elaborations of these two competencies are exiguous, each one demands a separate scrutiny in order to critically examine how youth consume and produce digital texts, as well as why “hanging out”—a phrase Horst, Herr-Stephenson and Robinson (2010) use to describe the differing levels of investments in new media activities in a way that integrate an understanding of technical,

social, and cultural patterns—is an integral activity for youth in the public sphere of the Internet.

2.3.2 Consuming, producing & ‘hanging out’

According to Hitlin and Rainie (2005), the Internet is one of the most important tools for academic learning. The digitalization of databases, for instance, “has helped revolutionize the landscape of how students access information and learn” (Lin, 2009, p. 567). Research no longer demands a physical trip to the library, and reading no longer necessitates a line of sight from eye to paper. A turn to digital texts and computer interfaces, then, not only impacts measures of accessibility, but also impacts the *ways* in which students read. As Kress (2003) notes, in older forms of page (that assume a culturally-formed left to right reading path) “students start at the top-left corner, read across to the right, return to the left one line down, and continue” (p. 157). He calls this process one of directional habituation, which has been disrupted in lieu of the “semiotic and the social power of the [computer] screen” (p. 160).

The ‘disruption’ here is hardly a “bad thing,” to use the words of de Kerckhove. Students are still taught to read by means of what teachers hand to them, yet, if students are able to enter the public sphere of the Internet as a way to complement their non-digital reading activities⁷, they will inevitably enter into new media spaces that help foster creativity as well as identities that no longer force them to “remain submerged in the habitual” (Greene, 1995, p. 100). For instance, students who read the blogs of others are able to leave comments and feedback based on his or her reading of the blogger’s original text, and this

⁷ The complementarity here is inferred from Lovell & Baker’s (2009) “blended” approach to collaborative learning.

feedback is in turn available for other readers to read; the ongoing process energizes what du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (2013) call a “circuit of culture,” which will be discussed thoroughly in the next chapter. Ultimately, the reading practices that take place in online *chronotopes* such as blogs enable a sort of digital *heteroglossia*, to borrow two terms from Bakhtin’s (1981) work on literary dialogism, whereby a number of different voices can be heard within the main ‘text.’

Chase and Laufenberg (2011) offer a practical example of students experimenting with digital literacies at Teaching at Science Leadership Academy (SLA), a partnership school between the School District of Philadelphia and The Franklin Institute. SLA provided Chase and Laufenberg with ample and varied examples of what digital literacies can be for K–12 students and educators. The following example is based on the data⁸ taken from grade 11 students interviewing 9th grade students about moments that shaped their lives:

The interviews are audio recorded and edited using audio production software on students’ laptops. The finished interviews are posted to the school’s website on each student’s individual blog. Students then listen to and comment on their peers’ work along with the global audience, responding to what has been created (see, for example, the “Real World, Real Life” interview here: drupaledscienceleadership.org/audio/lduffytumasz/22-sep-2008/2771). (p. 536)

The authors relay that through the process of recording the interviews, students are actually ‘writing’ their rough drafts, while the editing of the interviews can be taken as the ‘revision process.’ As well, posting these interviews teaches students “publishing skills,” and

⁸ Sample size is not provided.

acts of commenting demonstrate “reader response” (p. 536). For those students who moved beyond the audio interview and used a camera on a laptop to record a video, products were posted to sites such as SchoolTube.com, TeacherTube.com, YouTube.com, which teaches students to keep in mind the global audience. To sum up the students’ experiences of engaging digital literacies, Chase and Laufenberg (2011) proclaim: “What could have been a closed, in-class assignment finds its potential in authenticity and audience accessibility while allowing students to create across multiple modalities” (p. 536).

Engaging digital literacies has not always been welcomed in other parts of the world. In the U.K., for instance, and as Merchant (2007) informs us, “[there is] a political drive to the return to basics, currently framed in terms of a ‘simple model of reading’” that emphasizes recognition and decoding of words on a page (p. 118). The return to a simple model of reading, combined with “a low level of professional confidence in the use of popular digital texts in the classroom” is worrying for Merchant, who sees these two points as harbingers of the growing distance between everyday literacy practices and schooled literacy (ibid). His worry speaks to Warlick’s (2006) hope that “reading, as literacy, should be expanded to include skills that involve not only decoding text, but also deal with an open communication environment and new authors” (p. 92). Evidently, the call for students to engage in meaningful digital reading and writing practices so as to close the gap between everyday literacy practices and schooled literacy hinges upon a need for students to experiment with digital reading formats in new media spaces. If this need is realized, there will be a greater chance for students to become informed consumers and producers of knowledge during their digital practices.

2.3.3 Creating and communicating digital information

Back in the days when the word ‘literacy’ was more commonly used in its singular rather than plural form, Goody (1968) suggested that literacy, as writing, changed the literate’s “technology of intellect” (p. 4). A change of phrasing is necessary here to reflect new writing practices in the advent of new media: Technology, as a form of writing literacy, has changed and continues to change the intellect of the literate. With a shift of focus in this section from consumption to production, or more specifically, from the reading of digital text to the creation and communication of it, we will see how other spaces afforded by participation with/in new media contribute to students’ learning experiences (or ‘changes in intellect’) and identity formation in particular.

In his article concerned with the enablement of new modes of literacy through changes in technology, Bruce (2005) suggests, “the student ‘doing his/her own work’ may soon be the anomalous case for writing” as collaborative support systems are pointing to writing as a participatory process (p. 7). Engaging in new media affords students a plethora of social venues to provoke writing as collaborative and even reflective praxis. Participating in online communities such as social network sites, for instance, is one such way to facilitate participatory approaches to learning. However, learning, in this context, is not simply a reflection of the school curriculum; here, we are venturing into what Eisner (1994) calls the “null curriculum,” or that which schools do *not* teach, which he claims “may be as important as what they *do* teach” (p. 97, emphasis added). As we will see in later chapters of this thesis, it is through the null curriculum that the notion of ‘hanging out’ becomes an essential activity in youth’s engagement with new media.

In their research that deals almost directly with the convergence of digital literacy and online identities, Knobel and Lankshear (2008) suggest that online social network activities are deployed in “socially recognized ways” (p. 255) in which literacies of all types of codification systems, such as the manipulation of alphabetic symbols, ‘freezing’ language as digitally encoded speech and uploading it as a podcast on the Internet, or Photoshopping an image, capture material for generating, communicating, and negotiating meaning (p. 257). Following up with the codification system of Photoshopping, we are able to see that one of the most coveted assemblages of (youth) identity formation in social networking sites, ‘the profile pic,’ is not just a picture, nor just a means of expression; it is the praxis of photo-visual literacy that digital literacy enables. Given the array of literacies needed to participate in network sites, students are probably more literate than they think.

2.3.4 Implications for teachers and students

If it’s true that teachers often teach based upon the patterns and experiences they have had in their own learning experiences (Withrow, 2004), then how do the teachers of the analog generation keep up with the “Digikids” (Merchant, 2005)? As we have seen in previous sections, the changing nature of literacy lies in the collaborative actions and practices associated with new media and new technologies. It would only make sense, then, for teachers to align their own actions and practices within the ethos of collaboration upon which new media is premised. A rethinking of teaching styles, from authoritative downward dissemination to student-centered collaborative communication is in order (see McPherson, 2008a; see also Willett, Robinson, & Marsh, 2009). More specifically, as Withrow (2004) points out, “teachers will need to learn a new pattern of teaching where the learner is the

focus of the school. Technology does that; it concentrates the learning and teaching partnership on the learner rather than the teacher” (p. 54).

An example of how this type of student-centered approach can play out is offered through the use of what Yardi (2008) calls the “chat room backchannel.” She describes the backchannel as an online chat-enabled function that serves as “a secondary or background complement to an existing frontchannel,” the latter consisting of “a professor, teacher, speaker, lecturer, conference panel, or other similar environment containing a centralized discussion leader who is usually collocated in the same physical space as the participants” (p. 144). While the frontchannel implies a single focus of attention, the synchronous backchannel encourages users to participate and interact with one another; Yardi suggests that this changes the dynamics of the room from a strictly “one-to-many interactions” to a “many-to-many interactions” (ibid). She notes that in the backchannel, students can participate in knowledge creation because they have the freedom and the power to direct the discussion in ways that are relevant, contextual, and instructional for their own learning purposes (p. 149). However, she also warns of the disadvantages of backchannel usage, such as the possibilities for distraction, discomfort, as well as its unknown impact on memory retention due to its novelty factor (pp. 151-2).

As we can see from this example, the technological expertise of the teacher in facilitating these types of student-centered learning environments is already assumed. Clearly, the approach to pedagogy is troubled if teachers do not tinker themselves into technological prowess; perhaps overly so if students are more technologically savvy than they are—which is often the case. Herring (2008) has called this age gap with respect to technology the “generational divide.” Found within the generational divide are the “Digital

Natives” (Presnsky, 2001), or those who have grown up with technology, and the “Digital Immigrants,” or the adults who have come to it later in life. Prensky’s work has been expanded upon to a great extent by Palfrey and Gasser (2008), who have looked at the notions of “online” and “offline” identities in relation to these two groups. These authors claim that digital natives may not distinguish between their online and offline identities because they realize that “living in a digital era is a synthesis of real-space and online expressions” (p. 36). Reverting to the example of backchannels, some students may find it easier to ‘speak up’ in these types of online spaces rather than in the real-space discussions of the classroom or lecture hall. If a teacher is cognizant of students’ strengths and weaknesses as separately invoked through their online and offline selves, it is more likely that the communicative actions between the teacher and the students can be geared towards common understanding and cooperation.

The pedagogical implications for students and teachers who engage new technologies and new media are as expansive as the public sphere itself. Blogs, social network sites, and chat rooms are only some of the new media spaces within which the inter/personal, anti/social, meta/cultural, and cross/curricular pedagogical implications be realized. Clearly, changes in communications have catalyzed the blurring of these boundaries as notions of identity and (youth) culture are transformed by dis/embodyed performative actions and a rethinking of public and private nomenclatures. Although there is much left to be explored, it seems poignant to end not through more lines of questioning, but instead with the words of Charles Bazerman; his words capture much of what I intend to research and the objectives behind it, especially when it comes to literacy:

Literacy has always developed hand in hand with the technologies by which it is realized—whether clay tablet, printing press, or microchip—and people have almost always immediately wondered about and commented on how the newest technology might be used and its consequences. ... Whether or not it is the most fundamental issue literacy professionals must address over the next few decades remains to be seen, but it is certainly the most pressing. (2004, p. 440)

2.4. CONCLUSIONS OF INTEROPERABILITY: YOUTH, NEW MEDIA, IDENTITY AND DIGITAL LITERACIES

This chapter has provided a review of literature pertaining to youth, new media (exposure), identity and digital literacies. The sections of this chapter have been broken down to expand on these terms somewhat separately, to engage a fluidity in the flow of terminologies and concepts as well as to provide depth and breadth of empirical studies throughout and theoretical concepts in the last section. While the last section provides a general overview of digital literacies in relation to the available literature, practices relating to digital literacies are most relevant to the remainder of this thesis by means of *interoperability* with other sections of this chapter. To be more clear: While some of the provided literature pertaining to digital literacies demonstrates the need for youth and teachers to be ‘technologically savvy,’ the most relevant aspect of digital literacies henceforth relates to ‘technological prowess,’ that is, how youth *know what to say* and *how to say* it in the places they hang out online.

To be even more clear, with a purposefully pointed example: While knowledge of coding languages (such as C++) are certainly significant to practices of digital literacies, more significant here are the codes of Facebook employed by female adolescents in ways to

make Facebook ‘happen.’ The latter part of this sentence demonstrates the interoperability of *all* the main terms in this chapter: “the codes (*digital literacies*) of Facebook (*new media*) employed by female adolescents (*youth*) in ways to make Facebook ‘happen’ (*identity*).” This example emphasizes the importance of roping the main terms together; incidentally, it is perhaps no coincidence that the word ‘rope’ is found within ‘interoperability.’ The next chapter extends the roping of these concepts to new and existing ones at the theoretical level. Before commencing, however, the more circumspect reader is apprised that the development of a new theory (CIF) in the next chapter fully vindicates its length; full explication of all terminologies must be provided to support the necessary linkages among the many concepts discussed.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

The body is...a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the public and the private, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with mind/body opposition.

-- Grosz (1994, p. 21)

The old dualism in which research on ‘the body’ was left to the natural sciences while the humanities and social sciences focused on cultural and social matters, no longer holds. Although historical, positivist standpoints of the body define it by biological forms and functions, more recent theorizations of the body no longer view it as an object separate from rationality. While the body indeed has a material, tangible basis, sociological theory widely purports it as *socially constructed*, where social meanings are attached to it, and it is shaped and regulated by social forces (Butler, 1990, 1993a, 1993b; Fraser & Greco, 2005; Foucault, 1977b, 1980; 1991; Low & Malacrida, 2008; Nettleton & Watson, 1998; Moore & Kosut, 2010; Turner, 1984). Though other disciplines, such as anthropology, have long embraced a tradition of research relating to body practices and rituals (c.f., Linton, 1965; Malinowski, 1948; Murdock, 1949), this research has largely concerned itself within the opposition of nature/culture (viewing humankind as both separate and together with nature), and is generally not relatable to the study of the body in the social context of this thesis: urban, secular, dis/enchanted, consumerist, and capitalist. However, the study of the body in the discipline of sociology, and the accompanying emergence of the field of the ‘sociology of the body,’ opens up interesting trajectories to start contemplating the binaries associated with the mind/body opposition noted by Grosz (1994), whose excerpt opens this chapter.

How the body is united with the mind is the premise of the mind/body opposition, instituted by Descartes (1596-1650) over three centuries ago. This opposition assumes that mind and body are two distinct, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive entities. In the words of Descartes, which are worth quoting at length:

[T]here is a great difference between the mind and the body consisting therein that by its nature the body be always divisible, but the mind be completely indivisible. For surely when I consider the mind, or me myself in so far as I am only a cogitating thing, I can then distinguish no parts in me, but rather do I understand that I am plainly a thing one and complete. And although the whole mind would seem to be united to the whole body, I still cognize that, a foot or an arm or whichever other part of the body you are willing having been cut off, nothing has therefore been taken away from the mind. And the faculties of willing, of sensing, of understanding, etc., can also not be called its “parts,” because it is one and the same mind which wills, which senses and which understands. But—on the contrary—there is no corporeal or extended thing that can be cogitated by me which I might not easily divide into parts by cogitation, and by means of this itself I may understand that it is divisible: which one thing would suffice to teach me that the mind is completely different from the body... (Descartes & Heffernan, 1990, p. 209)

The Cartesian paradigm of mind and body is regarded as an important ‘problem’ in the extant literature, perhaps summed up best by Feigl (1967) as “a cluster of intricate puzzles – some scientific, some epistemological, ...some semantical, and some pragmatic” (p. 373). While the opposition of mind and body is intuitively attractive in the above excerpt—perhaps because of its innate simplicity—the reductionist rhetoric of essentializing

both mind and body to a notion of in/divisibility cannot in itself inaugurate conclusions of difference between the two. Indeed, Descartes' conclusion that the mind is completely different from the body is inferred from his rationalization that (1) The body is divisible *by its nature*; and (2) The mind is indivisible *by its nature*. Although he does not elaborate on what these *natures* are, Descartes conjectures that since the body is physically divisible and since the mind is not physically divisible, mind and body are therefore distinct. The nature of the body, then, is one of *physicality*, whereas the nature of the mind, then, is one of *mentality* or thinking. Thus, we can sever a foot or an arm from the body—as Descartes suggests—and we are effectively dividing the body. But, according to Descartes, since the mind is not corporeal or tangible, it is thus not severable; it is indivisible. The body, very simply, is an *object* of knowledge. As well, we have one mind, within this one body, and therefore one self.

The above logic solicits a vital quandary that provokes and energizes this interpretation of mind/body opposition, while heralding acquiescence to social theory and *a posteriori* methods of discovery for the remainder of this thesis: Assuming that individuals are able to navigate across their “multiple identities⁹” and achieve personal integration in the context of our increasingly complex, globalized world (Josselson & Harway, 2012), does this mean that the mind is indeed able to exist as two or more minds? Or rather, as two or more ‘selves,’ each with different identities— yet in one body? Clearly, this type of questioning disrupts the Cartesian body/mind dualism as it recognizes the nature of the mind beyond mentality and thinking alone; it recognizes the experiential and narrative nature of human knowledge—in this case, the corporeal, subjective, and emotional capacity of the self—

9 While pointed discussions of identity will strategically surface in the later part of this chapter, the use of the term ‘multiple identities’ suggests that individuals negotiate diverse actualities by acting consistently and convincingly within multiple plot spaces, and change in the process. (See Hastrup, 2008, p. 51.)

ultimately connecting mind with body. For Grosz (2005), this is key to explaining the interactions of body and mind, given that “within the experience of everyday life, there seems to be a manifest connection between the two in willful behavior” (p. 48). Attending to this manifest connection, Grosz offers a line of investigation that transcends Cartesianism, by viewing the body a “signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects)” (p. 50). She suggests the idea of a the body as a two-way conduit: “on one hand, it is a circuit for the transmission information from outside the organism, conveyed through the sensory apparatus; on the other hand, it is vehicle for the expression of an otherwise sealed and self-contained, incommunicable psyche” (p. 50). Grosz’s line of investigation adduces my own research investigations in support of fluid, volatile bodies that can express the complexities of their interiority and thus exert identities by making sense of the external world.

It is at this intersection of body and mind that a postmodern turn to the ‘sociology of the body’ is useful in theorizing corporeality and its relation to the notion of ‘multiple identities’ in the context of this thesis. As we will see in the next section, the emergence of the ‘sociology of the body’ in the history of Western philosophy and its relevance to this theoretical framework will help magnify the lens of this framework as one enmeshed with embodiment, femininity, technology, as well as identity.

3.1 SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY

“It is the concern with ‘the body,’” notes Crossley (2001), “which is just as much a part of (mind-body) dualism as the mind, that has generated the problem of dualism in our discipline” (p. 2). The location of the body, along with that of sociology within a culture based on dualism and binary oppositions, are two key themes within the sociology of the body (Featherstone, 1991; Frank, 1991; Hancock *et al.*, 2000; Howson, 2004; Leder, 1990; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993). The work of Bryan Turner is often recognized as a dynamic starting point in understanding the significance of these themes within contemporary, postmodern society. Turner’s (1984) seminal text, *The Body and Society*, explains that sociology emerged within a dualistic society where mind/body, culture/nature, and art/science were clearly separated and where corporeal matters were abandoned to the biological and medical disciplines. He thus developed a model of the body in society that paved the way for other theorists to build upon the social, material, internal, and external aspects of corporeality. Turner (1992) claims that his own work on the sociology of the body has built upon the theories of Berger, Bourdieu, Deleuze, Douglas, Elis, Foucault, and O’Neil, attesting to a self-confessed “hostility to intellectual specialization” (p. 2). His deliberate epistemic fluidity is evoked *ex dolo* in the framework that comprises this chapter, though our heroes do not always work in the same sites of tillage.

According to Turner (1984), “The body is always socially formed and located. ...The problem of the body [in society] is thus not simply an issue in epistemology, but a theoretical location for debates about power, ideology and economics” (p. 82). He attempts to ponder this ‘problem of the body’ by introducing a sociology of the body as organized around these four issues: reproduction of populations in time; regulation of bodies in space; restraint of the “interior body” through disciplines; and representation of the “exterior body” in social space

(Turner, 1984, p. 2). By anchoring his sociology of the body in the analysis of the dynamics of populations as well as the dynamic of the singular body and the self, Turner advances Foucault's (1977b) earlier work on discursive regimes¹⁰; recognizably, these four issues emanate a social, historical, as well as imaginary human body contained in and by power relations. While all four issues are significant and unarguably relatable to the sociology of the body composed in this thesis, the last issue, 'representation of the exterior body in social space,' is paramount to the situating of embodiment, femininity, technology, and identity into this framework. As Turner (1987) notes, women are more likely to experience "representational problems of the self" in a society where image is more closely associated with the notion of the self and wellbeing" (p. 99). How women display their bodies in social media spaces is a question of representation that requires significant attention in an increasingly digitalized world. Dynamically, social media pinpoints the playground where this issue is perhaps most deeply problematic, and most in need of analysis. To legitimate this analysis, I offer a diagnosis of 'representation' itself: that all representations herein will be assessed not according to accuracy but according to effect (i.e., what is seen or felt). In this sense, representation dislocates itself as a presence from which to be questioned or liberated or likened to anthropologism, allowing us very simply to ask: What is being represented?

As noted by Collier (2013), "whether we recognize it or not, we have metaphysical presuppositions regarding the body that determine our approach to the many practical issues of the day" (p. 3). Within the sociology of the body, these metaphysical presuppositions and accompanying epistemological views entice a desire to understand the social realities that

¹⁰ 'Discursive regimes' conceive power as diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed (Gaventa, 2003). This will be expanded upon in the next paragraph.

bodies constitute, the realities of which, in turn, have important implications for disciplinary analysis. While my own presuppositions regarding the body might appear obvious to those interested in thinking about the social significance of the body, this may not be the case given that the body is socially formed and located differently by different social theories. My presuppositions are thus: (1) that bodies are ‘real,’ in that they have corporeal existence, and (2) they are (also) socially constructed. As my research relates specifically to the body that is female, my presuppositions may seem at odds with each other, especially from within my “feminist sociological project” (Witz, 2000) that contributes to contemporary academic interest in the body, particularly in the field of feminism and in feminist studies. Considering that feminism and feminist studies are largely concerned with “theories of power and control to analyze the complexities of body-based phenomena” (Lorber & Moore, 2011, p. 4), this suggests a view of the body as “an object produced and regulated by political, normative, and discursive regimes” (Shilling, 2005, p. 16), in turn allowing us to “appreciate the overwhelming structuring powers of the social system” (p. 16). However, this notion of holding the body in discourse is exactly the reason why my two presuppositions are in opposition. What happens to the corporeal body within this notion of discourse? How can the body as ‘object’ be claimed or re-claimed as ‘subject’?

For the sake of definition and clarity, the notion of ‘discourse’ here is taken to be understood in the same vein as the Foucauldian notion of ‘discursive regimes,’ as noted in the previous paragraph. Foucault (1977b) contends that there are no major underlying structures or institutions that create culture. Culture is instead created in ‘discourse,’ a term he describes as “an entity of sequences, of signs, in that they are enouncements (*énoncés*)” (Foucault, 1972), conveyed in language to provide broad historical meaning. Henry and Tator (2002) layer this definition by suggesting that discourse is “a way of referring to or

constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice” (p. 26). Discussions of discourse usually involve ‘discursive practice,’ another important term, broadly defined by these authors as an approach in which meaning, representation, and culture are considered to be constitutive (ibid). Placing the notions of discourse and discursive practice at the heart of sociological endeavours is an achievement of *poststructuralism*, a philosophical movement that emerged in France in the late 1960s as a critique of phenomenology and structuralism and is primarily associated with theorists like Derrida, Deleuze, Lacan, Lyotard, Foucault, and Kristeva (Peters & Burbles, 2004; Moya, 2000; Williams, 2005). Poststructuralism opposes totalizing and deterministic structuralist principles and concerns itself with difference and multiplicity; it has been credited with textualizing the social world, the demise of grand narratives and general truth claims, and the critique of subject-centered thought (Moya, 2000).

The influence of Foucault has been paramount in poststructural studies exploring how the body is ordered and inscribed by power relations. Foucault (1991) conceives the body as “the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dislocated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity) and a volume of perpetual disintegration” (p. 83). A number of feminist scholars have drawn on his ideas to offer insightful analysis of the dynamics of power as it operates on women’s bodies and lives (e.g. Butler, 1998, 1990, 1993a, 1993b; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Sawicki, 1991). Following Foucault’s lead—yet remaining critical of his writings—Judith Butler’s (1990) *Gender Trouble* and (1993a) *Bodies that Matter* established the “*governmental management* of the body as key to the external environment in which social action occurs” (Shilling, 1995, p. 17, emphasis in original). In these writings, Butler engages with insights from poststructural thought, iterating a ‘poststructural feminism’ that emphasizes “the contingent and discursive

nature of *all* identities” (Randall, 2010, p. 116) and in particular, the “social construction of gendered subjectivities” (Prasad, 2005, p. 165). Markedly, Butler (1993a) has emphasized that ‘sex’ does not exist outside gender relations: it is but an act of “performativity,” to be rehearsed through “the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (p. 2). This very relevant notion of performativity will be discussed in section 3.3.2.

Despite the common interest between Foucault and Butler in how the body is governed through discourse, Butler’s directed postmodern analysis towards sexual difference offers entry into the challenges of theorizing ‘embodiment’ within the sociology of the body. However, theorizing embodiment in the next sections of this chapter will not be predicated on governmentality scholarship (i.e. the links between forms of power and processes of subjectification) alone. While the contemporary workings of power and discourse are critical issues within postmodern body studies, not to be excluded from the upcoming sections is the importance of “the body’s own experience of its embodiment” (Frank, 1991, p. 43). Even though the influences of both Foucault and Butler have helped destabilize a notion of the body complying strictly with the tenets of biological determinism, the body in its corporeal state is rarely discussed. Garnering a backlash in her critique of Butler’s philosophies, Nussbaum (2012) has critically asserted that the real danger of Butler’s (and thus Foucault’s) work is its distance from lived experience. She writes:

[I]t is much too simple to say that power is all that the body is. We might have had the bodies of birds or dinosaurs or lions, but we do not; and this reality shapes our choices. Culture can shape and reshape some aspects of our bodily existence, but it does not shape all the aspects of it. (p. 347)

Here, an interjection of the complexities of poststructural thought¹¹ helps to rescue or reclaim the ‘subject’ from within notions of power and discourse alone. Given the poststructural principle that *there is no pure presence* within poststructural doctrine, it is imperative to realize that this does not mean that there is no *presence* whatsoever (Williams, 2005, p. 8). According to Williams (2005):

Poststructuralism does not simply reject things. It works within them to undo their exclusive claims to truth and purity. So it is not that poststructuralists reject the self, the subject, the “I” or intersubjectivity, as some have claimed. Rather it is that these must be seen as taking place in wider historical, linguistic and experiential contexts. (pp. 8-9)

To ‘reclaim’ the subject, then, and to conceptualize an understanding of ‘embodiment’ within the sociology of the body, a turn to ‘the human self-understanding’ within the phenomenological tradition is useful because it disrupts both Cartesian mind-body dualism well as well as Butler’s sex/gender distinction. What this means is that by imparting phenomenological methods—concerned largely with structures of human experience and human consciousness—the body is always normative relative to a set of criteria, wherein the respective binaries of mind/body and sex/gender are able to dissolve and then reassemble within the poststructural tradition to generate understandings of ‘embodiment’ for this thesis. Important to note here is that phenomenological methods are not rejected by poststructuralism; in fact, “they are important for arriving at starting-points for a dilution, or undoing, or transforming extension, of our ideas of the self, of the subject and of

¹¹ Since my thesis is not about poststructuralism per se, I will make use of it and some of its principles. For interested reader on poststructuralism, please refer to Williams (2005), among others.

consciousness” (Williams, 2005, p. 8). Phenomenology purports that consciousness is *intentional* and that every act that we perform and every experience that we have, is also intentional; as Sokolowski (2000) defines it, phenomenology “is essentially ‘consciousness of’ or an ‘experience of’ something or other” (p. 8).

Maxine Greene (1971) writes that consciousness “is always consciousness *of* something—a phenomenon, another person, an object in the world” (p. 253, emphasis in original). Writing in the context of how this consciousness is related to curriculum, Greene suggests the following about the presence of the individual:

Reflecting upon himself as a conscious object, the individual—the learner, perhaps—reflects upon his relation to the world, his manner of comporting himself with respect to it, the changing perspectives through which the world presents itself to him.

Merleau-Ponty¹² talks about the need continually to rediscover “my actual presence to myself,” the fact of my consciousness which is in the last resort what the word and the concept of consciousness mean. (p. 262)

If the body, then, is still deemed to be as ‘object,’ then phenomenological tradition would transform it into a conscious one. While poststructural thought rejects that this view of the body is the *only* way to truth or essence, it does not reject an understanding of the hold that intentionality and subjectivity have on us. This means remaining in contact with one's own perceptions, one's own experiences, and striving to constitute their meanings. It means achieving a state of what Maxine Greene (1977), following Schutz (1970), calls “wide-awakeness,” defined by Schutz as “a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in

¹² In Greene’s article, she references Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) *Phenomenology of Perception*, an influential work of phenomenology that offers an account of the body that hinges between ‘object’ and ‘subject.’

an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements” (p. 28). This notion of “wide-awakeness” will be useful later on in this chapter, in section 3.2.2.

Granting the body ontological status by imposing insight from phenomenological tradition into poststructuralism as such allows the body to be a “source for the social,” as well as a site of “‘lived experience’ of embodied actions” (Schilling, 2005, p. 17). As noted by Grosz (1992), bodies cannot be understood outside of *place*, and this is exactly what phenomenology brings to these inquiries into the sociology of the body, especially within discussions of ‘embodiment’ in the next sections of this chapter.

3.2 EMBODIMENT

A number of theorists started making use of the term *embodiment* (especially Crossley, 2001; Featherstone, Hepworth, & Turner, 1991; Frank, 1991; Turner, 1984, 1996, 2001; Shilling, 1993, 2003), though there is still no succinct definition of precisely what embodiment *is*, or how it may be conceptualized. Crossley (2001) has offered one useful definition: embodiment, he suggests, involves “[c]orporeal aspects of agency, ... and focuses on the sensuous nature of human perception, emotion and desire, and the corporeal basis of agency, communication and thought” (p. 3). This layered, multifaceted notion of embodiment speaks to the diversity inherent to the sociology of the body. Crossley’s definition is most useful here because his assertion of what it means to be ‘embodied’ arises from considerations of the emotions in the context of a body that is social. And emotions, as Williams and Bendelow (1998) point out, are “central to the lived experience of our bodies and ourselves,” providing an “existential basis for social reciprocity and exchange and the ‘missing link’ between micro processes and broader macro issue of social structure” (p. 7). The next two subsections of this chapter concisely outline and illustrate two major

approaches that compose the sociology of the body as it applies to embodiment: (1) female embodiment, and (2) cultures of technological embodiment.

3.2.1 Female embodiment

Any discussion of female embodiment within educational research must be foregrounded with an understanding of feminism itself. For feminists, the opposition between mind and body is often cross-paired with an opposition between ‘male’ and ‘female’ (Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004; Grosz, 1994, 1997). Grosz (1994) contends that “femininity” is typically represented in two ways: either mind is rendered equivalent to the masculine body and body equivalent to the feminine, or each sex is attributed its own form of corporeality. However, Grosz notes that women’s bodies are often judged in terms of a “natural inequality” which helps to justify the unequal social positions and cognitive abilities of the two sexes (p. 14). But before a discussion of female embodiment can go any further, this concept of “natural inequality”—often seen as the very foundation of feminist studies—must be elaborated upon, as it is vital to feminist analysis. As such, this section will start by exploring the following two questions: First, what is feminism? And second, in what ways does feminist scholarship work to advance interdisciplinary conversations about women (or gender) in relation to the sociology of the body? By first exploring these questions, we will see how the various perspectives and positionalities of feminism are relevant to a notion of female embodiment within sociology of the body.

What is feminism?

Many authors concur that there is no single, agreed-upon feminist epistemology, rather, that abounding accounts of knowledge overlap to comprise what is known as ‘feminism’ (see Herrmann & Stewart, 2001; see also Alcoff, 1993; Tanesini, 1999; Weedon,

1997). These overlaps, at least in part, can be attributed to the historical roles women have assumed or played in attempts to achieve social change, with resounding desire “to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks, 2000, p. 1). Rampton (2008) suggests that some have sought to locate the roots of feminism in ancient Greece with Sappho (*d. c.* 570 BCE) or the medieval world with Hildegard of Bingen (*d.* 1179) or in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft (*d.* 1797) and Jane Austen (*d.* 1817) (n.p.). However, in the Canadian context, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century until present postmodern times that various issues relating to the interlinked constructs of gender and subjectivity have come to the fore of feminist discussions. Within the Canadian context, these discussions have focused largely (though by no means solely) on the following three areas, which will be briefly summarized in the ensuing text: (1) the women’s suffrage movement; (2) the inclusion and advancement of women in the political sphere, including property rights, legal rights, and constitutional changes against sexual discrimination; and (3) contemporary feminist activism and new understandings of gender relations.

Discussions about the women’s suffrage movement in Canada often begin with Dr. Emily Howard Stowe (*d.* 1903), founder and first president of the Canadian Suffrage Association, which was initially known as the Toronto Women’s Literary Club upon its inception in 1876. As well, Stowe is lauded as Canada’s first female doctor to practice in Canada, albeit without a license for more than a decade because, at the time, female medical school graduates were denied licenses by the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons (Bondy, 2015, p. 16). Stowe’s campaigns regarding the advancement of women’s status in Canada pertained largely to educational and occupational opportunities for women (Bacchi, 1982, p. 577). Shortly after Stowe’s death, Flora Macdonald (Denison) assumed presidency of the Canadian Suffrage Association (1908) and advocated for complete economic

independence for both married and unmarried women, arguing that “labour is not defined by gender and washing dishes is no more feminine than the sending of a marconigram is masculine” (ibid). Macdonald represented Canada at numerous rallies and conferences, including the Peace Conference in the Hague (1913), where “women crossed national boundaries in search for peaceful ways to divert the path of war” (Schmiegelow, 1997, p. 86).

It is well worth noting that in the 1870s and 1880s, women who owned property in British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba were granted voting rights in municipal elections, and that by 1900, single and married “propertied” women were able to vote in municipal elections throughout Canada (Kinahan, 2008, p. 13). However, provincial and federal voting rights were granted much later. Each province has a distinctive history, yet the struggle for women suffrage followed a similar pattern in Ontario, the West, the Maritimes, and Québec (though women in Québec were not enfranchised until 1940) (ibid). According to Sharpe and McMahon (2007), the influence of feminist and social activist Nellie McClung during the First World War guided then-Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden’s campaign pledge to equal suffrage for women. His introduction of the *Wartime Elections Act* included a clause that gave the vote to women “who were mothers, wives, widows, sisters, or daughters of living or dead members of the Canadian or British military (male or female) serving or who had served overseas during the war” (pp. 155-6). Notably—and quite undemocratically—this enfranchisement did not extend to First Nations women or to female immigrants (Kinahan, 2008, p. 14).

As Bacchi (1982) relays, with the exception of Stowe’s and Macdonald’s efforts in the women’s suffrage movement, none of the other popular arguments proposed by suffragists were truly radical. By and large, most suffragettes had no intention of abandoning

their “traditional sphere,” and their agendas for women’s enfranchisement were premised on maternal difference instead of differences of character or capability (p. 577; see also McDonagh, 2009, p. 189 for American contextualization of this issue). In many ways even McClung belonged to the latter group, and as she explained it herself: “[T]he reason for women wanting the vote is to defend their children, the children they have brought into the world” (McClung, 1915, cited in Bacchi, 1982, p. 581).

However, after the First World War, McClung, along with four other esteemed women—Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, and Irene Parlby—comprised a group of determined litigants to advance the status of women within the Canadian constitution. Famously dubbed “The Persons Case,” these five women sought a judicial ruling to amend section 24 of the *British North America Act, 1867*, so as to include ‘women’ within the definition of ‘qualified persons’ (Sharpe & McMahon, 2007, p. ix). As Sharpe (2013) explains,

The Act states that on the advice of the Canadian government, the Governor-General of Canada, as the Queen’s representative, can summon “qualified persons to the Senate,” and that “every Person so summoned shall become and be a member of the Senate and a Senator.” Do the words “qualified persons” include women? Today the answer is probably “yes” but it was not so straightforward in 1929. (p. 2)

Strongly led by Murphy’s relentless efforts, this group of women achieved the constitutional amendment on October 18, 1929, a mere few days before the stock market crash that predicated the Great Depression.

Constitutional changes against sexual discrimination continued, but it was not until the 1980s that the legal situation in Canada changed considerably once again, with the

provision of equality rights in section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1985*. According to subsection 15(1):

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. (Robertson & Canada)

In 1992, the *Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985*, was found to be in violation of section 15 of the Charter per the Ontario Court of Appeal (*Haig v. Canada* ruling), leading the Court to determine that the Act should be read and applied as if sexual orientation were listed. As a result, the Canadian Human Rights Commission has been accepting complaints of discrimination based on sexual orientation since that same year (Robertson & Canada).

It wasn't until after the *de facto* issues of the 1980s and 1990s that Canadian scholarship in the field of feminist history started focusing on gender and gender relations instead of focusing exclusively on women. As Carstairs and Janovicek (2013) point out, there are several advantages of "gender" history, including a better understanding of the complexity of power in people's lives and identities, greater attention to issues of race and class, and a deeper understanding of how political and economic structures were formed (p. 5). This contemporary shift towards gender relations in Canadian scholarship has been accompanied by a number of other women's issues, such as investigations into the racial biases of feminist theory and practice (Agnew, 1993), shifting representations of citizenship (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004), as well as a commitment to end violence against Indigenous women and girls (Pedersen, Malcoe, & Pulkingham, 2013).

With the rise of new understandings of gender relations, feminist theorists in Canada as well as in the U.S. started to problematize the very notion of what it means to be a

‘woman’ (see Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; see also Braidotti, 2001; Bronfen & Kavka, 2001; Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993a, 1999, 2004a, 2004c, 2006; Haraway, 1991, 2004; Lather, 2001, 2007). Arneil (2009) suggests that notions of *identity*, *difference*, *contradictions*, and *embodiment* are most significant and are likely to be examined with a deconstructive impulse that seeks to challenge the construction of these very categories (p. 255, emphasis added). Mann and Huffman (2005) contend that four major perspectives have contributed to the deconstructions of these categories: (1) intersectionality theory, as developed by women of colour and ethnicity; (2) postmodernist and poststructural approaches; (3) feminist postcolonial theory; and (4) the agenda of the new generation of younger feminists (p. 57). As mentioned in the previous section, it is largely in this second perspective that a critical exploration of the concept of female embodiment and its relation to my research will take place. I will also be working within the fourth perspective, though I am uncertain of what the ‘new agenda’ exactly entails; assuming it stakes commitment in giving women voice within a forum from which to ascertain their needs and challenge current practices and understandings of gender relations, then I am certainly working within this perspective as well. However, within feminism, it is still worth asking:

In what ways does feminist scholarship work to advance interdisciplinary conversations about women (or gender) in relation to the sociology of the body?

In a critique of the contribution that poststructural approaches have had on feminism, some, such as Mann and Huffman (2005), have argued that earlier essentialist aspects of feminist theory and practice dissipated “a politics based on identity to its negation—a politics based on non-identity” (p. 63, cited in Mann, 2000). Weedon (1997), whose work has been influential in bringing poststructural thinking to feminism, articulates the relationship

between poststructuralism and feminism as “the ability to address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class, and race might be transformed” (p. 20). Poststructural feminists, at large, are concerned with critical deconstruction as a method of exposing and transforming oppressive power relations, often using *texts*—the products of dominant culture and signs of postmodernity—in conjunction with the view of the oppressed, as the starting point of cultural interrogation. Once again, however, the notion of decentered subjectivities is problematic, this time for feminists who see deconstructions of the “knowing subject” as undermining the political project of feminism, thus “removing the possibility of feminist-researchers working in the interests of ‘women,’ and producing knowledge about and for ‘women’” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 91).

This raises the issue of differences among feminists. For instance, Rosi Braidotti argues that in order to announce the death of the subject, one must first have “gained the right to speak as one” (1991, p. 122). Even Butler (1992) has wondered who gets constituted as the “feminist theorist who knows,” and who is excluded and constituted as *not* the knowing feminist (p. 14). She draws a distinction between questioning how particular subjects come to be constituted and pronouncing the death of the subject:

To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject...deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that which the term ‘the subject,’ refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. (1992, p. 15)

There is much to be said about the construction of the body, and the female body in particular, as an object in this world. As explained in the last section of this chapter, power is indeed constituted by the constructing of objects, and in poststructural thought it is widely purported that the body is constructed *as based on* discourse. However, discourse is not only internalized by the body, but it is also *embodied*—referring back to Crossley’s (2001) definition of embodiment—as emotions and desires, communication and thought, and as agency itself. In other words, through embodiment, discourses are absorbed, taken up and eventually performed on the surface of the body. This conceptualization of embodiment as absorbed discourse speaks to an “aesthetic of existence,” or a series of stylized ethics and practices of the self in everyday life, advanced by Foucault thus:

For me, intellectual work is related to what you could call “aestheticism,” meaning transforming yourself. [...] I know very well that knowledge can do nothing for transforming the world. [...] But I know that knowledge can transform us, that truth is not only a way of deciphering the world (and maybe what we call truth does not decipher anything), but that if I know the truth I will be changed. (Foucault, 1997, p. 130-1)

Foucault’s insights into the interior landscape of the self, notably, of the possibilities of self-transformation in relation to self-knowledge and truth-telling, are much welcomed and most useful in this present theorization of female embodiment. For if the body is integral to the sense of self, of self-transformation, and of self-knowledge, and if gender is the focal binary of the body, it seems incomprehensible that males and females share an equivalent sense of their embodied selfhood. Alas, in theorizing female corporeality by denying the similitude of male sociality, there is a certain ‘centering’ of discursive practice that is only made possible

through the constitution of the female body as a distinct embodied object. In other words, by recognizing and valuing difference between male and female bodies, only then can meaning, representation and culture be conceived in such a way that the female body may be taken up as a distinct entity of sequences and signs in its own right.

Recuperating the ‘fleshy materiality’ of the female body from discussions within the sociology of the body remains a challenge to feminists, as well as to my own *écriture féminine*. Indeed, in this process of “theoretical bodybuilding” (Witz, 2000, p. 2), more attention must be given to feminist philosophies of the body that confront corporeality as a means to construct sexual difference, by looking at the ways in which gendered bodies interact with their sexual, emotional selves. As well, just as ‘bodybuilding’ in its literal definition uses progressive resistance exercise to control and develop one’s musculature, the theoretical bodybuilding propositioned here conditions the existing framework that focuses on women’s sociality. While gender binarism in the existing feminist framework that tenors inequality still holds, the focus here will be on a femininity that is attributed its *own* form of corporeality, one that lifts “the dead weight of tradition” (Marx, 1852/1985, p. 185). This is a corporeality of being and of becoming, that is, of living within representations both created and consumed by society.

Once conceptualized thus, it is possible to examine how a subject, as a distinct embodied object of livability, experiences her own power to transform herself and her relations with others. By resisting the backlash that is typically associated with issues of embodiment in poststructural feminist practice, and by embracing a social ontology that works with/in Crossely’s (2001) notion of embodiment—that is, the corporeal aspects of agency and the nature of human perception, emotion, desire, communication and thought—

this theoretical framework of female embodiment has its own metaphorical leg from which to support the next section of this thesis.

3.2.2 *Femininity as masquerade*

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, “The women of Avignon,” is arguably one of the most important works in modern art. The painting, *Figure 2*, is located in New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), and depicts five seductive and erotic female bodily images. *Les Demoiselles* graces the jacket cover design of Turner’s (1984) *Body and Society* and is indeed a visual depiction of what the book encompasses: abstractions, symbolic (re)marks and representations of the female figure. Turner (1996) writes that the choice of cover art represents “the body as a pictorial metaphor,” with “the masklike faces of the five principal characters of the painting summarizing much of the ambiguity of the relationship between gender and sex, the relationship between symbol and body” (p. xi).



Figure 2: Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)
Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

The MoMA *Highlights* handbook, which contains curators' selections of some of the most significant artworks in the museum's collection, notes that the faces of the figures in the painting are "influenced by African masks, which Picasso assumed had functioned as magical protectors against dangerous spirits" (Bee, Heliczer, & McFadden, 2013, p. 50). While *Les Demoiselles* marks a radical break from traditional composition and perspective, the notion of *masks* is a particularly insightful in theorizing female embodiment. Theorizing femininity or 'womanliness' as masquerade is hardly a new concept, "gaining a certain currency" in recent decades as well as casting a wider cultural extension and finding a place in thinking about questions of representation, sexual difference, and female sexuality (Heath, 1986, p. 47).

The work of Joan Riviere—Freud's earliest translator and an influential psychoanalyst on her own accord—is a starting point in such theorizations. Her work, particularly her piece entitled "Womanliness as Masquerade," published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1929, took up much of the work done by other psychoanalysts in the 1920s. Critiquing this piece, Heath (1986) has pointed out that the paper's concern is with "women who wish for masculinity and who may then put on 'a mask of womanliness' as a defense, to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (p. 48). While Riviere's piece has contributed to the discussion of Oedipus complex in women and to the broad umbrella of psychoanalysis and interpretive phenomenology, these particular discussions are neither useful nor insightful to my approach of theorizing the female body as distinct emotionally and socially embodied 'texts.' What is useful is Riviere's definition of 'womanliness,' notably, where she draws the line between *genuine womanliness* and the *masquerade*. As she writes: "My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are one and the same thing" (1986, p. 38).

Her definition is indeed controversial, enticing questions of representation and performativity that ask us what is ‘real,’ what is ‘simulated,’ and what is ‘seduced.’ Craft-Fairchild (1993) has written that Riviere’s (1929) definition of ‘womanliness’ points to the constructed nature of femininity itself: “[I]f in masquerade the woman mimics genuine womanliness, yet that ‘real’ womanliness she dissimulates is itself also a mimicry, neither is essence and both are uncertain” (p. 52). A statement of this nature disbands a dependency on essentialist ontological categories and instead ushers inquiry into the multiple realities of sexed bodies and gendered desires. However, the statement is also confusing; if a woman’s ‘genuine’ womanliness is itself a masquerade, does this mean that her masquerade is a masquerade of a masquerade? There could very possibility be some truth to this statement. However, though the logic holds, there is a balance between genuine womanliness and masquerade—or more simply, ‘self’ and ‘other’—that must be claimed for the sake of identification; for in the same way we can identify the figures in Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles* as female form, it is always possible to look beyond the masks and masquerades of women to identify an ‘authentic self,’ defined here as **a subjectivity that consciously problematizes existing (feminine) archetypes that may influence agency.**

The distinction between ‘subjectivity’ and ‘agency’ here is thus: While the constitution of both terms are complementary, the former assumes that a woman is always at least partially “wide awake,” to once again invoke Maxine Greene, as well as in tune with her own perceptions, her own experiences, the meanings constituted therein, and that she is also capable of a degree of reflexivity about herself and her desires. Let us now take ‘agency’ to be understood as the ability and capacity of an individual to make her own choices with or without the influences of factors such as gender, class, religion, race, ethnicity, etc. In other

words, in lieu or in spite of such factors, an individual is able to make choices, and these choices constitute his or her 'agency.' However, this does not mean that factors such as gender, class, religion, race, or ethnicity do not have an *influence* on agency. It simply means that ultimately the choice is up to the individual, and even though the choice may be underlined by the power of influence, it is nonetheless still the individual's choices that constitute her agency. Therefore, in defining a woman's 'authentic self' as 'a subjectivity that consciously problematizes (feminine) archetypes that may influence agency,' the authentic self is construed as both 'wide-awake' of herself as well as of the choices that she makes about how to exist as a woman in the world. Very simply, this woman is mindful, sentient, and self-aware, instead of being excessively aware of how she is being observed during her masquerade.

The notion of femininity as masquerade is a crucial one to this thesis when we consider another point made by Craft-Fairchild (1993), that masquerade can be seen as "view[ing] the inevitable female disguise as 'submission to dominant social codes'" (p. 52). While it is ignorant to assume that all women share an identical cultural experience, it is fair to assume that a woman's body may be seen as one that is marked by cultural inscriptions. These cultural inscriptions are the very 'social codes' that establish ideologies and accompanying conventions of how to communicate meaning (including how to dress, how to speak, how to act, etc.). As well, these cultural inscriptions are indicative of social norms from within a filigree of constitutive femininity, with Greer's (1970) feminine archetype of the Western woman still lingering in society today: she is "dressed, coiffed, and painted...her value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others...[h]er...virtue is assumed from her loveliness, and her passivity (p. 58).

With the praxis of critical pedagogy supporting a disruption and serious shift of this archetype, coupled with the feminist cultural critique urging against the perpetuation of this or any stereotype, the diversity among women's experiences and their differences of gender, class, religion, race, ethnicity, etc., helps to influence agency of women, which in turn shapes their subjectivities, establishing 'authentic selves,' and ultimately affirming the importance of feminism as well as the ways in which women might act collectively. At least, we hope it will be this way. Unfortunately, with adolescent female peer groups nowadays mostly communicating with each through social network sites instead of in-person (see especially boyd, 2008a, 2014; Livingstone, 2007; Ringrose, 2010), and with the dizzying array of sexed and sexualized feminine images appearing on social network sites and (social) media in general, archetypes and stereotypes of femininity abound in the virtual public sphere (as we shall also see in this thesis).

In these instances, as in the present research project, an understanding of femininity as masquerade is one socially *encoded*¹³ by what I refer to as *cultures of technological embodiment*, where the computer screen becomes the mask behind which women hide, and the online display of the body becoming the masquerade. Bodily displays have taken on different kinds of social functions over the years and become implicated in a number of distinct social practices; however, this will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 4 – Methodology & Research Design. For now, the next section will look at the significance of 'cultures of technological embodiment,' highlighting the possibilities of bodily transformation and subversive activity through masquerade.

¹⁴ The field of semiotics is concerned with the study of sign systems – 'codes,' of which the primary place in the human communication is held by language. Sign systems generate meanings and their intricate networks, notably social network sites in this context, *encode* all aspects of social life (see Doubravová, 2002; see also Hall, 1997).

3.2.3 Cultures of technological embodiment

Women's relation to technology and 'technoscience' is not necessarily a new field of inquiry (see especially Haraway, 1985/2000, 1991, 2004; see also Braidotti, 1996a, 1996b, 2001; Sassen, 2002; Stabile, 1994; Wilding, 2010), but it is an area of growing concern as the seeping of digitalized discourse into poststructural feminist practice marks a blending of both domains' boundaries, a marriage between two "total (un)institutions" – to borrow and disrupt Goffman's (1961) originally unbracketed term. Originating in the early 1990s, cyberfeminist theorists have sought to understand how the relationships between technology and gendered bodies have disturbed concepts such as embodiment and femininity, to name two of the more relevant ones to this thesis. Donna Haraway's (2000) metaphor of 'the cyborg' is the starting point for discussions about these concepts from within "a matrix of embedded practices and representations" also known as "cyberspace" (Bell, 2007, p. 5).

As Haraway (2000) describes it, the cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (p. 291). It is hard to resist visualizing the technological grafting of machine body to human body; perhaps a post-human hybrid of Hal and Hawking comes to mind. Humour aside, Haraway is using the metaphor of the cyborg to imply "the ironic dream of a common language for women in the integrated circuit" (ibid). This metaphor can be taken more literally when we consider the degree of digitalization present in the lives of female adolescents in this postmodern, post-gender world. Haraway (2004) calls for a move beyond the dichotomies of gender in poststructural parlance reminiscent of Butler:

There is nothing about being "female" that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as "being" female, itself a highly complex category constructed in

contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices... Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of *woman* elusive... (p. 14)

Arguing that the categories of male and female will become obsolete, Haraway (2000) also calls for the need to redefine the body—or what Braidotti (2001), critiquing Haraway, calls “the en fleshed structure of the subject” (p. 386)—in such a way as to account for its being immersed in the media apparatus while preserving a sense of singularity. This can be done if we think about the subject immersing herself within a *culture of technological embodiment* in a way to preserve her sense of singularity, or what I will liken to my notion *authentic self* (see section 3.2.2 for this definition). Here, ‘culture’ is used with the same meaning purported by cultural studies¹⁴ founding father Raymond Williams (1976), to discuss *ways of life*. The term ‘technological embodiment’ adds a layer to Crossley’s (2001) existing definition of embodiment (see section 3.2), which still arises from considerations of the emotions in the context of a body that is social, but are also *socially-mediated by bodies of technology*. To be clear about this meaning: technological embodiment employs Crossley’s definition of ‘embodiment,’ with additional considerations of how bodies of technology (i.e. computers, tablets, mobile phones) allow for social-mediation through various forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (i.e., instant messaging, email, blogs, social network sites, or text messaging). Significant to note is that the corporeal aspects of agency per Crossley’s definition of ‘embodiment’ are not lost in this supplanted definition of ‘technological embodiment.’ Corporeality and the corporeal aspects of agency (the sensuous nature of human perception, emotion and desire, and the corporeal basis of

¹⁴ The field of cultural studies will be further elaborated upon in Section 3.3 – Identity

agency, communication and thought) are ascribed through a computer screen, through words, images, audio, and video that enable an intangible tangibility. Put together, ‘cultures of technological embodiment’ are ways of knowing our corporeal, authentic selves as socially mediated in both online and offline contexts (see also section 3.4).

The idea that CMC is connected to notions of gender and embodiment is not a new one. In the early days of cyberfeminism, Kroker and Kroker (1993) argued that CMC had brought about a new ‘in-between’ gender. According to Kroker and Kroker: “In the absence of the physical, there are infinite possibilities—possibilities which will ‘reconcile’ the two sexes” (p. 18). The Krokers called this in-between gender, this third-sex, the “virtual sex,” and defined it thus:

Neither male (physically) nor female (genetically) nor their simple reversal, but something else: a virtual sex floating in an elliptical orbit around the planet of gender that it has left behind, finally free of the powerful gravitational pull of the binary signs of the male/female antimonies in the crowded earth scene of gender. (p.18)

Not surprisingly, the notion of a “virtual sex” did not catch on, perhaps because the physical is never truly absent from within discourses of cultures of technological embodiment. Over twenty years have passed since the proposal of this “virtual sex,” and cyberfeminists as well as scholars in all disciplines of the social sciences and humanities are still coming up with new theories and new ways of thinking about physical embodiment in cyberspace. In fact, as years go by, the rhetoric gets more complicated in the same sense the technology does; as new versions of software and hardware are updated and integrated into our cultures of technological embodiment, it is often hard to keep track of what is ‘real’ and

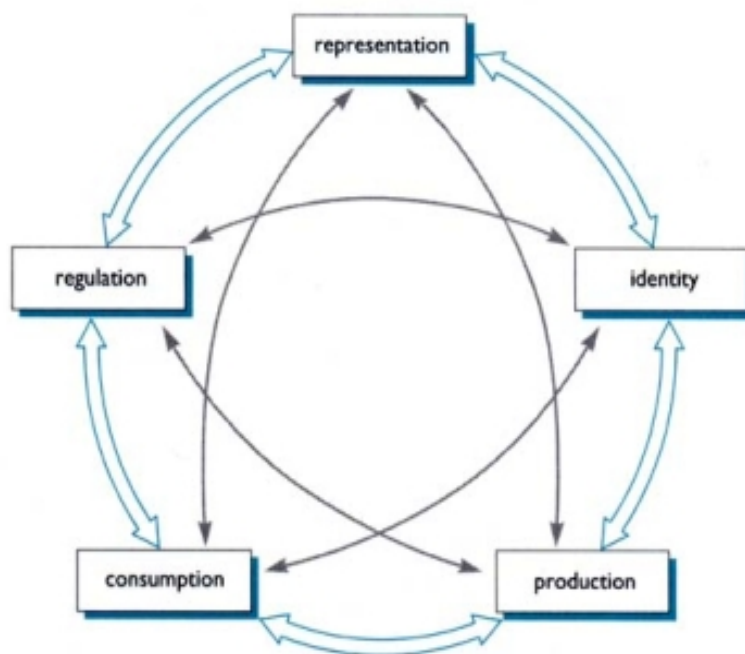
‘virtual,’ let alone come up with succinct theories on the topic. Nonetheless, the research undertaken for this thesis aims to take on this challenge, not by finding a ‘solution’ for cyborg polemics, but instead to meaningfully contribute to the complicated topology of the cyberfeminist landscape. On this note, any contribution to the cyberfeminist landscape and its reverberant overture for a “collective renegotiation of identity” (Braidotti, 2001, p. 386) would not be possible without an in-depth look at this last term, *identity*. Up until this point, ‘identity’ has taken a backseat to the other key concepts discussed and defined so far, namely, *embodiment*, *femininity as masquerade* (which will later on be discussed, at times, more simply as *performance* and/or *performativity*) and *cultures of technological embodiment*. However, all of these concepts are inextricably linked to the term ‘identity.’ It is finally time to define and explore this concept, systematically linking it with the other key concepts before any sort of ‘renegotiation of identity’ can take place.

3.3 IDENTITY

The use of the term ‘identity’ is prevalent within numerous academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. Logically, articulating the most comprehensive definition of the term would engage meanings across all of these disciplines. A foray of this nature is only possible if ‘identity’ is fluidly situated in “a field within multidisciplinary,” known as *cultural studies*’ (During, 2007, p. 27, emphasis added). In the 1950s and 1960s, a handful of scholars in the UK, (notably, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall) worked to expand understandings of culture in relation to societal notions such as power, gender, race, ethnicity, and media; these scholars came to be known as the founding figures of British Cultural Studies. At its most basic definition, cultural studies is the study of how society creates and shares meaning. Hall’s (1997)

definition is much more nuanced; for him, cultural studies is a discursive formation, that is, “a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society’ (p. 6).

To situate ‘identity’ within cultural studies is to identify it as a ‘moment’ at which culture is meaningful. du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997/2013) have illustrated this point with their model of culture as a “circuit” with five major processes or ‘moments’ through which any analysis of a cultural text or artifact must pass if it is to be adequately studied:



*Figure 3: The ‘Circuit of Culture’
du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (2013, p. xxxi)*

From this model, we see that the process of making-meaning—the very essence of cultural studies—is an ongoing process, energized by moments of representation, regulation, consumption, production, and of course, identity. While no moment is more significant than

another, and while each moment will be expanded upon in later analysis chapters of this thesis, for now the focus is identity. *Figure 3* is useful at this time to illustrate the complexities and contingencies inherent to cultural studies and thus to cultural analysis, especially if we think of culture as “steeply embedded within and around each of us, in and among all groups of people, and is especially shaped by the social context of education” (Irvine, 2010, p. xi).

3.3.1 Defining Identity

In this thesis, and within the circuit of culture, ‘identity’ will be discussed in the way that Hall (1992, 1996) suggests, as a process in order to take into account the reality of diverse and ever-changing social experiences. However, perspectives of identity from social psychology texturize this understanding of identity. Two theories from this discipline are particularly useful, namely *identity theory* and *social identity theory*. Linking the two theories, according to Stets and Burke (2000), establishes a more integrated view of the self. The similarities and distinctions between these two theories are as follows: While both theories note the rudimentary interplay between the individual and the social world through a conception of self-composed various social identities, *identity theory* is often understood to focus on roles (such as “I am a sister” or “I am a girl”) (see Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000), whereas *social identity theory* is often understood to focus on group processes and intergroup relations rather than roles (see Tajel, 1981; Tajel & Turner 1979, 1986; Turner *et al.*, 1987).

However, as Hitlin (2003) contends, it is important not to reify a rigid distinction between the focus on identity theory (roles) and social identity theory (groups) because groups can serve as referents for processes discussed within identity theory (p. 118).

Therefore, a focus on roles as well as intergroup relations will inform the following sections of this thesis. After all, people regularly present and perform themselves while simultaneously reading the presentations and performances of others. As well, it is also significant to note, as Stets and Burke (2000) assert, that in both theories the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object to classify, categorize, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social classifications (p. 224). In identity theory this is called *identification* (McCall & Simmons, 1978), whereas in social identity theory this is called *self-categorization* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). The former term, *identification*, will be used in this discussion of identity as it is the common one used in the language of poststructural cultural studies.

But the question still looms: What exactly what *is* identity? If it is a process that takes into account social experiences, as suggested by Hall (1992, 1996) and as taken up at the beginning of this section, then what exactly underpins this process? The ambiguities associated with identity in the postmodern epoch make it difficult to elaborate upon the term. Lawler (2008) has defined identity as “a ‘black box,’ unknown and knowable” (p. 6). Along the same lines, Buckingham (2008) has argued: “identity is an ambiguous and slippery term” (p. 1). Buckingham draws on Bauman’s (2004) postmodern conceptualization of identity as becoming ever more problematic, emphasizing fluidity and seeing it as almost infinitely negotiable. His view of identity as one of fluidity and multiplicity opens up boundaries to new possibilities, to New Identities (Hall, 1997) that are continually expanding within the postmodern tradition as well as in cultural studies. For Bauman, “identity” only becomes an issue when it is threatened or contested in some way and needs to be explicitly asserted (cited in Buckingham, 2008, p. 2).

Stone-Mediatore (2002) writes the following about the multiplicities of identity: “identities draw attention to the way that our everyday lives are affected by certain social, political, and cultural axes of difference” (p. 132). She asserts that identity has a troubling history, with hot debates abounding between the realist and the poststructural schools of thought in particular. She claims the following:

In the name of identities, lines have been drawn between who may govern themselves and who is enslaved, who can live in the neighbourhood and who is excluded, who can and cannot vote, and who does and who does not have ‘basic human rights.’ Given the way that ideologies of identity and difference have rationalized social hierarchies and oppression, one wonders whether appeals to identity can have any role in progressive social struggles. (p. 125)

Treating identity as ideology is hugely problematic here; evidently, the word ‘ideology’ is used as pejorative and identity ‘becomes an issue’ as a result. Stone-Mediatore (2002) notes that by treating identity as ideology, postmodern and poststructural scholars will “wrongly dismiss the many worthwhile processes of identification through which people orient themselves in and collectively confront their world” (p. 129). In this sense, identity must be thought about in more ways than as ideology or discourse alone. This can be done by thinking more deeply about ‘identification’ in relation to the notion of identity.

As previously defined, identification refers to the classifying acts of identity, that is, the relational and contextual moments of naming and addressing the self. Ibrahim (2008), who has written extensively and innovatively on the dialectics of identity in ethnographic performance, links identity to identification as a way to expound the intensities of the

relationship between Self and Other. Working with Hall's (1990) notion of identity as "production," Bakhtin's (1981/2001) work on dialogism, and Bhabha's (1994) notion of "third space," Ibrahim defines the *moment of identification* as one that "impacts and guides the shape, the form, and the intensity of the ways in which the Self *translates* the Other and vice versa" (p. 238, emphasis added). He adds: "The question of intensity is an issue of desire" (ibid). For Ibrahim, identification is the starting point of forming an identity. Taken together, it is from multiple moments of identification that a "third space" is borne, according to Ibrahim, translating ideologies in ways that are "corporeally articulated" as well as "ethnographically perceptible" (p. 239). It is my contention that while the moment of identification guides the *translations* of Self and Other, the multiple moments of identification guides the *transformations*¹⁵. Moreover, these multiple moments (or 'accumulation' of moments) of identification guides the definition of 'identity' within the context of my own ethnographic research study.

Reverting back to Hall's (1992, 1996) notion of identity that opens this section, identity is a process that takes into account the reality of diverse and ever-changing social experiences. Within this process of change (which itself can be seen as 'discourse,' or 'ideology'), social struggles such as the ones noted by Stone-Mediatore (2002) and within Ibrahim's (2008) ethnographic fieldwork can be taken up because they provide a basis for individuals to become self-aware and thus reflect upon themselves in relation to this process, by giving meaning to their experiences in the world. In the words of Giddens (1991), "without society and experience as a basis for reflexivity, there can be no internalized

¹⁵ The difference between 'transformation' and 'translation' is slight, seeing that translation is itself transformation. However 'transformation' encompasses more than translation alone, including, for instance, reflection, displacement, inversion, etc.

evaluation” (pp. 52-3). This internalized aspect of the self, or of consciousness of what one really is—as guided by the ancient Greek aphorism of ‘know thyself’—reaffirms the necessity for phenomenological tradition to work with/in postmodern and poststructural practice, as argued for in the beginning of this chapter.

3.3.2 Linking identity to embodiment

Bodies play a significant role in people’s experiences with themselves as well as with society. As previously discussed in this chapter, bodies are real in the sense of their corporeality and embodiment, and they are also inextricably linked to discourses (and ideologies). Shilling (1993) has argued that society shapes “body techniques,” a terminology first introduced by Mauss (1979), who defines the term as “the ways in which, from society to society, men [sic] know how to use their bodies” (p. 27). Mauss argues that such uses are ‘technical,’ ‘traditional’ and ‘efficient’: that is, they are constituted by a specific set of movements or form and serve a definite purpose or function (cited in Crossley, 1995, p. 134). However, how we use our bodies is not only shaped by society, and this is where Shilling’s earlier works lacked in his articulations of the body-society relationship. Shilling (2005) later noted that the body must be conceptualized not just as a location for, but also as a “generative source” of society (p. 14). Shilling’s (2005) approach to the body-society relationship laid out what he called a “corporeal realism”¹⁶ (p. 12) that took this point into account, insisting that the generative capacities of embodied subjects “actually interact with social structures and either reproduced or transformed them (and therefore establish the conditions in which the next generation of bodies develops, senses, and acts)” (p. 14).

¹⁶ Shilling (2005) defines corporeal realism as based on three elements: (1) the ontologically stratified character of the relationship between the structural forces, institutions and roles which constitute society and the people who inhabit society; (2) the need for a temporal element to social analysis; and (3) the potentially critical import of this approach towards social analysis (p. 12)

Drawing extensively from Marx, Durkheim, and Simmel to formulate his theory of corporeal realism, Shilling (2005) himself notes that feminist analyses have pointed out the gendered character of some of these writings. However, he also notes “this does not invalidate utilizing creatively what is productive in their work to our species as a whole” (p. 45). Indeed, the affective component of Shilling’s (2005) corporeal realism provides a space to examine the interconnection of identity and embodiment.

Ibrahim (2004) has argued that ‘the affective,’ is “that quasi-orgasmic rush, *jouissance*, running through our veins” (p. 114, emphasis in original). He claims it cannot be fully captured, and that “something about it is always left over” (p. 113). While corporeal realism celebrates the generative capacities of embodied subjects, imparting Ibrahim’s notion of the affective suggests that we may never totally be in control of how our bodies generate emotion and thus express it. In this sense, it is impossible to fully ‘know ourselves’ if there is always something left over in our generative processes, as in the Euclidean ‘remainder’ of a division equation that fragments the whole. What we can know are the moments—the moments of identity/identification, that is—that are fragmented through embodiment and eventually performed on the surface of the body (Ibrahim, 2008). It is here where the notion of a ‘representational’ self (cf. Goffman, 1959) helps elucidate identity as intimately intertwined with the public display and performance of exterior body surfaces. In what follows, I will discuss this linkage first with Goffman’s work on presentation, and subsequently with Butler’s work on performativity as it relates specifically to gender, femininity, and masquerade.

3.3.3 Linking identity to performance & performativity (femininity as masquerade)

In his classic book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) refers to life as a stage and individuals participating in it as ‘performers.’ Each performer uses verbal and nonverbal communication to express his or her identity. Self-presentation strategies may be engaged as a way of constructing self in a manner that pleases the audience (see also Baumeister, 1986). As Goffman notes, individuals always play different roles in different contexts. When an activity takes place in the presence of other people, the ‘actor’ performs so as to accentuate some aspects of self, while suppressing others. The aspects of self that are accentuated typically correspond to norms, conventions and ideals that are embraced in the group that the actor belongs to. Goffman claims that in all groups, some norms have higher status than others, implying that some behaviour gives more ‘rewards’ than others, typically in the form of positive responses from the audience. This means that characteristics that are highly valued within the group are likely to be displayed more frequently than characteristics with lower value. Important to note here is Goffman’s inclusion of both *roles* (corroborating with identity theory) and *groups* (corroborating with social identity theory) in his articulation of identity through performance.

However, performance strategies often are dependent on the presenter’s goals. According to Jones (1990), a performer’s most basic motive is to gain power in the relationship between presenter and audience. Most research on the presentation of self has examined the ways individuals present themselves to strangers or to those who have little knowledge of the individual (Tedeschi, 1986). Most interpersonal interactions occur with those who have some knowledge of the presenter’s previous behaviours—friends, family, etc. One study of the differences in the ways individuals present themselves to friends versus strangers found that individuals made more modest claims about themselves when in the

presence of friends (Tice *et al.*, 1995, cited in Bortree, 2005, p. 26). Even if only one friend were present in a group, individuals would make more modest claims. But when no friends were present, individuals would begin inflating their claims about self. Studies of this nature are useful to understand *why* performances are made in certain ways, in ‘real’ contexts such as the one just given, as well as in ‘virtual’ contexts such as social network sites, to be discussed in section 3.4. Before this contextual turn can take place, identity and its construction through actions, behaviours and gestures will now be discussed through the lens of Butler. In radical ways, Butler’s (1990) work is a rethinking of Goffman’s work through what she calls *performativity*.

Butler (1990) has argued that the concept of ‘performativity’ is elemental to gender construction and that gender does not have ontological status but is instead constituted through purposive acts: “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and discursive means” (p. 173, original emphasis). What this means is that gender is not what we *are*, but what we *do*. Thus, being a man or a woman is a performative reiteration rather than the essence of our being; it is not *done unto us* by way of birth, but rather, is a consistent practice of doing the gender that is expected of us (Borgerson, 2005, original emphasis). The instrumentality of these expectations is what distinguishes Butler’s ‘performativity’ from Goffman’s notion of ‘performance.’ Although the two terms are related, and even interdependent, the ways in which these expectations are managed and thus inscribed by the body is what differentiates the two terms. In performativity, these inscriptions are taken to be discursive regimes that are *embodied* and *enacted*. In performance, behaviours, gestures, and actions are *possessed*, and

thus held outside of discourse. To be even more clear: While Butler's acts of 'performativity' are the 'énoncés,' or the statements of possibility of language outside just the linguistic (including the social, the temporal and psychological), Goffman's 'performance' are the 'announcements,' or the actual expressions of language. The performance—or what is being said—is guided by the acts of performativity, conditioned by the ways in which these acts emerge and exist in discourse. Performance is meaningful only when it is guided by acts of performativity, and acts of performativity are only discursively meaningful in the performances that precede and follow. The distinction between these two terms is a finicky one, but it is one of language, in true poststructuralist style.

Butler presents a model for the self as masquerade that likens identity to performance and performativity thus:

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. Indeed, part of the pleasure ... of the performance is in the recognition of a radical contingency in the relation between sex and gender in the face of cultural configurations of causal unities that are regularly assumed to be natural and necessary. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which disavows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity. (pp. 137-8)

Butler's model of masquerade is one of a body doing drag; simultaneously oppressor and oppressed, despotic yet transgressed, this body refuses to ground its identity in one that is anatomical. Here, Butler provides a frame through which gender is likened to the guises of drag, where appearance and semblance are critical aspects of identity, but not in the

traditional sense. According to Rupp, Taylor and Shapiro (2010): “For Butler, traditional gender loses some its claim to naturalness and authenticity through drag, which uses parody to reveal the fundamentally performative nature of gender” (p. 277). On a side note, in espying the parodic nature of drag, humour through such performance of gender is only realized when it is not taken seriously enough.

Despite the iconoclastic sculpturing of Butler’s model of masquerade through drag, it has not been implored in this section to superordinate an ambiguity of gender above a masquerade through ‘femininity.’ Rather, drag is situated as a representation of what Schacht (2002) calls “a ‘masculine embodiment of the feminine’” (p. 173). Schacht asserts this type of embodiment is performed as drag “in the process of ‘realizing masculine authority and power’” (pp. 173-4). Although drag as performance quite obviously adjures a disassociation of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1993), this last point made by Schacht is pertinent to a deconstruction of drag as composed of two basic ‘acts’ or elements, to be discussed in subsequent analyses chapters: costume and makeup. While drag as performance is nothing without these two elements, neither is a masquerade of femininity. Unquestionably, both types of performances expose a realization of masculine authority and power through the use of these “paraphernalia of beauty” (Irigaray, 1991b, p. 78), manifested in two notions that direct the masquerade: the notions of *desire* and *seduction*.

3.3.3.1 Desire and seduction in masquerade

The role that the female body plays in the masquerade of feminine identity is significant in the context of patriarchal discourses of feminine archetypes that seek to prescribe certain body shapes, physical features and behaviours as desirable (Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993, 2006; Craft-Fairchild, 1993; Entwistle, 2000; Flanagan, 2011; Greer, 1970;

Irigaray, 1985; 1991a, 1991b; Kristeva, 1980; Riviere, 1929). Again we start here with Butler (2006), who, steeped in psychoanalytic Lacanian theory, suggests

Women are said to “be” the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the “reality” of the self-grounding posture of the “masculine subject” [...]. Hence, “being” the Phallus is always a “being for” a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that “being for.” (p. 61)

On a similarly disparaging yet more comprehensible note, Irigaray (1985), also Lacanian in her scripting, points out

masquerade has to be understood as what women do in order to recuperate some element of desire, to participate in man’s desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In masquerade they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain “on the market” in spite of everything. But they are there as objects for sexual enjoyment, not as those who enjoy. (pp. 133-134)

In these excerpts, both Butler and Irigaray espouse femininity as masquerade of maleness. This masquerade, for these authors, is a parade of patriarchal discourses of damaged desire. The notion of ‘desire’ is a significant one in contemplating the masquerade. Looking through the same psychoanalytic lens as Butler and Irigaray, ‘desire’ for Lacan entails “the absence or lack of the object of desire,” where ‘desire’ must be distinguished from ‘demand’ (as well as ‘need’) because “[d]emand is conscious, desire is unconscious” (Lash, 1990, p. 66).

Desire, then, is not what we need, nor what we necessarily ask for, nor what we wish for or want; it is “the desire of the Other” (Sharpe & Boucher, 2010, p. 50). This would very well

mean that the a masquerade of femininity is premised on a woman's phallogentric desire (Butler), and of desire to appeal to men (Irigaray), since desire is not one of Self. Going back to my working definition of 'identity' (section 3.3.1), which is premised on the accumulation of Ibrahim's (2008) "moments of identification," the question of *intensity* is now significant. As previously noted, Ibrahim defines the *moment of identification* as one that "impacts and guides the shape, the form, and the intensity of the ways in which the Self translates the Other and vice versa" (p. 238). In masquerade, this intensity is the very flow of desire, translating Self and Other (or even Self *into* Other) by means of its sister concept, 'seduction.' The original theory of seduction, again psychoanalytic, represents Freud's attempts to "explain behaviour prevalent in his female patients with regard to sexualized relationships (whether real or imaginary) with dominant males in their lives" (Bernstein, 1989, p. 204). Since Freud's time, numerous philosophers and authors have taken up the notion of seduction, though not always from directly within the playground of psychoanalysis. Baudrillard (1990), for instance, has written extensively on seduction. He claims that seduction is the alternative to sex and power, one that psychoanalysis cannot know because its axiomatics are sexual (p. 7). For Baudrillard, "this alternative is undoubtedly of the order of the feminine, understood outside the opposition of masculine/feminine ... This strength of the feminine is that of seduction" (ibid).

Put together, Goffman's (1959) notion of performance and Butler's (1990) notion of performativity help locate femininity as masquerade into a theory of identity based upon the accumulation of moments of identification. In these moments of identification, the Self and the Other—which are always in varying states of translation—negotiate the flows of desire as influenced by the power of seduction. The possibilities of multiplicity within these

translations are rife, from doing drag to blurring genders to buying into the dominant culture's performative prescriptions. Whatever the case may be, things get even more complicated in a contextual turn from real to virtual contexts, to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

3.3.4 Linking identity to cultures of technological embodiment

In her cyborg manifesto, Haraway (2000) asks: “Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?” (p. 314). As discussed in section 3.3.3, there are ways of knowing our corporeal, authentic selves beyond the boundaries of flesh, through ‘cultures of technological embodiment,’ which are socially mediated in both real (offline) and virtual (online) contexts. This is not to say, however, that the body ever disappears from within cultures of technological embodiment, and specifically from within virtual ones. In fact, the body and its embodiment are *always* present: as Crossley (2001) has argued, human beings are neither minds nor, strictly speaking, bodies ... but rather “mindful and embodied social agents” (pp. 2-3). In a discussion of identity, this means that moments of identification—the ones that impact and guide the ways in which the Self translates the Other (and vice versa)—are also present in online spaces, enacting a ‘virtual identity’ at the same time as a ‘real identity’ in offline spaces.

But what can be said about the relationship between translations of Self and Other (and vice versa) in real and virtual contexts? And how is this relevant to educational researchers and ways of knowing? Barnett (2009) has articulated the need for “educational researchers and contemporary practitioners to reconceptualize our ways of knowing and

representing adolescent identity as it is created *concurrently* in real and virtual spaces¹⁷” (p. 201, emphasis added). While Barnett has articulated this need, it has yet to be concretely theorized. I am thus proposing a way to renegotiate identity by introducing the notion of *concurrent identity formation*, or CIF, a notion I will develop in the following final section of this chapter.

3.4 CONCURRENT IDENTITY FORMATION (CIF)

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black,

And the dark street winds and bends.

Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow

We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,

And watch where the chalk white arrows go

To the place where the sidewalk ends.

-- Shel Silverstein

Reading somewhat like a children’s-lit version of Eliot’s (1922/1934) *The Waste Land*, this excerpt from Silverstein’s (1974) poem *Where the Sidewalk Ends* is taken as a metaphor for ‘identity.’ Without meaning to, the poem is asking: Where does identity end? The reader is tempted to also ask: But if it has an end, then where does this ‘sidewalk’ begin? And if we embark on the journey to find the end, moreover, by following the ‘arrows’—

¹⁷ The discourse of identity formation studies, to be discussed in the next section, is complicated by the social realities of the embodied world as well as the fragmented, disembodied world of the Internet. Words such as ‘real,’ ‘virtual,’ ‘digital,’ ‘cyber,’ ‘online,’ and ‘offline’ are often used as descriptors within this discourse. For the sake of consistency and clarity from this point onwards, I will maintain Barnett’s (2009) usage of the term “real” to signify an offline physical and bodily presence, and “virtual” to signify an online presence; terms will be used without quotation marks.

perhaps another metaphor for the pointer of a mouse cursor—where does the new identity lead, and what happens to the one we left behind?

Questions related to identity formation are particularly pertinent to the ways in which female adolescents, the focus of this thesis, interpret and make sense of their environments and relationships in both real contexts, as well as in the place led by the ‘chalk white arrows,’ or virtual contexts. Identity formation in adolescence is usually taken up in the psychological realm, typically addressed and acknowledged through one of a handful of models of development that address “potential emergence of the self within certain social and cultural frames of reference” (Kroger, 2004, p. 7). However, according to Kroger (2004), “there are many approaches one might take to understand how adolescents come to construct themselves in a world that is constructing them” (p. xii). She acknowledges “social and historical circumstances have undoubtedly left teenagers from technologically advanced cultures with ambiguous role prescriptions to struggle with the problem of self-definition” (p. 7).

In the face a formidable task, I am proposing the theory of Concurrent Identity Formation, or CIF, as a summation to most of the theories discussed above and a helpful way to think about my research and my research participants. CIF has not been constructed to necessarily find solutions to the problem of self-definition. Instead, CIF is subsumed in self-invention, challenging women to renovate existing aesthetic and social vocabularies. In no way does CIF substitute theory for narrative, either; it tells a story of being-in-the-world, by calling attention to what is (and what is not) present, what is real and what is virtual.

3.4.1 What is CIF?

CIF is indeed my very contribution to identity politics within the (cyber)feminist landscape, and will hopefully aid in understanding the interplay among the key terms discussed within this chapter: embodiment, femininity, masquerade, and performativity. The following diagram illustrates the theory of CIF, which has been conceptualized to look into the tension and the relationship between the real and the virtual; that is, the similarities and differences between what is re-presented online and the off-line identities.

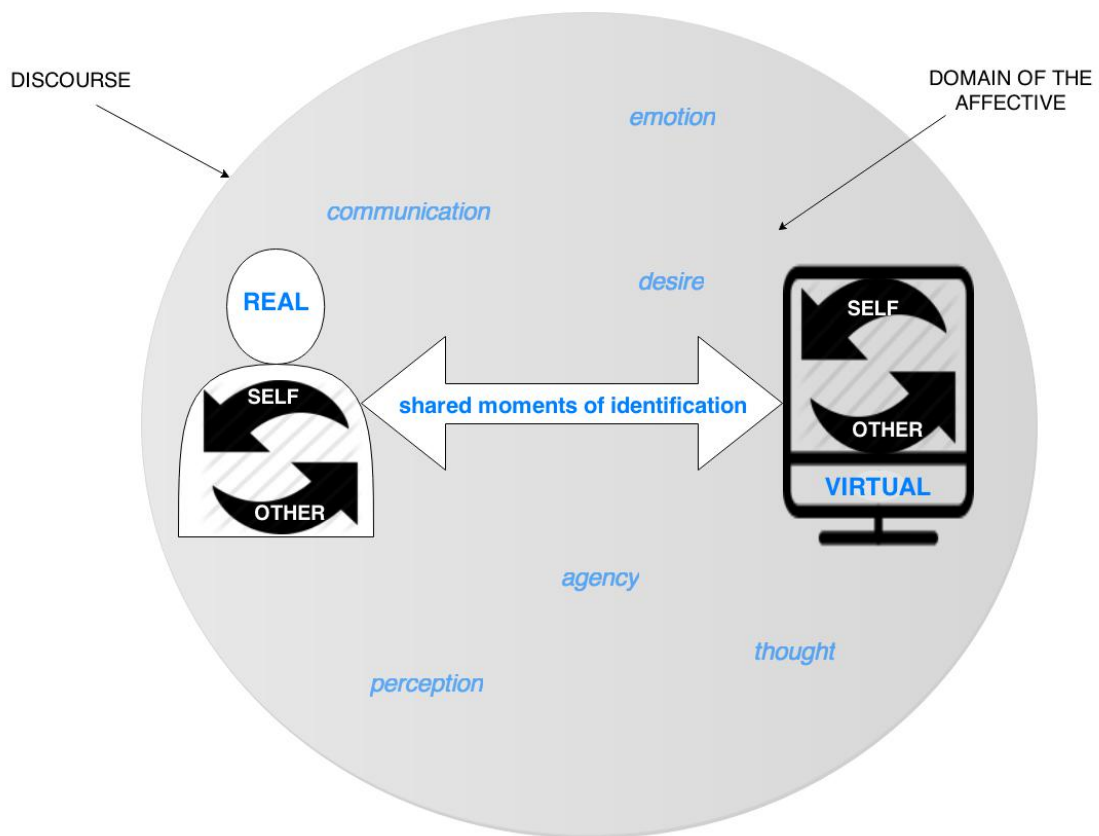


Figure 4: A theory of Concurrent Identity Formation (CIF)

At first glance of *Figure 4*, we see that all elements of the diagram are presented within a *field of discourse*, or the consequence of “what is ‘going on’ through language” (Benson & Greaves, 1981, p. 45). In this field, the body is held as both an object of discourse as well as a subject of human understanding. The form of a human body, depicted as two stacked shapes towards the left of the discursive field, displays the body’s own experience of embodiment. Within this figure are two black arrows, arranged in a circle to indicate a sense of flow. These black arrows denote the processes of Self \leftrightarrow Other translations, which were defined earlier in section 3.3.1 as moments of identification. This process of negotiation between Self and Other is performed from within the *domain of the affective*, which is the grey space in the diagram. The human body is absorbing and reflecting the various components that comprise the very meaning of embodiment, which are floating about the grey space that comprises the domain of the affective. It is only within the domain of the affective that bodies can be located as both object and subject.

The floating words, as seen in *Figure 4*, are slightly nuanced in textual opacity; this is perhaps not noticeable at first glance. However, if examined up close, one can see the slight differences in opacity, which attest to the varying *intensity* of the components as held in discourse. In other words, at any given time, some components are more and less intense than others because the body absorbs and deflects these components on varying levels (i.e. sometimes we are more perceptive than other times, sometimes we have strong desires, sometimes we are ‘more emotional,’ etc.). The human figure negotiating its relationships with Self and Other, by absorbing and reflecting the components of embodiment, is what I refer to as REAL identity, as capitalized in the diagram with Twitter-blue labelling. The choice of colour is not random here, nor is it random for other words in the diagram. Much like Twitter—described in Chapter 2 as a social network site that enables users to send and

read short 140-character text messages—moments of identification can be likened to ‘tweets,’ which is the name given to the 140-character messages sent and read on Twitter.

To the very right of the discursive field is the form of a computer. Within the computer screen—previously linked to the notion of the ‘mask,’ essential to masquerade (see section 3.2.2)—are the very same processes of Self \leftrightarrow Other translation as found in the pictorial representation of REAL identity. This is VIRTUAL identity. It is within online spaces such as social network sites that the negotiation of Self and Other takes place. Although the form here is a computer and not a physical body, this does not mean the form is not corporeal; it is corporeal in the sense that the same elements of embodiment are being absorbed and deflected on the screen. Essentially, the process of identity formation is the same in both polarities of the field of discourse; the only difference is form.

There are numerous moments of identification within real and virtual identity formation. What makes this diagram a model for *concurrent* identity formation is the depiction of conjoint chalk-white arrows displayed between the REAL and the VIRTUAL. This is the area, that “third space” (Bhabha, 1994), where moments of identification overlap between the real and virtual contexts of identity. These are the *shared* moments, the ones that literally connect REAL to VIRTUAL in the diagram. The arrows are conjoint to denote a sense of flow. This idea of ‘flow’ is the crux of CIF. In some ways, it is similar to Kroker’s (2012) notion of “body drift”—that we are literally drifting through many different specular performances of the body, recognizing the body as circulating, fluid, borderless, and with no certain boundaries or predetermined history. Body drift, for Kroker, is

How we circulate so effortlessly from one medium of communication to another; it is how we explore intimately and with incredible granularity of detail the multiplicity of

bodies that we have become; it is how our bodies are inflected, intermediated, complicated. (p. 2)

To think about the body as a circulating multiplicity is to consider the body itself as a cultural text or artifact in need of careful analysis, from which meaning can be made as the body drifts through the five moments of the ‘Circuit of Culture’ (see *Figure 3*, p. 89). However, to think specifically about *identity* (or *identities*) in relation to the body—a vital aspect of CIF—is to pinpoint this particular moment of ‘identity’ from within the Circuit of Culture. Accordingly, the theory of CIF has not been formulated *ab initio* because it extracts ‘identity’ from the Circuit of Culture and reveals the connectedness of ‘identity’ to the other four moments within the circuit, namely, ‘production,’ ‘consumption,’ ‘regulation,’ and ‘representation.’ Here, bodies are considered in both real contexts and virtual ones as producing and consuming information (as well as the meaning that we make of this information) through the processes of Self \leftrightarrow Other translations. These translations reveal more than just our identities, since what is ultimately performed on the surface of the body is always representational, as well as always regulated through our associations with others in language and in culture.

Earlier in this chapter, in section 3.3.2, I argued per Crossley (2001) and Ibrahim (2004) that the generative capacities of embodied subjects can never fully be realized in the domain of the affective. In this sense, identity cannot ever be fully captured. We can thus ‘know ourselves,’ but never *fully* because there is always something leftover in knowing ourselves in real contexts or in virtual contexts. This is why the domain of the affective, in *Figure 4*, is grey in colour; there are many ambiguities and unknowns within this domain. Ultimately, however, it is through the body and through our concurrent identity formations

that we are able to demonstrate our “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1988) that enable the communities to which we connect, making “a shared understanding of the world possible” (Rambusch & Ziemke, 2005, p. 1807).

Chapter 4

Methodology & Research Design

What is research but a blind date with knowledge?

--William J. Henry (1774-1836)

Research—be it feminist or otherwise—means presenting a new angle on an old question, a fresh perspective on a neglected topic, an exploration, an inquiry or an interrogation. McRobbie (1982) points out that within cultural studies, research frequently means “a mapping of the field” (p. 55). While the theoretical mapping discussed in the previous chapter interrogated the binaries of mind and body as well as real and virtual, among others, the present chapter predominantly explores the binary of *text* and *context*. ‘Texts,’—already defined in this thesis as the products of dominant culture and signs of postmodernity—can arguably only ever be understood from within specific contexts. As Gray (2003) suggests, “The analysis of texts themselves, no matter how sophisticated the framework, nor how broadly a text might be defined, ... is of limited use in understanding the circulation of culture and the production of meaning” (p. 14).

Gray’s quote about textual analysis may seem misplaced at the beginning of a chapter entitled “Methodology,” wherein research design and procedures of data collection are usually discussed before any talk of analysis takes place. However, the text/context binary is significant to note at the beginning of this chapter, considering my affinity towards poststructural approaches of binary deconstruction and destabilization of meaning. As well, the centrality of language to human activity and thus to culture is highlighted within the poststructural paradigm, providing “new practices of ‘reading’—both texts and text analogues—and new experimental forms of ‘writing’” (Peters & Burbles, 2004, p. 5). These

new practices are especially important to consider within Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) perspective of cultural studies as "a threefold concern with cultural texts, lived experience, and the articulated relationship between texts and everyday life" (p. 187).

As I begin to cast my "sociological gaze" (Tolson, 1990) upon my research and its participants, I remain aware that 'doing cultural studies' combines a hermeneutic focus on lived realities with a poststructuralist critical analysis of discourses that mediate our experiences and realities (Saukko, 2005, p. 343). While the hermeneutic impulse in cultural studies evaluates the value of research in terms of how sensitive it is to the lived realities of its informants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the poststructural bent assesses research in terms of how efficiently it exposes the politics embedded in the discourses through which realities are constructed and perceived (Lather, 1993). Thus, to start this chapter, a brief turn to this combination of approaches not only immediately links concepts from the previous chapter, but also situates the notion of 'text' as both a product of a particular culture as well as an agent in circulation. This will then open up trajectories into the methodological practices suitable for the context of this study, as well as the range of methods that will enable cultural inquiry.

4.1 REVISITING THE 'CIRCUIT OF CULTURE'

Yet again referring back to *Figure 3: The 'Circuit of Culture'* in the previous chapter, we see that an analysis of a text in the process of meaning-making is dependent on the five major processes or 'moments' through which any analysis of a cultural text must pass if it is to be adequately studied: production, consumption, representation, regulation and identity. The discussion here moves away from theoretical considerations of 'the body' as text and instead contextualizes the production of meaning from the texts of the present study as such:

(1) texts—including words, images, audio, and video, which together comprise the dominant culture and signs of postmodernity—are **produced** by participants; (2) production is **consumed**, or *read*, by the audience; (3) **representations** are construed through the (production and consumption of) text; (4) participants and audience are **regulated** by various institutional or social forces (i.e. authority, privacy, male gaze); and (5) **identity** is negotiated through translations of Self and Other, as discussed at length in the previous chapter.

Contextualizing these moments in this fashion prefaces the present qualitative inquiry, which aims to gather insight into the subculture of female adolescents and explore how female adolescents virtually represent themselves. As such, the unpredictability or “blind date” factor of this qualitative research—to channel Henry’s opening quote—is perhaps not lessened, but, at the very least, this contextualization bestows an “intimate familiarity” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) within this study, particularly in terms of the roles of research participants and the audience.

4.2 FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES

The purpose of this research is to explore how female adolescents virtually represent themselves. Given the gendered nature of this exploration, Harding (1987a) would have recommended establishing a methodological framework to engage possibilities of knowing these females and representing their experience by connecting the framework to issues of embodiment and identity (see also Lather, 1991). Feminist approaches to research have been fundamental to shaping my research ethics and practices, allowing me to understand and reflect upon my project in a way that correlates with both the lived experiences of the participants’ embodiment, as well as the theoretical abstractions discussed in the previous chapter (CIF).

Before a methodological mapping of *how* these insights will be gathered, a clear distinction between ‘methodology’ and ‘method’ must be made. As Harding (1987b) describes it, *methodology* is a theory and analysis of how research should proceed, whereas *methods* are the techniques for gathering evidence (p. 2, emphasis added). Feminist researchers emphasize the links and synergies among methodology and methods, and are interested in the different ways that a researcher’s perspective interacts with as well as influences data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Hughes, 2002). Harding (1987b) also notes that methodology and method are often intertwined with each other in both traditional and feminist discourses. In this sense, she claims “it is not at all clear what one is supposed to be looking for when trying to identify a distinctive “feminist method of research” (p. 2). Olesen (2005) concurs, stating further that feminist qualitative research is not a passive recipient of transitory intellectual themes and controversies:

Feminisms draw from different theoretical and pragmatic orientations that reflect national contexts where feminist agendas differ widely (Evans, 2002; Morawski, 1997; *Signs*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2000). Nevertheless, without in anyway positing a global, homogeneous, unified feminism, qualitative feminist research in its many variants, whether or not self-consciously defined as feminist, problematizes women’s diverse situations as well as the gendered institutions and material and historical structures that frame those. (p. 236)

In this section I will take up the ambiguity of framing feminist research by clearly stating what *I* am looking for in order to identify my own feminist method of research for this study. To start, I define and discuss feminist research practices, as well as trace its

origins. Then, I will consider three topics integral to feminist research practices, namely: (1) objectivity and subjectivity, (2) reflexivity, and (3) ethics. The discussion of this third topic will include a focussed elaboration of poststructural feminist approaches to research, highlighting the methodological work of Patti Lather and the turn toward difference in feminist theory and practice.

4.2.1 Feminist research practices

According to Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007), Laughlin and Castledine (2010), and Olesen (2005), feminist research originated within the context of the second-wave feminist movement; it was during this time that female scholars and students became increasingly aware of the blatant contradictions between their lived experiences as women and mainstream research. These contradictions elucidated a number of shortcomings in mainstream social science research that pointed to a lack of accurate representation of women's experiences and sometimes even the complete lack of women in research samples and scholarship altogether (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 5). This is why early feminist work was primarily concerned with writing women's voice into history and recording their lives and narratives (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010).

Feminist research approaches center and make problematic women's diverse situations; while the theme of domination prevails in the feminist literature, the subject matter is gender domination within a patriarchal society (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). As noted by Hesse-Biber (2012b), feminist research approaches also carry messages of empowerment, messages that "challenge the encircling of knowledge claims by those who occupy privileged positions" (p. 3). This requires taking steps from the "margins to the center" (hooks, 2000) while eliminating the very boundaries of domination within patriarchal society and in

knowledge building itself. In the words of Hess-Biber, these are boundaries that “privilege dominant forms of knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known” (p. 3).

As noted by Brooks and Hess-Biber (2007), it is imperative to recognize that “most feminist views and perspectives are not simply ideas or ideologies, but are *rooted in the very real lives, struggles, and experiences of women*” (p. 3, emphasis in original). Feminist research also embraces many of the tenants of postmodern critiques as a challenge to current society. When it comes to feminist research approaches, Creswell (2007) notes: “The goals are to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative” (p. 26). It is a complex area of inquiry, with numerous frameworks (i.e., male-oriented, white feminist oriented, able-bodied female oriented) and difficult issues (i.e. the absence and invisibility of women, who can be “knowers”) (Olesen, 2005).

4.2.1.1 Objectivity and subjectivity in feminist research

In many ways, early feminist work was taken to been seen as critiques of positivist, masculinist social science work where related notions of objectivity were disrupted (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983; Bell & Roberts, 1984; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley, 1990). Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) point out that the concepts, frames of reference, and perspectives that define traditional sociology have been expressed from a male perspective as well as from the perspectives from those who manage and control, with women largely absent from this world (p. 424). According to these authors, in the history of sociology the development of an approach to knowledge with the goal of “control” is what contributed to the failure to study

the situation of women, as well as to a conceptualization of women that is consistent with continuing male dominance (ibid). In fact, the notion of objectivity came under such sustained attack that the slogan “objectivity is male subjectivity” was coined during the early women’s movement (Spender, 1980).

Young (1990) relays this positivist notion of objectivity by situating the researcher as one who “judges and dominates from afar...the subject [who is] outside of all objects, fixes the object in its gaze, mastering and knowing it with unambiguous certainty” (pp. 190-1). As a backlash, early feminists sought new ways to explore how we understand, relate, and interact with others. This is why qualitative feminist researchers focus on generating ideas to produce knowledges about oppressive situations for women, for action, and for further research (see Lupton, 1995; Nielsen, 1990; Olesen & Clarke, 1999). However, as Olesen (2005) points out, “research *for* women should extend and amplify research merely *about* women, to ensure that even the most revealing descriptions of unknown or recognized aspects of women’s situations do not remain merely descriptions” (p. 236, emphasis in original).

4.2.1.2 Reflexivity

Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) assert the failure of mainstream research to “give voice” to women’s activities, experiences, and perspectives “provoked early feminist scholars and researches to seek remedies for these omissions,” which included the reworking of traditional methodological techniques and the creation of new research approaches (p. 5). For almost three decades now, there has been a push towards reflexivity in the research process as a means to explore the ways in which identity, intimacy, affect, and power shape empirical data and the wider research process (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010, p. 5; see also Craib,

1998; Klienmann, 1999; Harding, 1993; Lewis, 2010; Denzin, 2003; Walshaw, 2010; Wolgar, 1988).

When it comes to reflexivity, the situatedness of ‘researcher’ and ‘the researched’ is integral to the feminist research process, troubling the notion of the ‘knowing researcher’ by placing the researcher’s self under scrutiny. Wise (1987) argues that the “cognitive authority” of the researcher’s view in producing knowledge, and assessments as to whether or not that knowledge is empowering, are knotty ethical issues. She poses a series of questions, including: Who decides, and how, what counts as knowledge? What if one research group’s empowerment is another’s disempowerment? (see also Edwards & Mauthner, 2012, p. 18). Taking methodology to be an arbitrator of epistemological aims, these ethical questions are not contained to feminist sociological projects alone, but span across epistemologies and varying theoretical perspectives that inform all types of qualitative methodological undertakings.

Harding (1991) has famously written about “strong reflexivity,” or the requirement that the researcher gaze back at his or her own cultural situation, recognizing all the while how the object of inquiry gazes back (cited in Morawski, 1994, p. 99; see also Fine, 1992; Holland & Ramazanoğlu, 1994; Phoenix, 1994; Warren, 1988). Understanding this reciprocal gaze requires more than mere cognizance that it exists. As well, simply acknowledging one’s location as ‘researcher’ is not enough to eradicate its effects (Gill, 1998; Lewis, 2010). As noted by Walshaw (2010): “The reality is that the subjectivity of the researcher is always implicated in the complex research encounter precisely because the researcher self is always performed in and for others” (p. 592).

4.2.1.3 Embodied ethics: Blending theory, methodology and method

If the research process itself can be taken as ‘performance,’ this adds an extra layer to my theoretical concepts of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ as discussed in the previous chapter. While the ‘performance’ of my research and analyses strives to incorporate an awareness of the situatedness of the researcher and the researched, it was my hope that, while conducting my research, the research encounter was informed by my discussion of these differences in power with my participants. This is in line with my engagement with the practice of ethics as I employ a “feminist approach to knowledge building.” For Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004), a feminist approach to knowledge building is one which recognizes the essential importance of examining women’s experience, by remaining attentive to issues of difference, taking a critical stance against universal truths, and questioning social power (p. 3).

My feminist approach to knowledge building and indeed my very practice of ethics has remained one of embodiment throughout this blending of theory, methodology, and method. For Csordas (1994), the position of embodiment as theory, methodology, ethic, and practice constitutes a phenomenologically-inspired “radical empiricism” (p. 10), wherein sensory experience and perception are thought to “afford a pre- or nonlinguistic, pre-cultural mode of experiencing the world” (Farnell, 2012, p. 13). Csordas (1989) proposes we embrace Merleau-Ponty’s notion of pre-objective “being-in-the-world” as a dialogical partner to representation: “The equation is that [while] semiotics¹⁸ gives us textuality in order to understand representation, phenomenology gives us embodiment in order to understand being-in-the-world” (184). Csordas (1994) suggests “the point of elaborating a paradigm of embodiment is then not to supplant textuality but to offer it a dialectical partner” (p. 12). In

¹⁸ The practice of semiotics will be discussed in further detail in section 4.6 – Data Analysis.

this way, embodied methodologies offer a complimentary juxtaposition with theory and textual analysis. The work of Csordas has been a useful starting point in theorizing my ethics of embodiment within an embodied methodology. However, when the approach to feminist research is also poststructural—as it is here—the difficult task of producing stories of women’s lives in oppressive contexts relies not only on the textual analysis of cultural artifacts, but the discourses surrounding them, as well as their meanings.

For Denzin (1992), this type of textual analysis is pertinent to the “study of lived cultures and experiences which are shaped by the cultural meanings that circulate in everyday life” (p. 81). The ways in which the texts are analyzed, which will be discussed in the next section of methods, underscore an unequivocal need for *interaction* among the participants and researcher to shape and uncover these meanings and their circulation. Once again referring back to *Figure 3: The Circuit of Culture* (as well as the contextualization of the circuit given at the beginning of this chapter), a poststructural approach to feminist research is fitting because the dialogic nature of social discourse, including the languages and texts chosen to communicate and display to different audiences, is what helps to construct shared discourses and the very meanings in everyday life.

Maynard (1996) suggests that feminist poststructuralist researchers need not be concerned with questions of bias or subjectivity, but instead focus on ensuring that the research undertaken should be rigorous and meaningful. She states that:

At the very least, this call for rigour involves being clear about one’s theoretical assumptions, the nature of the research process, the criteria against which “good” knowledge can be judged and the strategies used for interpretation and analysis. In feminist work the suggestion is that all of these things are made available for

scrutiny, comment and (re)negotiation, as part of the process through which standards are evaluated and judged. (Maynard, 1996, p. 24)

While issues of bias and subjectivity remain part of my allegiance to feminist methodological ethics and practices, my particular engagement with the methodological writings of poststructural feminist Patti Lather (1988, 1991, 2006, 2007) has made me aware that, as Fonow and Cook (2005) put it, “the product of any research process is a construction of, not a reflection of, what the reality is all about” (p. 2221). In this sense, there is less need to “get the ‘real’ right” (Fernandes, 1999, p. 124) by means of finding a ‘perfect’ research design commensurate with epistemological aims; instead, emphasis should be placed on the reading of texts and the ways in which textual strategies of representing the real are used to handle the complexities of knowledge building and examining meanings of everyday life.

Lather (1988) suggests that emancipatory social science must be premised upon the development of research approaches that both empower the researched and contribute to the generation of change enhancing social theory (p. 570). She calls for feminists to channel their efforts from perspectives that are both critical and praxis-oriented¹⁹. For Lather, a reciprocally educative process is more important than product, as empowering methods contribute to conscious-raising and transformative social action. It is through interaction and reflexivity that design, data, and theory emerge, with the data being recognized as generated from the interaction between and among people in a relationship (pp. 570-2).

¹⁹ Lather notes that in her earlier work in the 1980s, she used the term “openly ideological” instead of “praxis-oriented.” She claims that “praxis-oriented” clarifies the critical and empowering roots of a research paradigm openly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society, and does not invite comparisons with fundamentalist and conservative movements.

In her article²⁰ entitled “The Validity of Angels: Interpretive and textual strategies in researching the lives of women with HIV/AIDS,” Lather (1995) describes how her use of the angel, as a witness or translator, led to a text that attempts to represent the voices and knowledges of the women researched, as opposed to a text that claims to speak the ‘truth’ through an authoritative voice. Here, Lather’s (1995) concept of “situated methodology” comes into play; this concept refers to the making of textual decisions appropriate to that of the experiences shared by all research participants, which are “grounded in writing with and from rather than about” (p. 58).

As already discussed, feminist scholars work within, against, and across epistemologies, often combining elements from different perspectives. Innovative methods are derived from successful efforts to reconcile differences and even from those efforts that conclude that certain epistemological differences are irreconcilable (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2213). The ethics of embodiment subsumed in my feminist methodology responds to Lather’s call to work within critical, praxis-oriented frameworks that value voice and interaction over authority, power, and control. At the onset of my research, and much like Lather, I too was interested in working in with females in participatory and collaborative ways. While my intent at this point was assumed ethnographic, I knew that I needed “a more interactive way of doing research than is usually the case where researchers are presented as disembodied ‘objective’ knowers” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xv). What follows in the next section is my take on ethnography as both ‘feminist’ and ‘virtual,’ altogether comprising an interactive approach to help situate my research within a methodology of embodiment. However, in order to define this approach of ‘feminist virtual ethnography,’ the

²⁰ Two years later, this article was turned into a book, *Troubling the Angels* (Lather & Smithies, 1997), which will be referred to in section 4.3.

terms must be broken down. While the ‘feminist’ descriptor is commensurate in its meanings with the definitions of ‘feminist’ methodologies in this section, the broader term ‘ethnography’ will first be discussed, followed by a discussion of the ‘virtual’ lens that magnifies the approach to ethnography.

4.3 Feminist virtual ethnography

Although feminist research practice requires a critical stance towards existing methodology... at the same time, it has to be recognized that the universe of askable research questions is constrained by the methods allowed.

-- Oakley (1993, p. 246)

The qualitative research approach of ethnography sets out to describe the culture and social interactions of a particular group or subgroup. This approach relies primarily on detailed descriptions (*graphy*) of the social life and cultural phenomena (*ethno*) of the particular group or subgroup of people (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Beynon-Davies, 2007; Buscatto, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Gobo, 2008, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). According to Creswell (2007), ethnography is best used to explain various issues within a group of individuals that have been together for a considerable length of time and have, therefore, developed a common culture. Creswell indicates that ethnographic research also provides a chronological collection of events related to a group of individuals sharing a common culture. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) point out that the ethnographic researcher studies the group in its natural setting for a lengthy period of time, several months or even years. Here, the focus of study is on the everyday behaviours of the people in the group, with intent to identify cultural norms, beliefs, social structures, and other cultural patterns. For

Gobo (2011), ethnography is based on direct observation, and in “doing ethnography,” it is essential to listen to the conversations of the “actors on stage,” read the texts produced by the participants under study, and ask questions (p. 15).

Virtual ethnography, a specialized type of ethnography, is a recent phenomenon rooted specially in the works of Coover (2004), Couldry and McCarthy (2004), Dicks, Soyinka, and Coffey (2006), Jones (1999), and Pink (2001). As Hine (2005) asserts, “our knowledge of the Internet as cultural context is intrinsically tied up with the application of ethnography” (p. 8). Virtual ethnography, then, is essentially the virtual equivalent of traditional ethnographic forms. It is where ethnography can describe consumption practices from the virtual standpoint of actual audiences, “by delineating the meanings that media consumers attribute to the texts and technologies that they encounter in their everyday lives” (Gobo, 2011, p. 24). Masten and Plowman (2003) contend that virtual ethnography is ideally suited to documenting the fluidity and flexibility already distinguishing contemporary cultures and communities (p. 77). These authors also note that while participants communicate their experience via the Internet, virtual ethnographers gather these details, whether they are in the form of words, images, or audio files, and then determine their significance as they are played out in the context of participants’ lives.

Murthy (2008) notes that because using virtual methods is a relatively new undertaking in social research practices, virtual methodologies are not always reflected in textbooks and handbooks of qualitative research. However, much of the research utilizing virtual ethnography as a methodological approach has shown that the Internet fosters participatory culture, as demonstrated by the formation of interpretive communities in and through virtual spaces (see Baym, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2000, 2010; Bury, 2003, 2005; Ito,

2010; Jenkins, 2006; Taylor, 2007). For instance, in Bury's (2005) research dealing with virtual "female fandoms"—females participating and 'hanging out' in virtual fan forums (pp. x-1; see also Ibrahim, 2014)—she investigated the processes of identification, community-making, and production of social space over a one-year period. Bury collected data from a female fan forum in cyberspace (pertaining to the television show *The X-Files*) by creating a listserv of 19 participants, using emails from the listserv as her source of data. She actively participated in the community-making and discussion processes of the X-Files group she observed.

Taking my cues from Bury and feminist methodologies in general, my research can be called 'feminist virtual ethnography.' Although Lather's work is not virtual in nature, this term is guided by a concern that Lather and Smithies (1997) express in their preface to *Troubling the Angels*:

By raising such emotionally charged issues as death, survival, and self-determination, this book walks a fine line between making a spectacle of these women's struggles and a wanting to speak quietly, with respect for all that it means to tell the stories of people willing to put their lives on public display in the hope that it will make it better for others. Charting the journey of their struggles with the disease, from initial shock to getting on with their lives in ways that make time for what matters, often results in admiration for those who are HIV-positive. Their vibrancy and hopeful realism are lessons in living.

Doing this work as both a service and a learning, our challenge has been to risk the necessary invasions and misuses of telling other people's stories in order to bear witness with fierce but unsentimental conviction that such stories can transfix,

overwhelm, linger, and compel in taking readers to the place where this research has brought us, a place where we can see all the “truth” that we can handle and be grateful for it. (pp. xiii-xiv)

At the outset of my research, I was not certain of the kinds of issues that would be raised during the course of my study, though I imagined the possibility that there would be some difficult issues of our own to talk about. My approach to virtual ethnography as ‘feminist’ has granted the females in my study the same type of respect and courtesies borne from the concerns of Lathers and Smithies (1997) in *Troubling the Angels*.

In her review and revisitation of *Troubling the Angels*, Perselli (2008) notes that contrary to the classic ethnography, what the book does not do is analyze the women’s stories (p. 225). According to Lathers and Smithies (2007), “efforts were made to not ‘santize’ each woman’s way of speaking” (p. xvii), “to drown the poem of the other with the sound of our own voices” (p. xvi). Perselli notes this has the “significant advantage of neither distorting their vernacular language and forms of words nor overwriting at a later stage what each person has told” (p. 225). My approach to feminist virtual ethnography will also not ‘santize’ each woman’s way of speaking, as this would be a great disservice to my virtual approach to research, seeing that subcultures spurn from and/or participating in online social network sites have their own interesting, unique ways of speaking. The next section will look more closely at this ‘virtual’ aspect of my methodological framework, introducing the social network site “Facebook” as the ethnographic research site from which my feminist virtual ethnography took place.

4.3.1 The virtual factor

The claiming of the online context as an ethnographic field site has chartered a “methodological shift” crucial in establishing the status of Internet as a cultural context (Hine, 2005, p. 8). This shift grew from various approaches to online phenomena in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, notably, Curtis’ (1992) discoveries about the social structures that emerged in the multi-user domains (MUDs) he helped to design, Rheingold’s (1993) accounts of his participation in an online network to establish the possibility of virtual community, and Correll’s (1995) attempts to combine offline methodologies such as interviews with Internet users.

With a focus on computer-mediated communications (CMC), virtual ethnographers are generally concerned with exploring and studying texts within online contexts, which is also the concern with which I opened this chapter. Hine (2000) suggests that one reason why the study of texts in online contexts has gained popularity is because of the ease of recording data: for instance, the “newsgroup, as a record, an archive, is the ultimate field recorder” (p. 22). However, Mackay (2005) asserts that while the pragmatics of recording utterances in online contexts may preserve the information, the experience is not preserved. He further delineates text from context by suggesting that while virtual ethnographers often miss the contexts in which texts are used, this is something that can be explored *in situ* observation of users (p. 129).

My research utilized virtual ethnography as my primary feminist methodological approach to foster inquiry into the lives of female adolescents who possess space on the social network site ‘Facebook.’ Facebook represents a relatively new site for inquiry, gaining excessive popularity for its hybrid of technological features (Young, 2011). As seen in the

work of Barsky and Purdon (2006), social network sites can be useful to virtual ethnographers because:

- (1) They are virtual ‘gatekeepers’ with chains of ‘friends’ who are potential research respondents;
- (2) Ethnographers can ‘invisibly’ observe the social interactions of page members, glean a previously unavailable type of ethnographic data;
- (3) Pages can be created by social researchers with the explicit purpose of conducting research online (e.g. focus groups watch an embedded video and comment on it); and
- (4) The structure of relationships on the sites is a useful research method itself with, as Garton *et al.* (1999) argue, the content, direction, and strength of the relationship ‘strands’ a fruitful approach. (p. 66)

While all four of these points have been taken up in my own positioning as a virtual ethnographer within my research study, the “invisibility” factor of my role was not always advantageous. While my ability to invisibly observe the social interactions and pages of my participants was inevitable due to the nature of social media, it was especially difficult to ‘be invisible’ at the beginning of my study when I was trying to gain entry into the subculture of my participants and form initial bonds with the girls. However, seeing that the girls could see my profile page and profile pictures as well, I can only imagine that it was equally difficult for them to decide to participate in the study as well as allow me entry into their lives.

According to Markham (2005), conducting virtual ethnographic research in social network sites allow researchers to look at the changing ways in which groups of people live their everyday lives. While some, such as Baym (1995, 2000), have come to apply ethnographic approaches in virtual field sites to understanding how groups *form* and are sustained online, my approach will target the understanding of how female groups or

individuals *perform* and engage in processes of becoming. I hope this has the potential to generate meaningful, useful, and compelling ways of knowing female adolescent identity. Reminding myself yet again of Siegel's (2005) call to remain cognizant of methodological pluralism, I will now explore another methodology that helped me piece together my methodological framework.

4.3.2 Feminist participatory action research (FPAR)

Before venturing into feminist participatory action research (FPAR), a brief look at participatory action research (PAR) is necessary. In the tradition of Kurt Lewin (1946), PAR provides a framework to critically enter active institutions, navigate politics, establish respectful relationships, provide spaces to interrogate common practices, and build enough cultural trust and awareness to collaborate change (Stoudt, 2009). Bradbury and Reason (2003) define PAR as a non-traditional research method in which research is done *with* rather than *on* people. These authors see PAR as a “value-laden activity” grounded in lived experiences and developed in partnerships, addressing significant problems, working *with* people rather than just studying them, and developing new ways of seeing and interpreting the world (pp. 156-8). Ozanne and Saatcioglu (2008) see action researchers as having emancipatory interest in improving human welfare, which is why these authors attest to the importance of reflection in action research. McIntyre (2008) points out that there is no “fixed formula” for designing, practicing, and implementing such research, nor is there “one overriding theoretical frame that underpins PAR processes. Rather, there is malleability in how PAR processes are framed and carried out” (pp. 2-3). Nonetheless, in essence, PAR is located in communities and emphasizes both participation and action. PAR seeks to change

the world by naming it differently and/or through better understanding, asking for collective action.

FPAR is a methodological framework that links feminist methodologies with PAR, enabling a methodology that allows for “a critical understanding of women’s multiple perspectives and works towards inclusion, participation, and action, while confronting the underlying assumptions researchers bring into the research process” (Reid, Allison, & Frisby, 2006, p. 316). Researchers working in the FPAR tradition, as these authors explain, seek to “facilitate building knowledge to change the conditions of women’s lives, both individually and collectively, while reconstructing conceptions of power so that power can be used in a responsible manner” (p. 316). Given the importance of power and control in relation to postmodern feminist epistemologies and methodologies, as previously discussed, we must seriously consider Tan’s (2004) parallel, recontextualized contention that the focus of education should be placed on collaborative explorations of how power in various discourses can be used for the benefit of students (p. 660). Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws and Watson (2002) concur, stating that if the concept of power in poststructural practice is conceptualized positively, this may allow feminists and feminist researchers to uncover the lines of power to “change thought and to change relations of power” (p. 294).

In Reid and Frisby’s (2007) exploration of new forms of representation as enabled through FPAR, these authors question how the voices and experiences of women work in relation to discourses of power and authority—who has the authority to represent women’s voices and to what end? Also, what forms of representation will best capture the dynamics involved? Lather (2001) indicates it is necessary to grapple with these sorts of questions and tensions in order to uncover counter practices for less exploitative and more creative ways of collecting, interpreting, and communicating research findings:

The necessary tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation lets us question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysis, transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility, where a failed account occasions new kinds of positionings. Such a move is about economies of responsibility within non-innocent space, a ‘within/against’ location. (p. 204)

Although Lather’s work is typically ethnographic, her work is consistently cited within research pertaining to FPAR, likely because of her gravitation towards reflexivity, which is also a central element of FPAR (Reid, Allison, & Frisby, 2006). Ultimately, Lather (2007) advocates for “getting lost” as a research methodology in which we must give up interpretive mastery, the unquestioned authority of the ‘one who knows,’ and can theorize others’ lives. This speaks not only to the FPAR framework, but more importantly to my possible research questions, which I pose in the next section.

4.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), qualitative research is “hypothesis-generating,” whereas quantitative research is “hypothesis-testing” (p. 4). What this means is that qualitative researchers often do not know enough to state meaningful hypothesis, particularly for cultures different from our own (p. 6). As well, qualitative hypothesis-generating research involves collecting interview data from research participants concerning a phenomenon of interest, and then using what they say in order to develop a hypothesis (p. 8). Basing my research hypothesis on conceptual ideas rather than on a relationship between a dependent and independent variable, as in quantitative methods, I am working with the following research hypothesis: Investigating the bodily displays of female adolescents using the social network site ‘Facebook’ is an essential act in understanding the ways in which

female adolescents virtually represent themselves; it is also essential in working towards an understanding of how virtual self-representations and transformations of these virtual self-representations speak to the ‘real’ identity of female adolescents, and vice versa.

The following are my research questions. While the issues addressed in this thesis are framed as questions, significant to note, the hypothesis-generating nature of qualitative research amends a possibility that not all questions may be answered, and that new questions will almost certainly emerge in the research process.

1) How is the female adolescent body virtually self-represented on Facebook in a time of hyper-representation?

- a) What does this research teach us about female adolescents in the 21st century, specifically in terms of self-reflexivity, social representations, and social implications?
- b) How can an understanding of this nature inform an understanding of (normative) femininity?
- c) How do these self-representations get transformed, cropped, Photoshopped, etc. and why?

2) What do these virtual self-representations and the transformations therein tell us about the ‘real’ identity of female adolescents?

- a) By reflecting upon their virtual self-representations and the transformations therein, what do these students have to say about the flows, tensions, and intersections of/between their real and the virtual identities?

4.5 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In order to collect data, I engaged in participant observation within a virtual field site, in this case the social network site ‘Facebook’. As an active user of this social network site

(at the time of the research), I already knew that a number of my 'Facebook friends' happen to be female adolescents, all of whom I know through my social networks. In large part, the procedure outlined below for my study echoes the procedure that Bortree (2005) followed for her ethnographic study of teenage girls' weblogs. My research commenced thus:

(1) To survey the field and gain entry into the subculture of active female adolescent Facebook users as a recognizable researcher, and of course after ethics (File #02-12-18) (see Appendix B), I sent out a message, through the Facebook messaging system, to all of my 'Facebook friends' (see Appendix A). In this message, I explained my research as well as the intended demographic, in hopes that one or multiple of the criteria-abiding female adolescents in my list of friends would respond and express interest to participate in the research study. At the time of conceptualizing the recruitment process of my research, I imagined that if I had received more than one eligible response to my recruitment message (note here that approximately 10% of my 'Facebook friends' at that time fell into the intended demographic, which meant that there were around 30 potential eligible candidates for my study) that I would select the eligible candidate on a first come/first served basis.

(2) The next day, I received a response from one of my Facebook 'friends' who expressed interest in the study and fit the criteria of the study. The response was from Geneviève.²¹ In her message response, she wanted some clarification regarding the time commitments of the study. After some back-and-forth messages on the Facebook platform, she agreed to participate in the study. She gave me her email address and I sent her the participant

²¹ All names of the participants, as well as the names of participants' friends, appear as pseudonyms throughout this thesis.

consent form (see Appendix C), as well as the parental consent form (see Appendix D) since she was approximately one month shy of turning 18. Both sets of forms were completed, scanned, and emailed back to the next day.

- (3) After receiving the forms, I started my research by observing her profile page and discerning which of her female friends she interacted with on a regular basis. Geneviève acted as my “key informant” or “gatekeeper,” which Creswell (2007) emphasizes is one approach an ethnographer can take to access a culture-sharing group (p. 71).
- (4) By observing Geneviève’s page for the next week, everyday at around 11 am, I figured that by eventually becoming ‘Facebook friends’ to *her* friends, that this would likely grant me greater access to other members of her subculture. However, I had to keep in mind that on Facebook, concerns of privacy often entice users to limit their profile settings—especially to those who are not Facebook friends. Nonetheless, I utilized a “snowball referral” approach (Brooks & Churchill, 2010) to increase the number of participants in my study. This approach, also known as “snowball sampling,” is defined by Atkinson and Flint (2004) as a technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of others who may also be interested in participating in the research process. These ‘referrals’ may themselves open possibilities for an expanding web of contact and inquiry. The strategy has been utilized primarily as a response to overcome the problems associated with understanding and sampling concealed populations such as the deviant and the socially isolated (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997), or can be placed within a wider set of methodologies that takes advantage of the social networks of identified respondents, which can be used to provide a researcher with an escalating set of potential contacts.

- (5) After approximately two weeks of observing Geneviève's page, I was able to identify seven Facebook users who were constantly interacting with Geneviève. As my key informant, Geneviève was most helpful in the recruitment process: she sent me a Facebook message with the names of two female friends she had seen earlier in the school day. Both of these female friends expressed interest in participating in the study and Geneviève told them to expect a message from me in their Facebook inboxes soon. The names of these two 'snowball referrals' were already included in my own list of seven potential participants. I let Geneviève know this, and I also her opinions about the other five individuals I had identified through my observations of her page. That same night, I sent all seven individuals the same recruitment message that Geneviève had originally responded to (Appendix A).
- (6) I heard back from one of the seven individuals—Leila—two days later. She expressed willingness and eagerness to participate in the study. Again, I asked for her email address and I emailed her the participant consent as well as the parental consent form, as she was to turn 18 in just over two months. I received her signed and scanned forms the next day, and I consistently observed her profile page from that point onward.
- (7) At the outset of my research, I did not have any frame of reference regarding the time it would take to form a group of girls to participate in my study. I received a Facebook message from Geneviève two days after my recruitment of Leila, asking when the first virtual chat would take place. I wrote back on her message, telling her I was still waiting for responses.

- (8) Four days after Geneviève's inquiry, I received another response from one of the group of seven individuals I had previously. After a brief exchange of messages that same day, it turned out that this individual did not meet all of the participant criteria and thus was not eligible to participate in the research study. However, it was this potential participant who suggested I contact a school friend by the name of Irene. I found Irene's Facebook page by looking through this potential participant's posted photographs.
- (9) I did not contact Irene right away because I wanted to find the right 'fit' of participants. In the spirit of FPAR and collaborative methodologies, it was essential to discuss the potential new research participants with the existing participants. Thus, before contacting Irene, I sent a Facebook message addressed to both Geneviève and Leila, asking their opinions about Irene's potential participation. I received feedback from Geneviève and Leila later that evening. The girls let me know that they felt as if Irene would be—in their words—a "good fit." Geneviève expressed surprise that she had not thought about Irene's potential participation prior to receiving my message.
- (10) That same night I received Leila's and Geneviève's feedback, I sent Irene my recruitment message (Appendix A). I heard back from Irene the following day. After a few back-and-forth Facebook messages regarding the research study, she gave me her email address and I emailed her the participant consent form (she was already 18 and parental consent was not required). Irene received the form immediately, and within less than 10 minutes, she had emailed me back the signed and scanned form. I was amazed at how fast she was able to do this; it seemed to me that she was extremely proficient with various technologies. I started observing Irene's page immediately, that same evening.

(11) The day after Irene came on board, I sent a Facebook message addressed to Geneviève, Leila and Irene regarding new potential participants. After a brief message exchange, the girls decided that their friend Nikki would be a “good fit” for the study. I had already contacted Nikki, as she was also part of my group of seven potential participants. I let the girls know that I had already contacted her just less than two weeks ago. Leila encouraged me to re-send the message to Nikki in case she skipped over it or thought it was spam. Geneviève told me she would see Nikki at school and talk to her the research study. Irene said she would email and text Nikki and remind her about my message.

(12) While I waited for a response from Nikki, I was not the only one waiting. I received messages from the other three girls inquiring about her participation. It became clear to me at this point that the three girls interacted with each other comfortably and regularly, as I could see that they all knew exactly what was going on. That weekend, I was logged on to Facebook looking at the girls’ profiles and found that Geneviève, Leila and Irene were all at once logged in to Facebook Chat (now called Facebook Messenger). I was logged in at the time as well. Geneviève initiated a conversation that invited me, Leila and Irene to join. The three of us joined the conversation and Geneviève initiated our very first group chat, informal as it was. She asked if I had heard back from Nikki. I let her and the other girls know that I still had not heard from Nikki. Leila and Irene expressed discontent. Irene seemed slightly annoyed. Leila expressed in the chat box that she was going to send Nikki a text message to ask her what was going on. After two more minutes of conversing with the girls, Leila let everyone know that she had not heard back from Nikki. Leila seemed annoyed and impatient, stating that it wasn’t like

Nikki to be “so slow” with her text messaging. I took notes of this conversation in my anecdotal journal. The conversation ended by all three girls letting me and each other know that they would try to get a hold of Nikki at school on Monday. I told the girls that we would proceed as a group of 4 if I did not hear from Nikki before the end of the next weekend. Although I kept waiting for a response (and I admit to my frustrations in the meantime, writing in my anecdotal notes that the ‘snowball referral’ process had gone differently than I had imagined), I continued observing the existing participants’ pages, taking anecdotal notes, as well as capturing screenshots of their profiles everyday, at around 10am. It was not until the very end of that weekend that I finally received a response message from Nikki. She let me know she fit the criteria of the study. She apologized for her late reply to my message and agreed to participate. After learning that she was 17 years old, I sent her both the parental and participant consent forms.

(13) It took a full four weeks from my initial observations of Geneviève’s page to Nikki’s assent into participation. I did not want the existing participants to lose interest while waiting for more responses from the group of seven potential participants. Thus, I decided that the group of four girls was sufficient and I ended the recruitment process when Nikki came on board.

(14) During the next week, I created a Facebook group called ‘Facebook Girls.’ Like all groups created on Facebook, this group had its own page where members could interact with each other away from their own pages. While creating this page I made sure it was classified as ‘secret’—meaning, the only members of the Facebook community who had access to this group were the four girls and myself. The ‘Facebook Girls’ group, as well

as the decision-making processes for our scheduled virtual chats, will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter of this thesis.

(15) For the remainder of the next four months, I documented the virtual activity of this group of four female adolescents, focusing specifically on the discursive, negotiated, and reflexive displays of their bodies, which involves photographs, icons, images, and written text. The total time of the study—five months—seemed to be sufficient for my proposed research. According to Bernard (1998), there is no definite standard length of time researchers should spend in the field in order to be qualified for ethnographic research; in fact, he approves durations that range from a few days to a few years. Considering the virtual nature of my proposed ethnographic study, and taking into account the almost instantaneous immersion into the field due to researcher invisibility—the five months seemed to be a sufficient duration of time to collect data. As Kozinets (2010) notes, virtual ethnography is less time-consuming and elaborate than traditional ethnography.

(16) I spent a total of two hours per day viewing the profile pages of these girls, documenting my observations by capturing screenshots of their profiles, making notes, as well as copying their conversations in an anecdotal journal. These screenshots, my notes, as well as the journal all have informed my understandings of the identities and representations, and will be analyzed together in the upcoming chapters that deal with the analysis of data. The methodological process of capturing screenshots for gathering data will afford me the opportunity to assess students' virtual re/presentation of their bodily displays. This methodological process has been used by Jones (2009), who analyzed personal profiles and bodily displays on the popular Hong Kong gay website *Fridae.com*. It has also been discussed by Ng-A-Fook, Radford, Yazdanian and Norris (2013) as a

virtual ethnographic strategy within the context of a high-school media studies social action curriculum project focusing on character development.

These 16 points comprise the method I followed in order to gain entry into the female adolescent subculture, gather a group of participants, and start my research. However, as ‘the researcher,’ I am aware that to gaze upon the screenshots and bodies of the girls and pronounce them to indicate certain behaviours or actions both authors and authorizes these girls as ‘other.’ To avoid this from happening, I decided to draw upon virtual FPAR strategies to complement my virtual ethnographic methodological approach. To be more specific, the girls and I decided on four dates to partake in online conversations about their online activity. All scheduled virtual conversations took place over Facebook Chat. At the end of the study, a single one-on-one conversation with Nikki took place over Skype (this will be discussed in Chapter 9). Both Facebook Chat and Skype are forms of instant messaging (IM) that allowed me to discuss the screenshots I captured that portrayed the girls’ bodily displays, as well as to retrieve the conversations for data analysis. (Please note that the methods used to facilitate the virtual conversations about the screenshots of their bodily displays will be discussed in the next chapter.)

I see these conversations as absolutely crucial to my research, as it is only through the voices of the girls that I am able to work towards an understanding of their concurrent identity formation (that is, how their virtual self-representations and transformations of these self-representations speak to/influence the formation of their ‘real’ identity, and vice versa). According to Barnett (2009), collecting data directly from participants in this manner “demonstrates the value in seeing their identity formation” (p. 205). Furthermore, he

theorizes that participant self-assessment of lived experience reveals a unique type of “performance,” where identities are always “in flux” (ibid).

I will attempt to reveal these performances from a “position of embodiment” (Davis, 1995) in order to fully engage with complexities of these girls’ bodily experiences. For Davis, this position includes “an empathetic understanding of how it might actually feel to have a body which is perceived as alien to an individual’s sense of self” (p. 171). Davis notes that it is precisely this position of embodiment that enables research ethics and theoretical positioning to become mutually generative and complimentary, where the research is enmeshed within the processes and experiences she encounters. She considers this both an ethical and empirical position based upon “a conception of morality that is self-reflexive” (p. 171). She also suggests that “it is precisely at this point of discomfort—our own and other women’s—that a feminist analysis...needs to begin” (p. 181).

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data in my study is comprised of the various texts gathered and observed within the virtual field site. These texts included: the daily screenshots of the girls’ profile pages and photographs; the written feedback and commentary provided by the girls prior to our virtual chats (this is discussed in-depth in the next chapter); my daily journal entries that recorded my observations of the girls’ activities within the social network as well as the subculture in general; and transcripts of my online conversations with the participants.

Data analysis was a continuous process throughout the research study, broadly taking place in three stages. The first stage of (preliminary) data analysis took place *with* the girls during our online conversations. During these conversations, the girls analyzed selected

screenshots of themselves as well as of each other. We discussed the ways in which the girls experienced their bodies, as well as other issues that came up by way of ‘hanging out’ with the girls online.

Prior to and during the research process, initial codes were considered from the conceptual framework of the study, as well as from my research questions. However, I decided to analyze the data inductively so that themes emerged from the data collected and were not predetermined or imposed upon the data. My initial coding considerations did not act as pre-set or *a priori* codes, but I certainly kept my research questions in mind in order to guide my emergent codes. Since I am interested in the underlying social structures that are displayed within these texts and conversations, discourse analysis emphasizing category identification, emergent themes, ideas, views, and roles is most useful to the present study.

The second step of data analysis included semiotic readings of the participants’ online bodily displays and performances. The data pertaining to each of the four participants was first analyzed separately, which is why these readings appear as individual narratives in Chapters 6 through 9. These semiotic readings included aspects of multi-semiotic practice as well as visual juxtaposition, which are important aspects of my methodology and are thus elaborated in the next two sections. At the end of each narrative chapter, I offer “Final Thoughts” as a way to connect the semiotic readings of the girls to relevant aspects of my review of literature (Chapter 2) and/or to my theoretical and methodological frameworks (Chapters 3 and 4). The last step of the data analysis considered the four semiotic readings together, from which ‘meta’-themes emerged. These meta-themes will be discussed in Chapter 10.

4.6.1 Semiotic readings and multi-semiotic practice

As noted above, the second step of data analysis included semiotic readings of the participants' online bodily displays and performances. Inquiry of this nature emphasizes the visual phenomenon of online bodily display, involving photographs, icons, images, and written text. It is here where the practice of *semiotics*, as a means of data analysis, must be discussed. Simply put, semiotics can be defined as “a systematic science of signs” (Culler, 2002, p. vii). The advent of modern semiotics is credited to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who divided the sign into two components—the signifier and the signified—as well as Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), who conceptualized the sign as “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (quoted in Zeman, 1977, p. 24). Eco (1976) has defined semiotic theory as “a unified approach to every phenomenon of signification and/or communication” (p. 3), further relaying that “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else” (p. 7).

The study of signs in a virtual context is where the notion of “reading” images and not just text (Kress, 2010) is most significant. This is where my analysis of discourse is extended from semiotic practice to what Iedema (2003) calls “multi-semiotic practice.” According to Iedema (2003), the blurring of boundaries among the different semiotic dimensions of representation has been linked to changes in our semiotic landscape as well as to analysts' realizations that humans are now predisposed towards multiple forms of meaning making, which takes into account semiotics other than just “language-in-use” (p. 33). This is the basis of *multimodality*, a term best described by Jewitt (2009b) as “approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which

attend to the full range of communicational forms people use—image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on—and the relationships between them” (p. 14).

A number of theorists, such as Gee (2003, 2012), Kress (2010), Jewitt (2009), Lankshear and Knobel (2003), and Mackey (2003) have explored this concept of multimodality and its intersection with social context. O’Halloran and Smith (2011) note that scholars particularly interested in multimodality and social context contend that digital technologies have “decisively changed antiquated notions of language, curriculum, and literacy research,” wherein texts can be seen as “increasingly multimodal, that is, they combine visual, audio, linguistic, gestural, and spatial modes to convey meaning in a richer way” (p. 12).

Iedema (2003) notes that multi-semiotic practice, which includes in its analyses of representations recognition to semiotics other than language alone, links the potential of different semiotics deployed to how they affect (“enable” and “constrain”) interaction and the formation of subjectivity (p. 48). It is my hope that extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice will enact the “fresh ways of seeing and knowing” that Barnett (2009, p. 203) claims is vital for researchers attempting to develop an understanding of concurrent identity formation.

4.6.2 Visual juxtaposition

Given my interest in visual research methods, specifically of taking screenshots of the girls’ profile pages, it is important to note here that the screenshots captured will not include only images and photographs, but text as well. Seeing that my methodological approach of feminist virtual ethnography aims to study the subculture of a group of four girls, my

analysis will include some elements of comparison among the screenshots taken. Because of this element of comparison, I will make use of a method of analysis that Metcalfe (2013) calls “visual juxtaposition.” Exploring its different elements and how it can be used, Metcalfe writes:

Visual juxtaposition is inquiry through contrast, facilitated by side-by-side positioning of two images, or images and text. When combined with a theoretical foundation that explores interactions between the material and discursive elements of visual data, juxtaposition creates opportunities for qualitative analysis that are not as readily apparent when individual images are considered. (p. 1)

Visual juxtaposition is a relatively new means of analysis, but it is worth considering within an ethnographic field site that is both visual as well as virtual, and where image and text are often linked together because captions are usually inserted by social network users to explain or hint towards their meaning of the (con)text.

In sum, my overall approach to data analysis will be guided by a combination of CIF for my theoretical framing and feminist virtual ethnography for my methodology, with elements of semiotic analysis and visual juxtaposition employed as methods to discuss the four girls as distinct cases, each of whom will be taken up in separate chapters.

4.7 LIMITATIONS AND OTHER ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the initial conceptualization of my research design, I knew I wanted to embrace the challenge of conducting my research in a purely virtual fashion. While I could have supplemented my virtual approach to ethnography with face-to-face meetings and

conversations with the girls, I chose to keep all communication and activity strictly virtual. Murthy (2008) claims that the presence of ethnographers in a virtual field site is often physically invisible and that the expression between “the researcher” and “the researched” is not always grasped, which makes virtual ethnography problematic (p. 840). My physical invisibility within the research site certainly disrupted the researcher/researched divide; it would have been highly disconcerting had this not been the case. However, this disruption was *not* necessarily problematic within the feminist framing of my methodology. This is because the FPAR layering of my methodological framework allowed the participants, as well as myself, to think across and through our multiple identities (i.e. participant-as-participant, participant-as-friend, participant-as-virtual-subject, me-as-(policing) researcher, me-as-once-teenager, me-as-virtual subject), which ultimately revealed intersections that helped to build our collaborative inquiry.

To put it more generally, rather than simply acting as a source of data, this research study has been designed so that participants actively share, engage, and invest in the outcome of the research, becoming contributors to the project. As we will see with concrete examples offered in Chapters 6 through 9, the researcher/researched boundary was blurred during the course of this research study. However, this was as a good thing, as I was afforded the opportunity of “getting lost” (Lather, 2007) in the project instead of strategically placing myself into the research site as ‘the researcher.’

4.7.1 Measures of anonymity within an “ethic of respect”

In all of the empirical studies cited in this thesis pertaining to how youth negotiate their identities using social network sites, not one has included visual depictions of the bodies of participants. In fact, the vast majority of this literature is bereft of images

altogether. Such is the case, for instance, in De Ridder and Van Bauwel's (2013) article about how youth negotiate sexualities and gender when commenting on pictures in Netlog, a popular social network site for Flemish youth living in Northern Belgium. Instead of including any images they analyzed within their work—an act that could very well aid the reader in processes of understanding and meaning-making—the authors described observed pictures and photographs in textual detail only. Where images do appear, such is in Weber and Mitchell's (2008) article that describes their *Digital Girls* project, only two images are included in the text, and neither are images of the girls themselves. One is a photograph of a pile of technology in a girl's bedroom, and the other is a photograph of a girl's teddy bear.

The general absence of images and complete absence of photographs displaying the bodies of research participants is of course purposeful on the part of these and other researchers. Here, considerations of anonymity come to the fore among ethical issues in online educational research. Educational researchers, especially those working within online contexts, have a responsibility to ensure that research is conducted within an “ethic of respect” to those who participate (James & Busher, 2007). This “ethic of respect” is concerned with protecting individual participants from harm when taking part in research intended to benefit research communities and society at large (DeLorme *et al.*, 2001). However, when it comes to online educational research, especially much literature cited in this thesis, the downside of maintaining measures of anonymity for the sake of participant privacy and confidentiality is the potential erasure of the subject. This is perhaps most relevant to the present study, a feminist virtual ethnographic project that hinges upon a sociology of the body, also highly visual in scope.

As noted earlier in this chapter, composing semiotic readings of the participants' online bodily displays and performances in Chapters 6 to 9 requires analysis and thematic grouping of the hundreds of screenshots taken throughout the duration of the research study. While it would be quite easy as well logical to follow the trends in literature and simply describe what I have viewed on Facebook in rich textual detail, this is highly problematic within an embodied methodology that refuses to absent the corporeal body as a generative site of analysis. Even within the feminist poststructural framing of this research, where "there is no outside of text" (Kirby, 1997, p. 2), the phenomenological dimension of my theoretical framing proffers to locate the (lived) body in the text of this thesis. Writing about the disappearing body in feminist projects of embodiment, Sommerville (2004) ascertains the need for feminist researchers to negotiate corporeality by bringing the lived body into discursive relation with theoretical formulations of the body. As such, including visual images of the girls and their bodily displays within this work has the potential to destabilize what Sommerville calls "the erasure of the corporeal body in the somatophobia of essentialism" (p. 47).

I have made the deliberate choice to include screenshots of the girls and their bodies in this thesis rather than simply providing rich textual descriptions of my observations. To maintain an "ethic of respect," all screenshots have been fictionalized by creative illustration. At the same time, fictionalization has been done to disrupt the prevailing discourse of somatophobia in feminist poststructural research, as well as to flesh out the difficulties of writing and representing the corporeal body in academic work (this will be discussed further at the end of the next chapter, when we finally meet the participants in section 5.3). In total, 40 screenshots have been fictionalized in order to include visual depictions of the girls'

bodily displays within their subculture. Rich descriptions of these 40 screenshots were sent to a male graphic artist, who worked with given camera shots, angles, and movement (see Appendix E) as well as given size measurements of the actual screenshot frames. The graphic artist was informed about the nature of the project but never viewed the original screenshots, nor was he privy to any of the personal information of the participants and their friends.

When necessary, identifying information (such as the names of the girls' workplaces) has been changed, to protect the identities of research participants and to prevent possibilities of identification in the future. In all instances, icons appearing next to the names of participants within screenshots and juxtaposed comment boxes have been completely covered with a stock Facebook logo. This has been done so that faces cannot be viewed and potentially recognized by zooming into an electronic copy of this thesis. Finally, all dates and timestamps have been removed from the screenshots and comment boxes. Dates are never included within the narrative text either. These precautions have been taken to further decrease any possibility of identification of the girls as based on historical, stored Facebook activity. As noted in Chapter 1, this research study took place within a consecutive five-month period during my doctoral studies, at some point between 2010-2015.

Chapter 5

Meeting the Participants

When people are not interacting face-to-face, but only via chat rooms or by creating and reading Web pages, where is the ethnographer to put his or her feet?

--Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui (2009, p. 54)

The methodological plurality detailed in the previous chapter outlines a feminist perspective of research practice that includes elements of virtual ethnography and participant observation, reflexivity and feminist participatory action research (FPAR), as well visual methods relating to multi-semiotic practice and visual juxtaposition. Given this multiplicity of methodologies, this chapter sets out to describe, in further detail, my journey through these various research interactions. The purpose of this chapter is threefold: first, it demonstrates the complexities I experienced with a purely virtual approach to accessing, representing, and writing up the lives and experiences of the girls in the context of feminist methodologies and embodied ethics. Second, while this chapter can be taken as an extension of Chapter 4—providing more detail to certain areas of the methodological jigsaw—it also introduces the four girls in a way to prevent confusion, crossover, or repetition with the sequential progression of the girls’ individual chapters, to follow in Chapters 6 through 9. This introduction or ‘meeting’ of the girls is intentionally written as “thin description” so as to not take away from the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of their narratives within their individual chapters. Third and finally, my ultimate aim is for the reader of this thesis to join me on my journey through the aforementioned research interactions, as I discover the girls, their lives, their identities, and their future hopes.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is an expansion of some of the methods utilized during the research process that enabled my textual and visual readings (and understandings) of the girls. Some of these methods, it must be noted herein, are experimental and were not part of the original research design; in fact, these methods were developed during the study to stimulate my readings and interpretations (and later, analysis) of the girls' social worlds within the virtual, invisible field site.

The second section of this chapter provides a terse description of the girls themselves, particularly about their class, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. While this thesis is not about ethnicity or race per se, this is an inextricable layer of 'identity' that cannot be glossed over despite a strategic and purposeful focus on understanding the research participants' identities through the displays of their bodies as 'women' and not as 'women of colour.' At the very end of this section, we see the girls for the first time. This chapter, along with the four that follow, provide an account of the virtual ethnographic experience that will be aggregately discussed in further thematic detail in Chapter 10.

5.1 GETTING TO KNOW YOU, PART I: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS INVISIBLY

The journey on which you, my Gentle Reader (as W. E. Du Bois, 1903/1965, would have called you), are about to embark comprises a visual and textual reading of the girls' *experiences of/with embodiment* on Facebook. This notion will become clear as the thesis progresses, but for now, using Crossley's (2001) definition of embodiment, it is worth noting that my reading of the girls focuses on their "sensuous nature of human perception, emotion and desire, and the corporeal basis of agency, communication and thought" (p. 3).

Three elements guide this journey to which my Gentle Reader is invited as I discover these girls' experiences with Facebook. First, there are the carefully selected screenshots as seen in this chapter and the chapters to follow. While it is impossible and unnecessary to include all screenshots taken throughout the duration of the research study, the selected screenshots have been curated using thematic grouping with no chronological order. Along with the screenshots, excerpts from the four scheduled virtual chats are also included to enrich the narratives of the girls. The final element, which was not part of my original research design, is the inclusion of a number of excerpts from informal and random virtual chats I had with the girls. This element needs clarification: From the first day of viewing the girls' profiles, I purposely set my status on the Facebook Chat messaging system to "available," indicated by means of a green dot next to my name in the Facebook Chat box. When I was logged into Facebook for my daily viewing of the girls' profiles, it was often the case that one or more than one of the girls also had a green dot next to their name within the Facebook Chat box, meaning they were also logged in and 'available' to chat. At times the girls would message me, or I would message them during these instances of shared availability; we had a number of conversations, mostly brief, and always unplanned. These conversations were simply the result of coincidentally being 'available' on Facebook Chat at the same time. The unscheduled, unplanned conversations proved valuable to my understanding of the girls, which is why I chose to make record of these conversations and include excerpts from these conversations as the final element to guide my understanding of girls' journey with Facebook, which starts about now:

Shortly before my first virtual chat took place with the girls, I created a Facebook group called 'Facebook Girls.' After observing the girls' profiles and capturing screenshots

for the entire first month of the study, I realized that we needed some sort of online space or portal to interact with each other outside of each others' profile page walls²². I initially envisioned the Facebook Girls group to be a place where we could set up meeting times for our virtual chats, as seen in the screenshot on the next page. This posting elicited over twenty comments²³ by the four girls and myself, and I came to realize just how challenging it would be to find times to chat that would suit all of our schedules. More importantly, these initial comments posted by the girls gave me a sense of their interactions with each other, their use and literacy of language online, and in many ways informed me about the frequency of their log-ins to Facebook and their willingness to comment. In *Figure 5*, for instance, Leila posted six comments, Nikki posted one comment, and Geneviève posted two comments (not shown). Irene posted a total of nine comments, informing everyone of her busy schedule and letting us know quite intricate details of her life for the coming week (also not shown).

²² The 'wall' on the profile page is the space that includes status updates and personalized posts generated by users, as well as other members' comments and responses.

²³ The screenshots taken during the research study were captured using either the "PrtScn" ('Printscreen') function on my Windows-based computer, and later using the "Grab" application for Mac OSX when I changed platforms.



Figure 5: Posting made to Facebook Girls wall

From the very early stages of our online interactions on Facebook, I was getting to know the girls and their behaviours. In my journal, I made a note that the girls used the word “busy” quite often to describe their days; in one of her comments to the thread in *Figure 5*, Leila had written the following: “I’m busy with either work or school every day that you’ve suggested but I’ll be available for whatever time you guys choose in the end though I don’t really have the time.” A number of the girls used terms such as “busy” and “not having time” incessantly throughout the course of our online interactions; this will be discussed further in the chapters to come. Besides being busy, meeting the girls virtually required a different set

of data collection tools and meeting times. For example, I used the Facebook Girls group to ‘create an event’ for our first virtual chat session, as seen in *Figure 6*. Two of the girls—Leila and Nikki—did not confirm their attendance to the event, even though I had asked Nikki to confirm her attendance via the Facebook Chat option (she was online at the same time I had posted the event, it was easier to ask her directly this way) and I had asked Leila to confirm her attendance by posting a comment to the event in *Figure 6*.

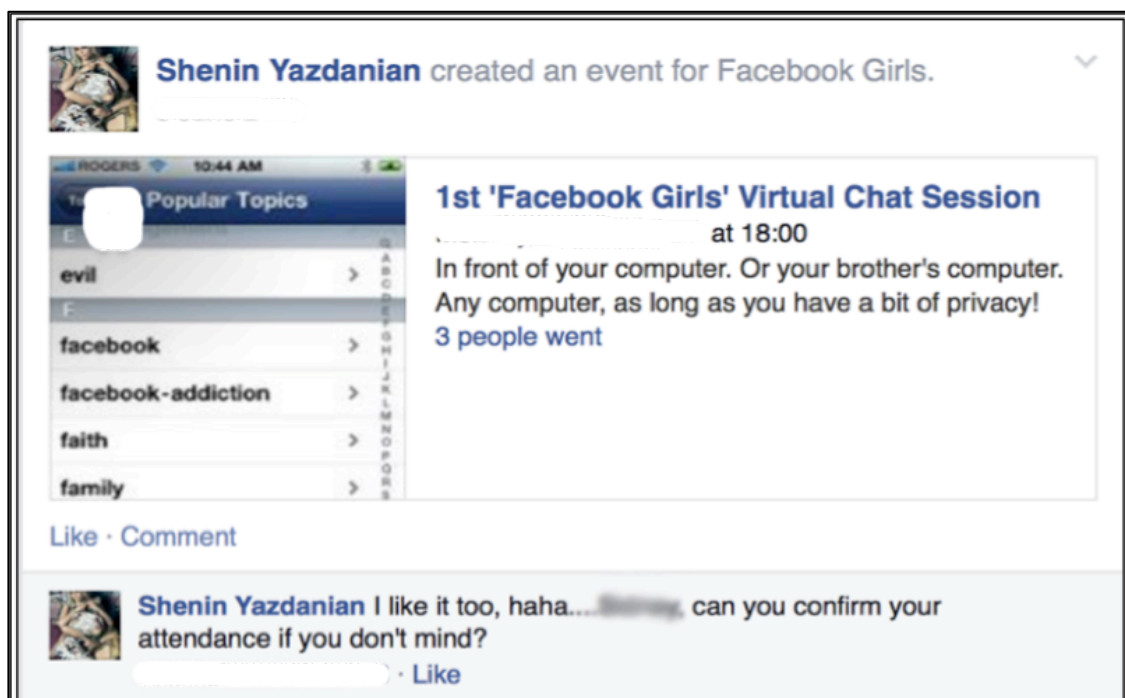


Figure 6: Screenshot of the event created for first virtual chat

Interestingly, the same day that I had posted the event, Irene had confirmed her attendance and she had also signalled a liking for the event by pressing the “Like” link, which is seen right next to the “Comment,” located above the thread comments (see *Figure 6*). The initial part of the comment I made in the thread attested to my own liking of the event, and I also injected a bit of humour (noted as “haha”) to keep the tone of the group friendly and light. The next day, however, I noticed that Irene had removed her “Like.” I

made a comment in my journal that none of the other girls had expressed a “Like” for the event, and that perhaps this was the reason why she decided to tone down her enthusiasm for the event. I had also envisioned the Facebook Girls group to be a place where we could have discussions and open-forum comment conversations about some of the images and representations the girls’ posted on their pages. I posted this message on the wall of the Facebook Girls group, as the very first message to welcome the girls to the group:

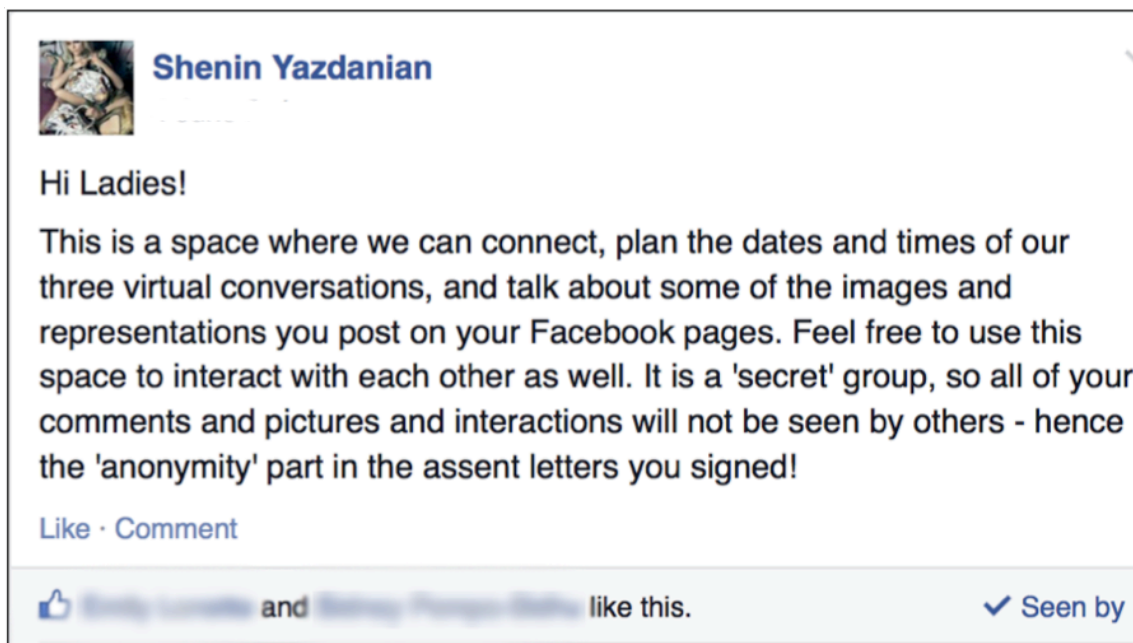


Figure 7: First posting to Facebook Girls group

After all of the girls had seen the message in *Figure 7*, two of them—Irene and Leila—decided to “Like” the posting. Neither “Like” was removed. From my observations being online at the same time as these two girls, I noticed that Irene had expressed her “Like” within minutes of Leila’s “Like.” I found this interesting because in the comment conversation in *Figure 5*, Irene had also expressed her “Like” for three of the comments that Leila had made in the thread of twenty comments. With regards to Irene’s removal of her “Like” per *Figure*


6, I had commented in my journal that I wondered if she would have kept her “Like” for the event if Leila had also expressed a “Like” for it as well.

From the observations above, one can already sense a pattern of peer-pressure, one where the girls are censoring themselves by observing each other’s move. Here, ‘Like’ is a check-move that requires other girls’ response, which can be ‘Like’ or silence. If it is the latter, as we saw above, a self-censor move is required. It is worth noting here that no comments were made on the posting seen in *Figure 7*, which emphasized that Facebook Girls was a safe and anonymous space where the girls could post whatever they liked. Throughout the course of my research, the girls only made comments in the Facebook Girls group when it came to meeting times. I had tried to initiate conversations and topics for discussion by posting what I imagined were thought-provoking images (see *Figure 8*) and interesting articles from popular media websites (see *Figure 9*). To avoid being seen staunchly as ‘the researcher’ by the girls within our Facebook Girls group, I chose not to ask the girls to comment on either posting in *Figure 8* or *Figure 9*. None of the girls took the initiative to make the first comment and so in the spirit of FPAR, I was not going to force it to happen. It seemed to me that the girls were hesitant, unwilling, or, in their words, “too busy” to make comments and start a discussion. I accepted this and started to ponder a different way to get them thinking and discussing important issues related to the research study.




Figure 8: Posting of an image to Facebook Girls group

I had posted *Figure 8* on the same day I had created the Facebook Girls group, and as such I did not expect much from the girls in terms of their comments on the image. I wanted to get them thinking about Facebook and about Facebook usage, and even about gender issues. While none of the girls commented, I knew that at least two of the girls—Nikki and Geneviève—had thought about this image, as both had referred to the image during our first virtual chat. This made me aware that *not* making comments on a certain posting did not necessarily reflect the girls’ interaction with the Facebook Girls’ group.

 **Shenin Yazdanian**

"Growing up watching nothing but reality television has encouraged a generation of exhibitionists."

Ladies....what are your thoughts on this quote? I read it on the blog below and was curious what you'd all think. The author is referring to your generation.



Social Network Reject: Facebook Code of Honor

I always try to contact the parent when a minor asks to be my "friend". If I e-mail a minor I always cc the parents so they know that I am contacting their kids.

SOCIALNETWORKREJECT.BLOGSPOT.COM

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [Share](#)

Figure 9: Posting of a media article to Facebook Girls group

A few days after our first virtual chat, I decided to post an article (blog) to the Facebook Girls group wall about the “Facebook Code of Honor.” I decided to post this for a number of reasons. First, it is a very short read and I figured the girls would find the time to read it. More importantly, however, the topics discussed in the blog resonated with a number of topics that came up in our first chat, such as unwritten rules of conduct in posting messages on Facebook and what kind of pictures are ‘okay’ to post (i.e., pictures of the girls drinking, even though some were underage). These and other issues will be discussed in the chapters to come; the purpose of bringing this up in this chapter is to make a point that ‘talking’ about these issues outside of the un/scheduled virtual chats and within the realm of the Facebook Girls group did not ever happen. Seeing that the girls were in their final month

of high school and very busy with finishing independent study units, final exams, applying to university, and getting ready for prom and graduation, I decided not to pursue further posts such as the ones in *Figure 8* and *Figure 9*. Up until the last day of our research study, the Facebook Girls group remained our online secret space to interact with each other, but the space was only used to come to a consensus for meeting times for the remainder of our scheduled virtual chats.

It was a few days before our first virtual chat that I started to get the sense that the Facebook Girls group would only be used to decide upon meeting times. While I kept hope that our secret group would become more of a discussion ground for issues that resulted as topics of conversation during our chats, I realized after the first chat that my intuitions were correct and that the girls' postings to the Facebook Girls group would be limited to deciding upon our virtual chat times only. Two days prior to our first virtual chat, that I posted a message to the Facebook Girls group asking the girls to check their emails. None of the girls posted comments to this message, nor had any of them expressed a "Like" for this posting—this hardly surprised me, based on their patterns of behaviour in the secret group so far.

I sent each of the girls a Microsoft Word document that included five screenshots that I had taken of their profiles during the weeks leading up to the first virtual chat. Below each screenshot, I asked a number of open-ended yet pointed questions. I realized from our interactions online that in order to develop a conversation with the girls that I had to be more forward with my approach to getting discussions going. While I was always cautious of being seen as "the researcher" throughout the duration of my study, it was at this moment that I realized that my invisibility in the virtual field site was not always working to my advantage. My intentions in posting *Figure 8* and *Figure 9* had been to entice the girls to

discuss what I had posted, as I had hinted towards in my posting in *Figure 7*. I realized that to talk with the girls about their virtual self-representations and the issues noted in my research questions (such as issues of normative femininity and the flow or real and virtual identities—see Chapter 4, section 4.4 – Research Questions), I had to be more direct with my approach to leading the conversation. Thus, I sent the girls their five screen shots each, with accompanying questions, and asked them to briefly respond to the questions and send the document back to me some time before noon on the day of our first chat. Seeing our chat would take place at 6pm that evening, I gave myself a six-hour window to look at their responses. Effectively, the process of having the participants look at a selection of their screenshots gave the girls the opportunity to review data I had collected; according to Hallett (2013), “member checking” of this nature has the potential of increasing a study’s validity and trustworthiness (p. 29). As well, Doyle (2007) and Duneier (1999) note that member checking is a particularly apt method of giving participants a voice in research processes that deal with invisible populations.

While it had crossed my mind that this may have been too much to ask the girls—seeing that I had not planned to do this from the inception of my study and thus it was not included in the criteria for the study (see Appendix A) or the consent forms (see Appendices C and D)—all of the girls responded with completed documents. My teacher-intuition had me anticipate that I would not get all responses by noon and I was correct; two of the girls sent their completed document between 2pm and 4pm, offering apologies infused with ‘being busy’ and ‘not having enough time.’

Figure 10, on the next page, shows an example from the document sent back to me by Irene, prior to our first virtual chat. As you can see, below the actual screenshot are my

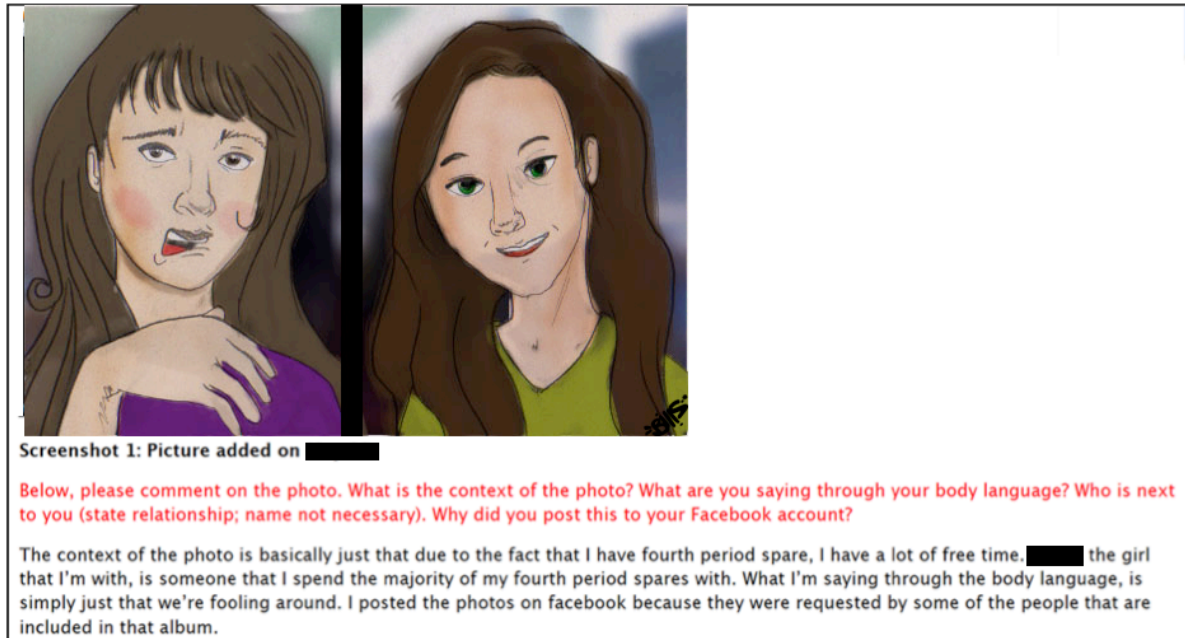


Figure 10: Example of screenshot sent prior to first virtual chat

questions (in red) and her comments below my questions. The screenshot in *Figure 10* shows an image of Irene, on the left, and a friend of hers—let’s call her Melanie—on the right. Irene is making a facial expression as well as a hand gesture that are not in line with her usual facial expressions or hand gestures that I had seen in other photos posted to her Facebook page. (Note: this screenshot is actually from a series of screenshots that will be discussed in Irene’s individual chapter, Chapter 8). As well, there are three comments that have been made, to the right of the picture (comments are not visible). The first comment, posted by Irene, reads: “We’re the cutest Melanie.” The second comment, posted by Melanie, reads: “...i guess we could call it cuteee.” The last comment is from another girl who seems to know both of the girls in the photo. She writes: “I cannot handle how attractive you are in this photo.” In the Microsoft Word document I sent to Irene, as seen in *Figure 10*, I asked her to comment on the photo and accompanying comment box, explain the context, let know what she is saying through her body language, inform me about the other girl in the

photo, and explain why she posted this picture to her account. Irene's response, which will be discussed later, answered most of my questions, and she let me know that she had posted the pictures at school during her spare because she had free time and did not want to do schoolwork, that the girl was a friend of hers, and that her body language is simply communicating that she's fooling around. She also relays that she posted the photo because her friends had requested her to do so.

During our first virtual conversation, I drew upon some of the 20 screenshots that I had sent the girls (I had sent them five apiece, totalling 20) prior to our chat. Together, we talked about some images more than others, as well as some of the photos that were not included in the 20 that I had sent to them. I found that getting the girls thinking about some of their photos and virtual self-representations prior to our first virtual chat enhanced the flow and direction of the chat. Seeing that the method worked for the first virtual chat, I chose to use this same method for the remainder of the chats. In the following chapters, the screenshots discussed by means of these various Microsoft Word documents I sent to the girls will contribute in large part to their individual narratives, as well as to the discussion in Chapter 10. This method of juxtaposing the image and text not only enabled me some interaction with the girls individually, but it also progressively gave me a better understanding of the girls. Talking about the images I presented the girls with in the Microsoft Word documents prior to our virtual chats sparked similar conversations about other images we discussed that were not included in these documents. Most importantly, this method of visual juxtaposition provided a structure to the conversations in terms of how the girls interacted within their social network on Facebook.

5.2. GETTING TO KNOW YOU, PART II: CLASS MEETING ETHNIC & CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

The four girls recruited for this research study were grade 12 students attending the same high school in a large metropolitan city in south-western Ontario, Canada. The school is part of an English-language public school board with a large immigrant population. According to the Fraser Institute's *Report Card on Ontario's Secondary Schools, 2013*, parents' average income for this school was reported as \$86,400, which makes the school low-to-middle class.

The four girls belonged to a diverse student population. As we shall see later in the narrative chapters, the screenshots show the four girls as *visibility* different shade-and-color-wise. Although elements of the girls' differences (and similarities) as based on their ethnic backgrounds and cultural inscriptions are certainly significant as well as discussed in each girl's chapter, these were but *elements* of emergent themes per the inductive process of data analysis. That is to say, I was guided not by my interest but by what the girls decided to talk about; and except for one incident, ethnic and cultural background was not a forefront issues. Put otherwise, while their differences by way of skin colour and cultural inscription are unquestionably relevant and revealing of their identities, these were not central issues during our conversations over the course of the research study. Nonetheless, their ethnic and cultural backgrounds will be taken up whenever possible in the "Final Thoughts" sections at the end of the girls' narrative chapters. For now, the following adds to the "thin description" (Geertz, 1973) of the girls, by way of introduction:

- Geneviève is of Iranian descent (mother and father) and enjoys participating in family and community cultural events;

- Leila’s mother is white and her father is Indian. During the summer of 2012, Leila’s father was remarried and she attended the wedding; Leila enjoyed dressing in full Indian costume for this event and had done the same for other events in the past. Although half Indian, Leila identified to greater extent with this aspect of her background;
- Irene did not want to discuss any aspects of her family, past or present; she made it clear during our first virtual chat that she was not open to discussing anything relating to her family or cultural background. However, from looking at her screenshots, it is but impossible not to notice that Irene is noticeably from Asian descent;
- Nikki is white and Jewish. She is the only of the four girls who spoke about religious affiliation, which is why it is included here. This topic came up after a discussion of a photograph that appeared on her timeline in which she appeared side-by-side her brother at his bar mitzvah.

5.3 SMUDGED SUBJECTIVITIES AND (SOCIAL) FICTION AS ARTS-BASED RESEARCH PRACTICE

Building upon the measures of anonymity within an “ethic of respect” detailed at the end of the previous chapter (section 4.7.1), the discussion here elaborates upon the difficulties of writing and representing corporeality and subjectivity in academic research. Techniques of blurring were initially considered to distort the faces and bodies of the participants within the original screenshots, to render participants unrecognizable and thus allow me to use these screenshots within my thesis—or so I had thought early on in my research process (see Appendices C and D). As it turned out, techniques of blurring the faces and bodies of participants were *not* sufficient to maintain an “ethic of respect” and integrity within this research; the girls were still recognizable. On the flip side, too much blurring

rendered the images of the girls as nothing more than a sunset of faded colours, breaking down the implicit contracts between narrative text and visual imagery, and in turn between author and reader. In large part, these are the reasons that prompted the fictionalization of screenshot images.

As noted in section 4.5, the names of participants in this thesis appear as pseudonyms. However, and as we will see starting in the next chapter, the participants' real names have not been erased from the screenshot frames; instead, these names have been blurred to the point of unreadability. As such, using this technique of blurring has not erased the participants' identities and inadvertently depicted them as mere objects of study. The blurry and unreadable names of the participants appear as poetic markers of their subjective existences. Moreover, these smudged subjectivities respond to—but do not negate—Barnard's (2006) contention that one of the pitfalls of participant representation in ethnographic research is that "*their* subjectivity can never match the authority of the writing subject" (p. 97, emphasis added). While this may be true when it comes to participant names, it is through arts-based research (ABR) practice that this does necessarily hold for the displays of their bodies.

After facing the ethical dilemma of protecting participants' anonymity and deciding not to include the original (blurred) screenshots in the girls' narrative chapters, a graphic artist was commissioned to create fictional representations of the girls' bodily displays on Facebook. A graphic artist with experience in drawing science fiction characters was a prerequisite of selection, as it was important for the images to appear life-like yet still slightly abstract. This was a personal choice, of course, but the prerequisite of artist selection was based on the abstract image that sparked my interest in visual depictions of the female

body: Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (see *Figure 2*, p. 80). The commissioned graphic artist specializes in illustrating science fiction characters, although his influence of Manga, particularly in the style of Japanese illustrator Katsuya Terada, also comes through in his illustrations.

Adapting the tenets of creative illustration through fictionalization as part of the methodology of this thesis is, one may argue, is a practice of what Barone and Eisner (2006) call "arts-based research," or ABR. According to Barone and Eisner, ABR is "meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities," as well as include certain aesthetic qualities that "infuse the inquiry process and the research 'text'" (p. 95). It is here where "releasing the imagination" (Greene, 1995) is most useful, and where Anderson's (1983/2006) influential work on the role of the imagination in the construction of communities in his book *Imagined Communities* is most insightful.

As Anderson puts it: "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (p. 15). In the next four chapters, it is through the style of *fiction* that readers of this thesis are granted entry into viewing what is otherwise inaccessible, allowing them, as Leavy (2013) relays, "to access imaginary or possible worlds, to reexamine the worlds we live in, and to enter into the psychological processes that motivate people and the social worlds that shape them" (p. 20). Leavy, a feminist sociologist who turned to (social) fiction as a form of qualitative research, uses fiction as a method to purport the goals of social science research (hence "social" fiction). For Leavy (2012), "Fiction is able to 'get at' and express complex layers of meaning without closing off the interpretive process in an authoritative manner" (p. 255). Within my feminist methodology that draws from FPAR, using fiction as ABR practice is in line with

my denouncing of interpretive mastery as ‘the knowing researcher’ who can theorize others’ lives.

As well, although I maintain an analytical and academic *writing* style in the upcoming chapters, it is the fictionalized style of the *images* of the girls, as we see below, that present new ways of representing, analyzing, and interpreting data in qualitative educational research. According to this style, the reader also has responsibility in deciding how to interpret my speculations of what appear as fictional representations of the bodily displays of the female adolescents on Facebook.



*The participants standing outside of their school, from left to right:
Irene, Leila, Nikki, and Geneviève*

Chapter 6

Geneviève:

(In)visible consumption and the reading of the green icon

I'm glad that not all the pictures on my page are liked. Liking is a popularity contest and I hate playing games. I "like" when people on Facebook leave me alone and I wish there was a button for that!

--Geneviève

This chapter introduces the ‘key informant’ of my study, Geneviève, whose assent into participation facilitated the snowball effect of my recruitment method as detailed in Chapter 4. When I had first started communicating with Geneviève online for this research study, she was 17 years old. However, I had first met Geneviève when I was a young teenager (and she, a child) at a Norooz (Persian New Year) event that brought both of our families together. Given our extensive age difference, my interactions with Geneviève had always been extremely limited. I continued to see Geneviève infrequently at cultural or family-related events over the years, particularly during special occasions such as weddings that took place in our families or at cultural events. Our occasional run-ins at these events were insignificant throughout this period of time. Interactions were always steeped in politeness and, to my recollection, the majority of our conversations were extremely short—mostly asking and answering the question, “How are you?” Although Geneviève was part of my broader social network in Ontario, I always only considered her as a family friend. However, upon reflection of this period of time, I suppose I did see Geneviève grow up and flourish into a beautiful, composed, articulate adolescent.

A few years after Facebook exploded and the search for “Facebook friends” became commonplace—Geneviève added me as a ‘Facebook friend’ to her profile. I accepted her request, though I did not consider her a ‘friend’ within my personal social network. From this point onwards, until the commencement of my research recruitment, I had only ever acknowledged our virtual ‘friendship’ by extending her annual birthday wishes, prompted by the ‘birthday reminder’ mechanism inherent to the Facebook platform. Geneviève always extended the same wishes on my birthday. Until the time of my participant recruitment and Geneviève’s expressed desire to participate in my research, this was the extent of our virtual interaction.

Geneviève’s response to my call for participants was fuelled with apprehension and questions. While she seemed open-minded and willing to participate from the very start, she also expressed reservations of her potential participation, noting a vacation in the later part of the summer that she felt would hinder her participation in the study. She wasn’t sure if she would be able to continue her daily participation on Facebook during her vacation, and expressed her concerns because daily participation in Facebook was one of the criteria included in my call for participants (see Appendix A). Early at the recruitment stage, Geneviève also challenged the guiding principle of the study, not understanding how the monitoring of her daily Facebook activity could say anything about her identity. The following is taken from our online correspondence on Facebook Chat on the same day she had replied to my initial call for participants:

Geneviève: Dear Shenin, I would be very happy to participate in your research study especially since I am considering applying to University of Ottawa next year. And I fit the criteria you listed. I do use Facebook daily and have it connected to my phone, and yes I have a group of friends that I interact with almost everyday on Facebook but I have

male friends in this group too and I feel they are important. I also don't understand how me being on Facebook is related to identity at all because everyone is on Facebook these days.

Shenin: Hi Geneviève, Thank you so much for your response to my message. You do fit the criteria of my study and I would be happy to get to know you and your group of friends more, for the purposes of this research. With regards to your male friends: I imagine your interaction with them is crucial to your daily participation on Facebook, but the focus of this research is on female adolescent identity, and as such, I am particularly keen on interacting with you and three or four of your close female friends with whom you interact with on Facebook on an almost-daily basis. This is not to say that your male friends, or men as a 'category' are unimportant in any way. Through our virtual conversations, you will be able to talk about your male friends, and I hypothesize that many of them will be integral to the study in some way. In terms of how Facebook is related to identity, and female adolescent identity specifically, this is exactly what I am trying to explore ☺ It will be a process of discovery for the both of us and who ever else participates. Let me know if you are still interested in participating.

Geneviève: Hi Shenin. It sounds very interesting and I am happy to participate. Thank you!

This brief initial 'conversation' over Facebook Chat with Geneviève was not particularly in-depth, but she did raise some issues that connected with the themes I developed later in my work. In part seeing the utility of the study, subsequent conversations I had with Geneviève over Facebook Chat and emails lessened her anxieties about participating and she seemed eager to help me get her close female friends involved in the project. Geneviève's comment about the importance of her male friends within her social network brought back the looming discourse that is absent in this study yet extremely present: that of the determining male gaze. In her in-passing comment, Geneviève made me realize that not only maleness has become an alterity in my research, but that male gaze is a crucial aspect of spectatorship within my virtual field site, of which I should not lose sight. Here, the dynamic of gaze is understood per Foucault's (1977a) metaphor of

the ‘panopticon,’ a penal building of surveillance “to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p. 201). Foucault writes in the context of prisons and discipline, yet, his metaphor is highly applicable to cultural and sociological studies of the body. As Duncan (1994) suggests, “The panoptic gaze is enstructured into many forms of media—magazines, film, newspapers, television, books, radio—and functions on many levels—textual, institutional, psychic” (p. 51). Channeling Berger (1972) and Spitzack (1990), Duncan (1994) notes:

The gaze is not only a visual act, it is an economy of surveillance that operates on many levels and via many forms of media. Women in contemporary Western culture are socialized to regard themselves through the (masculine) eyes of others, to train their evaluative gaze on themselves so that they are both spectator and spectacle. (p. 50)

What this means is that the notion of gaze, in the context of my research study, is (at least) twofold: (1) The gaze of the male friends within the girls’ online social network, here regarded as a doubled invisibility due to the nature of the virtual field site as well as the invisible social forces of patriarchy per panopticism; and (2) the gaze of the females upon themselves and their virtual speech acts, including the imaging, creating, editing and transforming of their bodies as a function of ‘being’ for others.

Despite the absent presence of male friends directly participating in the study, Geneviève’s sense of eagerness developed over the four months, and at the end of our second virtual chat with the other three girls who eventually came on board, she made this comment:

Geneviève: I truly look forward to our next conversation. I don't usually have the chance to talk about these sorts of issues with my friends or anyone in my life, really. A lot of this stuff seems so common sense, but a lot of it isn't common sense. Before this study, I never thought about why I do certain things on Facebook. I just do them. Everyone is on Facebook these days and everyone posts pictures and shares jokes and personal things. I just never really thought about why I do what I do, or why my friends or peers do what they do. We just do these things. It's like going to school. You just go, you don't think about going or why your going.

However, as Geneviève became more comfortable with her online participation, our conversation moved into talking about the photographs and pictures she viewed on Facebook, including those she perused on her friends' walls as well as those that appeared on her own wall. Her prevalent tendency to be critical in her online comments and postings was noticeable from the very start of monitoring her online activities, especially her representation and image consumption.

Because “Facebook is NOT the place to share it”!

Over the course of the study, interesting to note, Geneviève was not avidly posting pictures of herself and her friends every day. Instead, her visible “daily” Facebook activity (as she put it) consisted mostly of her commenting on other peoples' photographs, especially those in which she had been “tagged²⁴.” Early in the study, there were three consecutive days when I documented no visible activity on Geneviève's Facebook page. Her friends had tagged her in four photographs over the three days but she had not commented on these posts that appeared on her timeline. On the fourth day of no visible activity, I became slightly concerned, thinking she had stopped her regular activity on Facebook. I logged into

²⁴ Facebook Help describes “tagging” as such: When you tag someone, you create a link to their profile. The post you tag the person in may also be added to that person's timeline. For example, you can tag a photo to show who's in the photo or post a status update and say who you're with. <https://www.facebook.com/help/>.

Facebook around 6pm that evening, noticing a green icon next to her name in the Facebook Chat box. This indicated to me that she was online and available to chat. I spent approximately five minutes looking at her profile and profiles of the other girls and their friends, to see if there were any signs of visible activity. Everything seemed to remain the same, so I initiated a conversation in Facebook Chat by simply saying “Hi Geneviève.” After about five minutes, she responded, and the conversation flowed as follows:

Geneviève: Hey Shenin!

Shenin: Hey, how’s it going?

Geneviève: Good, just chatting with one of my friends.

Shenin: Oh I see, well I don’t want to interrupt. Just wanted to see how things were going because I haven’t noticed much activity here from you lately.

Geneviève: Well I am logging in everyday and chatting with my friends here like I usually do.

Shenin: I noticed from your profile that your friends have been tagging you in pictures recently.

Geneviève: Yeah, I wish they wouldn’t do that so much. I don’t always feel like commenting.

The delay in her last message let me know that she had likely re-engaged in the conversation with her friend. I didn’t pursue the conversation because I realized from the short interaction that Geneviève’s daily activity on Facebook did not always include elements of a *visible* online presence. She had certainly viewed the photographs and comments that others had made but simply chose not to acknowledge this on her timeline. Over the next three months, there were other short periods of time when I also documented no visible activity. However, I was not concerned during these times of invisible engagement in the study, especially since I saw her green icon at times during these periods as well,

sometimes lit for the full two to three hours of my daily observance of the girls' profiles. Based on my observations, this meant that she was online viewing others' images and profiles, or chatting with friends, or engaging in other online activities while she was still logged in to Facebook.

During our first virtual chat, Geneviève's selectivity of what to post and share became obvious, expressing a level of maturity and agency. For example, one of the research participants, Leila, observed that Geneviève takes a lot of pictures at school and social events but posts few to her Facebook account. "It's so repetitive," said Geneviève. "Like what's the point? Everyone else is so eager to get the pictures out there first. Some pictures don't even belong on Facebook." Her comments clearly allude to the fact that she spends a lot of time on Facebook looking at photographs, pictures and comments posted by others in her social network. That she recognizes some of these images as "not belonging" on Facebook indicates a level of criticality and maturity in what she was viewing online. Taken together, Geneviève's tendency to shy away from confessional and diaristic postings along with her general lack of posting pictures online signal an acute sense of self-awareness regarding her online presence and consumption habits. This speaks to her maturity of her consumption of online material as well her maturity relative to peers in her age group. The notion of maturity will be discussed at the end of this chapter as well as in Chapter 10, where I will compare and contrast the individual cases of the four girls.

For now, however, there is one case that is worthy of immediate discussion as it illuminates Geneviève's self-awareness, her online presence and her pattern of consumption. It happened during our second virtual conversation. While we were discussing the very acts

of viewing and creating online material—what I referred to in the conversation as ‘consuming’ and ‘producing,’ respectively—she exclaimed:

Geneviève: I know I consume much more than I produce. If, as you [Shenin] say, looking at others profiles is an act of consumption, then I definitely consume waaaay more than I produce. Sometimes I spend hours looking at others profiles but I’ll produce nothing, I won’t even comment on anything. Consuming is definitely time consuming! Producing is sometimes more difficult, if you want it to be meaningful.

Clearly, Geneviève’s self-awareness is heightened by virtue of becoming aware of her online presence and pattern of consumption. That is, by my asking her to ‘look at others profiles as an act of consumption,’ Geneviève is becoming more mindful and more aware of her consumption of online content on Facebook. Put otherwise, she had not before consciously thought about viewing other peoples’ profiles as an act of consumption; and in recognizing this, she is able to make introspective conclusions about her consumption as well as production tendencies online. Her introspective conclusion is, “I definitely consume waaaay more than I produce.” For Geneviève, consuming takes a lot time and production, that is posting, has to be meaningful. Otherwise, as she put it, it does not belong on Facebook. Expressing a sense of agency, there is a noted level of maturity in terms of what to produce and what to consume.

Another example might explain further Geneviève’s level of maturity in terms of being mindful in consuming and producing images on Facebook. Taken during the final month of our study, three days after our third scheduled chat, the screenshot on the next page depicts a posting made by Geneviève that sparked an exchange among her Facebook friends. They are talking about an image. Apparently, Geneviève had seen an image on one of her female friends’ profile pages outside of her close social network. She subsequently relayed to

me in a message over Facebook Chat that the picture was of a starving dog. I was not able to view the image of the dog, as her friend's privacy settings did not allow me access.

Geneviève claimed the picture spoke to her (or in her words, "made me sick") but that she was wary of simply consuming the image and moving on with her daily surveillance and consumption of other peoples' profiles and comments. As we see from her posting below, she was pushing her friends to think about why the post what they post.

Geneviève expressed her distain of the photo, claiming it was an inappropriate image to post on Facebook altogether. In other words, for Geneviève, people have to choose their Facebook postings carefully and with purpose. From my observation, this was one of the most powerful and most thoughtful posts that Geneviève had made throughout the course of the research study. Her posting stirred up quite a discussion among those in her social network, collecting 31 "Likes," including one each from Irene, Leila, Nikki and myself. The posting garnered 16 comments in total, which will be discussed instead of displayed (screenshot was cropped).



Geneviève neither Liked nor commented on her posting. Most comments were thoughtful, including a comment that provided a link to the Toronto Humane Society website (<http://www.torontohumanesociety.com>). By clicking on the name of the person who made this comment, I was directed to the user's profile, a female friend attending the same school as the four girls. Interesting to note here is that this friend's comment did not include any of her own words; her communication was fully assembled in an alternate mode of expression, specifically, of posting a link to a website for other Facebook users to click. This communicative event did not overtly signify that this friend was taking a certain 'side' to Geneviève's original posting. However, it is common to read such acts as either 'in favour' (in 'Like') or 'not in favour' of the original posting, and so I made the assumption that this friend agreed with Geneviève stance.

Not everyone liked Geneviève's framing of things. Always within the context of the image, a 'mocking' comment, interestingly enough, was made by a male friend connected only to Geneviève. His response was a YouTube clip of a fifteen-second "slow clap" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAryFIuRxmQ>). His relationship to Geneviève was unclear from looking at his profile because his privacy settings did not allow me extensive access to his profile. In my anecdotal notes that evening, I wrote down that I had laughed after viewing the clip: for me, it was funny to see a group of men performing a 'slow clap' with such sincerity and seriousness. However, my laughter was not so much because the clip itself was funny; I found this humorous simply because such a posting within my *own* group of Facebook friends would immediately be noted as an act of immaturity and as unwelcomed, useless commentary. Of course, I recognize that the clip itself is intentionally comedic. However, something seemed off with the way this male friend used the clip to

communicate his opinion about Geneviève’s original posting. Seeing how a “slow clap” in real life usually signifies mocking dislike or disapproval of the performer, the person performing the slow clap may be enticing the other performer to leave the stage. While I am not sure if this male friend posted the slow clap as a way of insulting or silencing Geneviève—or simply to be facetious—nobody Liked his response or chose to leave a comment. When asked about this male friend’s posting, all Geneviève had to say was: “He’s a goof.”

Overall, Geneviève’s approach to consumption appeared to be thoughtful, mindful and calculated. She was admittedly on Facebook every day, yet she often left no visible trace of her presence. She viewed numerous images but only ever commented on ones that she deemed important. She also demonstrated an awareness of what was ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ to post on Facebook; she even went so far as to broadcast to her entire social network that sometimes “Facebook is NOT the place to share” certain things, as we have seen in the previous captured screenshot. Interestingly, the absent presence in this study—notably, her male friends—also surfaced in this screenshot, with one male friend indicating a level of immaturity in comparison to the females in Geneviève’s social network. His posting of a “slow clap” YouTube link, though unacknowledged by all, is highly significant here to understand the interplay of gender differences within an adolescent social network site.

“I know you, craving attention...”

The absence of Likes in the above scenario of Geneviève and her male friend’s posting of a “slow clap” YouTube clip contributed to my overall observed pattern of peer-pressure and censorship, as discussed briefly in Chapter 5. There were numerous instances

throughout the duration of this study where Geneviève and her friends seemed to constantly observe the presence and absence of Likes within each other's pages. Additional comments to the above screenshot suggested that Geneviève had only posted her opinion on the topic so that others would Like the posting. As one of her female friends wrote in the comments section: "From what I see, most of the people who do that [post contentious issues] are doing it for attention and aren't actually passionate about anything except getting likes/comments haha." A similar comment, made by a male friend who posted frequently on Geneviève's timeline throughout the course of the study, reads: "You're just doing this for the likes, [Geneviève]. I know you, craving attention...Jeeze."

In both of these comments, Geneviève's friends explicitly mention the need of gaining attention through Likes. However, both comments implied that this was *not* the reason why Geneviève had posted her opinions on the topic. The first comment states that *most* people post about contentious issues for attention but few do it out of genuine passion for a subject or topic. Geneviève, it seemed, at least for this female student, was not included within that group of *most* people. The second comment was made by Matt, a fellow classmate who Geneviève described in our second virtual chat as "one of my best friends from school." Matt held something of a permanent presence in Geneviève's profile page, frequently making comments, tagging her in photographs, or appearing on her page as tagged. It was clear to me based on my observations of their Facebook friendship that his comment was sarcastic and written in jest.

Over the course of the study, I came to realize that Geneviève was extremely thoughtful and reflective by nature. She did not cry out for attention or post photographs and images as a means to gain popularity among her peers in her social network. When she did choose to post a photograph, the photographs always displayed happy moments with her friends. An example of this is seen in the screenshot on this page, posted



by Geneviève. On this day, Geneviève posted a series of nineteen 50s-themed pictures that appeared on her wall as Polaroid snapshots (see strip of images on next page). Upon seeing this series of photos on her page, I assumed she used a photo editing software (such as Polaroid Fotobar) to have her photos appear this way. However, during the first virtual chat I asked her about this series of images and she let me know that she had taken actual Polaroid pictures during a party, captioned the pictures with a blue Sharpie pen, scanned them, and then uploaded them to Facebook. During our first virtual chat she let me know that Polaroid pictures, to her, have always seemed “more authentic than regular pictures.”

On Facebook, Geneviève captioned the photograph as follows: “Such a great night. There will only be more to come ♥,” and tagged Leila, who is standing next to her. This post gathered 15 Likes from various family and friends, including Leila, Irene, Nikki, and Matt. By this point in the study I had already recognized the strong friendship bonds between Geneviève and Leila. In fact, during our collaborative snowball referral process of recruitment, Geneviève had identified Leila as her “best friend.” Seeing that all of the photos in this Polaroid series included the two girls, this point was only reinforced—especially since these 19 were the only photos Geneviève posted to her own profile during the second month of the study.

In the Facebook caption, Geneviève’s use of the “♥” symbol transcends the “Like” to signify a deeper appreciation and affection. While it is somewhat common for Facebook users to Like the photos and comments they post on their own Facebook walls, Geneviève never Liked any of her own posts. Instead, she used the ♥ symbol in her captions to express feelings of love, joy and excitement. In the comments below the caption, Leila wrote: “SO EXCITED! This is mad cute...Love you.” Based on this comment, it was clear that the feeling of love was mutual between the two girls. However, even without Leila’s comment, this mutual feeling is readable based on the girls’ bodily displays in the photograph; the girls’ bodies are overlapped and tilted towards each other, heads almost touching. The girls appear to be very comfortable standing so closely to each other, and their smiles are wide and bright.

This was one of the images I sent to Geneviève in the Microsoft Word document she commented upon prior to our first virtual chat. I found the image to be significant because she used this as her profile picture for a period of two weeks during the study. I called

attention to this image during our first virtual chat, and I had all the girls open another tab in their browsers and log in to Facebook to view this specific image posted by Geneviève on her profile page. Geneviève's response made me smile during the chat. She simply wrote "♥♥♥" in the chat box after all the girls confirmed that they were looking at the photo. A few seconds later, on the next line in the chat box, she wrote: "We are cute, aren't we [Leila]?" Then she got a bit more serious:

Geneviève: I see a lot of pictures like this one Facebook. The "best friends" picture. But I have posted this picture myself. And I didn't do it because I want to appear pretty to others or because I wanted other people to like it. What matters is that *I* like it. When I look at this picture, I smile. It represents our friendship – a closeness formed on the bonds we have developed through high school. We really are that close in real life.

There seemed to be a lot of truth to her last statement. Another image of Geneviève (not shown) appeared on her timeline towards the end of the third month of the study. Again she is standing next to Leila, who posted the image and tagged Geneviève. Leila also tagged Matt, who is in the background holding up a mobile phone. In the image, the girls' bodily stances are not as connected, but their bodies are still touching. The three friends appear to be at a party, eyes slightly glazed over and hair out of place from what seems to be lively dancing. Geneviève is wearing a revealing tank top, yet she holds her arms to cover her chest, perhaps aware of the revealing nature of her garment. Again she is seen smiling, but what she is communicating through her body here is different than in the previous photograph.

Whereas in the "Take 1 – 50s" picture (see p. 180) Geneviève was prepared for the snapshot, in the described photograph with Leila and Matt she appears off guard. Leila's

caption of the photograph exclaims: “Goooffssss,” which brings to the posting a certain acceptance in being caught off guard and not looking ‘camera ready,’ as in the previous picture. Interestingly, far fewer friends expressed a “Like” for this picture. In fact, only four people Liked the image, one of whom was Geneviève. In my anecdotal journal entry, I wrote down that perhaps one of the reasons why Geneviève decided to Like the image is because few others had.



There were numerous other postings on Geneviève’s wall where she appeared to be posing for photographs. For instance, in another photograph (not displayed), Geneviève is seen in the driver’s seat of a car next to Matt. It was posted by one of Geneviève’s female friends attending the same school, who captioned the image: “Beware. [Geneviève] is on the roads!” Geneviève is clearly aware of the photographer’s presence and looks directly at the camera, smiling like usual. Without fail, the pictures displayed of Geneviève posing ‘camera ready’ always gathered more Likes than in pictures where she was either caught off guard or purposely posing in a humorous or ‘unpretty’ way. The photograph of Geneviève posing in the car gathered 10 Likes, and five comments were made. Geneviève neither Liked the image nor did she choose to leave a comment.

The image of Geneviève below appeared on her Facebook timeline during the last month of the study; Leila tagged her in the photograph. As always, Geneviève looks happy and seems as if she may even be on the verge of laughter. Along with the look of apprehension in her eyes and her open mouth (which is unfortunately not visible to the reader of this thesis), the combination of expressions indicates a sense of fake or pretend fear. While she does not look scared, she does look slightly scary. In fact, after I took the screenshot and saved it to my hard drive, I even named the file “ScaryPic.png.” Only one person Liked the image—a male friend who attended the same school as Geneviève; from the looks of his profile, he seemed to be in the same grade as well. The only person that commented on this posting was Matt (comment has been cropped). In his usual sarcastic tone, he commented that Genevieve looked “soooo pretty!” in the photograph.



During my fourth virtual chat with the girls, I had the girls look at this photograph on Geneviève’s page. I asked them why they thought the posting only gathered one Like. Geneviève offered a provocative response:

Geneviève: I'm glad that not all the pictures on my page are liked. Liking is a popularity contest and I hate playing games. I "like" when people on Facebook leave me alone and I wish there was a button for that! And usually people only like photographs if you look good or something interesting's going on. Look at me here lololol, trying to escape pretzels from [Leila]!! I like my Facebook to be more personal with just my close friends.

That Geneviève's comment included a preference for others to "leave me alone" is a contention that the act of *not* Liking—an implicit event of silence—is a meaningful event in itself. Her comment also joined another contention she expressed during our second virtual chat. At one point during this chat she discussed her role as Elected Ambassador on student council and how she felt the need to manage her Facebook for the sake of her image. "I prefer communicating in person rather than online. At school I need people to know who I am in real life, not just the person they see online." Revisiting this part of our second virtual chat made me think that one of the reasons why Geneviève didn't care much for Likes on Facebook is because her active social life at school as well as her self-described preference for communicating in person were simply more important.

Another reason I found this comment intriguing is because Geneviève was distinguishing her presence at school from her online presence on Facebook; she had an *awareness* of her Facebook presence and how her online presence intersected with her in-person presence. I asked her to expand on her comment about preferring to communicate in person rather than online: "I see my friends at school and my other friends posting pictures online and usually it's to make themselves look good. I care about that too but not as much as in person." Considering that Geneviève had 362 Facebook—many of whom were easily identifiable as attending the same high school—I could understand her desire to manage her image. However, there was one particular event where Geneviève seemed to care just a little

bit more about looking good in her pictures appearing on Facebook: the prom, which will be discussed in the next section. Overall, as we have seen in this section, the act of pressing the Like button is a crucial signifier to express to others the following: (1) that the consumer of the images ‘approves’ of what he or she has seen, which also indicates that she or he is actively checking out the profiles of those tagged in the photograph; (2) that the consumer of the image has probably Liked the image because it is visually appealing and follows the trends of other Liked pictures he or she has seen online; and (3) that those tagged within the Liked picture have a validated online presence and are receiving due ‘attention’ from their



friends within their social network. That Geneviève prefers for others *not* to like her images and to “leave me alone” confirms that she does not need elements of her Facebook profile to be Liked in order to kindle her online—or even offline—presence.

“Camwhoring” A.K.A. Prom

About a month after the commencement of the research study, Geneviève attended a social masquerade of colourful gowns and ill-fitting tuxes, the teen rite-of-passage known as prom. In the photograph on this page we see Geneviève posing for a picture at a pre-prom party that took place in the backyard of her home. Once again, Leila tagged Geneviève in the picture, which is how it appeared on Geneviève’s timeline.

Geneviève is wearing a beautiful off-the-shoulder turquoise Greco-Roman style gown, radiating happiness through the glory of her smile. With regards to her choice of dress, this is what Geneviève had to say during our first virtual chat:

Geneviève: I'd love to say I had some sort of personal reason behind my dress-choice for prom, but my gay best friend Matt had sent me the photo of the dress when I was looking for dresses and the date for prom was fast approaching. Same thing with the hair – he basically co-ordinated my outfit himself (he had even picked out the earrings for me on a shopping date we went on months before).

To me, the photograph represents Geneviève's natural disposition; during my interaction with her and in observing her various interactions with the other girls, Geneviève always came off as extremely happy. In the photo, she performs her typical 'pretty' pose, with her left hand positioned on her hip, creating strong lines with the inflection of a pointed elbow. The body-hugging nature of the dress skims her curves but tastefully accentuates them. According to Geneviève during our second virtual chat: "It took only a few hours of getting ready – some of the other girls I talked to started getting ready hours before prom!" Choice of dress aside, I had learned something else from this tidbit of conversation: That Matt was gay. It was interesting to read Geneviève's description of Matt as "my gay best friend." Geneviève also let us know during our second virtual conversation that she was fully aware that the picture may end up on Facebook:

Geneviève: Whenever a picture is taken, like at an event, or at school, or anywhere, everyone knows that the chances that it will end up on Facebook are very high. Because there are automatic ways to post these pictures on Facebook, or Twitter, or Instagram or whatever."



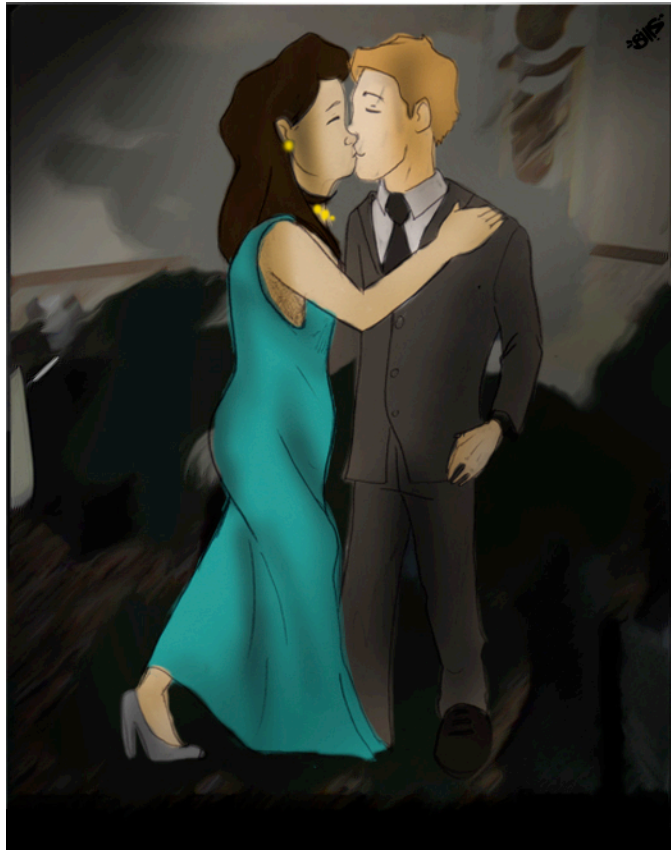
As already discussed, for Geneviève, looking ‘pretty’ is important, but it is not the most important thing. The screenshot on this page displays a posting made by Leila after the image of Geneviève in her prom dress appeared on Geneviève’s profile. This posting reads: “Cutttayyy camwhoring on mah phone #loveher.” Two female friends commented on the photo (comments are not shown), exclaiming “BEAUTY!” and “cuuuuuuuuuuuute ☺” respectively. While I could guess the meaning of “camwhoring,” I checked in with the girls about the meaning of this slang during the same virtual chat. Geneviève took this word to mean that she was “put[ting] on a show for the camera, but know[ing] the pictures will end up on Facebook.” Prom was one of the few instances during the study that Geneviève participated in bodily displays of “camwhoring.” While she did not post any prom pictures to her own account, she was tagged in many.



The photograph on this page displays another instance of camwhoring. This image received 48 Likes—the most number of Likes of all the prom pictures I had seen on Facebook. Many of the pictures in which Geneviève was tagged appeared similar to this one; what made this one stand out—apart from the perfect smiles, flattering poses and beautiful dresses—is the backdrop of rock assemblage. The colour and texture of the backdrop is in perfect contrast to the rest of the image, juxtaposing a raw earthiness to the delicacy of refinement. For me, this picture presents an impeccable display of calculated femininity through the use of fashion and facial makeup. I read it as the ultimate expression of camwhoring. I asked Geneviève to comment on the photo and this was her response:

Geneviève: I can't say there's anything we're trying to say with our poses, it's just a way to make us all look nice in a photo I guess? It's just one of those poses girls do when they want to look nice – makes your arms look more toned, you're showing yourself off at a flattering angle (the side, mind you that's if you have a good body). It's one of those things girls don't really think about, we've just learned how to pose and you turn it on when you have to.

Of course, no act of camwhoring is complete without “that *one* picture” with your prom date (as Geneviève put it, emphasis added), hence the photograph on the right. It expresses a shock from my part and solidifies the patterns of production/consumption in Geneviève. The photograph shows Geneviève with her boyfriend Robert, though



neither had posted the picture to Facebook. A mutual friend from the same school, who also attended prom, posted this picture and tagged both Geneviève and Robert. When I first saw this photo on Geneviève's timeline, I was taken by surprise. First of all, her boyfriend did not have a strong presence on her Facebook page. His name had certainly surfaced during the course of my daily observations up until prom, but I failed to make the connection that he was her boyfriend. I had thought he was a close friend, like Matt. (In fact, up until the discussion of prom pictures, I had thought that Matt might have been Geneviève's

boyfriend.) Geneviève and Robert did not engage in affectionate online behaviour such as the use of the ♥ symbol on each other's pages or even affectionate words.

Four days prior to prom, I was chatting privately with Geneviève over Facebook Chat when we happened to be online at the same time. The topic of relationships came up and I asked Geneviève if she had a boyfriend. Her reply was: "I'm not sure." I asked her a few more questions but she did not want to pursue this line of conversation. I assumed her relationship status was complicated and so I changed the topic of discussion. Although Facebook gives its users the ability to insert a relationship status on their profile for others to see, Geneviève's profile did not include a status. There was also no mention of a relationship on her timeline made by friends or relatives. When the topic of relationships came up in our third virtual chat, she let the group know that she feels relationships are a "personal matter" and she "doesn't feel the need to share this information with the rest of the world." Even during the first virtual chat when we talked about prom and prom dates, Geneviève was extremely reserved in her conversation about her boyfriend. For most of this chat session, she was completely unwilling to talk about him.

The photograph of the two kissing happened to be one of the images included in the Microsoft Word document I sent to Geneviève prior to our second virtual chat. It was her written feedback about this image that allowed me to understand her relationship and why she chose to leave it on her timeline instead of removing it by untagging her name. Had this image not been in the Microsoft Word document, I would not have learned the following:

Describe context of picture (what time during/after prom). When you posted this picture, what were your thoughts/feelings? How do you feel about this picture remaining on your profile page?

The photo was taken during prom, around dinner time. I didn't think about untagging myself because it's the only photo I have with [redacted] (my boyfriend) – everyone wants that one picture with them and their prom date. There are the professional ones that are taken at prom, but this one's so cute and candid. I'm not worried about my friends seeing this, we've been together for nearly a year now and I think it's okay for there to be photos of us together online. We don't PDA often, if at all, so I don't think it's a really exposing photo. We're in a relationship and the photo isn't inappropriate – at least I don't think so.

Based on Geneviève's response to my questions, it seemed to me that Geneviève regarded prom as a special event where she could momentarily disengage from self-censorship and openly express affection and desire—what she refers to as “PDA” (public display of affection). In her response above, not only does she turn this acronym into a verb, but she also defends the photograph's presence on her Facebook timeline. Seeing that “everyone wants that one picture with them and their prom date,” it was clear to me that this instance of camwhoring would surely be a memorable one for Geneviève. However, it was certainly not her only memorable photograph on her timeline, as we are yet to see.

“More than your regular actress”

The pre-prom party that Geneviève attended, which included over eight of her friends, was held in the backyard of Geneviève's home. That her parents allowed her to have this party in her own home speaks to her family-oriented nature as well, again, to her level of maturity. As already mentioned a few times by now, Geneviève did not post too many photos on her own profile page. However, whenever she had posted a series of pictures, there was



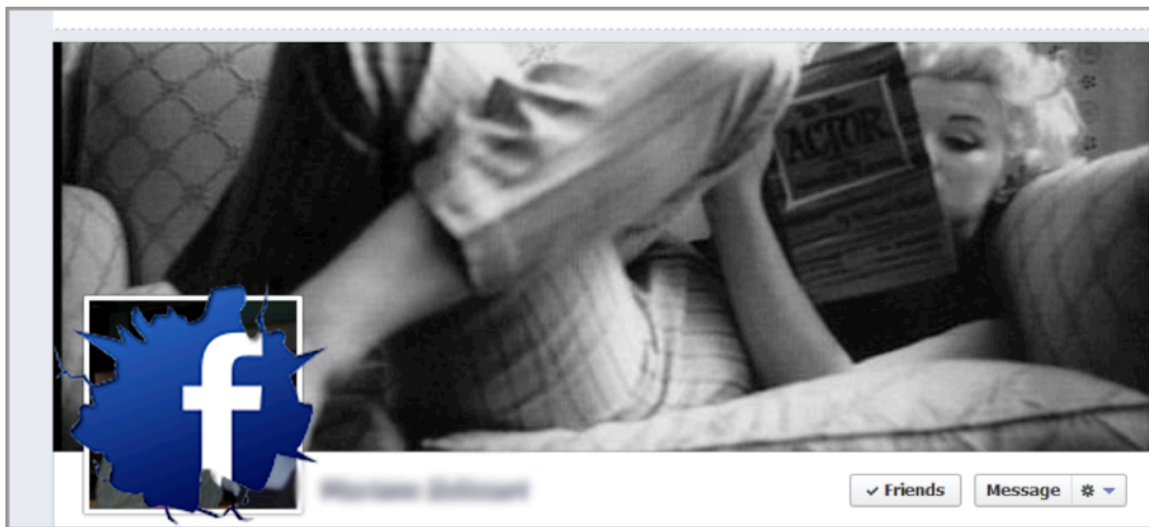
always a nod to the theme of home and togetherness within the albums. For instance, she posted a picture of her family at a campsite during the last month of

the study (photo not shown), an event she described in our final virtual conversations as: "... an annual tradition. Going camping every year brings us all together and we look forward to it all summer!" Although she is not even in the photograph, she chose to post it on her profile. She writes the photo caption (seen above): "How cute/Persian of us :)" and remarks about the disturbances made by the group every night, what she in the same virtual chat described as "typical of the Persian culture. During the annual camping trip every year, we eat a lot, we drink a lot, and we make a lot of noise 😊."

Describing the camping event in her caption as well as in our final virtual conversation clearly brought back good memories, which is likely why she used a happy-face emoticon in both circumstances. The photograph appeared as a Polaroid picture on her timeline, which for Geneviève denotes a sense of authenticity. In the photo, her family is gathered around the fire and everyone seems relaxed, with beverages in hand. The photo gained six Likes, including one from her mother.

Geneviève seemed to transfer this same sense of belonging and togetherness into her group of friends. At all times, Geneviève's profile picture depicted not just a picture of her own face or body, but of some sort of interaction with another person or within a group

setting. In the screenshot on this page, Geneviève’s profile picture comprises herself and a female friend from her high school (the profile image has been replaced with a Facebook logo to protect the girls’ identities). Both girls are making a funny face and holding up their hands in loosely clenched fists. It is not what the girls in her social network would consider to be a ‘pretty’ picture, but it captures a significant moment of friendship—had it not have held some significance, it is unlikely that Geneviève probably would have chosen it as her profile picture.



Perhaps more interesting in this screenshot is Geneviève’s choice of cover photo. The cover photo, which always appears on the homepage of a Facebook user’s profile, is seen here as a black-and-white Google image of Marilyn Monroe lazing on a couch, reading Chekhov’s *To The Actor* (incidentally, Chekhov was Monroe’s acting teacher from 1950-1955). I found myself drawn to the image and I wondered why Geneviève had chosen it as her cover photo. So, we talked about this image during our third virtual chat.

- Shenin: Why did you choose the image of Marilyn Monroe as your cover photo?
- Geneviève: I love Marilyn Monroe. She's real and beautiful and I'm practically obsessed with her. She was ridiculously classy and didn't feel the need to look like a sex slave to be considered beautiful. She was much more than your regular actress.
- Shenin: What do you mean by that?
- Geneviève: She's not like the fake, plastic and ridiculous stars people have a liking for in North America nowadays. She's a respectable woman, and that just makes her even more beautiful. I think she's an ideal of femininity that a lot of women have forgotten about today.
- Shenin: And the book she's reading?
- Geneviève: I'm not sure what the book is. But when I saw this image online it reminded me of myself. This is exactly what I do at home. I read on my couch like this all the time. It was as if I was viewing myself when I saw this picture.

It was fascinating for me to realize that Geneviève could draw such a strong parallel between herself and the image. While the cover photo was not a photo of herself on the couch reading, she considered it a representation of her own life at home. That she felt like she was actually viewing herself in the picture reveals the mirroring power of Facebook, as well as Geneviève's strong pensive nature.

This final image in this chapter, on the next page, appeared on Geneviève's profile after she was tagged by one of the girls in the photograph. I noticed that Geneviève chose to make it her profile picture almost immediately after it appeared on her timeline, and it remained as her profile picture for two weeks. Geneviève can be seen to the very right of the photo.

In this picture, the group of girls look comfortable in jeans or sweats, and all of them are smiling. Their arms are positioned vertically above their heads, and they are all holding hands. I did not ask Geneviève about this posting at any time during the study, so what they are doing and where they are remains a mystery. When I read the caption of the photo—“great times with great friends”—this summed up all that I had wanted to know. The photo radiates a sense of belonging and togetherness; the colours of the sky behind them indicate not just a setting of the sun, but a setting for the girls to be at peace with one another—perhaps in the absence of male counterparts—to open their arms to one another and live within their bodies and within the nature of their surroundings.



Final Thoughts

This chapter has highlighted a number of events, conversations and screenshots throughout the course of my observations of Geneviève's Facebook page. However, my discoveries and preliminary conclusions of her habits, tendencies, likes and dislikes, and preferences of interaction have not been made through observation alone. Keeping in line with my methodological approach of FPAR, many of my contentions and conclusions have been made *with* Geneviève; as she has discovered elements of her own online presence, I have discovered these elements alongside her. As a researcher, I have felt humbled yet empowered to be part of these discoveries. The intimate conversations I have had with Geneviève have allowed me to experience a spectrum of emotions; at times I have been touched, at other times I have been surprised, and at other moments, such as looking at her prom pictures, I have even reflected upon all the ups and downs that I had experienced during my own adolescent years. However, while the process of discovery alongside Geneviève has been a reflective one for me, I can only hope that she has been equally reflective and continues to enhance her mindful and thoughtful nature.

I have dealt with four main themes in this chapter: (1) Geneviève's consumption and production habits, revealing a sense of maturity that will be discussed once more in Chapter 10; (2) her tendency to avert or even avoid attention, such as in the form of being Liked or Liking others' pictures and comments on Facebook; (3) her feelings about 'looking pretty' online, especially during prom—discussions of which enticed a confessional about a complicated relationship and the existence of her boyfriend; and (4) how she feels strongly about putting her family and friends above all others, cherishing her moments with them and

choosing to post these memories online because these are the moments that she values the most.

When it comes to Geneviève's consumption and production habits, Geneviève reveals a sense of maturity because of her approach to privacy. As noted by boyd and Marwick (2011), how teens understand privacy has a profound bearing on the strategies they take to achieve social privacy. The way that Geneviève consumes more than she produces alludes to her ability to assert *control* in social situations, emphasizing that she is in control of *how information flows*. Controlling how information flows, at least for boyd and Marwick (2011), is one of the biggest challenges that teens face in navigating networked publics (p. 6). Geneviève's ability to control how information flows enables her to negotiate her agency and identity through interaction with others in her subculture. Her tendency to avoid attention (on Facebook as well as at school) and reject the continual flow of Likes as a social norm attests to her self-regulation on Facebook. It is at this intersectionality of maturity, privacy, and control where we see the connections between the moments of 'regulation' and 'identity' within the Circuit of Culture (*Figure 3*, p. 89) as well the negotiations of Self and Other through CIF (see *Figure 4*, p. 105).

Geneviève's expressed need to 'look pretty' and, notably, to capture that *one* perfect prom picture that "everybody wants," enforces that self-sexualization and the gendering of bodies is prominent in performative portals such as Facebook (Weber & Mitchell, 2008). However, with her demonstrated sense of maturity, and with little hesitation to post (or remain tagged in) candid photographs where she appears to be caught off guard, we see that Facebook accommodates her need for self-display by "offering the opportunity to consciously create, adapt, and edit one's self-presentation" (Haferkamp, 2012, p. 96).

It is from the four themes discussed in this chapter that I can conclude that Geneviève, much like Marilyn Monroe, is indeed “much more than your regular actress”—to use Geneviève’s own words. Although she often says little and reserves her postings and comments for those extremely close to her, there is much that can be read in her silence that allows her to stand out among her Facebook friends.

Chapter 7

Leila:

Speaking in tongues: Interludes from the ‘model’ student

I have thought about how i appear online and i am careful in regards to what i post and stuff. I do think i look like more a silly person on Facebook then in real life, but i am a character in real life as well, so i dont think that facebook portrays me falsely!

--Leila

From the very start of my online observations towards the end of the first month of the study, Leila’s presence on Facebook was difficult to miss. Her photographs and messages were splashed across Geneviève’s wall and visible throughout Geneviève’s timeline. By clicking on Leila’s name as it appeared on Geneviève’s page, it was easy to identify Leila as a potential participant in my study. With few limitations by way of privacy settings, it wasn’t long before I realized that the two girls were in the same grade, at the same school. Soon after my recruitment of Geneviève, I sent Leila the same recruitment message that I had sent out to my entire Facebook friends list ten days earlier (see Appendix A). I heard back from Leila soon after; in her reply, she expressed willingness and eagerness to participate, letting me know she fit the criteria of the study. She also provided me with her email address so that I could send her the consent forms—she was one step ahead of me. After accepting her friend request, I sent her a message back thanking her for her willingness to participate, and, even though her birth date was posted on her Facebook profile, I asked her to confirm with me that the information was correct. I also asked her if she had any questions. She messaged

back letting me know that her stated birthday was correct, putting her at 17 years of age. This confirmed that I needed to send her both participant consent and parental consent forms. She also let me know that she did have some questions but she had talked to Geneviève the night before and had gained a better understanding of what the study entailed as a result of their conversation. While I was happy to have another participant on board, my anecdotal journal notes that evening reflected my feelings about her redirection of questions to Geneviève. I wrote down the following:

Given my feminist research ethic, and remaining fully aware that my role as ‘the researcher’ shapes the dynamic of power between me and my participants, I wonder if I should initiate a conversation with Leila about the possible questions or concerns she may have—even though she tells me that she has already spoken with Geneviève? At the very least, shouldn’t I start getting to know Leila by having some sort of chat with her?

I sat with my thoughts for the remainder of the evening and ultimately decided that I *would* initiate an informal chat with Leila the next time I saw her green icon lit in the Facebook Chat box. Although the recruitment phase of my research was still underway, my study was already *in progress*; I had to start getting to know my existing participants (at this point, the number of participants totalled two—Geneviève and Leila) even though my group of participants was not yet fully formed. As a qualitative researcher engaging a unique egalitarian research approach, it was necessary to describe relevant aspects of myself to my participants, as Greenbank (2003) advises, including my expectations and any biases and assumptions that qualified my ability to conduct the research. When I received Leila’s participant and parental consent forms in my email inbox the next day, I logged into

Facebook and found Leila's green icon lit. I initiated an informal chat with Leila, starting off by thanking her for sending the forms and then by 'talking' about myself and my research interests:

Shenin: Hi [Leila], thank you so much for your forms. In your previous message you let me know that you've spoken to [Geneviève] and you don't have any further questions about the research study. Just to recap: I will be looking at your Facebook activity everyday, including the pictures you post, your status updates, comments you make on pictures, etc. We will also be scheduling (as a group), at least three chats to talk about my observations as well as get to know each other further. I am interested in how you display your identity, and ultimately I am attempting to understand the relationship between online and offline identities. Does that make sense?

Leila: Yes it makes sense and sounds really interesting. I just want you to know that im extremely busy with school right now and in the summer i'll be working and have lots of family stuff going on.

Shenin: I completely understand that you'll be busy. I know you are finishing up your last year of high school at the moment. As I just wrote, the chats will be scheduled as a group, which means we will find times that suit everyone's schedules. Where are you working this summer?

Leila: [name of workplace omitted to protect participant's identity]

Shenin: Sounds like a great job. What's your role?

Leila: admin, mostly paperwork. but i also model too

While Leila had posted her job in the 'Work and Education' box found in her 'About,' tab on Facebook, there was no mention on her profile about her part-time modelling position (note: Leila's forays into modelling will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this chapter). This wasn't necessarily a surprise—given her stunning looks and attractive features—but my initial semiotic readings of her profile, which follows in the next section, attuned an image of (alternative) femininity that was not necessarily in line with 'model' good looks or behaviour.

“remember me as an outkast, outlaw”

An initial reading of Leila’s Facebook profile conveyed a strong virtual presence mostly through photographs; I browsed half a dozen albums filled with pictures that she had either uploaded to Facebook from her mobile phone or embedded from her Instagram account, all neatly compartmentalized into titled albums. At least half of these photographs



were ones that she had taken of herself and shared on social media— “selfies,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary. The image to the left is the first one that I had seen of Leila during my participant recruitment process.

Leila is looking directly into the camera lens, her large almond-shaped eyes maintaining a steady gaze. Her pouty lips are coloured with a soft shade of pink lipstick or gloss, though other than this she does not seem heavily made up. Her

reddish-brown hair is long and flowing, perfectly placed in front of her shoulders to show off the imperfect waves. She dons a silver nose-ring on the right side of her nose. To me, the nose-ring read like a sort of disruption to her natural beauty. However, during our second scheduled virtual chat Leila let me know that she wore a nose ring because she was half Indian on her father’s side, and, “wearing a nose ring is something that a lot of Indian girls do.” She described her mother as “white,” but also told the group that she felt more connected to her Indian side, because, “growing up, I was immersed in my dad’s culture.

Like the music, the get-togethers, and all the events. So many lol. I was always drawn to dressing up and feeling that I belonged. It's a good feeling."

It was interesting to learn that she felt the need to belong because a reading of her profile in the absence of



Leila's voice tells a different story. Juxtaposed to the image on the previous page is the accompanying caption of the image, seen above. Leila has captioned the image: "i speak the truth, but I guess thats a foreign language to ya'll." I wasn't quite sure what this meant, but I took from it Leila's consideration of herself as authentic and truthful while she found others in her social network spoke a different language not in accordance with her values. Although the image is inviting and draws in the spectator to linger because of Leila's intense gaze, the caption is anything *but* inviting. That she views her spectators as speaking a "foreign" language immediately tempts them to view her page as strangers. The spectator is at once othered and displaced, betwixt with "conditional hospitality," as Derrida (2000) would call it, and uncertain to stay or leave. Unconditional hospitality is given to others as long as they are on the same page as Leila and claim to speak her language. Although her friends' comments are not shown, one of her female friends comments on the caption by writing "mine ♥" and Leila responds with a reciprocal speech act of love by writing "Awe <3333" underneath. Leila reciprocated the love with this friend and in turn that friend was a welcomed visitor.

Below this comment is another one (also not shown) made by a male who Leila identifies in the 'basic information' of her 'About' tab as her boyfriend (see screenshot on

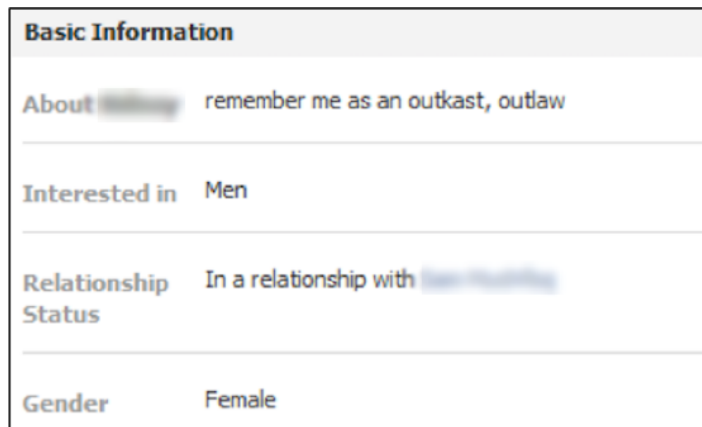
this page). He writes “cute duckie <3333” and Leila chooses to Like his comment, a hospitable gesture of approval and acceptance of this identifiable subject as the *not* foreigner.

During our first virtual chat, I asked Leila to talk about this caption:

Leila: I wrote that caption beside the picture because there are so many fake people and liars in my school, and it was right after there was some sort of confrontation between this girl and I. i’m not friends with everyone and I don’t want to be.

From this excerpt, it is clear that, first, Leila disliked “fake people” and “liars” at her school, particularly the girl with whom she had engaged in recent confrontation; and that, second, she used Facebook as a way to communicate with her friends as well as her “frenemies”—friends who

are sometimes enemies when faced with competition, jealousy, and mistrust (boyd, 2014). Although Leila did not tag anyone in her post, she seemed confident that this particular girl—one of



Leila’s 334 Facebook friends-- would see her message. Commenting on the phenomenon of ‘frenemies’ and its different angles, Leila and I had the following exchange:

Leila: I know the girl saw it because she used to be in my inner circle of friends but now it’s just whatever. It’s like a month later now and I don’t really care. Obviously she’s not going to comment.

Shenin: How are you so certain that she saw it?

Leila: We just don't do that on facebook. If someone's sending you a message by posting something a little vague, you're not gonna let the other person know you've seen it. You're going to pretend you never saw it. Or you'll use it later as ammunition. But I know this girl and she's on Facebook like 24/7 always liking other people's photos and posting her stuff. She saw it for sure.

Shenin: Ammunition? Sounds like a battle!

Leila: Well we're in grade 12 don't forget and there is so much drama and cliqueness on facebook and it's such a drag to deal with at school. But obviously you can't avoid it forever. Trust me that caption was for a lot of people, not just her.

Leila's passive-aggressive continuation of the confrontation with this girl was clearly calculated and composed with confidence. Further, she knew the girl was following a code of recognized female adolescent Facebook behaviour by not responding in any way to the caption of her selfie. In this sense, Leila neither expected nor waited for a response from the girl. The girl was clearly not a welcomed visitor. As Leila expressed later in my conversation with her, "My comment told her and the others pretty much that I was done with them. I'm too busy for this stuff anyways"; thus dismissing the significance of the topic. In my journal entry that evening, I reflected on this part of the chat. I wrote, "It is evident that Leila used Facebook as a tool to mediate—or in this case, end—friendships with those she 'didn't have time for.'" I also noted that, "although she stated she felt the message was 'just whatever' and that she 'didn't really care about it, her overall pattern of thinking was staunchly black and white—hence her previous declaration that 'people either get me or they don't.'"

In the basic information section of Leila's 'About' tab (see screenshot above on p. 205), she chooses not to actually describe herself but instead asks her friends and viewers to "remember me as an outkast, outlaw." I definitely did not "get" what this meant, so I took a screenshot of her 'About' page and included it in the Microsoft Word document I sent her prior to our second virtual conversation. I received this commentary in my email inbox the next morning:

In the "About section of your profile, you describe yourself by stating: "remember me as an outkast, outlaw." What do you mean by this?

The reason why I have the outkast, outlaw thing in my about me section on facebook is because firstly, its one of the major representations of one of my favourite artist, Tupac, and because I consider myself to be "out there" and different, and it just best describes who I am. I'm like an outkast, different than other people at school, doing my own thing and don't care how others judge me.

Beyond explicitly voicing the connection of the phrase to lyrics in a Tupac song in the above document excerpt, Leila had also included Tupac as one of her favourite artists in the 'Music' section of her 'About' tab. I blamed it on my lack of knowledge, but originally I failed to make the connection that the phrase could have been taken from any song, let alone from Tupac. With a bit of help from the knowledgeable vault known as Google, I found the lyrics online and quickly learned that it was part of the song "Until the End of Time²⁵" (see Appendix F, p. 437, for lyrics). In this song, Tupac declares himself *persona non grata* as he raps about his feelings of displacement and his life frustrations, avowing music as his ultimate saviour as the medium through which he will be remembered. Leila's resonance with this song and her feeling that it "just best describes who I am," speaks again to her need

²⁵ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9uEtplq6CI&feature=youtu.be to hear this song.

for belonging. When it comes to hip hop and youth identity, Dimitriadis (2009) has suggested that hip hop “has become a vehicle for disenfranchised youth to articulate their own local needs and concerns” (p. xiv). While Leila was not “disenfranchised”—she enjoyed many privileges in her life and described her family as “middle class” during our first scheduled chat—she opened up towards the end of the study, in our fourth scheduled chat about her troubled upbringing. I had noticed and documented a status update on her profile relaying that she was having a hard time sleeping, so I asked her why this was the case. The conversation then flowed thus:

Leila: well i guess it has to do with stress about starting university soon, but i often dont sleep well tbh. I think for my age ive experienced a lot more..and no I ac tually don't even mind talking about it...the past is the past.

Shenin: Well in our last chat we talked about your parents and how your dad recently got re-married after you posted all those pictures from his wedding. You made some comments about your family and your half-sister, but you didn't say much more except that you love them and that you're happy for everyone.

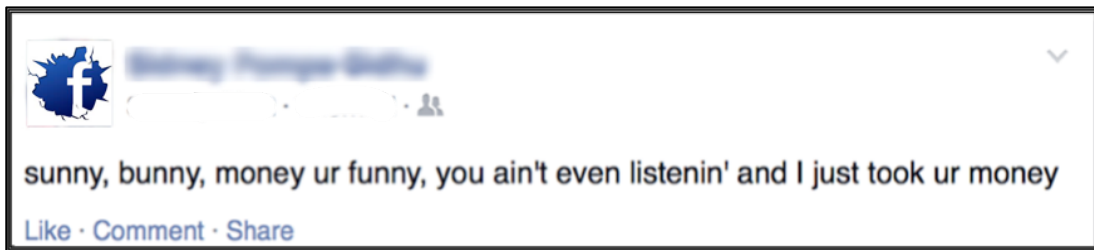
Leila: no i dont even mind..i just dont say anything unles someone asks usually.

Shenin: Well, what do you mean when you say you've experienced a lot for your age?

Leila: it is family related yes..that has alot to do with it to. its more what happened after m y parents split...they were never really married btw ...i was kind of an accident lol. I am happy for him and im glad he has someone else now...but things have changed so much since hes been married. i posted those pics of his wedding because i am proud that he is married and stuff. i like to appear happy and smiling in all the pictures on Facebook. yeah maybe the pics put up a bit of a front. it was hard growing up and i had to do a lot of things on my own so i try to be independent with everything now.

Leila’s disclosure that her parents “were never really married” and that she was “kind of an accident” revealed aspects of her upbringing that fostered her independent streak. Interestingly enough, in the face of challenging life obstacles, Leila found comfort, identity and voice in hip hop. As she put it, “I developed my love for hip hop,” a musical genre unlike others that spoke to her and her issues. She let me know this in a private chat I had with her that took place three days after the fourth scheduled chat with all the girls. I had initiated and scheduled this ‘extra’ chat with Leila after reflecting on the fourth group chat, realizing that Leila seemed to want to talk about herself and share her feelings as long as she was *asked*—my strategy up until this realization was to let the girls do most of the talking and questioning. Thus, feeling that our online (research) relationship had reached a more comfortable level of disclosure, I asked Leila if she would like to chat further one-on-one. She gladly made time for me in her self-described “busy schedule” later that week.

During this chat, we discussed music more in detail. I told Leila that I noticed she periodically posted hip hop YouTube videos to her timeline, such as ‘Check Yo Self’ by Ice Cube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aAbOgdbTbM>), ‘Mercy’ by Kanye West (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Dqgr0wNyPo>) and ‘Syllables’ by Eminem featuring Dr. Dre, Jay Z and 50 Cent (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIDgh99aqII>). I also let her know that I had noticed she had a habit of dropping short rhymes as status updates. Three examples are seen on the next page. During our chat, Leila let me know that these short interludes were always song lyrics:



Leila: i do a lot of other things when im on facebook, usally listen to music. hip hop or alternative music really speaks to me. I almost always go back to hip hop. I mean, I like most kinds of music and I'm really into heavy rock and roll such as Kiss. My mom too, lol. but listening to hip hop is just different because the stuff I listen to brings me back and helps me relate to others in life and their struggles. some times your right i post the lyrics im listening to at the time. i never noticed i did this frequently.

Shenin: What is it about hip hop that “brings you back”?

Leila: rappers like Tupac are just so real, so raw. eminem is one of my favorites too im sure you noticed. like they go through so much shit in their lives and in the end they just really want their moms!! and money of course lol. going through struggles really just developed my love of hip hop I guess.

Shenin: So is listening to hip hop really about family then? Or money? ;)

Leila: lol, yeah its about family. and struggles. look at everyone on facebook trying to look perfect all the time, pretty all the time. me included. i dont want to show weakness and i AM strong so thats how im gonna

present myself. but deep down we all got our shit. sometimes its nice to just say f*** you!

In the beginning of this exchange, Leila lets me know that she multitasks when she is logged on to Facebook, usually listening to/viewing music on YouTube. Her preference was always to listen to hip hop, though she also listened to alternative or grunge; her status interludes on the previous page reveal hip hop lyrics from Eminem ('Syllables'), R&B lyrics from Mario ('Let Me Love You'), and alternative lyrics from Pearl Jam ('Just Breathe'). She let me know that she posted lyrics that resonated or "spoke" to her, at the time of her listening. Music, it seemed, was a subliminal force of Leila's identity, flowing through Leila's timeline and allowing her to feel "strong." At the end of the above exchange, Leila's self-censorship of profanity with asterisks was intriguing, seeing how she had not censored profanities in previous chats or on her profile page. In fact, she had no qualms overtly performing subversive acts online, as we will see in the next section.

"im just expressing myself"

Leila described herself as "complicated lol" in our very first scheduled chat. She added her customary "lol" (laugh out loud) to the end of the word, which I came to understand as an act of self-protection, a suppression of the possibility of judgement from others, because, after all, what had been said might actually be a joke. When I asked Leila during that chat why she added her "lol" to the description, she replied: "well, i could be joking right?" I asked her if she was joking in this scenario and she said she wasn't; she affirmed that she was indeed "complicated and proud of it!" I asked her to expand on her self-labelled complication and she responded:

Leila: as irene said earlier, i guess people at school see me as ‘cool’ a lot of the times. i guess im popular but not in the traditional sense. i just dont have trouble putting people in their place or expressing myself the way i want.



Leila’s embodiment of expressing herself freely was easy to read from a number of the images she posted to her timeline. For example, at the end of the second month of the study she posted the image seen on this page to her profile. Leila is on the right side of the image, her perfectly manicured middle finger adorned with a chunky silver ring. The female on the left side is a girl she identified as

her “best friend” (incidentally, not Geneviève), also with a manicured middle finger pointed towards the camera. While the image is shocking in some ways, it was not out of place in the context of her profile; the shock value itself did not arise from the actual acts of profanity but instead from Leila’s willingness to post the picture to her profile for everyone in her social network to view. Leila captioned the photo “Bodmons”—a Reggae take on the words ‘bad man’—and tags the other girl in the photo. Identifying as a “bodmon” invokes a sense of complication and trouble, as if the girls are doing something they should not be doing. Leila

admits this was indeed the case: “We were drunk lol,” she confessed during our second virtual chat. She continued:

Leila: we do that sometimes. it’s silly. i know i shouldn’t but i don’t consider myself a bad influence on anyone. everyone makes their own choices at the end of the day. im just expressing myself.

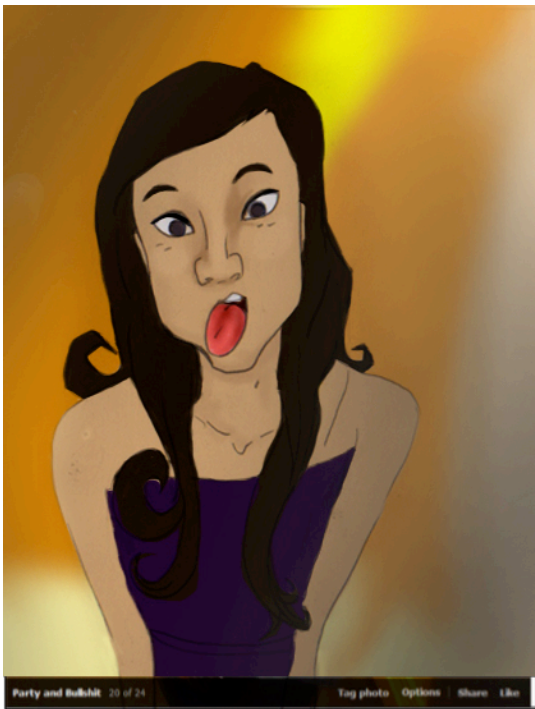
Shenin: Does it matter to you that this picture is on Facebook?

Leila: I dont think facebook has an impact on the way I express myself to others its just there for us to use. leisure time. it’s not school.

Based on this snippet of conversation, it is clear that, at least in part, Leila had posted this image because she had free time on her hands. Posting on Facebook, as she expressed it, was something she did for “leisure” and fun. Her recognition that Facebook is “not school” provokes the logic that since Facebook and school are separate entities, the rules and codes of either institution do not necessarily corroborate. Thus, while the picture was appropriate for Leila to post on Facebook, sharing the same image with her friends at school may not have been appropriate or acceptable. Leila’s logic was indeed complicated, but it made some sense. As Drotner (2009) reminds us,

[Y]oung people who engage in digital practices in their leisure time rarely define their activities in terms of learning, in fact quite the opposite: when they are out of school, they want to do something different from the routines found when they are at school, and media are an obvious and popular choice. (p. 168)

As we see in the previous photo, Leila isn’t just swearing but she is also sticking out her tongue. I had noticed this same gesture in countless photographs she posted to her profile throughout the months I observed her profile. Two more such displays follow:



The photo on the left is one of Leila taken by a friend, and uploaded by Leila to her profile from her mobile phone. She admits that she “was drunk again lol” in this picture. The photo on the right is a selfie taken by Leila, who appears in the middle, with Geneviève and Matt to her left and right, respectively. “we weren’t drinking,” she let me know. “and i don’t always do the tongue thing just when im drinking. Most of the time though. The three of us hang out a lot and things always get silly.” One day during the fourth month of our study, I saw Leila’s green icon lit and I asked her what it means when she sticks out her tongue in pictures. This is what she had to say:

Leila: oh we're just being silly. i do do it and i know it, but ther is never a partiular reason i do it, it is just a sper of the moment type thing. I do it in some pictures maybe because it shows the inner rock and roll listener in me...because i do love heavy rock..but I am not totally sure why..

Shenin: I have seen you stick your tongue out in numerous pictures. I've seen it on other girls' Facebook profiles in your social network as well. I thought maybe the act meant something, that you were trying to communicate something. Do you ever think about how you appear online?

Leila: there is nothing I am really trying to communicate really, as i said, theyre just taken in the moment. And yes I have thought about how i appear online and i am careful in regards to what i post and stuff. I do think i look like more of a silly person on Facebook then in real life, but i am a character in real life as well, so i dont think that facebook portrays me falsely!

Leila claimed that she was fully aware of how she appeared online—in her eyes, she appeared “silly.” She also claimed that she was careful with regards to what she posted online. However, her claim is troubled if we refer back to her explanation of the photo with her raised middle finger; when asked about posting this image, she relayed: “i know i shouldn't.” This shows that, although Leila was aware of *what* she was posting to her Facebook profile, she was also aware, at least at times, that *what* she was posting *was not appropriate*. In other words, she was also aware of what *should not* be posted, but chose to post images she shouldn't be posting nonetheless. Furthermore, as Leila relays twice in the above conversation snippet, the photos displaying her extended tongue were taken “in the moment.” For whatever reason, it was important for Leila to *post* these photos to her Facebook “in the moment” as well. These “in the moment” acts demonstrate an embodiment of what Jenkins (2006) refers to as the “on-demand” aspect of media for social communication; and as a result, Leila displays an “instant identity” (Stern, 2007). Although she labels this identity as that of a “silly person,” Leila claims to be “a character” in real life

as well. Leila recognizes a flow between her “instant identity” and who she is off-screen, which can be read as a notable instance of CIF that demonstrates a connection between her real and virtual presence.

The snippet of conversation on the previous page also demonstrates Leila’s natural disposition to express herself through music. Only this time, she likens her actions to “the inner rock and roll listener in me” instead of to hip hop. Leila’s act of sticking her tongue out can thus be read in relation to rock and roll music. In the previous section of this chapter,

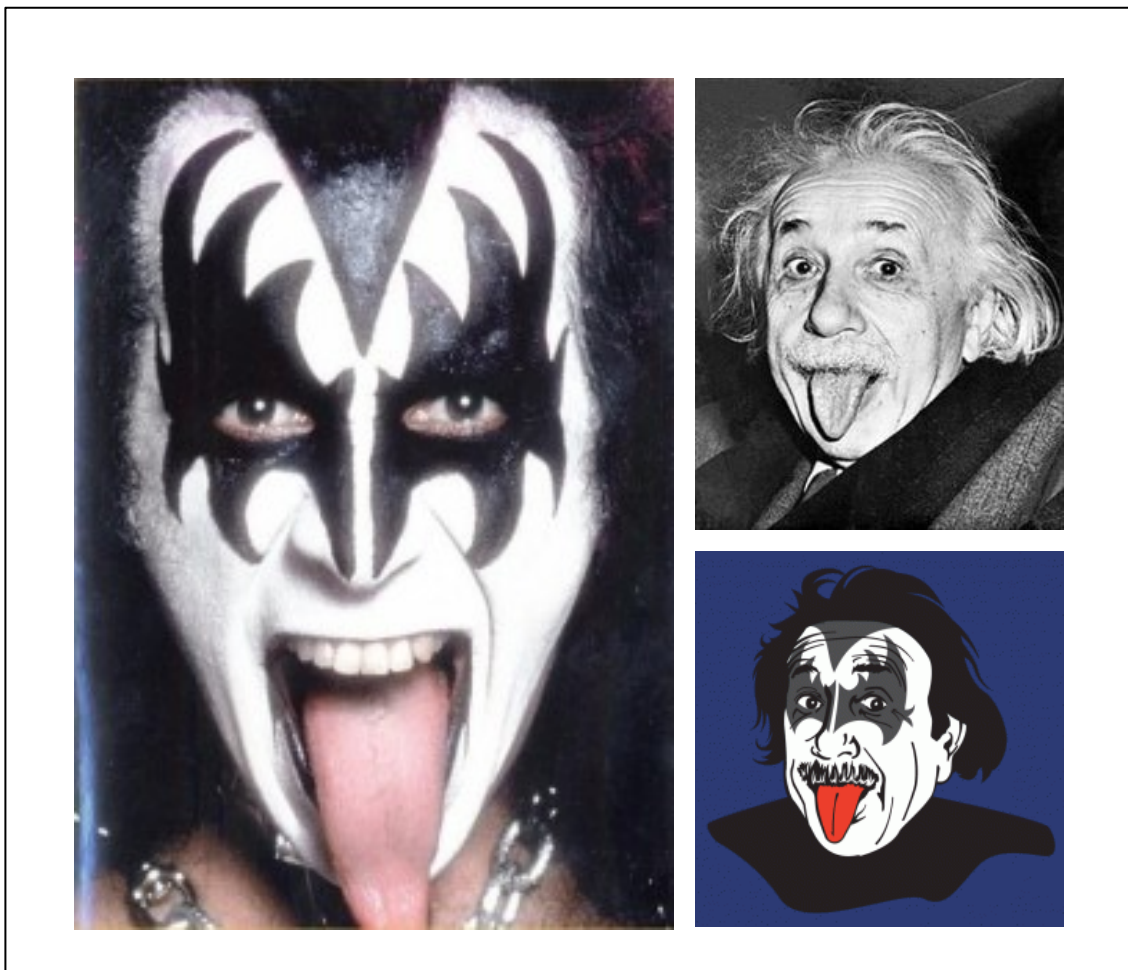


Figure 11 – ‘Speaking in Tongues’: A popular image of Gene Simmons from the rock band ‘Kiss’ (Simmons, (Author) (2001) [Cover image]; left), Albert Einstein (Sasse, 1951; top right) and a parody of Einstein (see Chenkus, 2009; bottom right)

Leila let me know that one of the rock bands she (and her mother) gravitates towards is Kiss, whose famous frontman Gene Simmons is pictured in the largest of the three images on the previous page. Simmons is seen here in his performance makeup, sticking out his large tongue—so large it does not fully fit into the photograph—in a way his followers came to expect of him during his concerts and appearances. Simmons’ performance technique of sticking out his tongue became so well known that even Einstein—famously photographed in the top right picture taken in 1951, sticking his tongue out for a photographer on his 72nd birthday—became a subject of parody, as we could see in the bottom right photo. Although the meaning of this performance technique is not specified in available literature—perhaps sticking out one’s tongue actually does mean nothing?—what matters here is the very act of Leila’s mimicry. If, as Leila clearly states, there is nothing she is communicating when she sticks her tongue out in photographs, her mimicry communicates not only that she is impressionable, but that she has embodied her “representational self” (Goffman, 1959) in a moment of identification with popular culture and rock music in particular.

“Party and Bullshit”

One of the underlying themes common to Leila’s bodily displays in the last section is that of underage drinking. Leila turned 18 years of age in the third month of the study—still a year shy of the legal drinking age in Ontario at the time of the study. In two of the images seen in this chapter so far, Leila admits that she is drunk. She is 17 years of age in both of these photos. A reading of the images included in this chapter so far does not alert the viewer of her illegal activity, since there is no visible alcohol in the pictures and no mention of alcohol in the captions. However, there were some photos posted during the months I spent looking at Leila’s profile that enrich the present narrative. Some of these images will be seen

in the pages that follow. Descriptions of these images will be given first, followed closely by Leila's comments related to the *theme* of underage drinking. Significant to note here is that I chose not to specifically address any of the following photographs with Leila, which is why her words only speak to the theme in general. Very simply, I did not want to assert a presence of "the 'policing' researcher." As an ethnographer trying to make sense of Leila's social actions and the larger context of these actions, and in my privileged position as researcher, I felt that speaking more generally about these images would maintain "a degree of intimacy with the researcher and the researched" (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 140). The theme of underage drinking was discussed in our second virtual chat.

The picture below is the first image that suggested the possibility of Leila's consumption of alcohol as a minor. Leila is in the middle of the group of four friends,



wearing the light blue shirt. Geneviève has tagged Leila in this photograph, which is part of the same 50s-themed album previously discussed in Chapter 6. While there is no visible alcohol in this picture, the caption of the photograph reads: “A bit buzzed...” suggesting consumption of alcohol at the party. Comments are not shown, but Leila was the first to comment on the photo, writing “LOL, awwwee ♥.” The subsequent comment is made by a male friend: “legit fuckin 50’s, I think (y)²⁶.” Leila has the final words in the comment thread, agreeing with this male friend’s comment. There is no mention of drinking or alcohol within the comments. Instead, the comments focus on the display of friendship and the adherence of the party-goers to the party theme.

The photo on this page is one posted by Leila in the third month of the study. Leila is seen here with Geneviève, both smiling, and both wearing the same outfits from the 50s-theme party. Seeing how their outfits and hairstyles are consistent with previous photos from the party, it is safe to assume the photo was indeed taken on the same day as the party. Here, we see Leila holding a beer bottle in her left hand and a shot glass in her right hand

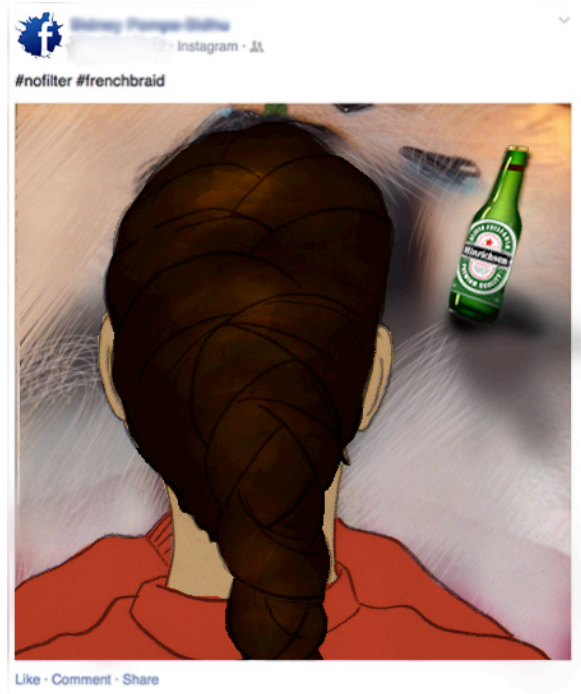


her right hand, which she is clinking with Geneviève’s shot glass. Interestingly, in the

²⁶ (y) is a popular code that displays a “thumbs-up” emoticon.

background there is a lamp fixture with a number of Polaroid pictures affixed to the rod. This suggests the setting of the photograph is in Geneviève’s room, seeing how she had a tendency to take Polaroid pictures. While it is unclear if there are more than three people in the room (Leila, Geneviève and the photographer—unless, of course, the girls were using a photography device such as a GoPro), one thing is certain: Leila is consuming her alcoholic beverages in a private space. Leila added this image to her album “Party and Bullshit,” which is also the name of a hip hop song by The Notorious B.I.G

As seen below, the image on the left depicts Leila drinking out of a dark beer bottle. She is standing next to Geneviève, who is touching her breast. Both are wearing skin-baring tank tops and the girls are grinning widely. Leila posted this picture to her Facebook account



using her mobile phone. She captions the photo: “Definition of our friendship! LOL. I love you [Geneviève]” and she tags Geneviève. Geneviève and Matt have Liked the photograph.

In the photo to the right, Leila posted an image of the back of her head, her long, dark hair in a neat French braid. Considering how seconds prior to this posting she had posted a YouTube video about do-it-yourself French braids, it is possible that she braided her hair herself and then posted the image to her Facebook profile once she finished. At first the image caught my attention for her handiwork, knowing first-hand how difficult it is to French braid your own hair. I almost passed over this image until I realized there was an open bottle of Heineken beer in front of Leila. It was unfair to assume the beer was hers, especially since there was likely someone in the room with her, taking the picture—both of Leila’s arms are in front of her, making it impossible for her to take the picture herself. Leila captions the photo with hashtags²⁷, which makes sense because she embedded this photo from her Instagram account. The hashtags she has chosen include “#nofilter” and “#frenchbraid.” There is no #beer or #Heineken hashtag, meaning the beer bottle may be read as an insignificant part of the photograph that does not deserve attention as a trending topic.

During our second scheduled conversation, I approached the topic of underage drinking by initiating a discussion about the girls’ acceptances into university. Leila had been accepted into the University of Ottawa for undergraduate studies. I could tell from her profile that she was extremely proud of her acceptance because she embedded the Instagram picture

²⁷ A hashtag consists word of phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram to identify messages on a specific topic. Popular hashtags become ‘trending topics’ on these social media sites.

seen on the next page to her Facebook profile soon after she heard back from the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC).



I congratulated Leila on her acceptance and briefly ‘spoke’ about my experiences in Ottawa and student life at the university. Based on personal experience, I knew Leila’s offer of admission was conditional. I asked the group very generally about what they thought a ‘conditional offer’ meant, beyond achieving the required grades. This is what Leila had to say:

Leila: well I guess there are other things that could screw up our uni acceptances.

Shenin: Like what?

Leila: well obviously drugs and alcohol. we can get into trouble i guess for posting pics like that

Shenin: Leila, I’ve noticed a couple pictures of you consuming alcohol, most recently in the last two weeks.

Leila: yeah i know there are those pictures.im aware of whats on my profile. when i think about posting it depends what the content of the pic is, that is how i base how much i debate whether or not i should post it on fb. there are filters for privacy and limited profile and anyone i think could get me in trouble is on limited. but really most of us drink and its not a big deal, just fun. and its not like we’re all gonna get each other in trouble!

Shenin: Am I on limited profile?

Leila: no lol. the forms said there are no risks with this study and you told us last convo just be ourselves

While I was happy to hear that Leila had thought about her online privacy and enacted desirable settings on her Facebook profile, without being alarmist or moralist, one may raise a concern that she thought posting pictures of illegal activity was “not a big deal.” Also, Leila’s words conveyed that she belonged to a group (“most of us drink”), and that members of this group looked out for each other (“it’s not like we’re all gonna get each other in trouble!”). Again, we see Leila’s need for or sense of belonging in the undertones of her remarks. Although the above conversation continued on the topic of underage drinking, Leila didn’t have anything more to say. Instead, she frequently agreed with the other girls’ comments—something she tended to do in almost every single conversation. While Leila certainly had a presence in our scheduled virtual chats and always expressed an opinion, she did not particularly demonstrate a willingness to talk through issues—this relates to her pattern of black and white thinking. It was clear from her Facebook that she was certainly engaged in all of the conversations and that she was not doing other things at the same time, but she did have a tendency to assert opinions without explanations and showed little desire to talk about ideas or concepts beyond her initial thoughts. As well, I did not realize at this point of the study that in order to hear more of Leila’s voice that I had to *directly* ask her questions. However, very importantly, I did realize that after this chat, the only picture from then on that included Leila with any sign of alcohol is the picture she embedded from Instagram towards the end of the study, showing off her French braid and the Heineken beer bottle—the mainstay of the image seen as the former, not the latter. Leila did not add additional pictures to her “Party and Bullshit” album after this conversation. In most pictures

after this chat, Leila's posted pictures included mostly 'pretty' shots of herself, her friends and her boyfriend, which guide the topic of the next section.

“i used to look at my ex's profile, too”

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Leila worked part-time as a model. In my 'extra' chat with her that took place after our scheduled fourth virtual conversation, Leila told me about her modelling agency and some of the work she had gained as a model as well as an actor. Leila informed me that she had been with the agency since she was little, nonchalantly telling me that she had almost scored a role in a hit Hollywood film. She then informed me about the reason why she was turned down for the role:

Leila: ...like they cut my hair, i filmed it and everything but then they thought i was too dark for the part cause it was summer and i used to get like blk when i was little

Shenin: You must be a good actress to have been considered for the role! How did it make you feel when they turned you away based on your skin colour?

Leila: well i was upset because they cut my hair and everything... yeahh lol ...i do remember it wasnt a great feeling being rejected. and its not like i didn't get other opportunities after that, so i wasn't too upset.

Realizing that I was speaking with an actress, I couldn't tell from the conversation if Leila was "putting up a front" again or if she genuinely wasn't too upset about her role rejection in the film. Her revelation that she had faced racial discrimination when she was younger spoke to her strength of character and her very need to put up a front in her everyday life. We talked a bit more about her skin colour:

Shenin: From my own experiences, it's never a nice thing to face discrimination based on skin colour, gender, age, education or any other variable. Have you ever faced discrimination of any kind on Facebook?

Leila: well as you already know i have a boyfriend. and to be honest i like having my relationship status there [posted on Facebook] because im proud of it and i find that i dont get half the creepy adds, or pokes or weird msgs from guys. mostly indian guys but different types and the msgs say smthg like how im sexy and i look exotic and its really annoying. im not sure if that is discrimination

Shenin: I'd say it's harassment, and harassment can be seen as a form of discrimination – so, yes. It's interesting to me that you post your relationship status to detract messages from “creepy” guys.

Leila: yeah, I'm harassed about my looks a lot i guess lol. did you see that letter that I posted?



Leila's reference to the letter that appeared on her wall was actually something I had wanted to discuss with her during our 'extra' chat—but again, she beat me to it. The image seen on this page is a handwritten letter on a crumpled sheet of paper that reads: "You look very pretty and beautiful / Love the way you smile." It was signed

from “Random Guy.” Leila told me the following: “LOL that was with [Geneviève].... it was so funny..some guy at jackastors gave our waitress the note to give to us.” She wanted to emphasize the humor of the situation so she typed “LOL” again, in the next line of chat. Then she wrote: “it was just fun and so random so i took a pic and decided to share it. we were laughing so hard at the time.”

Prior to this ‘extra’ chat I had with Leila, during our fourth scheduled virtual a few days earlier, I asked the girls a very simple question: “Why do you post pictures on Facebook? I know it’s a very simple question, but really, WHY do you do it? Have you ever thought about this?” Eventually Leila chirped into the conversation and let me know her reasoning: “because we can.” I asked her a second time after she was silent for a period of time during that part of our conversation, thinking that she may have needed a bit of time to think about why she posts online. However, she answered with the same logic: “because we are able to.” She paused for a brief second before adding: “and uhmm why not?”

I tried to be a bit more specific so that I could hear Leila’s voice within the conversation. I decided to refer the group to one of the images that I had sent her in the Microsoft Word document prior to our chat (seen on the next page). Of the five photographs I had sent her in the document, Leila did not comment on this photo. This image depicts Leila, who is smiling and who appears very natural looking. She had embedded this photo from Instagram to her Facebook page. The hashtags she uses to caption the picture are “#smilin” “#nomakeup” and “#natural.” She doesn’t caption the image on Facebook. Her boyfriend is the first to comment on the photo (comments not shown). He writes: “beeeeaatautiful girl, I wonder whos lucky enough to be with you:P” and Leila responds to

this comment writing: “Awe baby, thank you ♥♥ YOU, sillehhhh boy :S ahahaha!!” In our chat, Leila now had more to say about why she posts pictures on Facebook:



Leila: awe i love [my boyfriend's] comments on this pic! well i think i look good with no makeup on so i posted this pic. sometimes girls do this on insta. i also like to appear happy cause i am happy. of course not always but i like to appear happy. i smile in a lot of my pictures. i posted this because to me beauty is natural and im all natural in this pic.

Shenin: Did you expect your boyfriend to comment on this picture?

Leila: Yeah i knew he would lol. he likes checking up on me but i do the same. when youre in a relationship on fb you look at each others profiles constantly. i used to look at my ex's profile, too

Leila's relationship with her boyfriend was not a secret and she had posted numerous pictures of/with him throughout our study. One of the images that caught my attention a few months prior to this fourth chat is seen on the next page. Leila has captioned this photo:

“♥♥♥my baby.” We had also discussed her relationship in our previous three conversations, and I recalled the topic of “checking up” on each other had also come up. While Leila seemed secure in her relationship and always only posted pictures of herself in which she was smiling with him, the fact she was checking up on him using Facebook revealed that she didn’t just post pictures “because we are able to.” Leila posted pictures—in this case, pictures of herself and her boyfriend—to feel a level of certainty within her relationship as well as to express affection.



A Note on Literacy and Language

Leila’s linguistic practices on Facebook and in her conversation excerpts reveal aspects of her digital literacies relating to ‘technological prowess’—that is, how youth *know what to say* and *how to say it* in the places they hang out online, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4. The following linguistic practices are present within this chapter: consistent use

of lowercase letters where uppercase is appropriate, such as at the beginning of a new sentence, as well as the use of “i” as a personal pronoun; use of acronyms that comprise Internet slang, such as “tbh” (to be honest), but far more prevalently, “lol”; lack of contractions when appropriate, as in “hes,” “im,” “thats,” “dont,” “theyre,” and “whats.” On two occasions, Leila uses the language of hashtags to describe her photographs, such as #nofilter, #frenchbraid, #smilin,” “#nomakeup,” and “#natural.” In these two instances, the photos appeared on her Facebook timeline because they were shared from Instagram. However, the language of hashtags prevails on Facebook and Twitter as well.

Seeing this thesis is not a sociolinguistic investigation into the lives of female adolescents on Facebook, this note on language and literacy does not pertain to the development of self through philosophy of language such as Buber’s (1958) notion of “I,” Beneviste’s (1958) “I-You polarity,” or even Lakoff’s (1975) theorization of “women’s language” in relation to issues of power—although these types of investigations would be most interesting. While Leila’s linguistic practices may easily signify a general grammatical laziness, there is more to the way she uses language as in the examples given in the previous paragraph: Leila is enacting certain social codes of conduct in ways that are deemed ‘acceptable’ in her social network. For now this remains a ‘note’ on language and literacy, but her enacted social codes of conduct will be taken up once again in Chapter 10.

Final Thoughts

This chapter has presented a “complicated” (using Leila’s term) narrative of Leila through a reading of the numerous Facebook and Instagram photographs, status updates, and snippets of our various conversations. While it was at times difficult to hear Leila’s voice

among the voices of the other girls in our scheduled group chats, I adjusted my strategies of interaction in a way that (hopefully) allowed her voice to come through. At times feeling overly conscious of my role as researcher, I attended to this concern by picking up on Leila's response cues. Ultimately, my hope in this chapter is to deploy my FPAR methodological framework and make use of it as I analyze Leila's case.

This chapter has been divided into four main themes: (1) Leila's tendency to turn to music, specifically hip hop and rock, as a vehicle to assert a need of and for belonging; (2) her need to express herself freely, even if this self-expression demonstrated subversive or inappropriate acts; (3) her underage drinking and related issues of privacy; and (4) Leila's feelings about her image, beauty, and her relationships—particularly with her boyfriend.

Leila embodies the complexities of online impression management that blur the distinction between what Manago (2008) refers to as “the ideal” and “the authentic” (p. 454). While Leila asserts a need for belonging, there are numerous instances where she appears inhospitable to others who view her profile page or where she projects an image of rebellion through subversive acts such as swearing through hand gestures. Here, “the ideal” of fulfilling her need for belonging is often at odds with “the authentic” version of herself that she performs on Facebook.

This distinction between “the ideal” and “the authentic” is also pertinent to Leila's masquerade of femininity. As Craft-Fairchild (1993) has pointed out in *Masquerade and Gender*, masquerade is often double-sided; it can be represented as a disempowering capitulation to patriarchal structures, yet, it is also depicted as an empowering defiance of

dominant normative discourses of femininity. While Leila’s “pretty” pictures can be taken as the former side of masquerade, her images of rebellion comprise the flip side.

To conclude, although Leila was more agreeable and apathetic than forthcoming during most of our scheduled conversations, a reading of her Facebook profile alone exposes an extremely opinionated version of this beautiful, caring, and cultured ‘model’ student. Interestingly, Leila was well aware from the beginning of this research study that others viewing her profile could easily find her offensive. Below is a status update she posted to her Facebook page during the first week of the research study. Right from the start, I knew there was a lot more to Leila than meets the eye.



Chapter 8

Irene:

Beaching, ‘Branching,’ and the Apprehension of Boredom

Facebook is like the one place we’re actually on outside of being at school together or at parties. Other sites are better but I know they won’t catch on like Facebook. ... I am on FB everyday. I mean, it’s part of me and I’m part of it.

--Irene

Before recruiting Irene as a participant in my research study, I had attempted to recruit two other potential candidates who were both mutual friends of Geneviève and Leila. One of these two candidates had expressed interest in participating but ultimately decided she did not want to participate because I could not let her know the dates and times of scheduled virtual chats in advance; this despite my explanation that the dates and times of the chats were to be decided upon as a group to suit everyone’s schedule. It turned out that the other potential candidate, funny enough, did not fit one of the basic requirements of participation. I had approached this individual—also a mutual friend of Geneviève and Leila—with my Facebook recruitment message (Appendix A), and I received this message in reply: “Dear Shenin, I am a 17 years old adolescent student, last year of high school, live in Canada, go on Facebook everyday and I communicate on Facebook in English with my classmates. Your research seems cool.” Delighted that this individual seemed to fit the criteria of my study, I replied back with this message: “Thank you so much for replying to my message. I am wondering if you had any questions or if you would like to chat before you commit to participating in the study?” A few minutes later I received this response: “Well the problem is...lol...I’m not a female. Hehehe, sorry!” From the looks of this

individual's profile, including username and the limited timeline information of which I had access, I was not actually able to identify the profile as belonging to a male or a female. I found the interaction humorous and sent a message back explaining why I was only looking for female participants. He let me know that Geneviève had mentioned the study to him at school the previous day and that he wanted to participate but he knew he wasn't eligible—he let me know he was just “playing around” in his previous messages. Interestingly, just after I thanked him and we exchanged goodbyes (and a few laughs), he asked: “How about Irene?”

Upon this student's suggestion, I looked for a link to Irene's page from within his limited profile. I noticed that Irene was tagged in a number of his photographs, so I clicked on her name and browsed her photos and timeline. Scanning through her pictures, I immediately identified Irene as a friend of both Geneviève and Leila. From the general looks of Irene's profile, she seemed to fit the criteria of my study. From these very early observations, it was clear that Irene took to Facebook every day, regularly posting pictures and links to/from other new media sites such as YouTube and Twitter. She also regularly communicated her feelings or observations of the day via her status updates. I also documented a unique observation of Irene's profile that certainly played out as the research study took its course: there was a very strong male presence appearing within her photo albums, accompanying comment boxes, as well as on her wall.

I sent her my Facebook recruitment message that night and heard back from her the next day. Irene informed me that she fit all the criteria of the study and that she would like to participate. I sent her a Facebook friend request, which she immediately accepted. I then let her know about the consent forms and she relayed to me that she would only need the

participant consent form because she had just turned 18. We chatted about the research study and what her participation would entail. The following conversation thus ensued:

Irene: Why are you interested in studying our identity on Facebook though?
It's just who we are, online.

Shenin: Great question. Well, I am interested in looking at how you and the other girls represent yourselves online and on Facebook specifically. I am looking to explore how these representations come about as well the meanings of these representations. Do you think the way you represent yourself online is the same as how you represent yourself in person?

Irene: What do you mean represent?

Shenin: What I mean is the way you appear online, including the ways you act, interact, communicate, dress, present yourself...

Irene: Well then I guess I am a bit different online. I mean, no one is ever exactly the same but imho [in my humble opinion] I never thought about it really. Social media is just supposed to be fun in my opinion and to keep me connected to my friends. But I am interested in participating in your study and talking more about these things. It's not like we talk at school about this stuff and I don't with my friends either.

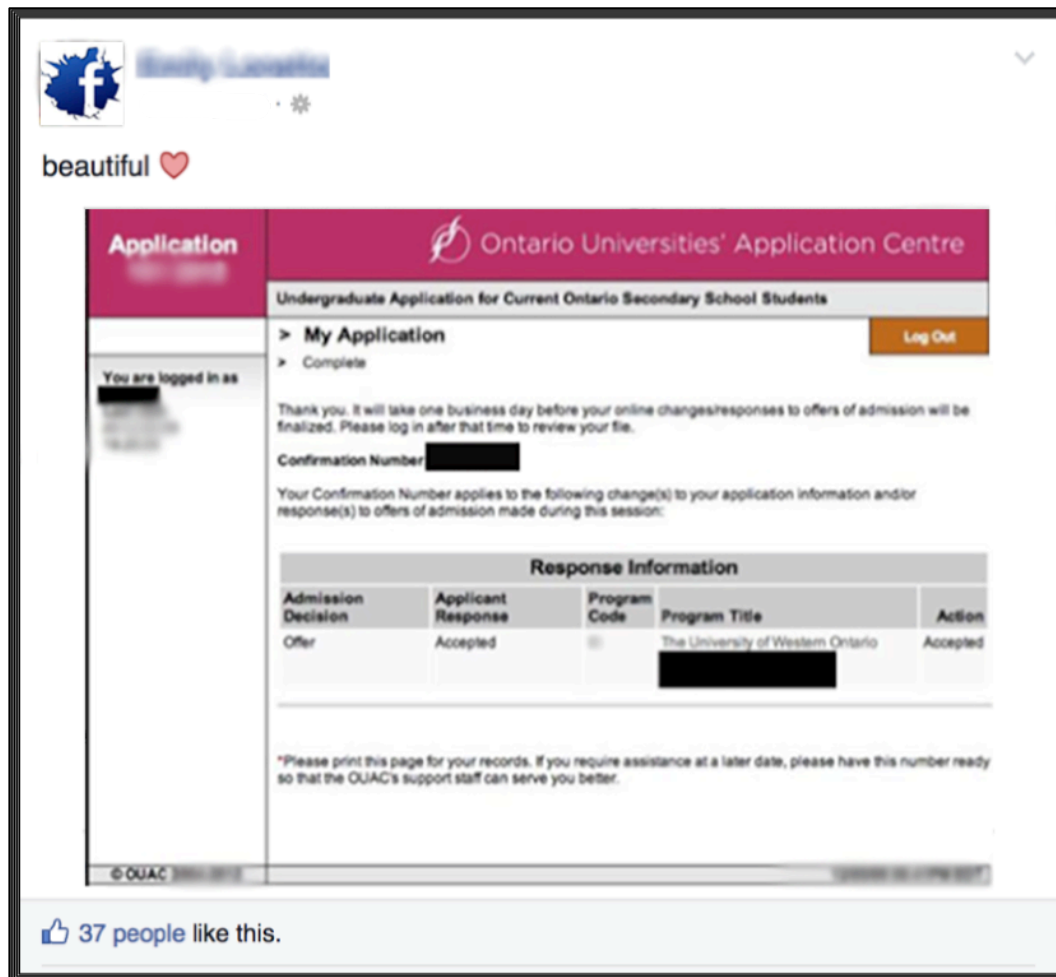
Irene's initial questioning about the study illuminated her inquisitive, pensive, open-minded, and approachable nature. Chatting with her was effortless and easy; Irene seemed genuinely interested in learning more about identity and representation per the research study. As well, she didn't ask about the other participants or mention any names; this told me that she was thinking for herself and basing her decision to participate on her own accord rather than the influence of others. Irene's honesty also came through in the above conversation excerpt, in her letting me know that she had never given much thought to her virtual representations on Facebook. It was fascinating that within a matter of a few minutes of conversation, Irene's opinion changed from "[i]t's just who we are, online" to "I guess I *am* a bit different online" (emphasis added). Irene was thinking fast yet critically; as soon as

she understood what ‘representation’ meant in the context of the research study, she had a better understanding of why I would be interested in studying identity on Facebook.

At the end of this brief initial chat, I let Irene know that we would further discuss issues of representation during our scheduled virtual chats. With no further initial questions, I emailed Irene her participant consent form. Much to my surprise, Irene had read, printed, signed, scanned and emailed the document back to me within ten minutes. I noticed her lit green icon in the Facebook chat window after I received the document in my email inbox. I sent her this message: “Thank you, Irene, for your form. Wow, that was super fast!” Her reply to this message, though short, is quite telling and can in fact be read as an exordium to the first section of this chapter. She wrote back: “I’m pretty good with technology 😊”

“When you really have nothing else to do...”

One of the very first postings I noticed on Irene’s wall is seen in the screenshot seen on the next page, taken shortly after I received Irene’s participant consent form in my email inbox. This screenshot actually displays another screenshot, captured from the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre (OUAC) website and taken by Irene. Her screenshot displays her acceptance into a prestigious undergraduate program at the University of Western Ontario (UWO), which was to commence shortly after the research study ended. Looking at the time stamp of her screenshot as dated by the login time on the OUAC website (blocked out for Irene’s privacy), she had just found out about this acceptance literally a few minutes before I noticed it on her profile. She captions the posting “beautiful ♥,” the heart icon expressing her happiness. There is no element of surprise or exclamation in her caption.



The posting garnered 37 Likes and 17 comments (not shown) from Irene’s friends and classmates who were all extremely impressed with her achievement. One of Irene’s three responses in the comment thread was appreciative (“thank you ♥”), while the other two skirted the praise altogether—it seemed as though she was trying to change the topic of the thread in these other two comments. Irene’s posting, along with her casual responses in the comment box, display a moment of on-screen *sprezzatura*, as if she had expected acceptance into the program all along. Moreover, Irene’s method of communicating this information to her friends by taking a screenshot exhibits an element of originality as well as technological know-how. That weekend, I saw Irene’s green icon once again and I congratulated her on

her news. I also asked her about the screenshot. She let me know that she had learned the technique from “one of the guys at work” at her part-time job as a technology associate at TechCanada Limited (note: name of workplace has been changed). I asked her what aspect of her job required taking screenshots and she replied: “No no, we were just messing around with one of the computers. We were bored.”



Two additional instances of Irene “messing around” on her computer occurred within the next two weeks of my observations of Irene’s Facebook page. The first instance is captured in the screenshot seen on this page, which has already been discussed briefly at the end of Chapter 5. This screenshot displays one of the five images in the Microsoft Word document I sent to Irene prior to our first virtual chat. Irene is seen on the left side, with her friend Melanie next to her. Irene provided some comments on this screenshot in the Microsoft Word document sent to her prior to our first virtual chat. The following are her comments:

Screenshot 1: Picture added on [REDACTED]

Below, please comment on the photo. What is the context of the photo? What are you saying through your body language? Who is next to you (state relationship; name not necessary)? Why did you post this to your Facebook account?

The context of the photo is basically just that due to the fact that I have fourth period spare, I have a lot of free time. [REDACTED], the girl that I'm with, is someone that I spend the majority of my fourth period spares with. What I'm saying through my body language is simply just that we're fooling around. I posted the photos on facebook because they were requested by some of the people that are included in the album.

Irene writes that her body language communicates that she “fooling around” because she has “a lot of free time” during her fourth period spare. She also relays that she posted the picture upon the request of others. While the explanation of her bodily display solicits viewers to find humour in her over-emphasized facial expression and accompanying hand gesture, Irene’s bodily display can also be read as obscene, inappropriate, and highly offensive. Due to the fictionalization of the image, it might be difficult for the reader to discern what Irene is doing with her face: she is crossing her eyes and flaring her nostrils with her mouth agape. Her right hand is flush to her chest as if she is enacting an involuntary reflex, similar to an uncontrollable movement of someone suffering from athetoid cerebral palsy. Irene’s implicative insensitivity, while certainly jarring, is not unnoticed; in this photo, we see Melanie glancing at her sideways and sheepishly, looking slightly uncomfortable and discommoded.

In the comment box that juxtaposes the screenshot of the girls (not shown), Irene initiates the comments thread, writing: “We’re the cutest Melanie.” Melanie’s response to Irene’s comment appears to be written with reserve: “...i guess we could call it cuteee.” Here, Melanie’s use of the phrase ‘I guess’ reveals a sense of uncertainty related to the

photograph. The last comment is from another girl, who writes: “I cannot handle how attractive you are in this photo.” The overall tone of sarcasm is pervasive in all three of the girls’ comments. Irene knows she appears neither “cute” nor “attractive” in the photograph, yet the general sarcasm insinuates that appearing “cute” and “attractive” are the defining norms of how females in her social network *should* appear in photographs on Facebook.



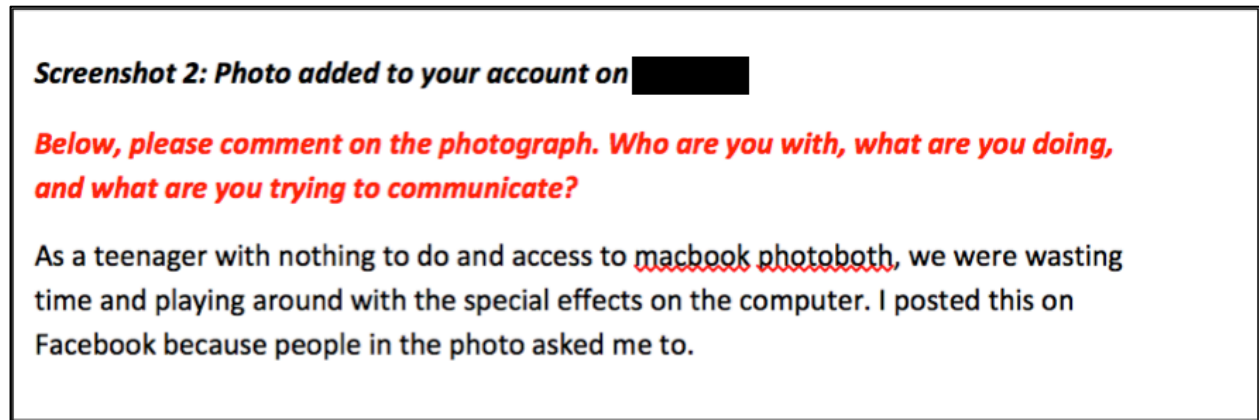
The second instance of Irene “messing around” on her computer is seen on this page. This photograph was posted by Irene to her Facebook. The photo was taken on the same day and during the same fourth period spare as the previous screenshot, but for whatever reason Irene chose to post the photographs at different times.

In the screenshot on this page, we see Irene (center) with two female friends and two male friends. Everyone is posing rather awkwardly for the photo. Irene and the two male friends are seen with distorted ‘funny’ enlarged faces, an obvious result of photo-editing. The two other girls in this screenshot appear to retain normal (smiling) expressions. Irene’s

caption of the photograph reads: “cannot even explain how useless fourth period spare is...” She has tagged the other four people in the photograph. It is interesting to note here that only one of the three *girls* in the photograph—Irene—appears with a photo-edited ‘funny’ enlarged face. The photo gathered seven Likes, six of which were from male friends and only one from a female, who is also one of the girls tagged in the photograph. This breakdown of Likes is significant, seeing how there is a general tendency for females in Irene’s social network to Like images whenever the females in the photograph pose with intent to look ‘pretty.’ Irene’s face is distorted and as such she does not appear “cute” or “attractive” in a way that would appeal to her female friends, which could be why only one female friend has Liked the photo.

From the comment box that juxtaposes the photo (not shown), the commenters are aware of the funny and immature ‘characters’ as represented through their photo-edited bodily displays. Irene’s friend Sam initiates the comment thread. He writes: “can’t believe you’re going to university.” Irene responds with an “Ouff” followed by “:\$ pound”. Sam ends the thread, writing “LOL” in a manner true to the acronym’s literal meaning. Generally, Irene’s male friends asserted this over-used acronym more literally than many of her female friends, who often used ‘lol’ in one of three other ways: as a filler statement, usually seen at the end of a comment; as a remark of discomfort or perceived agreeability; or as response for the sake of response, that is, to have online presence without asserting an actual opinion. Overall, Sam’s jocular remarks about Irene’s acceptance into university speak to Irene’s contrasting academic/professional and playful personalities, a juxtaposition that played out for the entire duration of the study. His comments can be read very simply as an extension of “messing around.”

The photograph that has just been discussed was also included in the Microsoft Word document I sent to Irene prior to our first scheduled virtual chat. Her comments regarding this photograph consist of two sentences, seen below my questions in red:



In the first of these two sentences, Irene self-identifies as a teenager “with nothing to do.” From the caption of the photograph, she clearly means nothing to do *during her fourth period spare*. Her claims of “wasting time” and “playing around” during her spare period echo the explanations she gives in the previous photograph. However, from this first sentence, Irene also reveals the absence of an outside photographer—Irene and her friends are taking the pictures themselves using a MacBook installed with a software application called ‘Photo Booth’ that utilizes an iSight webcam by Apple Inc. The second sentence of Irene’s comments is yet again similar to her comments of the previous picture: she states to have posted this picture to her Facebook account upon the request of her friends.

Both of these images belong to a Facebook photo album Irene has named “When you really have nothing else to do...” When we discussed these two images during our first virtual conversation, I asked Irene why she chose to use her fourth period spare to engage in

a Photo Booth shoot with her friends. She asked me cheekily if I had read her comments regarding the screenshots in the Microsoft Word document. I let her know that I had certainly read her comments, and that my understanding is that she had taken the pictures because she was bored. I then let her know I was wondering why she chose to engage in this *specific* activity to pass time. This is how the conversation then unfolded:

- Irene: Fourth period spare is such a waste of time, everyone knows. I had my macbook and we were bored so we found something fun to do with it.
- Shenin: Why the faces?
- Irene: Well the one with me and [Melanie], we are using photobooth but not the special effects. My face is just random, me being bored.
- Shenin: And the other photo?
- Irene: Yeah, we used the special effects to transform our faces. It was fun since not all my friends have the program because they don't have macbooks. Oh and we didn't have internet access at the time.
- Shenin: So, this was the second best way to pass your time during your fourth period spare?
- Irene: I guess.
- Shenin: What would you have done on the Internet if you had access?
- Irene: Facebook lol. Or 9gag²⁸. Or Twitter. I didn't care to put these pics up on Facebook but they wanted me to so I did.
- Shenin: Why do you think they wanted you to post them?
- Irene: I don't know. Probably to be seen as funny.

²⁸ <http://9gag.com> is an online platform and social media website wherein users upload and share user-generated humorous images and videos.

The conversation topic meandered after Irene's final comment in the above conversation excerpt. However, this short exchange positioned the Internet and social media in particular as permeating passages Irene flits through when transitioning from schoolwork to free time. As well, in the absence of an Internet connection, Irene and her friends still found a way to gain (latent) online presence, seeing that the pictures were later posted to her Facebook account. Irene demonstrates her technological competencies, in part because of her privileged ownership of a MacBook; however, for this reason, taking photos with the Photo Booth software did not have the novelty value for her as it did her friends who did not own MacBooks. Despite this, there is indeed realizable value in taking the pictures—even for Irene. As noted by Kim and Kamil (2004): “Computers give adolescents opportunities to develop literacy skills through collaboration and social interactions with each other” (p. 358). We can see from these two images that the collaborative efforts of the Photo Booth shoot, guided by Irene and her MacBook, enabled the students' development of digital literacies and photo-visual literacy in particular. Although Irene claims that she and her friends were simply “wasting time” and “playing around” during the Photo Booth shoot, these students were in fact engaging in an instance of social interaction that can be considered as part of their “null curriculum” (Eisner, 1985). What this means is that the students created an opportunity to use technology outside of the classroom in a way to develop visual modes of thinking that are not traditionally considered as part of their intellectual repertoire. As we will see in the next section, Irene's very presence on Facebook is in fact subsumed in a notion of visual multimodality.

“Facebook is dying just a little”

Irene’s affinity with technology and new media became increasingly apparent with each passing month of the research study. Early on in the study, I noticed a trend relating to Irene’s posting habits on Facebook. Irene posted a link to <http://9gag.com/gag/4244314>, which displays a humorous image of a volleyball with a drawn-on face, found inside a sport shop. Soon after, Irene posted a link to let her friends know that she had started playing the Family Feud game online, as seen on this page. Both of these postings can be taken as examples that establish Irene’s playful nature, disporting a need of self-amusement with a variety of digital media.

Three days after this Family Feud posting, Irene changed her Facebook status by embedding a tweet from her Twitter account to her



Facebook account. Embedding tweets to her Facebook account is something that Irene did at least once a week throughout my months of observation, except when she went on a Caribbean cruise during the fourth month of the study. An example of Irene posting to her Facebook account from Twitter is seen on the next page, in a screenshot of her status update:

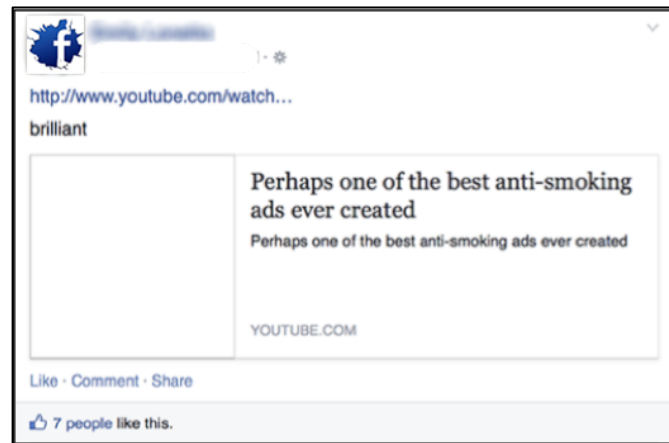


In this posting, we also see that Irene acknowledges membership within another social network site, LinkedIn, described in Chapter 2 as business-oriented social network(ing) site. Interestingly, once again Irene discloses self-awareness of her age. Instead of identifying as a “teenager,” as noted earlier in this section, here she asserts a sense of maturity in stating she is “getting old” because she feels the need to check her (professional) LinkedIn account more frequently than her (social) Facebook account. From this it is understood that Irene equates “getting old” with more time spent on her professional communications and less time on her social communications. While it is rather amusing that her statement comparing LinkedIn to Facebook originates from a completely different new media website—Twitter—perhaps more intriguing is that Irene is extremely aware of the frequency she checks her various social media accounts. In more broad terms, this speaks to the sheer amount of time she spends online, which, as we see from these examples and the ones that follow, is noticeably a great deal.

There are indeed countless more examples of Irene displaying her frequent engagement with digital media up until the very end of the research study. Irene often posted YouTube clips to her Facebook profile, such as Simple Plan’s ‘Summer Paradise’ featuring Sean Paul (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjHlgrGsLWQ>), a remixed Disney/Pixar

song from the film ‘Up’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2yt1ooLQGo>), and a mashup by Third Eye Blind, Flo Rida, and Matisyahu & Akon entitled ‘One Blind Whistle-Blower’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5_EIcF32Y0). These are just three of the many YouTube music clips Irene posted to her wall, offered here as examples of the YouTube material appearing on her wall within a span of 10 days. These clips also illuminate Irene’s self-described “eclectic taste in music, usually some kind of rock”—as she told the group during our second scheduled virtual chat.

There was only one occasion, during the third month of the study, when a YouTube clip appeared on her wall in a media format other than a music video. This occasion is captured in the screenshot seen on this page, and is a rather insightful



and thought-provoking anti-smoking statement (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO0qwl5k9R4>). Seven of Irene’s friends Liked the video, four females and three males. The only comment (which is not shown) regarding the posting is made by one of the three male friends, who further expresses his appreciation of the clip by stating: “so awesome!!” By means of this posting, Irene projects an earnest and conscientious presence, exhibiting perspicacious judgment in the media content appearing on her Facebook wall. This presence is in stark juxtaposition with some of her rather insensitive postings as discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

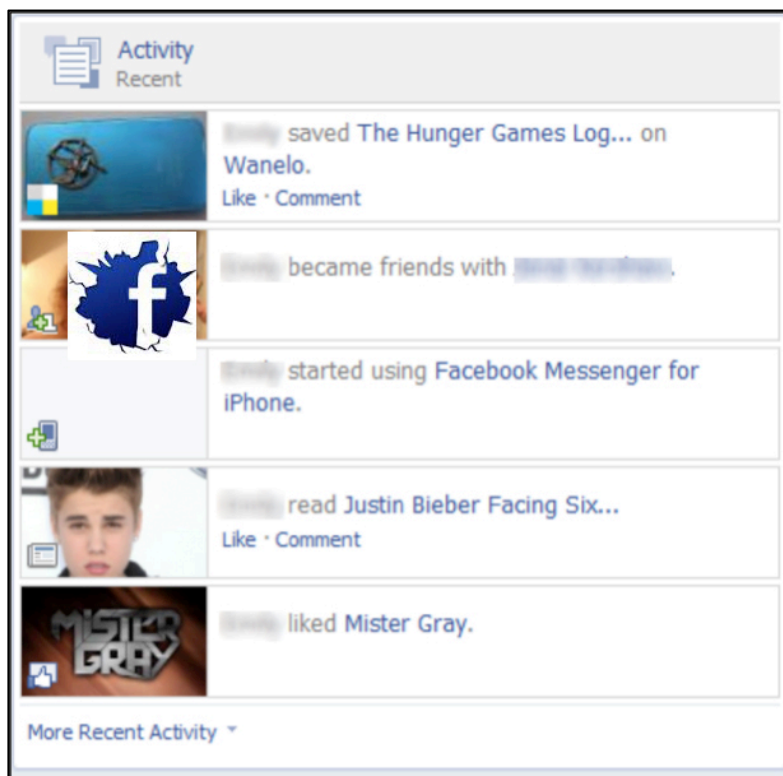
While posting clips from YouTube is a very common activity for Irene as well as for her friends on Facebook, Irene demonstrated her *branching literacy* in a way that outplayed most others in her social network. Branching literacy, according to Eshet-Alkalai (2004), relates to navigating texts in hypermedia environments in a non-linear, easy, and precise manner; he notes that “people with good branching literacy are characterized by a good sense of multidimensional spatial orientation, that is, the ability to avoid losing orientation when surfing” (p. 99). Most impressive, Eshet-Alkalai (2004) would argue, is the breadth of digital media with which Irene engages, including some rather obscure sites she either posts from and/or embeds to her Facebook account, such as the following as seen on her timeline: a post about Investopedia (<http://www.investopedia.com>); a post expressing her addiction to Wanelo (<http://wanelo.com>), an online shopping mall; various postings from <https://soundcloud.com>, a social sound platform of audio distribution enabling users to create, upload, record, promote and share their originally-created sounds; various posts from <http://9gag.com>; an embedded link from www.timeanddate.com, counting down the days until the beginning of her Orientation Week at UWO; and a shared photograph of a ‘Cthulhu’ wedding cake from www.ThinkGeek.com.

Along with the breadth of digital media, the frequency of Irene’s engagements with digital media is also significant to note. During any given week throughout the research study, Irene engaged with numerous types of media and technologies. The screenshot seen on the next page was taken in the fourth month of the study, and presents a snapshot of Irene’s recent activity during one particular week. The screenshot demonstrates Irene’s bountiful engagement with media and technology. We see from this screenshot that Irene has done the following five different activities in one week: visited Wanelo and saved a Hunger

Games Log; formed a friendship with an Facebook user; started using Facebook Messenger for iPhone; read an article about Justin Bieber from a news website; and Liked 'Mister Gray,' a Miami-based deejay.

Only two of these five activities are strictly Facebook activities: forming a new Facebook friendship and Liking Mister Gray's Facebook page. The other three activities involve utilizing different technologies and (new) media sites. Her installation of Facebook Messenger for iPhone reveals not only that she carries around a miniature, portable media device to keep her connected at all times, but, by way of her installation of the Facebook Messenger application to this device, Irene now has the ability to entertain on-demand chats with her Facebook friends from almost anywhere.

As we have seen throughout this second section, Irene exhibits an affinity towards using and exploring new media,



digital media, and various technologies. Except in instances when she did not have the ability to be 'plugged in,' such as in the absence of an Internet connection, Irene always found a way of being online and connected. A perfect example of this occurred during our final scheduled virtual conversation. Irene was uncharacteristically late in joining our

conversation. I asked the other girls if they knew if she would be joining the conversation, to which Nikki answered: “Well, she’s in Sable Beach right now.” Literally a few seconds later, Irene’s green icon appeared within our Facebook Chat box. She entered the conversation, greeting everyone and apologizing for joining in slightly late. She immediately told us the following: “I’m on Messenger on my phone but I’ll try to keep up best I can.” I was intrigued that she was chatting with us using her mobile phone while at Sable Beach so I followed up with my thoughts:

Shenin: Wow ... I appreciate you found a way to join us while you are away.

Irene: I am actually on the beach right now lol. My friends are swimming.

Shenin: Did you know before you left that you’d use you’re the Facebook Messenger app on your phone to join our chat?

Irene: I didn’t actually think about it, no. But I knew we had a chat. Here I am! lol

Shenin: Do you ever think about the technology or media you use?

Irene: What do you mean?

Shenin: Well over the past four months I’ve observed that you use a LOT of different types of media and platforms and technologies.

Irene: It’s not like I sit down and think about what I’m going to do online, like wonder to myself, uhhh, do I check fb or twitter or go on whatever site or app. I just like discovering new things and new apps and new sites. I like to keep connected and on top of what’s out there. And to be honest I think Facebook is dying just a little.

Irene’s very last comment in this conversation excerpt struck a chord with all of the participants in the conversation. I asked Irene to explain her comment about Facebook dying just a little:

Shenin: [Irene], if other sites and online hangouts are taking over and Facebook is dying, then why are you still on Facebook? Other than for

purposes of this study, of course ;) Seriously though, would you ever leave Facebook?

Irene: Facebook is like the one place we're actually on outside of being at school together or at parties. Other sites are better but I know they won't catch on like Facebook. And no I would never leave unless I had to for some reason. I am on FB everyday. I mean, it's part of me and I'm part of it. I live for the notifications. The more the better!

Despite Irene's previous statement that she didn't "sit down and think" about her online activities before plugging in, her final excerpt on this page suggests she uses (not to say thinks about) Facebook more than she realizes or even wants to admit. Specifically, her statement that "[Facebook is] part of me and I'm part of it" implies an embodied association of master and machine and of mind and megabyte. Furthermore, this statement infers Irene's complete submergence into the technological trappings of the "Facebook Generation" (Kitsis, 2008), so much so that her overprogrammed ontology denies recognition of Facebook membership as choice. Finally, Irene's remark that she lives for notifications²⁹—"The more the better!"—validates Irene's strong presence on Facebook and the amount of hours she spends online. As we will see in the next section, Irene's need for this type of validation can also be read in relation to the number of Likes her postings and pictures receive—especially when it comes to photographs in which she appears 'pretty.'

"people post stuff on Facebook so that others can like them"

When Irene was not posting links from other sites to her wall or embedding tweets to her Facebook page, she often took to Facebook to post pictures of herself, her friends, and her boyfriend. Not once did she post any pictures of her family. During our very first

²⁹ Notifications are markers that signal activity related to a registered Facebook user. Examples of this activity include letting the Facebook user know that he or she has been tagged in a photograph, or that his or her name appears in a posting. For a visual display of notifications, refer back to Chapter 5, *Figure 8*.

conversation, I asked all of the girls about the role of family in their life and on Facebook.

Irene was unusually silent during this part of the conversation. She finally chirped in with a bit of my encouragement:

Shenin: What about you, [Irene]? How significant is the presence of your family in your life and on your Facebook?

Irene: I find them important though i have a shifty family scenario so would prefer not to talk about it much if you don't mind.

Shenin: I understand and I want you and everyone else to feel comfortable at all times during our chats. What about friends though? I see from your profile that you have many...

Irene: I do have a lot of friends. You've seen most of them now since you've seen all my prom pics. My boyfriend [Frank] goes to a different high school so I have friends at his school. Actually I'm going to his prom soon. My friends are super important. They're like family.

Irene posted hundreds of pictures in various albums to her Facebook profile over the duration of the study, all neatly compartmentalized into the following titled albums: "Prom" "Prom/Sable/Graduation," "DECA," "Sable," "Mobile Uploads," and "Birthday Edgewalk." She appears in these pictures almost exclusively with female friends and/or with her boyfriend, Frank. Irene appeared in hundreds of other photos that appeared on her wall mostly as a result of others tagging her name. Again, these pictures usually displayed Irene either with *other girls* or with her *boyfriend*. This is significant to note because the lack of male presence in her photographs (outside of the photos with her boyfriend) is in strong juxtaposition with the distinctive male gaze cast on her wall and made obvious in many comment boxes. To be clear about this: Irene appeared in very few photographs with *male friends* (except in large group shots). However, her male friends *frequently posted* to Irene's

wall, commenting on either status updates or the various links she posted to her timeline. Her male friends rarely commented on Irene's photographs.

There were many other instances of a strong male gaze; the following two instances are offered as strong examples (screenshots are not embedded to protect the identities of Irene's friends). A male friend, who has observed Irene's engagement with digital technology, makes the first posting. The male friend writes: "You're the biggest troll! LOL," and then Irene and this friend engage in technobabble relating to the event that spurred the original posting. For instance, Irene replies: "I'm going to hell. Virtual MMORPG hell." The male friend then leaves this comment: "true, don't worry, you can reunite with your M 85 maxed out stat character.....LMAOOO." Irene ends the thread with the following comment: "dude, im a level 85 paladin ☺ get it straight."

This second screenshot displays a posting made by a different male friend. This posting was made in the last month of the study, exactly a week after Irene returned from brief Facebook hiatus to go on a Caribbean cruise. This male friend has been out of touch with Irene for a period of time and misses her presence. As he posts to her wall:

I physically feel like a part of me is missing.

Maybe it's because I lost my thumb in a horrible water polo accident.

But I like to think that it's because I haven't seen you in what feels like decades, but has probably only been a millenium.

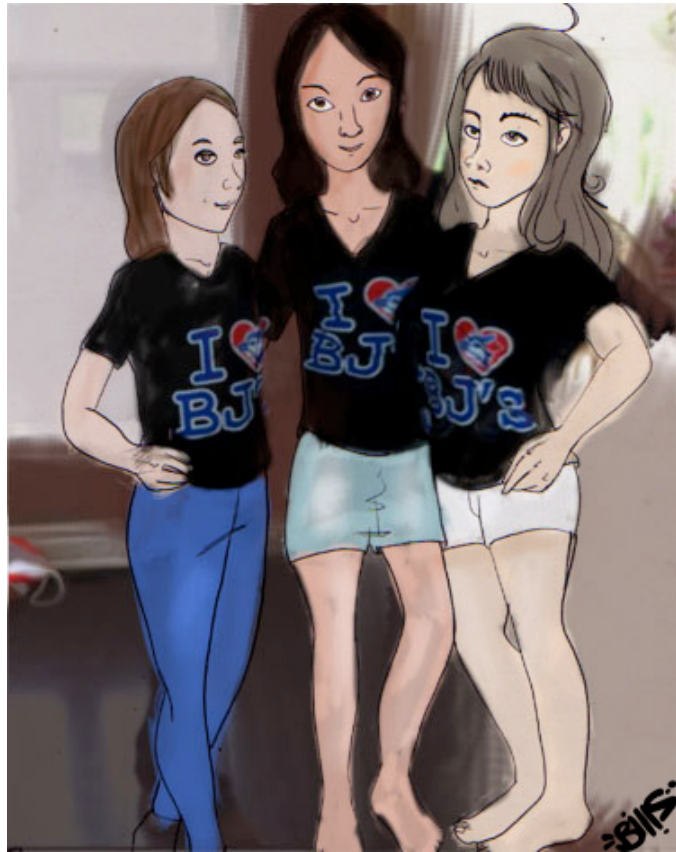
He wants to let Irene know that he misses her, but he is not very direct with asserting his feelings. Although no one has Liked or commented on his posting, he initiates the comment

thread to his own posting. He asks: “How do we go about rectifying this awful situation?” Irene does not answer or leave a comment in the comment thread.

However, a different male friend leaves this comment: “Because it is impossible to say, ‘I miss you, we should hang out.’” This comment is noticeably sarcastic, prompting the original male friend to reply with an equal dose of sarcasm. In retaliation, he posts a link to ‘The History of the Zipper’ (<http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa082497.htm>), indicating that he is annoyed and that this other male friend should ‘zip it.’ Once again, the original male has a difficult time expressing his feelings, silencing this individual with a hyperlink rather than with his own words.

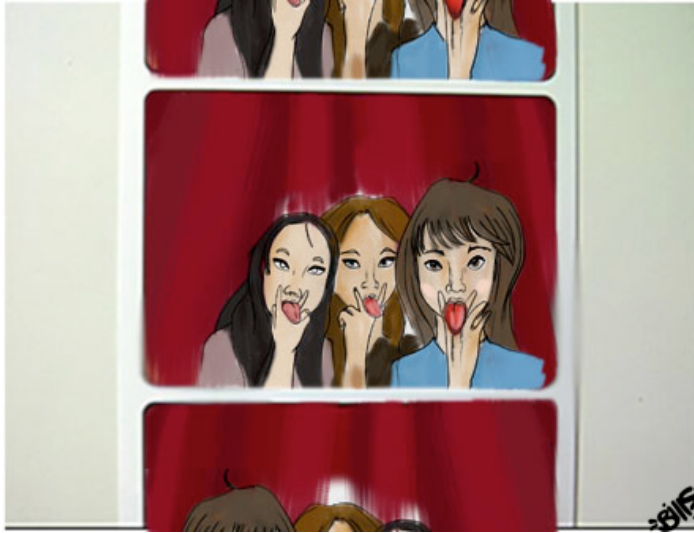
While the above two examples appear as scenarios of the male presence on Irene’s Facebook timeline, what follows is a series of photographs that speaks to the *absence* of male presence when it came to commenting on or Liking Irene’s photographs. The distinction, to be clear, is the manifest male presence observed within Irene’s timeline *except* when it came to commenting on photographs specifically. When it came to photographs in which Irene appeared with her female friends, as we will see in the next four instances, Irene always either commented upon or Liked the posting (or both). Noticeably, there is a complete lack of visible male presence in these postings; no male friends have commented upon or Liked any of the photos. The next four photographs appearing in this section display Irene with her various female friends from school. These photographs appeared on Irene’s timeline either because she uploaded them herself or because her friends tagged her name. As well, these four are chosen as strong examples, and each is taken from a different month of the research study (this is done to demonstrate consistency in research observations).

At the top of this page we see Irene, to the very right, with two other females friends, all wearing the same t-shirts (note the sexual innuendo of the printed phrase “I ♥ BJ’s”) during a trip to Sable Beach in the second month of our study. Irene has posted this photo to her own timeline. She tags the other two girls. Irene and the two other girls Like the photo.



The second photograph on this page depicts Irene and three other female friends after their graduation ceremony. Irene appears in the photograph in the middle—she is the shortest of the four girls. This photograph was posted by one of Irene’s friends, who has tagged Irene and the two other girls’ names. Only Irene has Liked the image.





On the left, we see Irene and two friends appearing on a picture of a photo reel. Irene can be seen to the far right in this image. Like the two other girls, she is sticking out her tongue. This is the only image in which Irene engages in this specific

bodily display. One of the other girls in the photographs captioned the photograph in a comment box (not shown). She writes: “This one is my fave ☺.” She also tags Irene and the other girl, who has Liked the photograph. Irene does not Like this image. Instead, she leaves the comment “bahaha ♥,” signifying a fond remembrance of the good time they had together.

The girl to the very left of the image then writes: “Lmaooo were too classy!”

Below right, we see a photograph taken at the University of Western Ontario (UWO). Irene, who appears second from the left, is seen with four other girls during a visit to



UWO in the final month of our study, prior to Orientation Week. This picture was taken in Irene’s new student residence. The four other girls live on the same floor or in her building.

The photograph appeared on Irene’s wall after her name was tagged by one of the others appearing in the picture, and has been captioned: “Thee Ladiezzz ☺.” Interestingly, four of the five girls in the image—Irene included—are wearing very short shorts, while only one is wearing long pants.

These four images are but four examples that demonstrate a complete lack of visible male engagement with Irene’s photographs. None of her male friends commented on or Liked these four images or other similar photos in which Irene appeared with her female friends. This observation may seem insignificant, but, as demonstrated earlier with the (text) examples of Irene’s male friends posting to her timeline, her male friends are clearly engaged with Irene’s Facebook profile and are thus more than likely looking at the abundance of photographs that appear on her timeline. That none of her male friends ever commented on or Liked a single image of Irene with her female friends still remains a mystery—though one possible explanation is because Irene’s relationship status was posted to her timeline, comments made by male friends on these types of photos would have caused her boyfriend to experience feelings of jealousy that may have disrupted his relationship with Irene. However, this is purely speculation.

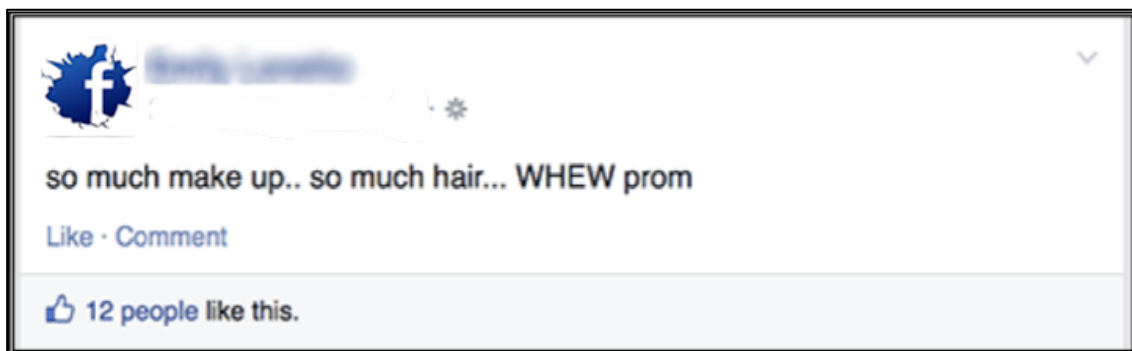
During our third virtual chat, I asked Irene why she Liked so many images that appeared on her timeline, particularly when she appeared in the pictures. This was her response:

Irene: Well people post stuff on Facebook so that others can like them. I just feel like it’s nice to get noticed and recognized. It’s nice to have fans!

Shenin: What do you mean so that other can like ‘them’? Do you mean ‘them’ as people or them as in the stuff posted?

Irene: I meant the stuff posted. But them as people too. I mean we put a lot of effort into our pictures and getting the pics right. Like I remember spending hours getting ready for prom. The pics came out great and of course I wanted people to acknowledge that.

Irene certainly did put time and effort into her appearance. Other than her photo-edited ‘funny’ photos discussed earlier in this chapter, Irene always looked good in her photographs. Prom, of course, was not an exception. In fact, Irene even made a point the following status update to her Facebook profile regarding her prom preparations, seen below. The next section of this chapter examines Irene’s bodily displays, starting off from where this section ends—her prom pictures.



“Some girls I swear...Photoshop and them are best friends.”

Posted to Irene’s timeline were many prom pictures. The photo on the next page displays Irene and her boyfriend kissing her on the cheek as she smiles for the camera. Irene’s prom pictures indeed “came out great” and she looked extremely happy and beautiful in all of her pictures. Moreover, Irene appeared poised and ‘pretty’ in all of her prom pictures as well. Since Irene had brought up the topic of prom during our third virtual chat, I carried on with the prom talk. I asked her if she used photo-editing software to enhance any of these pictures. This is what she had to say:

Irene: Well obviously I wouldn't distort the images the same way as the other pictures you saw on my profile before. That was prom and those pictures are memories forever.

Shenin: So no editing?

Irene: Well filters but they don't count and everyone uses filters. To get the lighting right. Sometimes the lighting was off.

Shenin: Do you use filters for any other reason when you edit photos?

Irene: Uhm, for red eyes and to create softer slightly blurry images too. Some girls I swear...Photoshop and them are best friends.

Shenin: What do you mean?



Irene: Some girls spend hours you know, getting rid of things they don't want on their body or whatever or changing things. I don't do all that.

Irene's comment that filters "don't count"

because "everyone uses filters" implied a normalized use of filters among her friends when it came to posting pictures on Facebook. This virtual transformation feature was clearly acceptable and even expected between Irene and her friends. What was *not* normal (and even scoffed at by Irene) was the use of Photoshop by other girls to alter their physical attributes and 'erase' unwanted bodily features. She let me know that she had editing

software installed on her MacBook and used it sometimes, but more for her personal projects related to one of her main hobbies, graphic design—to be discussed in the next section.

Towards the end of the study, one of Irene's male friends posted a very interesting comment to her timeline (comment not shown). He writes: "You change profile pictures more than a girl changes clothes :P." In the comments, Irene does respond but purposely diverts attention from the subject [she actually writes "(diverting from subject)"]. I saw Irene's green icon lit late the same evening I had seen the male friend's posting, so I decided to ask her about it:

Shenin: Do you feel uncomfortable with the comment this friend made? Is that why you diverted the subject?

Irene: I don't know about uncomfortable. But I am more comfortable when my girlfriends comment on my stuff. When it's males I just don't know what the intention is. Especially since I have my relationship status posted for everyone to see. So sometimes its weird.

Shenin: What do you feel about his statement?

Irene: I guess it's funny. And true. Ok not literally I mean. But I have such great pics so so many of them can be profile pics.

Shenin: What makes your profile pics "great"?

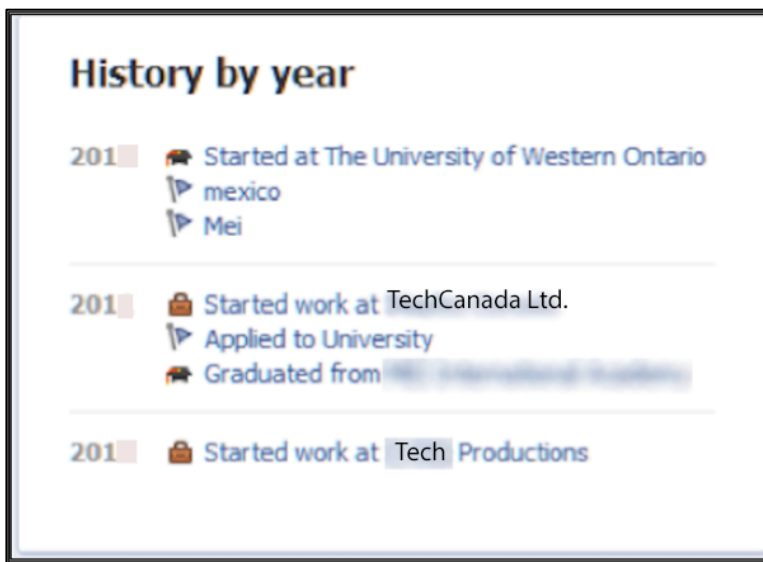
Irene: Obviously I have to look good. Good teeth, smile, hair, outfit. And skin. Obviously I am in the photo if it's a profile picutre and usually with my friends. Or boyfriend.

Irene's descriptions of what makes a profile picture "great" were definitely present in all of the profile pictures posted to her Facebook account. In fact, these descriptions were true to *all* of her pictures, save the ones where she is deliberately making 'funny' faces or "fooling around." Interestingly, it was when Irene appeared in these deliberate displays of "fooling around" that her male friends took to commenting upon or Liking the image. However, as we may conjure from this final example of the male who observes Irene's constant changing of her profile picture, the male gaze certainly did not stop short at these "fooling around" postings; her male friends—or at least some of them—were also noticing

Irene’s ‘pretty’ profile pictures. As we will see in the next section, there is another type of posting Irene made to her account that caught the attention of her friends, both male and female alike.

“I’m good with my hands, not with my mouth”

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Irene worked at TechCanada Limited as a technology associate during the time of the research study. A view of her “History by year,” found in the “About” section of her profile informed me as to when she started working at this company. As we see in the screenshot below, Irene started working at a



productions company the year prior to commencing her job at TechCanada. I was not familiar with the specific production company prior to inquiring about it during our second scheduled chat. Irene let me know that she was in fact the founder of the

company. She also let me know that the company scouted bands and put on shows in Ontario. Impressed with this tidbit of information, I asked her about her roles within the company. She told me that she was responsible for booking the venues for the shows as well as preparing the marketing material. She then sent me a link to a brochure that she had designed for the company. The brochure was certainly impressive, showcasing Irene’s

creative marketing skills. It was at this point in the study that Irene opened up about her passion for graphic design.

Before actually discussing her passion for graphic design during this chat, she wrote about it in a description of one of the screenshots included in the Microsoft Word document I had sent her the previous night. This screenshot is seen below. It shows the cover image that remained on Irene’s profile page for four months of the duration of the research study.



The following are Irene’s comments on the cover photo, which have been cut and paste from the original Microsoft Word document for easier reading. In the document, I had asked Irene to explain the cover photo, including its significance and meaning. A secondary question inquired if the phrase “We are stronger together than ever apart” represented her in some way. These were the comments Irene emailed back to me:

This was one of three pieces I did for my final triptic project in Graphics. The quote was put there to combine the two other pieces; one representing patterns from islam the other from the indian cultures of the navajo. This was the middle piece, therefore it was stating that by combining the two patters, of which i did in the banner, I was able to create something different and even more effective than the other two separately. I love this backplash because a) I'm fascinated by the navajo style and culture and b) because it's something that I made on my own, therefore a representation of my skills as well as aesthetics in the graphics field.

Irene's description informed me that the cover photo is in fact a piece of art she produced for her Graphics class in school. She relays that the production of this piece combines her passion for culture with her passion for graphic design. Irene does not go into great detail about this "passion for culture," in her response text. She did not want to 'talk' about her own culture (or family) at any point during the research study. However, it is plausible to conceive that Irene's stated "passion for culture" and its inscription within her artwork held deeper, personal meaning. I had read her description of the cover photo the morning of the second chat, and I knew it was one of the screenshots I wanted to discuss with the group, to dig deeper about her passions. This is how the discussion of the screenshot unfolded later that day:

Shenin: It's a beautiful piece, so detailed and meaningful. I really like your comment you sent me earlier about how the piece represents your skills and aesthetic capabilities in graphic design.

Irene: Thank you, I am really proud of it. That's why I've kept it up so long. Honestly, I'm not good at expressing myself orally. I'm good with my hands, not my mouth.

There was a brief pause in the conversation and a few shared "lols" (one of the other girls wrote: "Melt in your mouth, not in your hands!") before she resumed her thoughts:

Irene: Okay, I didn't mean that sickos. I'm being serious. I feel like I'm just so much better expressing myself through art and design and not actually speaking myself.

Shenin: It's great that you recognize that about yourself already.

Irene: I think that's part of the reason why I'm so into technology and creative production. I don't have to speak a lot. And I don't get bored when I do projects like the backslash photo.

Irene's statement that graphic design projects fended off boredom was certainly not an obvious statement. Irene informed us that she engaged with graphic design as a means of creative expression, which in turn apprehended her boredom. The above excerpt is also revealing about Irene's affective nature, in that she feels she is not good at expressing herself well with words. Not surprisingly, Irene did not want to 'talk' about her passion for culture during this part of our chat, which in itself reinforced her preferences for other types of communication and expression.

The brief pause noted in the conversation excerpt seen on the previous page—when the conversation lulled (and lol'd) after Irene's unintended sexual innuendo—was an interesting moment with the girls and especially with Irene. Irene seemed embarrassed after she made the sexual innuendo; she even referred to the other girls as "sickos," in reference to their deviant, 'sick' minds. However, outside of our chats, Irene did not shy away from sexual suggestion or displays of sexuality. The 'artful'—and indeed very 'graphic'—image seen on the next page appeared on Irene's timeline in the second month of our study, when she attended the International Career Development Conference (ICDC) with her fellow Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) members.



Irene posted this picture to her wall and included it in one of her photo albums, but she did not tag anyone or caption the photograph. I had not asked Irene about this image when I first saw it posted to her wall. It wasn't until another sexual remark appeared on her wall later on—a status update reading “I enjoy copious amounts of dick” (seen below)—that I decided to bring up both the image and the posting seen on this page. While I

was not expecting Irene to validate or refute what she had written, I was interested in understanding the significance, if any, of both the image and text.



Thus, during our final chat, I asked Irene if the image was related to the posting. In true Irene-style, she diverted the topic; either she could not express herself with words, or she was embarrassed to talk about the sexualized remarks. It was Geneviève who re-asked my question during the chat. This was Irene's response:

Irene: I just posted the image of that guy because I was bored. I drew it on his neck on the bus because I was bored. Omg seriously can we talk about something else?

Respecting her wishes and sensing her sheer discomfort in discussing her “sexplorations” (Reed, 2014), I didn’t pursue the line of conversation any further. While I was intrigued by the sexual, controversial nature of the image and the posting, more intriguing is that Irene had acted on her boredom by marking the body of another individual. Irene had found a new canvass of expression, and not even the image on this canvass was immune to making an appearance on Facebook.

Final Thoughts

Irene’s online presence proved to be an ‘easy read’—she comfortably shared her thoughts and feelings in her near-daily status updates and through her plethora of posted media material; she appeared in hundreds of photographs, posted either by her or her friends; and she often commented upon or Liked these images. As well, even though one does not have that sense in the above quoted conversations, her voice often dominated our scheduled virtual chats, making the getting-to-know-you process even easier. Her strong presence during our conversations was certainly never overbearing, as her willingness to contribute so openly during these chats (at least most of the time) actually encouraged the other participants to follow suit. This in turn improved our group cohesion, facilitating trust and ease of speech. However, the sheer amount of material that appeared on her timeline, coupled with her many voiced thoughts during our chats, translated this ‘easy read’ in a very ‘difficult write.’ While Irene did not present herself as necessarily complicated, she certainly

came across as a bright, multi-talented, technologically savvy, and perhaps even under-challenged young lady.

In an almost odd way, despite her tendency to contribute at length during our conversations, Irene completely shied away from expressing herself on a truly personal level. She let me know, categorically, that she did not want to discuss anything related to her family. She also shied away from discussing her passions outside the realms of media and technology, and she also did not want to discuss sex or sexualized images.

This chapter has been divided her chapter into five main themes: (1) Irene's penchant to turn to technology during her downtime, often as a way to combat boredom; (2) her unquenchable desire to seek out new media sites, platforms, and technologies, so as to keep on top of what's new and hot; (3) her need to be appreciated in the multitude of photographs that appeared on her timeline, by way of comments or Likes; (4) Irene's desire to look 'pretty' and 'picture perfect' in the photographs posted to her Facebook account; and (5) Irene's passion for creative media design and artistic production, which, very interestingly, seemed to be the only true dampening force of her chronic boredom.

Irene's allegiance with technology and new media—at home, at school, and on Facebook—raises questions about the links between the different ways she uses technology and new media as both learning and play. Clearly, this chapter delineates a relationship between informal and formal leaning.. As we have seen, there are many skills related to digital literacy that Irene is (perhaps unknowingly) learning even when she is “messaging around” on her MacBook. She also understands languages of technology (or what I have called “technobabble” earlier in this chapter) as a way to interact with likeminded (mostly

male) individuals in her Facebook network. However, the ways in which Irene *experiences* digital communication through technology and new media is only one facet of her learning. When it comes to digital communication, Irene is also interested in her “peer culture,” a term Merchant (2005) defines as “the potential [for youth] to learn from each other,” within which there is a “recognition that some youth are more expert than others and that such knowledge is worth appropriating” (p. 55). As one of these more expert youth, Irene’s interest in her peer culture seems to be a driving force of her engagement with technology and new media, as well as her general sociality—after all, she did have over 1,300 Facebook friends at the time of this research study.

Irene was almost always ‘plugged in’ during this five-month research study, even participating in one of our virtual chats using the Facebook Messenger application while relaxing on the beach. Throughout the research study, it seemed as though her cell phone and/or her Macbook was always in hand or within arm’s reach. Irene effortlessly drifted from ‘real’ to ‘virtual’ contexts of human interaction, demonstrating her ‘technological embodiment’ as a way to socially mediate herself within both online and offline contexts, often simultaneously. In this sense, her cell phone and/or Macbook seemed to link her social and personal identities while connecting her to others at almost any given time.

Unique to Irene’s timeline was a distinctive male presence; other than her boyfriend, her male friends did not often appear in her photographs. However, her male friends posted to her timeline frequently, usually to engage in technobabble. As the research study progressed, this male presence on her timeline intensified, and one of her male friends even commented that she changes her profile picture “more than a girl changes clothes.” This comment indicated that her male friends took notice of Irene’s appearances and not just her

willingness and ability to communicate about issues relating to technology (however, Irene did not change her behaviours at any point, even though she had hesitations regarding male intention). Irene made tremendous efforts with her physical appearance, especially when she knew that photographs taken by her friends and during social events would almost always appear on Facebook. As Pempek *et al.* (2009) have noted, “photographs are a powerful tool for self-expression” and social media users tend to post photographs as “identity markers” (p. 233).

Irene’s abiding desire to appear “picture perfect” in all of her photos can be read as an “identity marker” in terms of her general desire to strive for perfection in other facets of her life, such as in her courses at high school. Her tendency to use filters to enhance photographs for the sake of “perfection” may allude to what Harrison and Hefner (2014) call “objectified body consciousness,” which is tied into lower physical self-esteem in adolescents (p. 137). These authors suggest that photo-retouching (i.e. using filters) can be considered a self-enhancement motive as “a drive to compare the self to less fortunate or endowed others to reap the benefits of contrast” (p. 137). Considering that Irene is interested in strengthening her “peer culture,” as noted earlier, a self-enhancement motive to reap the benefits from less fortunate or endowed peers within her Facebook network is best explained by Gill (2007, 2008), who notes that representations in current media culture are characterized by contradiction.

Chapter 9

Nikki:

Deceiving dis/appearances: (Tall) tales of a “text message addict”

i dont think people have 2 personalities one on the internet and one in real life. people just have more confidence saying things over the internet cause your comp acts as a barrier.

--Nikki

My interactions with Nikki were shorter and considerably less detailed than with Geneviève, Leila and Irene (although her chapter, ironically, is the lengthiest of all). There are a number of reasons why my interactions with Nikki were less frequent, and each reason will diffuse as Nikki’s narrative here unfolds. But to start, a summary is useful: (1) Nikki was the last of the girls to join our group. She joined a full month after Geneviève, about three weeks after Leila joined, and about a week and a half after Irene came on board; (2) Nikki did not keep up with her daily Facebook activity, despite agreeing to do so before I sent her the consent forms. In fact, sometimes she did not log in to Facebook for up to six consecutive days; (3) Nikki did not attend the final two scheduled virtual chats. She also did not provide feedback for the screenshots in the Microsoft Word documents associated with the two chats she missed; (4) Other than the two scheduled group conversations Nikki attended using Facebook Chat, her green icon was never lit during my daily observations of the girls’ profiles. As such, we did not engage in any informal chats; and (5) Nikki’s friendship with Geneviève, Leila and Irene weakened towards the end of the summer. As a result, her interactions with these girls on Facebook lessened and she was noticeably less engaged with the research study.

Despite these shortcomings and the resulting (many) moments of frustration, I kept my “strong feelings” (Peshkin, 1991) in check and embraced one of the greatest challenges I encountered during this qualitative inquiry: to hear Nikki’s story and ultimately to use her words to describe phenomena. During the times that Nikki was present and engaged with the research group, she always had interesting things to say, often offering unique perspectives and even challenging the perspectives of others. However, during Nikki’s periods of absence, particularly during the scheduled chats that she missed, it was impossible to hear Nikki’s own voice. Interestingly, even during the chats she missed, Nikki was never *completely* absent; as a group we still discussed her photographs and we ‘talked’ about her participation as well as the issues that contributed to her falling-out with the girls. While Nikki’s absent presence certainly resulted in discussions *about* Nikki rather than *with* Nikki, these discussions were invaluable to my understandings of Nikki, her relationships with the girls both inside and outside their high school, as well as the change in our group dynamic as a result of the falling-out. As such, excerpts from discussions with the other girls will be used in this chapter, imparting a distinct polyvocality—though never at the expense of Nikki’s own words or in a way to author her as ‘other.’

It was during my very first week of observations for participant recruitment, that I took note of Nikki’s profile page and included her name in a list of seven potential research participants (see Chapter 4, section 4.5 – Methods of Data Collection). At that time, Nikki’s profile appeared as incomplete or inaccessible—a clear sign of inactivity or enacted privacy settings. I was able to see her list of friends, her listed family members, as well as some of her photographs. From the looks of her timeline, Nikki did not post to her Facebook account regularly. She did not engage in diaristic postings or frequent status updates. Her friends

posted messages on her timeline almost every day during my observations, usually brief questions about school, work, or hanging out. At this point I was unsure how much material (if any) was invisible due to privacy settings. Overall, I was unsure about Nikki's potential participation, particularly because of her lack of visible Facebook activity.

Five days after I had first taken note of Nikki's profile, I had exchanged a brief message with Geneviève about my list of seven potential research participants. Geneviève described Nikki as "a school friend I see a lot at parties." I sent Nikki my recruitment message (Appendix A) that same night. I waited patiently for a response, continuing to observe Nikki's profile. During this period of waiting, I ended up recruiting both Leila and Irene. While I kept on waiting for a response from Nikki (or from one of the other seven potential participants), the existing research participants expressed eagerness to set up a time for our first scheduled virtual chat. I let the girls know that I did not want to proceed quite yet, as I was still waiting for responses. The day after Irene's recruitment, I engaged in a brief message exchange with the existing participants and I asked their opinions about the potential research participants who had not yet replied. The girls decided that Nikki would be (what they considered) a "good fit" for our group, and so the three of them decided to contact her individually (at school, by text message as well as by email) and see if she was interested in participating. I also re-sent the recruitment message to Nikki via Facebook message, in case she had skipped over it or thought it was spam. The feedback from Geneviève, Leila and Irene was positive: all three had been informed that Nikki wanted to participate in the study but had simply forgot to reply to my message. However, when I *still* had not heard back from Nikki by the following week, doubt prevailed in my mind and I let

the girls know that if I did heard back from Nikki within the next three days, that we would proceed as a group of four instead of five.

It was not until the end of the next week that I finally heard from Nikki about participating in the study. Strangely, she did not reply to me through the Facebook message system. Instead, I received a text message from a Toronto area code number that evening, which read: “Hi Shenin.” Not knowing the identity of this individual, I delayed my response and tried to figure out who had sent the message (to no avail). After about half an hour, I sent back a minimal reply: “Hello. Who is this?” She responded to this message right away, letting me know her name and that she would like to start participating in the research study. She let me know early on in this exchange of text messages that she asked Leila for my number. (My mobile number was visible on the consent forms; I also gave it again to each participant separately during our initial interactions in case they needed to contact me for any reason). Continuing with the text messaging—clearly Nikki’s preferred mode of mediated communication—I asked if she understood what the study entailed and if she had any questions. I took note of her surprising response, as well as the rather lengthy text conversation, in my anecdotal notes journal. Instead of asking me details about the study, Nikki instead asked the following:

Nikki: We won’t be like getting into trouble or anything right?

Shenin: No. This is a non-intrusive virtual study and your real name and identity will not be disclosed. Every measure will be taken so that all data is kept confidential and presented anonymously. You will remain anonymous. I think I should email you the consent forms to read over before you agree to participate.

Nikki: No the girls told me about it and I’m in, just know I work lots and don’t spend all my time on Facebook unlike lots of people

Nikki: [-----@hotmail.com]

Shenin: Thanks for your email address. There are two forms. One is for your consent and the other is for parental consent if you are younger than 18. Do you need both forms?

Nikki: yah both

Shenin: [Nikki], what is your concern with getting into trouble?

Nikki: You know pictures that people shouldn't see. I have privacy on because I don't want people seeing things. I want to get into university and don't want trouble

Shenin: I assure you that everything will be kept confidential and you will remain anonymous. Please read the consent forms fully so that you understand how I will use my observations and data in the future.

Shenin: Do you have any more questions about the study?

Nikki: Not now. Happy to help with your research.

Shenin: Okay, thanks. Hopefully you will get something out of it too ☺ Just be sure to keep up with your regular Facebook activity. I will send you a Facebook friend request now and email you both forms. Please get the forms to me as soon as you can. And feel free to message me on Facebook, call me, or text me at any time.

Nikki: Bye ☺

Shenin: We will be having scheduled chats on Facebook, but times and dates will be established based on everyone's schedule. It will be really important to attend these chats.

Nikki: Yeah I know thanks gtg

Although I left this text chat with mixed feelings—what was it that Nikki did not want others to see?—she was a “good fit” (to again use the other girls’ words) with the existing participants and I wanted her as part of the group. It was clear at this point, being a good fit, that all four girls were friends inside and outside of school, as well as on Facebook. Further, Nikki had communicated with all of them about the research study. I followed up with Nikki five days, inquiring about the status of her forms. My follow-up was through the

Facebook messaging system and not through text message. This is the response that I received three days later:

Nikki: hey omg i totally forgot cause i was busy. i'll get them too you somehow either today or tomorrow

I wrote the following reply as soon as I received her message:

Shenin: Thanks [Nikki]! Try to get them to me today, if possible.

Four days later, I had still not received Nikki's forms. As well, I had not once seen Nikki's green icon lit in the Facebook chat box, which made it impossible to send a friendly, gentle reminder by means of an informal chat. I promptly sent her the following Facebook message after these extra four days of waiting:

Shenin: Hi [Nikki], can you please let me know the status of your forms? If you are having problems we can discuss options for you to get them to me. Please respond to this message or to my previous emails, as soon as you can. I am just waiting on you now that I've received all the forms from the other girls.

I did not get a response to this message for another three days, which was also the same day our group discussed possible meeting times for our first scheduled conversation using our 'secret' Facebook Girls group (see Chapter 5, *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*). This is the message she posted on the Facebook Girls group wall:

Nikki: Sorry guys my computer is actually a piece of shit I can only use fb on my phone tonight. I'll use my brothers comp when needed. I work Tuesday -Friday 430-close so I can't this week but Monday is perfect...I'll get those forms to you by tomorrow sorry like I said my computer sucks and it's isu time.

Nikki's message was most informative: She let us know that she was available on Monday to chat. Further, she was having troubles with her own computer but could use her brother's on that day. She was also working very long closing shifts at her part-time job during the school week. Finally, the end of the school year was approaching and her independent study units (ISUs) were coming due for her courses. Clearly, Nikki had a lot going on. That she was having troubles with her computer was clearly an added stress in her life. Although Nikki let me know in her message that she would get her forms in by the next day, this did not happen for another week. After another Facebook message to Nikki two days prior to our first chat, she finally let me know the delay with her forms was a result of not having access to a scanner. I suggested she download a document scanner application to her smartphone. Despite explaining how the application works, she was quick to dismiss the idea: "It's too complicated," she let me know. "I'll just give them to [Geneviève] tomorrow to scan them for me." The following Monday, just before our first group chat, I received an email from Geneviève with Nikki's signed forms.

Despite the wait for the forms, I had been keeping up with my daily observations and screenshots of Nikki's page since the recruitment phase of research at the end of the first month of the study. I certainly made notes about what I observed and captured, but since Nikki's green icon was never lit, I did not have any sort of chat with her prior to our first scheduled virtual conversation. In fact, other than our initial text conversation and the Facebook messages we exchanged regarding her forms, I had not 'heard' Nikki's voice whatsoever. As we will see in the next section, it wasn't until our first conversation that I started to understand Nikki's initial concerns with "getting into trouble."

“trust me ... my pics are the most deceiving”

Given Nikki’s concerns about “getting in trouble,” I was unclear if, after accepting my friend request and knowing my role as a researcher at the University of Ottawa, she had enacted privacy settings to limit *my* visibility of her profile. Although I wanted to interact with Nikki and the girls strictly through Facebook (and email, but only to send and receive the Microsoft Word documents), I decided to send Nikki a text message on this occasion. Our text conversation was brief but speedy because Nikki replied right away:

Shenin: Hi [Nikki]. Thanks for accepting my friend request on Facebook. I’m so happy you are now part of the group!

Nikki: Np happy to be part of it

Shenin: I can see more of your profile now, which is great.

Nikki: I have privacy on for people who aren’t my friends

Shenin: So privacy is off now?

Nikki: Yeah lolllllll its not like I put you on privacy or anything. You told me I can’t get into any trouble

Shenin: That’s right.

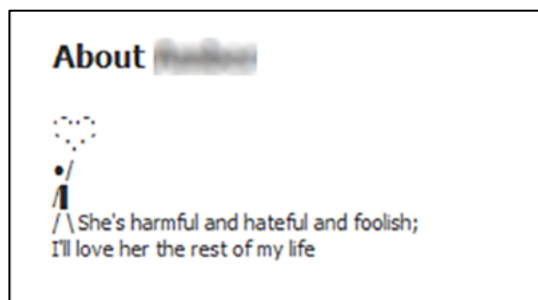
Nikki: Have a good day I gtg

At this point I had full access to her timeline, photographs and the information included in her ‘About’ tab; there was certainly much more to see—especially photographs—when privacy settings were no longer an issue. In the absence of informal virtual chats, there was also much to talk about with Nikki during our first chat. Nikki was quite silent in the beginning of this chat. In fact, about five minutes into the virtual conversation, I had to ask her the following question:

- Shenin: [Nikki], can you give us an indication that you're here?
- Nikki: im here! im with [Irene] in her room. But i thought we were skypeing. i wanna see all your beautiful faces
- Shenin: Hey [Nikki]. Nice to 'hear' from you ☺ No, we decided to meet here.
- Nikki: minus [Geneviève]. kidding.
- Shenin: Why did you think that?
- Nikki: i'm just used to skypeing. i skype with my friends. we never chat here. actually, we just always text each other or see each other. im a text message addict. don't like being at a computer all day long.

It was surprising, in a way, to learn that Nikki and Irene were together in the same room. Nikki's visible online interactions with Irene were extremely limited from the start of the study in the first virtual chat and ultimately until the very end of the research study. The only visible interactions that took place between the two girls occurred on three separate instances when Irene either Liked or commented on postings that included the two girls. While Nikki's comment about being in the same room as Irene was surprising, the explanations about her preferred modes of communication were not. Her stated preference for text messages in particular made a lot of sense, especially considering my very first interaction with Nikki was through text messaging. As well, her comment that she didn't like "being at a computer all day long" explained, to a certain extent, her general lack of presence on Facebook.

Ten minutes into our conversation, I asked Nikki to explain what she had written in her 'About' tab, which is the screenshot displayed at the top of the next page. Her 'About' information reads: "She's harmful and hateful and foolish; I'll love her the rest of my life." I asked Nikki what her words meant:



Nikki: oh lolllll. that. it's from a song that i like. it doesnt mean that I'M harmful hateful and foolish. its just that some people see me like that and so I'll let them think that. appearance are deceiving anyways. and I like those two lines because everyone that really knows me knows that im very loveable

Shenin: What song are the two lines from?

Nikki: its called clinton street girl by wakey wakey. indie pop

Shenin: Is that your preferred genre of music?

Nikki: no i like more rap and hip hop. Im a white girl with a black girls taste in music.

Shenin: I think you posted a picture of a rapper on your wall last month.

Nikki: yeah. Wiz! we love him right [Leila]?



The rapper we were discussing is seen on the right side of this page; his full stage name is Wiz Khalifa. About a month earlier, Nikki took the image from a music website and posted to it to her wall. In the above excerpt, Nikki troubles her racial identity. Just prior to discussing this image of Wiz Khalifa, I asked all the girls, very generally, to tell me a bit

about themselves. Nikki let me know that she is Canadian and Jewish. In the above excerpt, she elaborates on her (racial) identity: She considers herself “a white girl with a black girls taste in music.” Through her words, she chooses to racially identify as a white female, but she also constructs this identity within a discourse of black femaleness. As well, she implicates gender and race/ethnicity within her ethnocentric view that listening to rap and hip hop music is a custom of black females. By doing this, Nikki is “performing her whiteness,” which is what Alexander (2004) describes as: “an act of doing in terms of the social import that is placed on skin and how that manifests into specified behavioural relations to others within and without that now racialized category” (p. 655). Alexander draws from Butler’s (1990) notion of gender performativity and Brown’s (2000) analysis of performativity for constructing whiteness. Alexander would argue that Nikki is performing her whiteness from a position of privilege. As he contends:

White people who perform Whiteness know that they are White. They know that the skin they live in offers them social privilege. And they know that although they are individuals, the nature of their performance of Whiteness is linked to historical, if not categorical precedence. (p. 656)

Writing from a position of privilege, then, Nikki attempts to bring Leila into the discussion about Wiz Khalifa. Leila obliges, offering her opinions in a way that she and Nikki find humorous. This is how the discussion continued:

Leila: Yeah I like him too. I guess he looks a little harmful and hateful though loool.

Nikki: lollllllll. thing is he’s like the nicest guy. he might look a certain way that some might not like but like every interview he is so down to

earth and grounded and cares about family. and like you can just tell he's nice and not really gangsta. I find him soooo sexy.

Here, Leila's comment about Wiz Khalifa's appearance as "a little harmful and hateful" stigmatizes the black male as violent, criminal, and/or dangerous. Nikki reciprocates Leila's "lol" as a way of agreeing with her statement. She states that Wiz Khalifa "might look a certain way," which highlights aspects of rap and hip hop that reinforces negative stereotypes about black men (Kitwana, 1994, p. 24). As Rebollo-Gil and Moras (2012) note, "these stereotypes include images of black males as angry, violent, and/or otherwise dangerous creatures" (p. 120). Despite agreeing with Leila's comments, Nikki ends the discussion of Wiz Khalifa by letting us know that she feels the rapper's appearances are deceiving: "...you can just tell he's nice not really gangsta." I turn the conversation back to issues of representation and ask:

Shenin: Does the image represent you in some way?

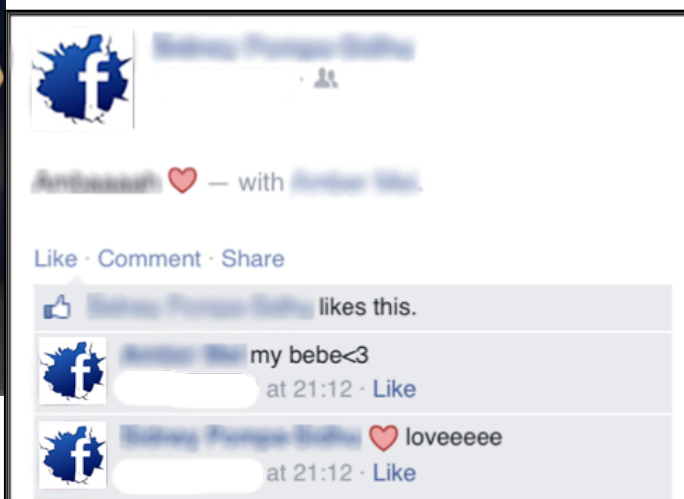
Nikki: for sure. people get me wrong all the time based on what they see on fb. trust me. o f all the girls in this research study, my pics are the most deceiving.

Nikki's final comment was most fascinating, particularly in the way she expressed with such certainty that she was the "most deceiving" of the girls. At such an early point in our first virtual conversation, Nikki had already made three comments that spoke to her "deceiving" nature: (1) She stated that the description of herself in the 'About' section of her profile did not actually speak to her character; (2) she self-identified as "a white girl with a black girls taste in music," at once othering herself and evidently buying into racial stereotypes regarding who should listen to what kind of music based on skin colour; and (3) she agreed

that the image of the rapper—an artist she considered “the nicest guy” despite “looking a certain way”—was actually a representation of herself.



After Nikki’s final comment in the previous excerpt, the virtual chat drifted to a discussion of the girls’ prom pictures. At first, Nikki had very little to say about her experience at prom; she mostly agreed with

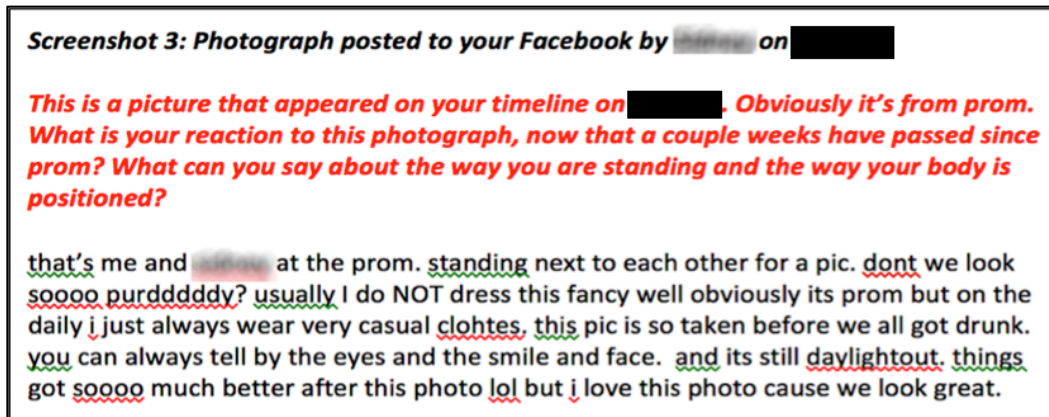


the points made by the other girls.

Nikki informed me at this time that she did not have a boyfriend but that she attended prom with a male friend. According to my observations, Nikki appeared in 36 prom pictures posted by other girls and 11 that she posted to her own timeline. On this page we see Nikki and Leila posing together and smiling for a picture taken at prom.

This photograph appeared on Nikki’s timeline but was posted by Leila a few days after prom took place. Leila captioned the photo with Nikki’s nickname followed by a “♥” symbol to express love and affection. This was one of the images I had included in the

Microsoft Word document I sent to Nikki prior to our chat. These were Nikki's comments on the photo:



Upon reading these comments more than once after the first virtual chat, I noted that there was a hint of “deception” in Nikki’s writing, for she had provided answers without actually answering either question; she does not write about her reaction to the photo nor does she comment on her bodily stance (other than that affirming that she is indeed standing). Moreover, there is no mention of what can be read as the most significant aspect of the photo, that being her *friendship* with Leila. Instead, Nikki responds with an answer that reveals two themes that will be addressed in the next two sections of this chapter, respectively: underage drinking and physical appearances.

However, before moving on, it is significant to note the contrasting skin colours of Nikki and Leila, as seen in the photograph on the previous page. Nikki is visibly white and Leila is visibly brown. Though neither have skin colour that is black, we have seen in this section that both girls negotiate meanings of what it means to “be black” as a result of their exposure to black men and black women in hip hop culture and popular music. This remains as a sub-theme for now, but the significance of these issues will be revisited at the end of this

chapter so as to not exclude race and ethnicity from the ways in which the girls see themselves ethno/racially.

“its how teenagers catch people doing stuff”

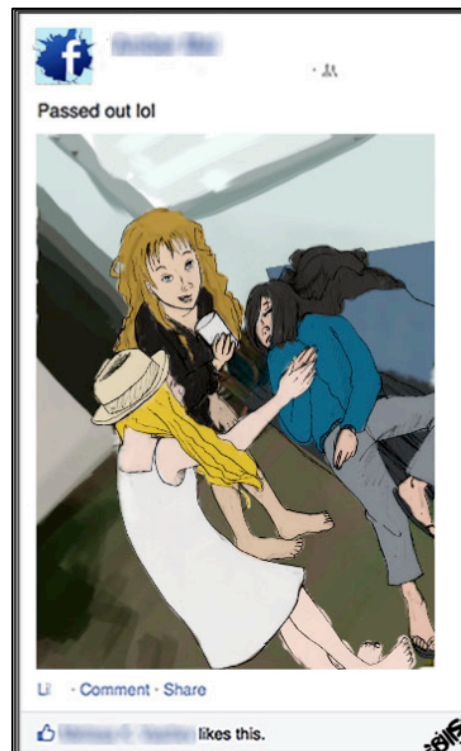
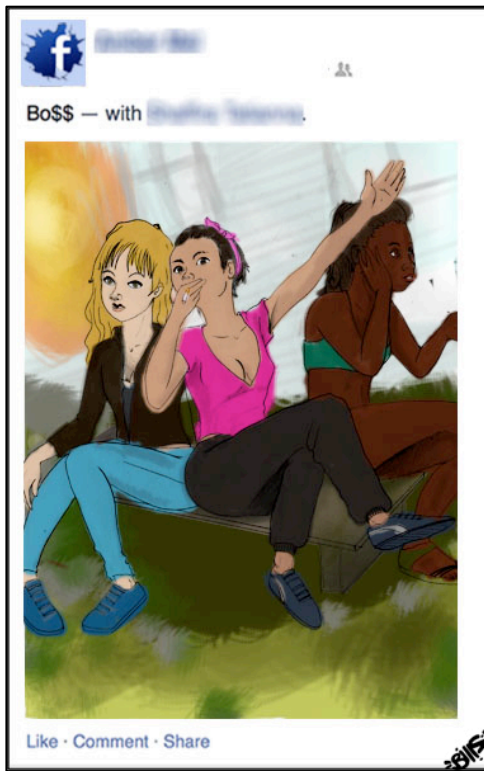
There was something most unique about Nikki’s posting habits on Facebook. Nikki had a tendency to ‘binge-post’ her own photographs, meaning, she took to Facebook anywhere from one to five days per month and posted a larger-than-proportionate number of photos on these days in comparison to the average number of photographs posted on any other day of the month. (Note: Although Irene also posted a lot of photographs to her Facebook account, she did not ‘binge-post’; Irene was consistent with her postings). The following is an overview of Nikki’s photo-posting activity: She posted photos on four days in first month of study: one photo on the first of the month, six photos on the fifth of the month, another six photos on the twelfth of the month, and 64 photos on the twenty-eighth of the month. Nikki posted photos on three days during the second month of study: one on the seventeenth of the month, two on twentieth of the month, and 53 on the thirtieth day of the month. During the third month of the study, Nikki only posted photographs to her timeline on two days: one on the sixth of the month and 13 on the eighth of that month. The final month of the study was an anomalous month in comparison to the preceding three months; she only posted one picture the entire month, on the second of the month. Nikki’s overall Facebook activity drastically declined in the final month of the study. This will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

There are two things worthy to note in Nikki’s photos. First, on the days that Nikki posted only one or two photos, these photos always included Nikki with either friends or

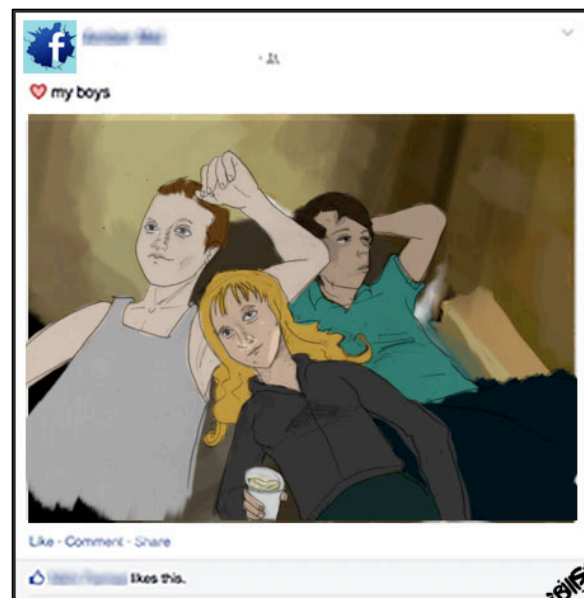
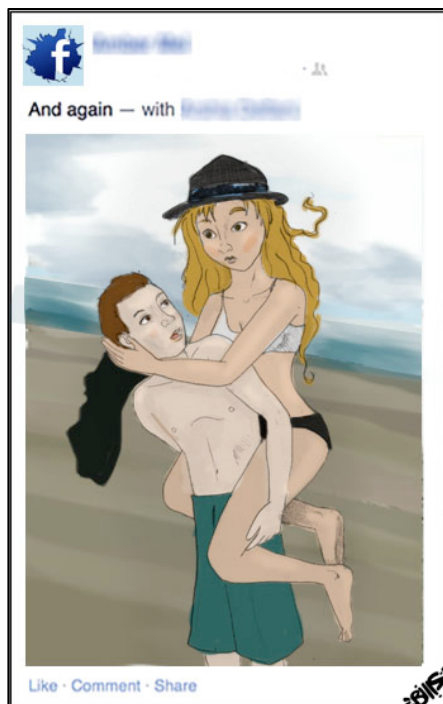
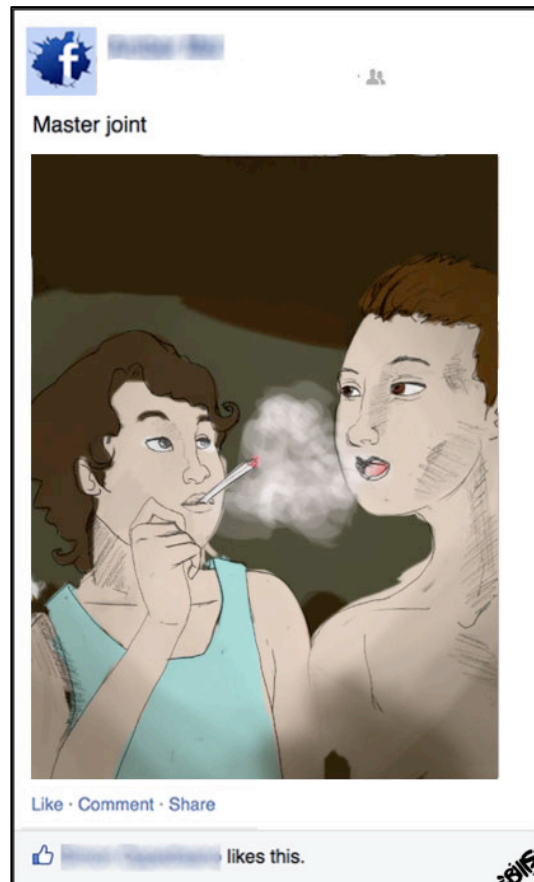
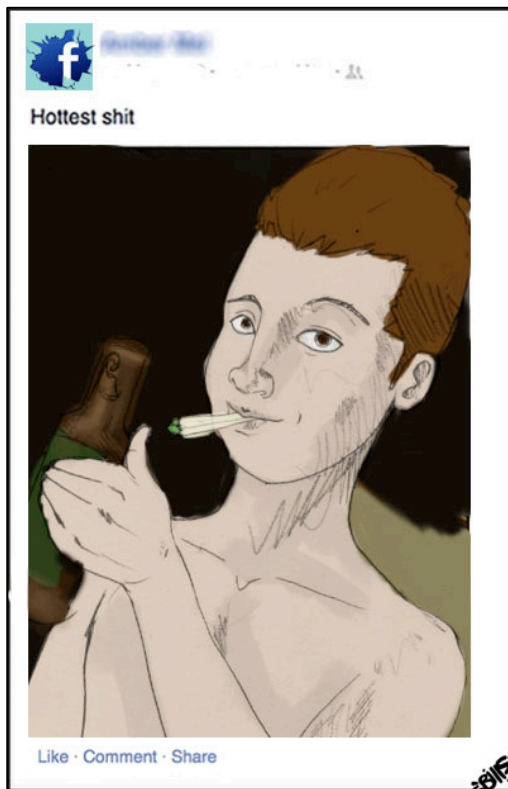
family members in very casual and relaxed settings (for instance, at a daytime birthday party event or an evening out for dinner). However, second, on the days that Nikki engaged in binge-posting, the photos always included Nikki and her friends together at memorable events.

Nikki's tendency to binge-post reached peak levels on two specific dates. There were two big events that preceded the first of these dates: prom, as a trip to Sable Beach. One big event preceded the second of these dates: graduation. As we see in pictures below, it was Nikki's binge-posting on the first of these dates (prom and Sable Beach photos) that made clear her expressed worry of "getting into trouble." While 11 of the 64 photographs were quite 'tame' prom pictures (such as the one in the previous section with Leila), the remaining 53 photos were anything but tame. These pictures depicted Nikki and her friends engaging in four subversive activities: (1) hard-partying and underage drinking; (2) underage smoking (cigarettes), (3) drug use (marijuana) and (4) suggestive sexual encounters. The following two pages include photographs of all of these activities. The activities are grouped as followed: *Group 1: Hard-partying/underage smoking (cigarettes)* and *Group 2: Drug use (marijuana) and suggestive sexual encounters*. Each group includes four photographs. The four photographs in Group 1 are seen on the next page. Nikki is seen with her friends. It is clear from the photographs that the girls are consuming alcohol: in three of the four photographs, Nikki has a drink in her hand. One girl in the top left photograph is smoking a cigarette. The girls are wearing revealing clothing (for the most part), and in the photos that Nikki is posing with her friends, stances are always very close. As a result, the following photos are sexually charged. In the bottom right picture, one of Nikki's female friends is

Group 1: Hard-partying/underage smoking (cigarettes)



Group 2: Drug use (marijuana) and suggestive sexual encounters



seen passed out on a couch, enforcing the existing literature claiming underage drinking among girls is a growing problem (Fang, Schinke, & Cole, 2009, p. 708). Nikki is seen attending to the friend; however, she still makes sure to smile for the photographer. Nikki sees humour in the photo, and has captioned it: “Passed out lol.”

In the second group of photographs, Nikki is pictured with the same male friend twice (bottom left and bottom right). In the bottom left photograph, Nikki is touching his face as he lifts her up in an extremely sexual manner: their bodies are touching in a way that connects their torsos, skin to skin. In the bottom right photograph, Nikki is seen in bed with this male (as well as the other male friend in the top right photograph). Nikki has her head on his chest, as well as a drink in her hand. This particular male friend is actually seen in all four photographs: in the top right and top left photographs he is pictured smoking marijuana (as well as drinking in the top left photo). Nikki is not smoking weed in any of the pictures. However, she did admit to smoking weed, as we will see in the conversation excerpt about these photographs, to follow.

I included two of the above eight images in the Microsoft Word document I emailed to Nikki prior to our second virtual chat. Nikki chose not to comment on any of the images I included in this document; in fact, she did not even acknowledge receipt of the document per my request. However, we did talk about the theme of underage drinking (and in Nikki’s case, drug use) during the second chat. As mentioned in Chapter 7 (Leila’s narrative), I was weary of my role as the ‘policing researcher,’ so this topic was broached by a discussion of the girls’ university acceptances. At this point, Nikki let me know that she had yet to be accepted into university; she had not received a conditional offer (unlike the three other girls). She also let me know that she was just about to start summer school because she was

missing some credits and that she had every intention of “working really hard.” While we were discussing the meaning of ‘conditional’ offers, at one point I addressed Nikki directly and asked her if she thought her pictures depicting drug and alcohol use would have any bearing on her potential admission to university. At this point her voice dominated the conversation:

Nikki: obviously. but my profile is on super limited. i dont want universities and family going on my facebook. seeing me taking shots, smoking weed... it’s just not appropriate. there are ALWAYS going to be pictures taken at parties. so you’re always going to see the pictures of me partying and being stupid

Shenin: When you go to parties are you certain the pictures will end up on Facebook?

Nikki: yes pretty certain. a lot of pictures i dont like on facebook for the exact reason of negative images. but that’s why i untag

Shenin: But you posted all those pictures YOURSELF, to your own timeline. I’m referring to the photos from Sable Beach at the end of May after prom. The ones with alcohol and weed.

Nikki: friends i dont care about or people i meet. because if you’re that stupid to judge what you think I’m like through facedbook you arnt worthy of getting to know me

Shenin: Okay

Nikki: i don’t go on people’s facebook and see them partying and automatically assume theyre crazy partiers... i get to know them then see their facebook

From this excerpt, I came to understand that Nikki was almost certain that the photographs from her binge-post (Group 1 and Group 2 photos) would show up on Facebook. She also let me know that she didn’t appreciate others judging her solely by viewing her photographs (“you’re (that) stupid to judge what you think I’m like through facedbook”), especially because she did not judge others this way. The end of the above

except also demonstrates a CIF moment: as Nikki states, “I get to know them [other people] then see their facebook.” What this means is that Nikki does not see others as having two distinct identities (online and offline). Rather, Nikki constructs her understandings of others’ identities based upon her interactions with them in real life *as well as* by looking at their Facebook pages/profiles. In other words, she will construct her opinions of others’ identities only when there is a connection between what she discerns from their ‘real’ identity and its overlap with ‘virtual’ identity, or what she sees on Facebook. Our conversation continued:

Shenin: What about in the future, say you go to university or get a job and you need to network. What if someone you meet in the future adds you to their Facebook account to make more connections based on your profile, or something along those lines. Then what?

Nikki: im aware of that.. and when the time comes ... when i go off to university i’ll start a new facebook... BUT highschool is high school

Here, Nikki lets me know that she is aware that her Facebook footprint might hinder her future job opportunities, and that she’ll “start a new facebook” when the time is right. However, for Nikki, “highschool is high school.” What she means by this is that she is still a teenager and not yet in the ‘real world’; at this point in her life, Nikki knows that she can repeatedly get away with certain activities and behaviour, especially in terms of how she constructs her sexuality and gender on Facebook (as seen in the Group 1 and Group 2 photographs). De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2013) call these repeated acts on social network sites “performative repetitions,” and note that performative repetitions “continuously construct their own reality” (p. 567).

Nikki’s explanations were so engrossing that I did not want her to end her trail of thoughts. However, one of the other girls started ‘speaking’ at this point, so Nikki went

silent for a period of time until I asked the girls the following question: “How integral is Facebook to your daily lives?” Nikki was the last of the girls to respond to the question.

Again, she made some intriguing remarks. This was her response:

Nikki: important. like normally it’s like how teenagers catch people doing stuff

Shenin: You mean how people catch teenagers doing stuff?

Nikki: lolllll no. its how we catch EACH OTHER doing stuff.

Shenin: What do you mean “catch teenagers ‘doing stuff’”?

Nikki: were a open generation, willing to say anything on the internet... and people know that so they look for that. i feel like society even is pushing us to HAVE facebook or go back to it because so many things revolve around it now. even for updates at school. but my facebook barely works as it is, i dont need it.

Based on this comment, Nikki reveals she feels a distinct pressure to have a presence on Facebook. She identifies this type of pressure not as peer pressure, but as societal pressure and school-related pressure. She notes that she even receives updates from her own school through Facebook (this means that Nikki’s school has a Facebook page that she pays attention to). According to Reid and Boyer (2013), Facebook can be used in schools as a resource for collecting information about student interests, as well as a framework for initiating personal, local, and global communication” (p. 250). Nonetheless, Nikki let me know that “i dont need it [Facebook].” I asked her why:

Shenin: You don’t need Facebook?

Nikki: more like the hassles that go along with fb

Shenin: Is there anything in your control you can do to feel less hassled?

Nikki: well im not going to change who i am. i wont change my profile.

Here, Nikki is linking ‘who she is’ to her Facebook profile. As such, Nikki is demonstrating a CIF moment in this part of our conversation exchange. By changing her Facebook, Nikki feels that it she would be changing part of “who I am”— her identity. On this note, I probed further to understand the connection between her ‘real’ and who she is on Facebook:

Shenin: Would you say you’re the same person on Facebook as in your daily life, outside of social media and Facebook?

Nikki: no. my profile is sriously not me. I do go to a lot of parties...i think it’s really important to make appearances and socialize because i’m young. i dont drink but i smoke. i dont think people have 2 personalities one on the internet and one in real life. people just have more confidence posting and saying things over the internet cause your comp acts as a barrier.

In this excerpt of our conversation, Nikki claims that her profile is “sriously not me.” This supports her earlier contention that her Facebook profile promotes her appearances as “deceiving.” However, at the end of her excerpt, she claims that she doesn’t think people have 2 personalities (“one on the internet and one in real life”). This statement took me aback slightly during our conversation, as is seemed in complete contradiction to everything Nikki had expression in our chat pertaining to ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ identities. Nikki does note, however, that interaction with others over the Internet gives people more confidence to post and “say” things, because “your comp acts as a barrier.” In other words, Nikki feels that the invisibility aspect of CMC is what allows people to be ‘real’ on the Internet. As also understood from reading the above excerpt, Nikki claims that she does not drink, but that she does smoke. Considering the abundance of underage drinking photos Nikki posted to her own timeline, this is another notable moment of contradiction.

Current research suggests that self-representations in social network sites are characterized by contradiction (Gill 2007, 2008). De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2013) note that contradictions are most prevalent when it comes to youth negotiating their sexualities and gender performances in particular (p. 570). As well, these authors note that repetitious patterns within self-representations (or what they call “significant resignifications”) are often accompanied by “a recuperation of heteronormativity” (p. 565). This notion will be taken up in the next section.

“I got cut out cause of my fuggo face ☹”

In most of the photographs appearing on Nikki’s page that were available for my viewing prior to increased visibility of her profile, she appeared alone (selfies) or with family and friends. There were no visible pictures of drug or alcohol use. In fact, Nikki appeared extremely ‘pretty’ in all of these pictures. Even after I gained full visibility of her profile, there were many

more pictures of Nikki looking ‘pretty’ in the subsequent months—such as all of the 53 photos she binge-posted (these were all pictures of her graduation festivities and did not include any hints of subversive activities). The



‘pretty’ pictures seen within Nikki’s Facebook profile all depict her with a bright smile, acne-free skin, neat hair, and an overall happy demeanour.

The photograph on the previous page presents my first visual encounter of Nikki, who can be seen in the center of the photograph. The photo appeared on Geneviève’s timeline at the end of the first month of the study, as a result of Nikki tagging Geneviève’s name. Incidentally, it was the only photograph from the five-month duration of the study that included both Geneviève and Nikki. Geneviève appears on the right, heavily pouting her lips, and Leila appears on the left. Nikki’s body is closely connected to the other girls, signifying a level of comfort and friendliness. Her smile is bright and relaxed. Her long blond is held in loose waves, cascading down one side of her body. She is wearing modern clothing, the least revealing of the three girls. Nikki appears happy, and the closeness of the girls’ bodies signifies what appears to be a close friendship. This was the very first image I had included in Nikki’s Microsoft Word document prior to our first scheduled. These are her comments about the photo:

Screenshot 1: Picture posted by you on [REDACTED]

Below, please comment on the photo. What is the context of the photo? What are you saying through your body language, clothes, and your facial expression?

i dont remember this picture. im with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. were out for dinner. Honestly, im probably a little high and dont really remember much. we all dressed nice and i guess we look older. were teenagers its what we do. dress up and go out and have fun with your girls. Lollll at [REDACTED] s duckface. she is so wasted. im not really into the duck face like most girls. its a drunk thing. Im more of a smiley laughing person who make me laugh 24/7 and im giggly to begin with so :p

During our first chat, we discussed the value the girls place on physical appearances. Although her explanatory comments relating to the screenshot (seen above) were informative, I wanted to hear more. When I asked Nikki about physical appearances and the way she presented herself on Facebook, these were her comments:

- Nikki: well ...it's sorta like any social media... i'm not gonna post a naked picture on facebook or twitter cause EVERYONE can see it... same goes with an upgly picture I guess :P
- Shenin: What do you mean 'ugly'?
- Nikki: not pretty
- Shenin: What's 'pretty' to you?
- Nikki: lolll. not ugly. more like model looks.
- Shenin: I've noticed that you and your friends like to comment on each other's photos with comments about how you look like models.
- Nikki: yeah that's the standard, ideal

At the beginning of this conversation exchange, Nikki states that she is “not gonna post a naked picture on facebook” (or Twitter, or any social media site). Part of her reasoning for this is because “EVERYONE” would be able to see it. Nikki, who is heterosexual, wants her virtual self-representations to fit in with those of her peers. Posting naked pictures is *not* part of the normal activity within Nikki's Facebook peer group. However, while posting naked pictures is not acceptable in Nikki's eyes or within her peer group, posting pictures displaying highly revealing/sexualized outfits (such as some of the images seen in Group 1, previously seen in this chapter) is a frequent occurrence. By subscribing to the trends they consume through the viewing each others' photographs (not to mention the mass media, fashion magazines, etc.), Nikki and her friends produce and

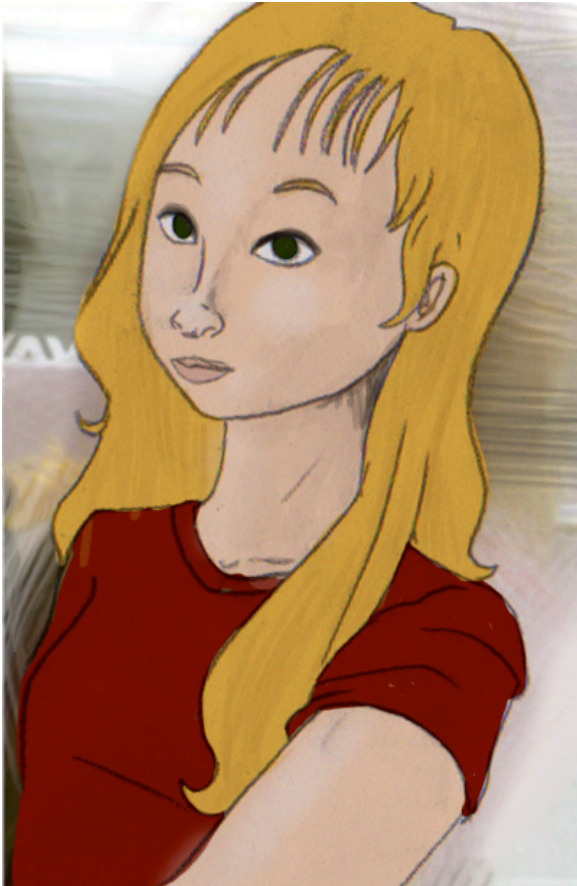
reproduce the acceptable “heteronormative” ways of dressing that abound within the female adolescent subculture (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013, p. 565).

In the above excerpt, Nikki also offers her definition of the word ‘ugly’. Her definition of ‘ugly’” described a tautology that holds beauty to high standards: for Nikki, ‘ugly’ meant “not pretty,” and she defined ‘pretty’ as looking like a model (or in her words, “model looks”). Thus, for Nikki, looking ‘ugly’ meant not looking like a model.



The image on this page illustrates an example of Nikki’s comments about aspiring to look like a model. This is an image she binge-posted to her account with the Group 1 and Group 2 photos. Nikki is pictured with one of her close male friends, who appeared in many of Nikki’s photographs on her timeline. She captioned the photo: “Supermodels in training,” and evidently, based on what she had disclosed regarding her ideals of beauty in our first conversation, there was some truth to her captioned statement. Nikki exhibits the same

“duckface” as seen performed by Geneviève in the photograph that introduces this section. While Nikki made it clear in her Microsoft Word document explanation (her comments about the photo in which she appears with both Geneviève and Leila) that she’s “not really into the duck face like most girls,” she is indeed performing the “duckface” in the above picture captioned “Supermodels in training.” In fact, there were many more photographs of



Nikki that captured her performing the “duckface,” Once again, Nikki’s descriptions were held in contradiction to her performed actions, much like her previous comment that “i dont drink but i smoke.”

There was much more that I wanted to discuss with Nikki about her notions of beauty and femininity, but there was not enough time to talk about everything during our first virtual chat. During our second virtual chat, as we have seen above, Nikki ‘spoke’

extensively about underage drinking, and again there was little time to discuss issues of beauty and femininity. The image seen on this page was among some of the images I had wanted to discuss with Nikki during our third conversation; however, Nikki did not attend the third scheduled virtual conversation. Nikki made this picture her profile photo for the last two weeks of the fourth month of our study. The photo is a selfie. The comments that Nikki

received (not shown) include “babe,” “omggggggggggg.” “ur actually stunning,” and “hiya beaubs (:”—all of these comments spoke to Nikki’s perceived beauty. Moreover, these types of comments were acceptable forms of critiquing ‘beauty’ and ‘femininity’ on Facebook, again within a discourse of heteronormativity. As we see from the selfie, Nikki has cropped someone out of the photograph in order to showcase her own face and upper body for her Facebook viewers. One of the commenters—evidently, the person cropped out of the image—has taken note of the way Nikki transformed the picture. She writes this in her comment box: “i got cut out because of my fuggo face ☹.” Here, the word “fuggo” is a variation of the word “fugly,” which is a slang that combines the words “fucking” and “ugly.” The “☹” emoticon seen at the end of this girl’s comment signifies her unhappiness with being cut out of the photograph and/or the fact that her face appears “fuggo” (in her own eyes). That this girl considers herself “fuggo” reveals a lack of self-esteem that is common within young women during adolescence (Orenstein, 1994).

As already mentioned, I had wanted to ask Nikki more about the photo and its associated comments during our third virtual chat. However, this never happened, since Nikki did not attend the third (or fourth) chat. In the complete absence of Nikki’s lit green icon, there was also no possibility to informally chat with Nikki. In the next section, Nikki’s act of disappearance will be discussed in detail, extensively drawing in the voices of the other research participants.

“i was bullied hard by these bitches”

Up until our second virtual conversation, Nikki was interacting with the other girls, demonstrating an active use of Facebook (though not as active as the other girls), as well as contributing to our discussions. Nikki failed to email back comments about her second set of Microsoft Word screenshots (corroborating with our second virtual chat), despite two email reminders after the second virtual conversation took place. However, this was the last of my worries. After our second virtual chat, I noticed a marked drop in the number of postings that Nikki had been making to her Facebook timeline. She continued to Like images on other girls’ pages, but there was a noticeable decrease in interactions with the girls in our research study. This was strange, seeing that she had demonstrated a keen interest in interacting with the other girls specifically for purposes of this study, as we see in the screenshot below (she posted this on the first day of the second month of our study).



This screenshot shows a status update made by Nikki that reads: “HELLO! We must facebook interact ;)” Nikki tags Geneviève, Leila and Irene right before the status update description. I was the only one who Liked the image (not shown). However, Nikki, Leila and Irene discuss the posting in the comment box. Geneviève does not comment on the posting. I thought nothing of Geneviève’s visible lack of comments at the time, seeing how Geneviève was generally reserved when it came to making comments on Facebook. Nikki, Irene, and Leila, however, seem to be on good terms. (Incidentally, there is one

comment made by a male friend in the comment thread. He writes: “why am I not invited, bullshit”—this is the same male friend that suggested I check out Irene’s profile during the recruitment phase of the research study). Within the comment thread, the three girls are making jokes and scattering their comments with both “♥” and “☺” emoticons.

I knew from our second virtual conversation that Nikki was attending summer school during the third month of our study. I also learned from an informal chat with Leila that Nikki was still working a lot, at the same establishment she worked at during the school year (a casual-dining restaurant—she worked as a hostess and kitchen manager). It was quite clear that Nikki had a lot on her plate. However, when Geneviève, Leila, Irene and I were discussing possible dates for our third scheduled chat, Nikki was absent from the decision-making process. I held off on finalizing a date with the other girls because I wanted to know Nikki’s availabilities. So, I sent her a message on Facebook, I posted to our ‘secret’ Facebook Girls group, I sent her two emails and I also sent two text message within the next week. With no response and growing concern, I communicated with the other research participants to see if they knew what was going on with Nikki. Irene’s green icon lit one night, so I asked her if she had communicated with Nikki recently. Irene informed me that she and Nikki did not speak much anymore:

Shenin: Hey Irene. Have you heard from Nikki lately? I want to ask her opinions about a date and time for our next chat.

Irene: no not really. We don’t talk much anymore. After we graduated, it just kind of happened. I mean nothing actually happened though. Not between her and I at least.

Shenin: What do you mean? Did something happen between Nikki and Leila or Geneviève?

Irene: I don't know. You should really ask them yourself.

At this point in the summer Geneviève was on vacation; she was still communicating with me about scheduling of our third chat but she was not logging on to Facebook chat during her vacation—which meant no lit green icon. However, the night after speaking with Irene, I saw Leila's green icon lit and immediately started the following informal chat:

Shenin: Hey Leila. Have you heard from Nikki recently? I want to ask her about her availabilities regarding our next chat, but I can't get a hold of her...

Leila: uhm well we havent talked in a while.

Shenin: How come?

Leila: uhm, like I still wanna know how she's doing so i check up on her facebook but we kinda stopped talking now.

Shenin: Do you mind explaining why?

Leila: I dunno. i don't really want to talk about it right now

Shenin: Ok, no problem. Thanks for letting me know what you've told me. Maybe we can chat here another time.

In Nikki's absence, the other three girls and I decided on the date for our third virtual group chat. The same day we decided upon this date, I sent Nikki another text messaging, asking her to join the chat if she was available that afternoon. Nikki did not show up to the chat. During this chat, the other girls shared some of their feelings about their friendship with Nikki. This is what Geneviève and Leila had to say:

Genevieve: I'm not good friends with Nikki, haven't been in a very, very long time so I don't really keep up with what's going on with her anymore. I haven't checked out her Facebook in a while.

Shenin: Did something happen after high school wrapped up?

Geneviève: No. She just backstabbed me earlier HAHA.

Shenin: What happened?

Geneviève: Loooooong story, but it's fine!! Honestly, I swear I make these things sound more dramatic than they are.

Shenin: I would have never gathered any of this by just looking at your profiles...

Leila: yeup her and i had a fallout because she chooses to be friends with girls who have screwed her over just becuse they are mmore popular?

Geneviève: Ah but overall people don't think I have issues with anyone

Shenin: Did the falling out happen during research study, since [the second or third month]?

Geneviève: No, a very long time ago. For me I dropped her ages ago.

Leila: Summer last year. We're acquaintances, and nothing dramatic caused it. I just made a choice to personally distance myself because she was providing me with an unhealthy environment

Shenin: You and Nikki have only been acquaintances since last summer? I would argue that the photos of you and Nikki together in more recent months tell a different story...at the very least, the photos in [the first month of our study].

Leila: it happened months ago and then we tried to become friends again and then recently i stopped talking to her becuse i have a hard time b ehing friends with ppl that i dont respect

Shenin: I thought she was in your close group of friends, hence her participation in this study. Actually, the three of you decided that she would be a "good fit" for the group!

Irene: Well we were all friends. At least on Facebook back then.

Geneviève: After this study I'm purging my friends. No point to keep people who aren't actually your friends in real life.

Irene's comment as seen on this page suggests that being 'Facebook friends' with other females in their peer group does not necessarily indicate friendship at school. Overall, Irene remained quite neutral and did not express many opinions about Nikki; she was more interested to discuss her recent trip to the Caribbean.

Geneviève's comment at the end of the above excerpt suggests that she was going to delete Nikki from her list of Facebook friends once the research study was finished. It was not absolutely clear if Geneviève's desire to delete Nikki had anything to do with the research study; my general feeling from the discussion was that Geneviève no longer wanted to be friends with Nikki as a result of past drama that had only escalated during the months in which the research took place.

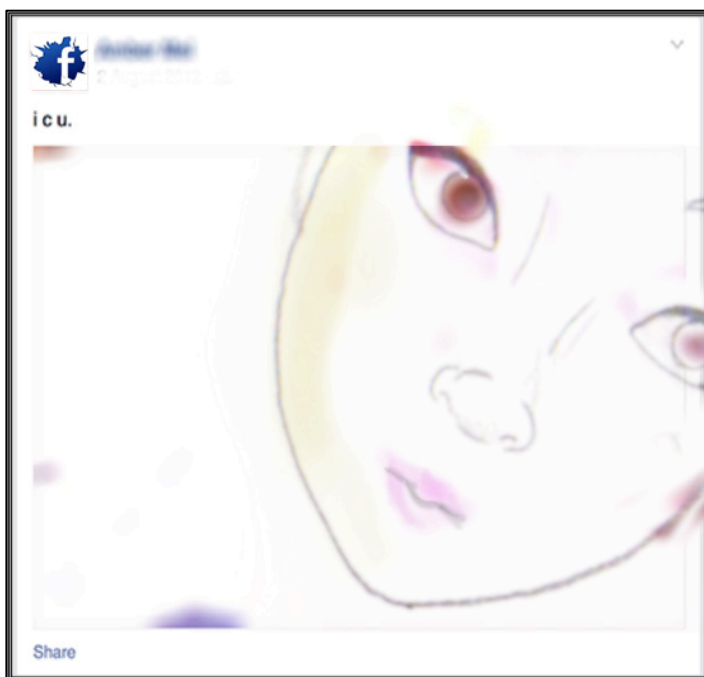
Leila's remark that she was just acquaintances with Nikki seemed out of the blue, especially since the two appeared in a number of photographs together and commented on each others profiles, especially in the first two months of the research study. Nonetheless, after the third conversations with the girls, I tried to reach out to Nikki once again. I sent her the following Facebook message the day after our third scheduled chat:

Shenin: Hi [Nikki] ...I am just wondering if you are upset or frustrated about being part of my research study? I know you were in summer school and that you've been working a lot as well. Can you and I chat sometime? We can talk on the phone or Skype if you prefer. I just want to know if you would still like to participate. I tried my best to respect your schedule but I sense that you're not very interested in participating in the study any more. You can call me, or text me if you prefer, to tell me how you feel about it all...my number is -----.
You can also reply here. Whatever you prefer. I hope to hear from you soon.

Nikki did not reply to this message. For the next while, I did not have any communication with Nikki whatsoever. In terms of her Facebook activity, her friends posted on her wall frequently, but Nikki did not Like or comment on any of the postings made by her friends. Nikki only made one posting during the month that I reached out to her, which is seen below. When the other girls and I finalized a date for our fourth and final chat, I let Nikki know about the time and date. I finally heard from Nikki soon after. This was her reply:

Nikki: Yes I would like to participate but my Facebook wasn't working so I couldn't get your message and # until now. I really don't appreciate you openly saying Infront of all the girls I'm the reason this study isn't happening. If I remember correctly [Irene] went on a cruise, [Leila] had work, and at one point [Geneviève] was half way across the world. I'm going to text you now. Ok. Just texted you.

In her Facebook message reply, Nikki was bold (not to say, accusatory of me and the girls). What was clearly a contextual comment—me asking the other girls



about her absence—had turned into gossip and/or taking sides. When I received Nikki's text, I replied and asked her if I could speak with her on the phone. Although I wanted to keep the research study to purely computer-mediated

communications (CMC), the nature of what I wanted to speak with Nikki about was serious, and I did not want my words misconstrued in text messages. We spoke on the phone for approximately 10 minutes and Nikki let me know she had been having a hard time that summer—with school, with her faulty computer, and with the transitions she was experiencing with her friends after graduating from high school. Nikki told me that she would not be able to attend our fourth scheduled conversation because she was scheduled to work that day. However, she agreed to a one-on-one conversation, which took place at the very end of the last month of the study (over Skype; the video camera on her laptop was not working so we messaged each other in the Skype application text box instead). During this conversation, I learned more about Nikki, particularly about her past with bullying and how it related to her present situation with the other girls in our research group. This is what Nikki had to say about her friendships with the other girls:

Nikki: [Geneviève] dated my bestfriend, we were closer when she was dating him.. then she started dating [Robert] and and we sorta stopped talking... [Irene] and me was close with in grade 9, the rest of high school she was in a different circle (more friends with the kids who took a lot of computer courses) And [Leila] that's a whole other story

Shenin: If you want, you can share.

Nikki: we arn't friends anymore. i wish we were. but nope.

Shenin: I'm really sorry to hear this.

Nikki: its okay not your fault lol

Shenin: Did this research study make you feel uncomfortable (because of [Leila's] presence) at any point?

Nikki: no not at all... i actually hoped it would bring us closer because id have an excuse to interact with her in a way. we were friends all of grade 11 like SUPER CLOSE... closer than [Geneviève] and I ever

were. and in grade 11 i was bullied hard by these bitches and she was there for me.

Shenin: I'm sorry you were bullied – that must have been tough. I was bullied too, so I can relate to what you are saying.

Nikki: [Leila] is the kind of girl who is mean and doesn't give a shit about anyone she doesnt like or doesnt like her. i'm not like that. for me it's uncomfortable being around girls who constantly hate me

Nikki: so i acted fake towards the girls that bullied me and vice versa and we didn't become friends but we became good... like no more fighting nothing and we could hang out together... but [Leila] didnt respect that so so stopped talking to me... then like 6 months later I took her out and explained myself cause i missed her... and then at the end of grade 12 she stopped being my friend again.

Shenin: It sounds like you're upset that you're not friends any more.

Nikki: I love the girl.. [Leila] is an amazing person seeing her do good would never upset me. but its funny because when I was being bullied in grade 11 she was there for me. now lol she's the one bullying me. or at least that how i feel.

Shenin: But you said you guys aren't even talking...

Nikki: exactly. she's bullying me with her silence. that's her style.

It was upsetting to learn that Nikki had been bullied in high school. At the same time, it was interesting to hear how she had been bullied in real life, as well as cyber-bullied. Nikki noted that it was Leila who was bullying her on Facebook “with her silence”—or such was her perception of the situation. Realizing that Nikki's version of the story presented only her side, I felt it only fair to hear Leila's version of the story as well. (Knowing that I was having an ‘extra’ chat with Leila a few days later, I was almost certain that I would hear Leila's version of the story at that time.) Nikki apologized for her disappearing act and made the following remarks at the end of our Skype chat:

Nikki: soorry if not chatting with the girls and with you affects your study.

Shenin: You know what, it's all part of the research process. I had a great time getting to know all four of you. Thanks for re-connecting with me and agreeing to have this chat.

Nikki: your welcome. i forgot to tell you that i got into university!!! in exactly one week i will be going to university of windsor. i'll be the first in my entire family to go to university

Shenin: Wow! Congratulations! I'm so glad you shared that. Seems like you really were working hard this summer ☺

Nikki: For sure. Keep in touch ok

Shenin: Of course. Bye for now.

During my 'extra' chat with Leila a few days later, it was Leila who initiated talks of Nikki. This is what Leila had to say about her friendship with Nikki and issues of bullying:

Leila: i just wanted to say a few things about [Nikki] cause i know you talked to her the other day. From like grade 10-11 we have been friends...she has gotten bullied by these girls like crazy...i had her back...those girls hate ME because i stuck up for [Nikki] so many times...and now those same girls that have snaked her and screwed her over so many times are her bestfriends....so i have no respect for her...as the days go by i care less and less

Shenin: Is there any hope for your friendship?

Leila: nope im deleting her...that's the last straw...i was gonna a while ago...but I never got the chance. Im going to though. [Geneviève] did the day after our last group chat.

In many ways, by the end of that month our research group had morphed into live Facebook-edition of the popular teen flick "Mean Girls." Overall, it was quite disheartening to listen to the girls' stories about previous incidents of bullying. While Nikki wished she was still friends with Leila, Leila wanted nothing to do with Nikki.

On the very last day of that month, I noticed that Nikki and Leila were no longer Facebook friends. Leila's act of un-friending Nikki on Facebook signified the end of their friendship. As Leila put it, deleting Nikki from Facebook was "the last straw"; for Leila, un-friending someone on Facebook is a signifying practice that obliterates the friendship in both the virtual and the real context. Leila noted that she cared "less and less" about Nikki as the days went by; un-friending her from Facebook would indicate that Leila finally did not care at all—hence, "the last straw."

A Note on Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Racism Awareness

Nikki and Leila are the two girls in this research study who voiced their opinions about rap and hip hop music, likely because they were the only of the four who expressed interest in these specific genres. The girls' discussion of a popular rapper (Wiz Khalifa) contributed to my understanding of the way Nikki constructs her identity, as well as how both she and Leila buy into stereotypes that stigmatize the black male as "harmful and hateful."

However, while Nikki is white and 'speaks' from a position of "white privilege" (McIntosh, 1989), Leila is visibly brown by the shade of her skin. As noted in Chapter 7 (Leila's narrative), Leila is white on her mother's side and Indian on her father's side. At no point did Leila self-identify as either "white" or "Indian," but she did let me know that she felt more connected to her Indian side because she grew up "immersed in my dad's culture." In her chapter, it was noted that Leila faced racial discrimination for being "too dark" when she was considered for a movie role. Despite feeling the sting of discrimination first-hand, Leila was quick to joke about Wiz

Khalifa's image in a way that perpetuated negative stereotypes of black men, enforcing this existing discourse (and especially how this discourse relates to rap and hip hop music).

That Leila and Nikki were joking and exchanging "lols" on a very serious topic indicates a lack of "racism awareness," which is understood here as a form of consciousness-raising to build relationships across differences (Aldana *et al.*, 2012, p. 121). This term moves beyond perceived discrimination and instead focuses on an "understanding of the social hierarchy that privileges white people and perpetuates racial inequalities that put ethnic-racial minorities at a social disadvantage, regardless of one's experience with discrimination" (ibid). Of course, thinking about racism awareness requires critical thinking skills as well as a forum to discuss issues of difference. While our virtual conversations on Facebook could have provided the girls with a safe, non-judgmental space to think about racism awareness, unfortunately we just did not get to this discussion during our chats.

Final Thoughts

Getting to know Nikki over the course of the research study presented a number of challenges that I had not experienced with any of the other girls. These challenges include: her delayed responses to messages during the recruitment phase of research; her inability (or lack of willingness) to answer questions fully and directly; the blatant contradictions in her patterns of thinking; and most of all, her overall lack of presence on Facebook, particularly during the final two months when she disappeared and stopped interacting with all members

of the research group. Despite these challenges—or perhaps because of them—Nikki’s participation in this study proved to be invaluable.

As a researcher interested in feminist ways of knowing, the tensions that arose as a result of these challenges provoked a strong reflexivity with regards to issues of trust and integrity in my research relationship with Nikki. This strong reflexivity peaked when I received her Facebook message (after her disappearance) that informed me that she was interested in participating in our final conversation. Reading her criticism—“I really don't appreciate you openly saying Infront of all the girls I'm the reason this study isn't happening”—proved to be one of the most difficult moments of the research process. Although I had wanted the whole research process to be strictly virtual and mediated by computer technology, I reached out to Nikki in a more personal manner with a phone call, in order to regain her trust and renew her perceived integrity of the research study.

With regards to Nikki’s views on femininity, it was important for Nikki to appear ‘pretty’ in her photographs. She held herself to high standards, and noted her “ideal” is to look like a “supermodel.” However, Nikki did not always look polished or “supermodel”-like in her photographs. When Nikki engaged in disparaging behaviours and subversive activities, and when those moments were captured and posted to Facebook, Nikki’s virtual self-presentations painted the opposite picture. As far as friendships go, Nikki had a number of friends (males as well as females outside the research group) regularly posting to her wall. She seldom replied to these messages. Her friendships with the three other girls in this study were always in wavering states, which is problematic because “friendships increase in importance during adolescence” (McLean & Jennings, 2012, p. 1455).

I have dealt with four main themes in this chapter: (1) Nikki's self-described "deceiving" nature, which revealed a number of contradictions and lies that surfaced throughout the course of the study; (2) Nikki's concerns with privacy and "getting into trouble," which she elaborated upon in great detail while discussing her engagements with underage drinking and drug use; (3) Nikki's views about beauty and femininity, which were unfortunately limited due to her periods of absence; and (4) Nikki's perceptions and understandings of how previous experiences of bullying affected her relationships with the other research participants and with the research study writ large.

Facebook is a safe place for self-presentation, including hidden and ideal self-aspects (Seidman, 2013). Interestingly, Nikki's "deceiving" nature was not something she wanted to hide from our research group; this was something she told the research group about as early as our first virtual conversation. As well, at least for the most part, Nikki did not want to hide her risky practices of underage drinking and excessive partying; with what seemed like little hesitation, she posted photographs that could get her into trouble. According to Staksrud, Olafsson and Livingstone (2013), "users with more risky SNS practices will encounter more online risk than those with fewer risky practices" (p. 48). Although Nikki lacked Facebook presence for the final two months of the study, it would have been most interesting to find out if she had encountered any online risk as a result of posting any of her pictures to Facebook.

In terms of Nikki's views about beauty and femininity—her noted ideal was to "look like a supermodel"—it became clear in our conversations that Nikki was highly influenced by mass media. Wilksch, Tiggemann and Wade (2006) suggest that those who consider the

media an important source of information about being attractive, who compare their own appearance to media images, and who feel pressured by the media to improve their appearance are particularly vulnerable to decrements in body satisfaction following exposure to idealized images. Although I was not able to converse with Nikki about these body issues due to her absence, it has been noted by Gomez (2010) that online social networks create a cult of femininity, where discourses found there reflect women's roles in society and also socialize young women into these roles.

The final of the four themes noted above (Nikki's perceptions and understandings of how bullying affects her relationships) drew in the voices of the other research participants so as to not, as Kleinman and Copp (1993) put it, "safely quarantine the confessional from the substantive story" (p. 17). For this reason, it was pertinent to hear all sides of this story and not just Nikki's. Very unfortunately, the story of Nikki and her interactions with the other girls had a sad ending, with Geneviève and Leila un-friending Nikki from their Facebook accounts when the research study came to an end.

Chapter 10

'To the Actress'

Body-Image-Text:

The Girls' Experiences of/with Embodiment

The previous four chapters have detailed each of the girls' *experiences of/with embodiment* online, meaning their ways of knowing, understanding, communicating and representing their affective sensibilities, including (but not limited to) their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires and perceptions. While these four chapters have highlighted the differences among the girls as well as the various modalities facilitating their cultures of technological embodiment, meaningful patterns exist across their experiences of/with embodiment. The purpose of this chapter is to examine and discuss these meaningful patterns, which serve as the meta- themes that allow for a better understanding of the girls' identities and concurrent identity formations.

First, however, it is worth revisiting the research questions that guided my investigations into the lives—and more specifically, the bodily displays—of the female adolescent research participants on Facebook. It is important to note here, once again, that these questions served as frames of reference that encouraged the 'getting-to-know you' feminist virtual ethnographic research process during our scheduled and informal virtual chats. As we will see in this chapter, 'hanging out' with the girls online has not provided definitive answers to any of these questions, for there is always an element of "unknown" when it comes to defining identity (Lawler, 2008) and there is always something "leftover" within affective sensibilities (Ibrahim, 2004; see also Grossberg, 1992). However, it is my

hope that the meaningful patterns to be discussed will provide countenance to theoretical and methodological perspectives of postmodern identity assemblage. As well, it is within these meaningful patterns that I seek answers for how truths are produced, sanitized, and sustained. The following are my research questions:

1) How is the female adolescent body virtually self-represented on Facebook in a time of hyper- representation?

- i) What does this research teach us about female adolescents in the 21st century, specifically in terms of self -reflexivity, social representations, and social implications?
- ii) How can an understanding of this nature inform an understanding of (normative) femininity?
- iii) How do these self-representations get transformed, cropped, Photoshopped, etc., and why?

2) What do these virtual self-representations and the transformations therein tell us about the ‘real’ identity of female adolescents?

- b) By reflecting upon their virtual self-representations and the transformations therein, what do these students have to say about the flows, tensions, and intersections of/between their real and the virtual identities?

The first of these two overarching questions beckons for an overall reading of the girls’ narratives as subculture, as in female adolescent “ways of life” (Williams, 1976) on Facebook. Integrated within these ways of life are the ways in which the girls display their bodies on Facebook, which is a pertinent aspect of their experiences of/with embodiment. Such is what will be discussed in the first section of this chapter, which is then taken up within a framework of four meta- themes, as follows:

(1) *Prosumption*. This theme is discussed first because it serves as the grounding theme that connects the central issues and concepts of this thesis to the products of the research (the girls' narratives). This theme takes up the girls' "interrelated acts of consumption and production," which is the very definition of "prosumption" (Rizer, 2014. p. 3). Although prosumption is usually discussed within the field of consumer studies, in more recent years it has been regarded as a relatively new way of thinking about the inventive possibilities of online practice.

(2) *Bodily displays of femininity*. This theme looks at the way the girls performed their bodily displays and the deeper meanings attached to these displays. Here, I also revisit the notion of 'femininity of masquerade' in relation to the girls' acts of prosumption—how are the girls influenced by what they consume and produce ("prosume")? How do they regulate their bodily displays on Facebook?

(3) *The politics of Facebook recognition*. As we have seen in the past four chapters, 'being on Facebook' complicates a 'politics of recognition' in the girls' lives. This is a highly significant aspect of the girls' identities pertaining to the ways they see and translate themselves, others, and the world. Issues such as attention, popularity, maturity, gossip, privacy, secrecy, and censorship are key to understanding the politics of Facebook recognition.

(4) *Language and literacy – 'Words create worlds*. As noted in Chapter 2 (Review of Literature), Chapter 7 (Leila), and Chapter 9 (Nikki), knowing *what to say* and *how to say it* online is a pertinent aspect of youth identity. Patterns emerged across the girls' use of

language, which will be discussed within the broader notion of ‘literacy’ and ‘digital literacies’ in particular.

The second overarching question is more abstract, to be understood within the conceptual framework of concurrent identity formation (CIF), as outlined in Chapter 3, section 3.4. This conceptual framework will be re-introduced in the second section of this chapter, drawing in articulated aspects of the girls’ experiences of/with embodiment that addressed the flows, tensions and interactions of and between their real and virtual identities. The framework of meta-themes utilized in the first part of this chapter is certainly not exclusive to the first overarching research question and will thus serve to enhance understandings of CIF in the second section of this chapter as well.

10.1 BODY-IMAGE-TEXT

Play freely with the Presence you invent; let it follow or precede you, let it walk beside you or even fly above your head, according to the mission you want to fulfill.

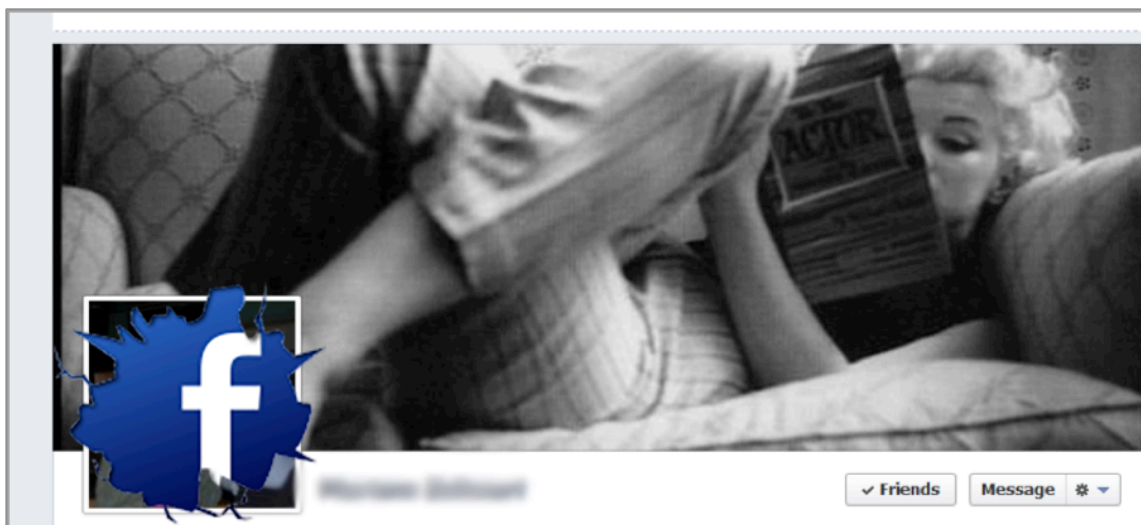
--Chekhov (1953, p. 140)

Discussing the girls’ experiences of/with embodiment on Facebook incites a re-visitation of many of the theoretical concepts explored previously in this thesis. The re-visitation of the theoretical concepts within the present framework of meta-themes sutures cohesion beyond simply ‘stitching together’ the sections of this thesis; for it is in this re-visitation that theory foment the raw complexities of the everyday lives of female students on Facebook, coalescing a ‘recrudescence of female adolescence’—or what Barnett (2009) refers to as “the fresh ways of seeing and knowing” adolescent identity (p. 203).

To re-visit the theoretical concepts of this thesis is to denounce—with a lot of humility—any sort of interpretive mastery that I can claim of the girls’ experiences of/with embodiment, especially by way of epistemology alone. The products of the undertaken ethnography—namely, the previous four chapters of data analysis—maintain both etic and emic approaches to studying the subculture, the latter of which have been emphasized within a methodology of “getting lost” (Lather, 2007) and using feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methods of inquiry. In this sense, and in conducting the research *with* the girls, my ‘doing’ of ethnography has opened up textual possibilities to discuss the girls’ narratives in a way that emphasizes that “the product of ethnographic work is a descriptive reconstruction of the hosts’ *own* construction of their worlds” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 15, emphasis added). What Whitehead (2004) means is the socio-cultural context of ethnography and the very meanings of any cultural system must be understood from the perspectives of the members in the system. Guba and Lincoln (1994) concur, pointing out that various hypotheses and theories brought by researchers “may have little or no meaning within the emic view of studied individuals, groups, societies, or cultures” (p. 106). This emphasizes the ethnographer’s need to grasp the members’ points of view. As Lather (2007) writes in *Getting Lost*, of her ethical struggles with the writing of lived experience:

I trouble the ethics of reducing the fear, pain, joy and urgency of people’s lives to analytic categories. Exploring the textual possibilities for telling stories that situate researchers not so much as experts “saying what things mean” in terms of “data,” the researcher is situated as witness giving testimony to the lives of others. (p. 41)

Leaving my researcher hat in the virtual field, I now situate myself as “witness,” to discuss the narratives of the girls from the sidelines of the construction site, casting my gaze from without rather than from within. The “textual possibility” to enable my positionality as witness is grasped through the prevailing emic perspective of this ethnography: that the girls play freely with their online presences as if they are actresses on a stage. During my third virtual chat with the girls, we discussed the ways in which the girls play with their presences on Facebook. The discussion arose after Geneviève explained her choice of cover image, which appears towards the end of her chapter (p. 194), but is offered below as a refresher:



Geneviève strongly identified with Marilyn Monroe’s “beauty” and “class,” as she put it, relating to the above image with her description that she is “much more than your regular actress.” Geneviève went on to explain that when she first saw this image online, it was as if she was viewing herself. Leila agreed at this point in our third virtual chat, noting that she is an *actress on Facebook* as well—a description that came up in her chapter a

number of times when she described herself as a *character* on Facebook (as well as in real life). During the conversation, Irene also agreed that she is an actress on Facebook, adding the following descriptively philosophical point to our discussion: “I think we’re all actresses, starring in our own movies LOL.” As we have seen in her chapter, Irene took this concept one step further, drawing a parallel of those who Like images on Facebook to “fans”: in her words, “Well people post stuff on Facebook so that others can like them. I just feel like it’s nice to get noticed and recognized. It’s nice to have fans!” Nikki was not present during our third virtual chat and so she did add to the points made by the other girls at the time of the chat. Also, at no point during the study did Nikki explicitly liken her presence on Facebook to that of an actress. However, as discussed in Nikki’s chapter, her self-presentation on Facebook was cast with the ideal of ‘being a model’ instead of ‘being an actress.’ Seeing how actresses often get their start as models—as in Marilyn Monroe’s case, for instance—the leap from the runway to the screen is not far, especially since the roles of model and actress are similar in that both perform upon a stage for the pleasure and desire of others (and self).

Each of the girls, in some way, self-identified as a performer. The idea of individuals as performers is not necessarily novel, and has already been discussed as a layer of theoretical framing per Goffman (1959) in Chapter 3, which was subsequently linked to Butler’s (1993a) notion of performativity. Goffman’s sociological perspectives are derived from dramaturgy, that is, the composition of a performance and its main elements on the stage. Furthermore, his application of dramaturgy concerns sociality relating to face-to-face interaction, “especially the kind of social life that is organized within the physical confines

of a building or plant,” which, “can be applied to any concrete social establishment” (p. iii).

He also writes about the roles of performers and the audience:

Given a particular performance as the point of reference, we have distinguished three crucial roles on the basis of function: those who perform; those performed to; and outsiders who neither perform in the show nor observe it. (p. 90)

While his ideas are germane, these conventional aspects of dramaturgy are not entirely applicable to the study of sociality on the boundless, branching stage of Facebook, where the roles of the performers (self) and audience/outsider (other) never fully dislocate, and where communication is never face-to-face. As a result, the online performances of the girls are still dramaturgical, but their stage is one of amateur *participatory theatre*, described by Sloman (2011) as follows:

Participatory theatre builds on conventional theatre. It gives the same benefits of escapism, a forum to put across a message, and a way to address issues, but it also provides an active way for the audience and community to become involved in the issues explored and form a sense of ownership. Participatory theatre is made for and by the community. It engages people to identify issues of concern, analyse and then together think about how change can happen, and particularly how relationships of power and oppression can be transformed. (p. 44)

Sloman (2011) offers participatory theatre as a “tool” for international community development, noting the shift to participation within the field’s theory and practice and emphasizing the need to move away from governments, NGOs and organizations making decisions *about* communities. I too offer participatory theatre as a “tool,” but in the context

of this discussion it is invoked to understand the girls' subculture and their experiences of/with embodiment on Facebook in a time of hyper-representation, where roles of producer and consumer are entangled. Further, I argue that the girls' online performances and their engagement with audiences formed a "sense of ownership"—understood here as *identity*—perceived and realized by three prevailing approaches to the girls' interaction on Facebook, concretized henceforth as *body*, *image*, and *text*.

As we have seen in the previous four chapters, there is a dynamic interplay among the notions of *body*, *image* and *text*. The *body*, constructed and read as a site of social and cultural scrutiny, is always experienced as/in/with *image* (pictures, photographs and icons) and *text* (captions, status updates, wall postings, relationship status, 'About' tab, and all other textual displays that constitute "sign activities" (Lou, 2005, cited in Jones, 2009)). Although the body is the natural starting point of discussion, the interplay of body, image, and text does not necessarily assume the order in which these words appear, nor necessarily the same meanings in which this order makes sense. In the order of *image*, *body*, *text*, for instance, the *images* (pictures, photographs, icons) and displays of the *body* (physical, corporeal, fashioned, culturally inscribed), are viewed as/in/with *text* (previously defined as 'the products of dominant culture and signs of postmodernity'). Furthermore, these texts are often only understood in juxtaposition to other texts ("sign activities"). From these examples, we see that the interplay among the notions of *body*, *image*, and *text* is truly dynamic because the notions themselves diverge and intersect; and as such, commas denoting sequence are replaced with dashes denoting flow and continuity, as in: *body-image-text*.

Discussing the girls' subculture on Facebook in a way that centralizes body-image-text is the method I will use to offer testimony to their lives within the analytic framework of meta-themes that follows. This requires cooperation on the part of the reader to recognize the girls and their "ways of life" on Facebook in the very way they recognize themselves: as actresses upon a stage. Keeping in mind the powerful mirroring image of Marilyn Monroe presented in Geneviève's chapter, writing the girls' testimony here is done by reading the girls' reading themselves (and others). In the aforementioned image, Marilyn Monroe is seen reading Michael Chekhov's (1953) *To the Actor*, a book that prescribes techniques of acting by way of interpreting body, image, and text. The book also responds to questions such as: How does an actor learn to compose a performance? Develop a character? Create individuality? Express himself freely and completely? Enchantingly, and without knowing anything of the book in the image, Geneviève was asking herself these very questions. In fact, all of the girls were asking themselves these questions, which, in a peculiar way, can very easily be asked alongside my own research questions. It is thus 'to the actress' the ensuing discussion salutes, and each meta-theme advances, fittingly, with a quote from Chekhov's book. These advances are intended as provocation of textual possibility and by no means as prescription. As well, in the same way Chekhov states his book is the result of "prying behind the curtain of the creative process" for years in Russia at the Moscow Art Theatre (p. xi), the discussion that follows is of similar process, though the screening of the girls on their stage took place behind a very different type of curtain, always of varying opacity.

10.1.1 Prosumption

In art, as in life, we begin to evaluate, to understand and experience things differently if we see them in the light of true contrasts. Think of such opposites, for instance, as life and death, good and evil, spirit and matter, true and false, happiness and unhappiness ... The very essence of one without the other might easily escape us.

--Chekhov, 1953, p. 105

The girls' experiences of/with embodiment are premised upon two contrasting activities that speak directly to body-image-text, making Facebook 'happen' not just for the girls, but for anyone who participates in online activity: namely, *production* and *consumption*. As noted in Chapter 2, *production* relates to the creation and communication of digital information, while *consumption* relates to reading and understanding in digital formats. According to Bawden (2008), production and consumption are among the central competencies of digital literacies today, without which any claim to digital literacy has to be regarded sceptically (p. 29).

The production and consumption activities that make Facebook 'happen' for the girls are wide-ranging and certainly not exclusive to their subculture. Moreover, the patterns and processes of their production and consumption activities are certainly not mutually exclusive. Perhaps the best example is a very basic one, noted in all of the girls' chapters: the girls posted (produced) and viewed (consumed) photographs appearing on their pages and the pages of their Facebook friends. What can be said about the ways the girls posted their photographs in relation to viewing the photographs of others? Further, how does this relationship between consumption and production speak to their formation of identities, that

is, their negotiations of self and Other? To understand the relationship between consumption and production, a binary breakdown of the two terms is necessary in the name of postmodern identity assemblage.

Drawing largely from the work of Toffler (1980) and Kotler (1986), Ritzer (2014) uses the term “prosumption” to articulate “*the interrelated process of production and consumption*” (p. 3, emphasis in original). He notes the innate banality of the term by offering a mundane example of prosumption in everyday life: bussing one’s own debris in a fast-food restaurant. In this example, the roles of the consumer and producer blur as the consumer helps the producer maintain a clean restaurant, despite only paying for the product (food) and not the service (cleaning). Ritzer refers to this blurring of consumption and production as the “near invisibility of prosumption.” He notes that the social changes associated with prosumption are prevalent in many different types of social worlds (airports, the Internet, etc.), but because the changes are usually so mundane, “it is difficult not only to see their connections to one another, but also that they are also part of some larger set of changes.” Moreover, he notes that that many scholars have been “unable to discern the commonalities or connections among the diverse changes and the even more diverse phenomena undergoing these changes” (p. 4).

I am working with Ritzer’s (2014) contentions to understand the implications of the girls’ rather banal acts of prosumption on Facebook. Reverting back to the ‘basic’ example of the girls’ prosumption activities—that is, producing and consuming photographs in their social network—we can discern from their narratives not only that what they posted influenced what they viewed (and vice versa), but that these processes are interrelated (and sometimes, misunderstood by the girls). The following are examples from each of the girls’

narratives: In Geneviève's case, she felt that Facebook was not the place to share certain images, such as an image of a starving dog she had seen on one of her friends' Facebook pages. Her consumption of this image manifested into a posting she made to her own timeline, relaying the message that "Facebook is NOT the place to share it!" Leila, a consumer of rock-and-roll music and imagery, produced photographs of herself as 'rock star' on Facebook, admittedly under the influence of alcohol in true rock star style. Irene enjoyed playing with her photographic presence on Facebook, often choosing to use filters to enhance her appearance in the photographs she posted. She even claimed that filters "don't count" as photo-editing because "everyone uses filters." From this we see that her production of photographs is based upon her consumption of her friends' photographs, specifically relating to her perceived norm of filter use among her peers. Last, Nikki was fearful of "getting into trouble" because she didn't want subversive photographs impeding her possibilities of university acceptance. However, numerous subversive photographs appeared on her timeline, as seen in her chapter. When asked about why she continued to post subversive photographs, this was part of her reasoning: "I don't go on people's facebook and see them partying and automatically assume theyre crazy partiers... I get to know them then see their facebook." From this we can start to see that the way Nikki read (consumed) other people's photographs is the way she wanted her own photographs to be read as well; her production was thus interrelated to her own consumptive values.

The above examples are all innately simple and may seem overtly obvious once read, but these acts of prosumption are actually anything *but* banal; for it is the interrelated processes of production and consumption that substantiate the discourse of the girls' subculture. It is through prosumption that the girls experience embodiment and assert

*authentic selves*³⁰, meaning that they are always at least partially “wide awake” (Greene, 1977) because their acts of prosumption entice a search for meaning as based on perception of themselves and others. Moreover, the girls’ acts of prosumption speak directly to their “aesthetic of existence” (Foucault, 1997), a terminology introduced in Chapter 3 and defined as the possibilities of transformation in relation to what is known and what is considered ‘truth.’ Although the sample size of the female adolescent subculture on Facebook was but four girls, each of the girls had unique experiences, different ways of knowing, and their own sets of “truth”—Leila was most explicit about her truths, claiming the following early on: “i speak tha truth but i guess thats a foreign language to y’all.” Similarly, the truths that Geneviève, Irene and Nikki ‘spoke’ were also distinct languages, influencing their ways of being and knowing and their ways of playing with their presences in accordance with their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires and so on. Conclusively, I argue that the girls’ acts of prosumption are the very acts that renovate their aesthetic and social vocabularies as they either perpetuate or challenge what is present within the discourses they internalize and embody.

The following three sections explore the girls’ narratives to detail further the patterns that exist across their experiences of/with embodiment. In doing so, I am recasting the notion of prosumption as a way to view consumption and production no longer as contrasting activities, but as inseparable and evocative performative acts of body-image-text. These evocative acts, I am contending, allow the girls to express the complexities of their interiorities and ultimately exert identities.

³⁰ ‘Authentic self’ was defined in Chapter 3 as a subjectivity that consciously problematizes existing (feminine) archetypes that may influence agency.

10.1.2 Bodily displays of femininity

“Showing off” is the negative side of beauty ... An actor who develops a sense of beauty simply to enjoy himself fosters only a surface gloss, a thin veneer. His aim must be to acquire this sense only for his art. If he is able to extract the sting of egotism from his sense of beauty, he is out of danger.

--Chekhov (1953, p. 15)

Within the integrated scene of Facebook, a multimodal perspective of the body offers it as image (photograph, icon, picture), comprehended familiarly through recurring patterns of gaze, facial expression, gesture, and stance (Jewitt, 2009b; Flewitt, Hampel, Hauck, & Lancaster, 2009). If we take the examples of the girls’ photographs from prom, we see the following patterns in all four of their chapters: gaze transfixed on the camera; happy eyes and wide, bright smiles; one or both hands on the hip, setting the elbow as a point of inflection; legs positioned closely with one foot slightly forward if appearing alone, or within close stance if appearing with another body. (On a side note, these recurring patterns were not limited to the observed bodily displays of just the four girls, as they were replicated/emulated in the hundreds of prom pictures posted within the girls’ social network; this is where the virtual ethnographer on Facebook locates herself somewhere between ‘spectator’ and ‘cultural voyeur.’)

The recurring patterns of the girls’ bodily displays across their prom pictures speak to the social implications associated with these displays. To use Leila’s word, the girls were “camwhoring,” a term that Geneviève described as “put[ting] on a show for the camera, but know[ing] the pictures will end up on Facebook.” While the use of the word “camwhoring” affirms the girls’ roles as actresses, it also contextualizes their bodies in distinct ways. First

of all, the ways the girls put on their shows perpetuated Greer's (1970) archetype of the Western woman as "dressed, coiffed, and painted" (p. 58). Second—and more significantly—the derogatory root word *whore* (from the suffixed *whoring*) constructs the girls' gendered subjectivities in ways that sublimate desire for attention into socially acceptable forms of Facebook critiques of femininity. The first point will be taken up within the enumerated framework of social implications, to follow. The second point is of utmost importance in understanding the girls' bodily displays within their subculture, as well as in discourses of femininity and visual media imagery, and will become clearer in the next section of this chapter. Right now, however, it is worth noting that the girls' camwhoring was certainly not limited to prom, as their chapters include numerous photographs depicting them with coiffed and braided hair, made-up faces, manicured fingers, revealing clothing (low-cut tank tops, short shorts) and stylized accoutrements. Although the previous four chapters include some photographs where the girls (particularly Geneviève, Leila and Irene) appeared less coiffed and painted, these were always candid instances where they were either purposefully performing as self-described "funny" or "silly" characters, or taken off guard with no intention of putting on a show for the camera.

In all of the girls' chapters, the word 'pretty' has been used to describe the pictures where the girls are camwhoring (that is, posing and smiling, "dressed, coiffed, and painted"). The word has always been used in single quotes to denote precarious and contested meaning; however, viewing the 'pretty' images of the girls on Facebook—beyond their "surface gloss," as Chekhov calls it—reveals three critical social implications relating to their experiences of/with embodiment within their subculture:

1) **The girls translate their bodies in line with heterosexual (normative) values.**

At the time of the research study, Geneviève, Leila, and Irene were in relationships with male students in their social networks. Nikki was not in a relationship but she let me know that she would “hang out” with her ex-boyfriend. It was important for Geneviève, Leila, and Irene to appear in prom photographs kissing their boyfriends. For Geneviève, prom marked a special circumstance where she could display her gendered body in a (hetero)sexualized fashion. This was also true for Irene, but prom was certainly not a special circumstance seeing she appeared in other similar pictures with her boyfriend during the research study. Leila also appeared in prom pictures with her boyfriend, though she displayed an even more (hetero)sexualized body by posting pictures of herself with her boyfriend in bed, for instance. Nikki, despite not having a boyfriend, appeared in (hetero)sexualized photographs with male students during her trip to Sable Beach, such as the one where she appears in a skin-baring, two-piece bathing suit locking her legs around the torso of male student.

Translating their bodies in line with heterosexual values went beyond “showing off” (as Chekhov put it) their relationships with male significant others or male friends. In one highly significant instance during our first virtual chat, and as noted in her chapter, Geneviève revealed that Matt, her “gay best friend,” co-ordinated her outfit for prom. Her description of Matt as “gay” can be read as a heteronormative discursive practice that, without intention, marginalized Matt’s sexual preferences and subtly othered him outside accepted and assumed defaults of heterosexuality. Another significant instance appears in Leila’s chapter, as seen in the photograph where Geneviève is cupping Leila’s breast. The girls are at a party and Leila is drinking from a dark beer bottle; the girls pose in the

photograph with daring smiles on their faces, their bodies quite far apart. This image is *sexualized* but it is not sexual; the girls are experimenting with their sexualities yet the noticeable distance between their bodies marks a line of uncrossed heterosexuality.

Finally, we also see from the girls' photographs that the ways they dress, style their hair, and apply their makeup certainly 'fits' the mould of female heterosexuality. However, these performances are significant beyond simply appearing "dressed, coiffed, and painted." Commenting on a picture of Geneviève, Leila, and herself, Nikki noted that dressing "nice" translated into *trying to look older*: "we all dressed nice and I guess we look older. were [sic] teenagers, it's what we do. dress up and go out and have fun with your girls." Nikki's expressed desire to look older speaks to her desire to be *perceived* as older and not as a teenager. In a way, Nikki's words are reminiscent of Geneviève's explanation of why she posed in certain ways for her prom pictures: "It's one of those things girls don't really think about, we've just learned how to pose and *you turn it on when you have to*" (emphasis added). From both Nikki's and Geneviève's explanations, we can begin to understand that while the girls translated their bodies in accordance with the heterosexual values they embodied, they often did this without giving it much thought or reflection. As a result, the girls were objectifying their subjectivities. What this means is:

2) **The girls' subjectivities and 'authentic selves' cannot always be read on Facebook.**

The ways the girls appeared in photographs did not always align with their expressed understandings and beliefs of femininity and beauty. This lack of alignment can be read through the dynamic interplay of body-image-text, where the girls' comments (*text*) about each others' physical bodies as appearing in images posted to Facebook did not necessarily corroborate with their understandings and beliefs of femininity and beauty per our informal

and/or scheduled chats. Across the chapters, the girls commented on each others' 'pretty' pictures with words such as "beautiful," "beauts," "stunning," "gorgeous," "attractive," "love you" and the symbol "♥." These words and this symbol, which can be considered as inessential qualifiers, appeared significantly more times in comment boxes associated with 'pretty' pictures as opposed to the candid photographs where the girls appeared as "silly" or "funny" characters or were simply taken off guard. The following provides a synopsis of salient content from each of the girls' chapters to further demonstrate how their online bodily displays did not always represent their subjectivities and 'authentic selves':

Geneviève was the notable exception of the four girls; in many ways, her 'authentic self' could be read mostly clearly from the displays of her body on Facebook. As she noted of Marilyn Monroe:

She's a respectable woman, and that makes her even more beautiful. I think she's an ideal of femininity that a lot of women have forgotten about today.

This powerful excerpt reveals that Geneviève consciously problematized feminine archetypes. Femininity, for Geneviève, is not just about the adornment and display of the body, but also about class and respect. Further, her attendance at a 50s-themed party suggests that she is in tune with the way her understandings and beliefs of femininity translated into her experiences. To sum it up, of all four girls, Geneviève's 'authentic self' can be best read on Facebook.

Leila—a model in real life—posted numerous 'pretty' pictures of herself. However, a single photograph Leila uploaded to her Facebook account (from Instagram) told a different story than all of her other photos: she captioned this photo with the following hashtags: "#smilin #no makeup #natural." The photograph is a headshot of Leila wearing no makeup or

jewellery, her hair is slightly frizzed and pushed to one side, and she is smiling her most radiant smile. These were her comments about the photo:

...i think i look good with no makeup on so i posted this pic. sometimes girls do this on insta. i also like to appear happy because i am happy. of course not always but I like to appear happy. i smile a lot in my pictures. i posted this because to me beauty is natural and im all natural in this pic.

Leila's understanding of beauty as "natural" can only be read from this one photograph, wherein her understanding of beauty is translated through her bodily display. What is slightly troubling about the translation of her body in the image is the accompanying text: "#smilin #no makeup #natural." By including these hashtags as descriptors of the image, Leila is *making a point* that she was not wearing makeup and that the photograph is indeed "natural." As well, as she explains in the above excerpt: "sometimes girls do this on insta." This explanation troubles Leila's 'authentic self' because her subjectivity comes into question; although Leila is problematizing existing feminine archetypes by appearing "natural," the interplay of body-image-text suggests that she is, at least in part, emulating what she has seen on other girls' social media pages (Facebook and Instagram).

Irene's 'authentic self' is difficult to discern from her bodily displays on Facebook. For the most part, Irene was generally reluctant (or perhaps shy) to discuss her body and issues of sexuality. Whenever asked about the displays of her body, Irene's responses usually focussed on the actual image, in some ways isolating image from body-image-text. For Irene, appearing 'pretty' was for the sake of preserving aesthetic photographs. Irene noted her desire to consistently look good in her photographs. For instance, when it came to discussing her profile pictures, Irene claimed she "obviously" had to look good, with "good teeth, smile, hair, outfit. And skin." As she explained of her prom pictures: "the pictures are memories forever." Irene also enjoyed messing around with her friends, as we have seen in

her chapter with her postings of distorted Photoshopped images. However, by the end of the summer, these “funny” images disappeared from Irene’s profile. When it came to her pictures, Irene only wanted to appear within existing archetypes of beauty, and this definitely made a reading of her ‘authentic self’ very difficult based on her Facebook profile.

Nikki described her photographs as “the most deceiving” of all the girls—this statement itself implies an awareness of how she translated her body on Facebook in misleading and self-described “inappropriate” ways. However, during the scheduled chats she attended, Nikki revealed a disconnect between her Facebook presence and her ‘authentic self.’ Overall, Nikki readily and easily bought-into existing feminine archetypes, though the displays of her body as “model” were not always consistent across the spectrum of her photographs. Of all the girls, Nikki’s ‘authentic self’ is most difficult to read on Facebook due to the contradictions, discrepancies and general “deceiving” nature of her photographs on Facebook.

3) **The girls display their bodies using techniques of comparison and photo-editing.**

Of the four girls, Leila is the only one who admitted to emulating other girls’ bodily displays, as noted in her description of the “natural” photograph she posted to Facebook from Instagram. However, even though the other three girls did not admit to emulating each other or other girls in their social network (or other women in the media, such as celebrities), at the very least they were always *comparing* themselves to each other, for this is the only way for patterns of bodily display to exist across their Facebook accounts; without comparison, emulation and recurring patterns of body, image, and text would simply not be possible. Examples of the girls using the technique of comparison to display their bodies include: (1) The girls all posed similarly during prom and other pictures; (2) All of the girls,

at some point during the study, stuck their tongue out for photographs (Leila most of all); (3) All of the girls performed the pouty ‘duckface’; (4) All of the girls engaged in similar forms of commentary when it came to commenting on ‘pretty’ pictures.

In certain circumstances, such as (2) and (3), the girls themselves could not explain meanings or reasons attached to their bodily displays—these circumstances are defined here as purposeless acts of emulation. Although socially accepted and recognized within their subculture, these are bodily displays of lost or empty meaning—bodily displays for the sake of emulation, to ‘fit in.’ The girls’ use of comparison as a technique to translate their bodies into recognizable patterns of bodily display speaks to the presumptive nature of these displays. When logged on to Facebook, the girls are *constantly* viewing (consuming) each other’s bodies, often subconsciously. These acts of consumption regulate the ways the girls then perform their own bodily displays—often through emulation—in turn producing the recognized ‘ways of life’ on Facebook. It is through this silent, ‘banal’ relationship of consumption and production that the girls’ subculture sustains and ultimately develops.

In terms of using photo-editing as a technique of bodily display, none of the girls used Photoshop to enhance their photographs, though Irene noted that some girls in her social network are “best friends” with Photoshop, meaning these girls use Photoshop regularly to enhance the pictures they post to their social media accounts. Geneviève is the only of the four girls who did not alter or enhance her photographs in any way. In fact, she preferred to display her ‘authentic self’ with Polaroid photographs, which lack in technical brilliance and manipulation compared to digital photography. In stark contrast to Geneviève’s preference for Polaroid photographs, Irene and Leila used filters on their mobile phones to enhance their photographs. Irene also noted that filters “didn’t count” as photo-

editing because “everyone uses filters.” Once again, we see the regulatory power of prosumption. Based on her consumption of her friends’ photographs, Irene noticed rampant filter use, which in turn made it acceptable to apply filters to the photographs she produced. Not only was it acceptable, but using filters had become such a common trope of photographic bodily display that Irene did not even consider the use of filters as photo-editing.

Nikki did not use filters to enhance the photographs she posted to her Facebook timeline. She did, however, regularly crop her friends out of photographs to make her own body the focal point of the image. At times, Leila also cropped her photographs in the same manner, though not nearly as frequently. While cropping others out of photographs centralizes the self (body) within the image, it also centralizes the importance the girls place on their own bodies. Cropping, much like using filters and Photoshop, is a transformative technique the girls use to construct and generate ‘new’ selves on Facebook, with or without intention to appear “virtually perfect” (Harrison & Hefner, 2014). This calls into question two basic themes³¹ related to their bodily displays: “How others see me,” and “how I see myself.” These themes will be elaborated upon in section 10.2.

In this section, three critical social implications associated with the girls’ bodily displays have been discussed: (1) the girls translate their bodies in line with heterosexual (normative) values; (2) the girls’ subjectivities and ‘authentic selves’ cannot always be read on Facebook, and (3) the girls display their bodies using techniques of comparison and photo-editing. These social implications contextualize the girls’ bodily displays within the

³¹ In her writing about role-playing and transformation in women’s art, Lucy Lippard (2010) suggests these two themes lend themselves to ‘conceptual art,’ which she defines as inexpensively written and/or photographed or taped pieces in which the idea is usually more important than the visual object (p. 476).

dominant discourse of femininity, constructing their masquerade as gendered, sexualized, beautified and, at times, accentuated. While this discourse is notably limiting—usually constructing femininity within the confines of the male gaze—within their social network, the girls are not performing strictly for males; their masquerade is also directed towards their female friends, as well as themselves. As we will see in the next section, a ‘politics of recognition’ companions the girls’ masquerades, situating them as more than just objects of (male) desire and victims of beauty norms.

10.1.3 The politics of Facebook recognition

The audience is an active co-creator of the performance... At first the experiences of your imaginary audience will appear before your mind's eye as a spontaneous, clarified and general impression. But you must draw the sharp and specific conclusions from it, formulate all the potential thoughts and define all the emotions.

--Chekhov (1953, p. 162)

It is in this section that Facebook as ‘participatory theatre’ is best conceived. As Sloman (2011) has described it at the beginning of this chapter, “participatory theatre provides an active way for the audience and community to become involved in the issues explored and form a sense of ownership” (p. 44). Simply ‘being on Facebook’ is not enough for the girls to explore issues and form a sense of “ownership,” which is taken here to mean ‘identity.’ As noted in Chapter 2, the review of literature, Thomas (2007) has suggested the following: “[t]o have an identity or presence online, users must *interact* with others through words. To not speak is to not have a visible identity in this context” (p. 113, emphasis added). However, when Facebook is conceived as participatory theatre, interaction through

words (*text*) alone is not enough to become fully involved in issues that, as we have seen in this chapter so far, are intertwined with *body* and *image* as well. Furthermore, the *effects* of interaction are elemental to the way the self negotiates others (and vice versa); it is only after the effects of interaction are realized that a sense of “ownership”—or identity—can be exerted. These effects of interaction are critical to the girls’ experiences of/with embodiment on Facebook, and include the following issues that have been discussed across the girls’ chapters: attention, popularity, maturity, gossip, privacy, secrecy, and censorship. Taken together, these issues comprise the effects of interaction on Facebook, which are broadly envisaged here as ‘recognition.’ This term has been linked to identity most notably by Taylor (1992), who alleges a ‘politics of recognition’ thus:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (p. 25)

Although Taylor writes in the context of multiculturalism, his above thesis is applicable to *all* contexts of human self-understanding that are dialogical. To exist in their subculture, the girls’ performances are subsumed within the recognition of their interactions with each other. When it came to their photographs, for instance, the girls obtain recognition through Likes and feedback in associated comment boxes. For Leila and Irene, a greater number of Likes translated into being more popular within their social network. For Geneviève, who claimed not to care about Likes, fewer Likes translated into a greater sense of maturity.

Nikki, who desired popularity and to fit in with the other girls (especially Leila), often gained attention from her photographs in a way that created *misrecognition* within her social network; as we have seen in her chapter, her deliberate posting of “deceiving” photographs troubled the recognition she received from others in a way that fuelled gossip among the other girls and eventually led to the *nonrecognition* of Facebook friendships with Geneviève and Leila. As Taylor asserts, nonrecognition “can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” In many ways, since Nikki was acting in false, distorted and “deceiving” ways on Facebook, the oppression she faced from the other girls had much to do with the nonrecognition of her ‘authentic self’ on Facebook; what this means is she faced oppression because, in many ways, she oppressed herself. As well, her lengthy absence from Facebook contributed to a lack of recognition simply because she was not present.

All of the four girls learned to exist within strictures of privacy in their social network. Each had family members as Facebook friends who were on ‘limited profile’ and could not view the extent of the girls’ online activity. This was a way for the girls to be recognized in acceptable ways by their family members. The girls themselves recognized that placing others on ‘limited profile,’ as well as untagging their names in captioned photographs, were ways to avoid “trouble,” which normalized the secrecy and censorship aspects of their privacy concerns. The girls also recognized that appearing in subversive photographs had the potential to hamper their university admissions, and none of the girls desired such misrecognition.

Geneviève was comparatively more private than the other girls on Facebook, preferring recognition at school rather than on Facebook. She also did not post her

relationship status on Facebook. Leila desired recognition from her boyfriend on Facebook, and often assured she received this recognition by posting photographs of herself and her boyfriend together, such as the one where the two appear in bed. As Leila let me know, she *knew* her boyfriend would see and comment on the photo, so posting it to Facebook fulfilled her need to feel secure in her relationship. Irene also desired recognition from her boyfriend on Facebook, however, in her case it was less about feeling secure and more about fending off unwanted attention from male friends. Both Leila and Irene had their relationship status displayed in their 'About' tabs, with the names of their boyfriends listed as well. Again, this was the girls' strategy to fend off unwanted attention from male friends (or, in Leila's case, random men) who viewed their profiles.

This concern of unwanted attention is significant to consider when Facebook is conceived as participatory theatre; as Sloman (2011) suggests, participatory theatre "engages people to identify issues of concern, analyse and then think together about how change can happen, and particularly how relationships of power and oppression can be transformed" (p. 44). None of the girls claimed to desire unwanted attention from men; Geneviève attempted to transform this power relationship by not posting her relationship status, whereas Leila and Irene did the opposite, by clearly stating their relationship statuses. It is impossible and unnecessary to deem one strategy 'correct,' and the other 'wrong.' However, it is through body-image-text that the girls' claims are troubled, particularly if we revert back to their bodily displays of femininity through camwhoring. Within their social network, the girls received recognition from each other as well as their friends, by way of Likes or comments (such as "beautiful," "beauts," "stunning," "gorgeous," "attractive," "love you" and the symbol "♥."), when they appeared in 'pretty' pictures on Facebook. The act of Liking as

well as these types of comments can be seen as check-move—or a pat on the back—administering attention for and from each other, and encouraging each other to post more of the same pictures. Camwhoring, for the girls, is a way of constructing gendered subjectivities in ways that sublimate their desire for attention—from both males and females—into socially acceptable forms of Facebook critiques of femininity. What is most troublesome about camwhoring, then, is that it works in opposition to the girls' stated desire to fend off unwanted attention from men; further, with the male gaze cast over their pages, the male friends who choose not to comment on 'pretty' pictures are, at the very least, reading the critiques of femininity on their pages and internalizing the dominant discourse of femininity. Instead of interrupting the discourse, the girls are perpetuating it; and instead of using Facebook as a stage to think together about ways to avoid unwanted male attention, the girls are instead welcoming it, encouraging it, and desiring it. To sum up: femininity, beauty, and sexuality are tangled discourses within the girls' social networks. At this stage of adolescence, the girls may or may not grasp their true desires; however, what is certain is that all of the girls desire the attention they receive through the politics of Facebook recognition.

10.1.4 Language and literacy – 'Words create worlds'

You will never confuse the qualities of the character and those of yourself as an artist if you will learn to distinguish between what you act (the theme, character) and how you do it (the way, the manner of acting).

--Chekhov (1953, p. 13)

In their research that deals almost directly with the convergence of digital literacies and identity, Knobel and Lankshear (2008) suggest that online social network site activities are deployed in “socially recognized ways” (p. 255) in which literacies of all types of codification systems, such as the manipulation of alphabetic symbols, “freezing” language as digitally encoded speech and uploading it as a podcast on the internet, or Photoshopping an image, capture material for generating, communicating, and negotiating meaning (p. 257). As we have seen across their chapters, the girls use various emoticons to convey emotion; they upload YouTube clips and songs to their timelines, they use filters to enhance their photographs, and so on. These are certainly concrete examples of the girls’ digital literacies, yet, without further exploring the ways in which the girls use *language*, these “socially recognized ways” say little about the girls’ ways of life on Facebook other than that these patterns of activity exist across their performances.

From a sociocultural perspective, the girls’ use of language reveals much about their ways of life on Facebook. Across the girls’ chapters, Leila and Nikki’s use of language was most striking and inspired by musical preferences. Leila was heavily influenced and inspired by both rock and hip hop music, often posting song lyrics to her wall. For Leila, turning to hip hop and Tupac songs in particular helped her overcome the adversity of her youth and gain a sense of belonging. She embodied her love of hip hop through her use of language, often writing in the manner of the lyrics that spoke to her most deeply. On a similar note, Nikki was also influenced by music, notably rap and hip hop. As she put it: “Im a white girl with a black girls taste in music.” These words construct a world with which she identifies but does not belong because of her whiteness. However, this did not detract her from

adopting the language of this ‘other’ world, nor did it detract her from consuming images of rap and hip hop that, at times, she re-constructed on her Facebook wall.

The ways Leila and Nikki embodied their musical preferences speak to the characters they chose to perform and enact on Facebook, revealing much about *who they are* and *how they exist* within their subculture. According to Gee (2012), to appreciate language in its social context, we need to focus not on language, but on “Discourses (‘big ‘D’ Discourse’)” that include much more than just language (p. 2). As he put it:

It’s not just what you say or even how you say it. It’s also *who* you are and *what* you are doing while you say it. It is not enough just to say the right “lines,” you have to be (enact, role play) the “right” sort of person. (ibid)

Gee’s (2012) reasoning is most fitting within a framework where the girls locate themselves within the Discourse of performance and performativity on Facebook, where language is socially constructed, performed, and accepted or rejected within *text* as well as *body*, and *image*. In a different social context outside of music, we have also seen in Irene’s chapter that one of the languages she ‘speaks’ with her (male) friends on Facebook is the ‘technobabble’ related to her immersion in technology. In this circumstance, Irene’s use of ‘technobabble’ language was always only within the contexts of those who were equally as immersed into technology and could ‘speak’ the same language. In many ways, this revealed a subculture within her subculture—a world within a world, created by words.

A final note on the girls’ language and literacy pertains to a general acceptability of what was previously noted in Leila’s chapter as ‘grammatical laziness.’ This includes a lack of capitalizations (such as the personal pronoun “i”), a general lack of contractions (im,

theyre, dont, etc.), and persistent use of acronyms (tbh, fyi, lmao, omg, lol, etc.). Within the girls' Facebook subculture, grammatical correctness was not a significant issue. In fact, at times the girls identified Facebook as "not school," meaning their being on Facebook constructed them in a different world in which different social codes existed and were enacted. The examples of 'grammatical laziness,' above, are indeed examples of these social codes, which were not only *acceptable* but at times were *expected*. The best example is the use of the acronym 'lol,' which appeared in all of the girls' chapters. When the girls' found humour in each other's performances, it was expected that recognition of the humour was to be coded as 'lol'—which, similar to the act of Liking, can also be read as a check-move to signify presence, acceptance, and 'fitting in' within their subculture on Facebook.

To sum up, the girls easily dismiss their 'grammatical laziness' as commonplace, trite, and "socially accepted." However, there are consequences of adopting 'new' styles of writing, even if these styles of writing are taken as social codes within specific social contexts. These consequences will be explored as pedagogical implications, in the chapter that follows. For now, the four meta-themes as explained in this chapter will be taken together and discussed for a final time, in the revisiting of concurrent identity formation (CIF) that comprises the next section.

10.2 REVISITING CONCURRENT IDENTITY FORMATION (CIF)

Transformation—that is what the actor’s nature, consciously or subconsciously, longs for.

--Chekhov (1953, p. 85)

The first part of this chapter has addressed the girls’ experiences of/with embodiment within a framework of meta-themes as based on meaningful patterns across the previous four chapters. By revisiting the theory of concurrent identity formation (CIF), which was introduced in Chapter 3, we can attempt to answer the second overarching research question: ***What do the girls’ virtual self-representations and the transformations therein tell us about their ‘real’ identities?***

A re-visitation of CIF calls for a re-visitation of the diagrammatic theory proposed in Chapter 3. Upon first glance, once again we see that the girls’ REAL and VIRTUAL identities are held in discourse. As suggested in this chapter, the girls’ bodies are held as objects of various discourses, such as discourses of performance and performativity, discourses of presumption, (dominant) discourses of femininity, discourses of desire, discourses of recognition, and Discourses of language that focus more on social context than language itself. At the same time their bodies are held as objects within these various discourses, they are also held as subjects of human understanding within the domain of the affective. What this means is that the girls are able to experience their own bodies, including their ways of knowing, understanding, communicating and representing their affective sensibilities, including (but not limited to) their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires and perceptions.

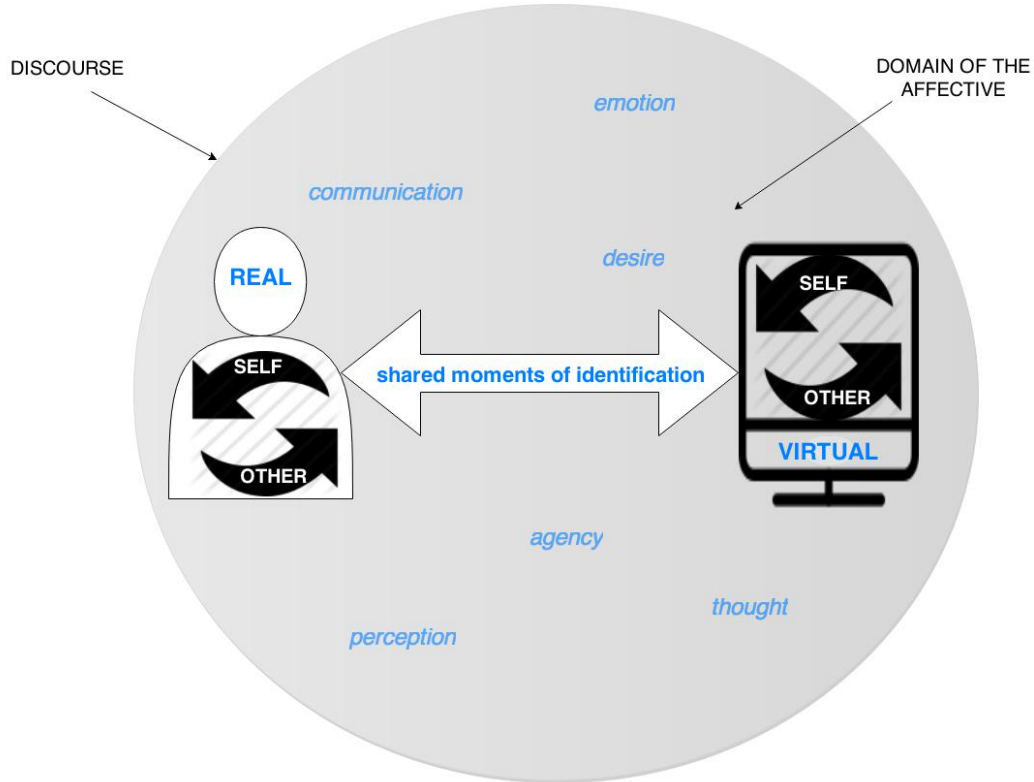


Figure 4: A theory of Concurrent Identity Formation (CIF)

However, their experiences of/with embodiment within discourse and within the domain of the affective does not hold them in isolation. It is here that the two themes mentioned at the end of section 10.1.2 come into play, namely, “How others see me,” and “how I see myself.” Within both REAL and VIRTUAL contexts, the girls are constantly negotiating and translating their bodies with themselves, others and the world. These negotiations and translations are premised upon much of what has been discovered in this chapter, such as their presumptive activities, the comparisons they make of and with each other, and the ‘politics of recognition’ that takes into account the *effects* of their interactions. In many ways, these negotiations and translations define the girls’ ‘moments of identification,’ allowing them to assert identities. Once again, a ‘moment of identification’ is

an instance that “impacts and guides the shape, the form, and the intensity of the ways in which the Self translates the Other and vice versa” (Ibrahim, 2008, p. 238). When these moments of identification pertain to both REAL and VIRTUAL identities, these are the ‘shared moments of identification’ that enable CIF. Thus, to see the utility of the theory and to bridge this theory into practice, I will offer notable shared moments of identification for each of the four girls in a way that attempts to answer the second overarching research question.

One notable moment of identification came from Nikki, who considered herself “a white girl with a black girls taste in music.” This is the way she described herself in the REAL context. However, she articulated this moment of identification in a discussion of her VIRTUAL identity and the photograph of a rapper she posted to her timeline. This photograph is taken as a virtual self-representation. Clearly, this instance reveals an overlap within this moment of identification, situating it as a shared moment of identification across her REAL and VIRTUAL identities.

On her part, Geneviève revealed a moment of identification during our fourth virtual chat when she discussed her preferences relating to how she appears to others on Facebook as well as in-person. According to Geneviève: “I see my friends at school and my other friends posting pictures online and usually it’s to make themselves look good. I care about that too but not as much as in person.” An overall reading of Geneviève’s chapter indicates a mixture of ‘pretty’ and candid photographs. Clearly, Genevieve cares about how she appears on Facebook, but not to the same extent as some of her friends. Her statement indicates she translates others (her friends) on Facebook as a way of negotiating patterns of performance. What makes this a shared moment of identification is that even though Geneviève ultimately

prefers to ‘look good’ in the REAL context of her identity, this is something she also cares about on Facebook, albeit to lesser extent.

When it came to Irene, one of her moments of identification related to her need for recognition. As she noted during our third virtual chat of her photographs, “I just feel like it’s nice to get noticed and recognized.” In real life, Irene also liked to get noticed and recognized, which explains her overall popularity within her peer group at school as well as with her friends from other schools, such as the school her boyfriend attended.

Finally, one of Leila’s moments of identification on Facebook translated her as an “outkast, outlaw.” When asked to explain what this meant, Leila let me know that she considered herself to be “out there” and different, and “it just best describes who I am.” What makes this a shared moment of identification is the rest of Leila’s explanation: “I’m like an outkast, different than other people at school, doing my own thing and don’t care how others judge me.” On Facebook (VIRTUAL context) as well as at school (REAL context), Leila identified as an “outkast, outlaw.”

Although few in number, these are four quite telling examples of the relationship and shared moments of identification between the girls’ REAL and VIRTUAL identities. There are also other instances, detailed in each of the girls’ chapters, which further demonstrate CIF moments. Taken together, the examples given above as well as the ones appearing in the girls’ chapters ascertain the utility of CIF as a theory and way of knowing and understanding female adolescents on the social network site Facebook. Without question, there are flows, tensions and overlaps between their REAL and VIRTUAL identities. The theory of CIF,

including its limitations and possibilities for potential future research, will be discussed for the last time in the next chapter.

Chapter 11

Reflections and Pedagogical Implications

In this thesis, I have explored female adolescent subculture on Facebook. Specifically, I have explored the ways female adolescents virtually represent themselves on Facebook and the social implications associated with these representations. I have also sought to understand how female adolescents mediate their identities on and through Facebook. Both of these nodes of inquiry have been informed by centralizing ‘the body’ within discussions of the girls’ online interactions and experiences on Facebook. This has highlighted the importance of ‘the body’ in exploring and evaluating the cultural relationships between Facebook and female adolescent sociality.

Using a qualitative research methodology I have developed and called ‘feminist virtual ethnography,’ I engaged in virtual participant observation of the four female adolescents who participated in this study. This included looking at the participants’ Facebook profiles and pages, taking screenshots, and recording anecdotal notes of what was seen and captured, on a daily basis. These virtual participant observation techniques were layered with strategies to engage the girls in discussion and ‘hear’ their voices. This was possible by chatting with them using the Facebook Chat messaging system and, in one instance, using Skype. Engaging with the girls through our various chats was most useful to understanding elements of female adolescent subculture and the representational potential of Facebook. By using a participatory approach during our virtual chats, the girls and I were able to share our thoughts, feelings, and affective sensibilities in a safe, non-intrusive, shared space. By discussing their virtual representations—that is, the displays of their bodies on Facebook, as well as other shared images and texts—the girls were able to think about the

meanings associated with their representations and the ways they interacted with others online. As well, it was through these virtual chats that I was able to learn more about how the girls' virtual representations mediate their 'real' and 'virtual' identities.

While the present chapter concludes this thesis, the ensuing text does not offer 'conclusions.' Much like the ending of Lather's (2007) *Getting Lost*—a text that has been most crucial to the writing of this dissertation—I do not offer conclusions because, as we will see in this chapter, there is much that is “still lost” when it comes to tasks of understanding representation (p. xi). Instead, I offer reflections, which provide the opportunities to review what has been done and what has been learned in the research process, which is key to feminist qualitative research (cf. Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Devault, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 2012b; Hughes, 2002; Lather, 2007).

To start, I will reflect on the research findings through a final re-visitation of the first overarching research question (and associated sub-questions) that guided this research study. Next, I will provide reflections on the theory of concurrent identity formation (CIF) in terms of its limitations and its potential for further research. Reflections on the methodology of 'feminist virtual ethnography' follows from this section, offering further insight into CIF in a way that exposes methodology as an arbitrator for epistemological aims (Siegel, 2005). Pedagogical implications will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

11.1 REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

The approach of feminist virtual ethnography has helped me to answer the first overarching research question, which is: **How is the female adolescent body virtually self-represented on Facebook in a time of hyper-representation?** This question encompasses

three sub-questions, which will be taken up chronologically. The first sub-question asks: *What does this research teach us about female adolescent students in the 21st century, specifically in terms of self-reflexivity, social representations, and social implications?* As we have seen in this thesis, and particularly in Chapter 10, the female adolescent body is virtually self-represented on Facebook in *negotiated* as well as *discursive* ways. By *negotiated*, I am referring to the ways the girls represent their bodies as ‘subjects of human understanding’—that is, the ways the girls experience their *own* bodies, and how they come to know, understand, and communicate their ideas, thoughts, desires, perceptions, and feelings through a negotiation of themselves with those around them (Self and Other). Put simply, the girls’ representation of themselves on Facebook becomes a moment that expresses, on the one hand, who they are, their desires and hopes and, on the other, how they understand and relate to others, and how they would like others to understand and relate to them. By *discursive*, I am referring to the ways the girls experience their bodies *in discourse*, such as discourses of performance and performativity, (dominant) discourses of femininity, discourses of desire, especially sexuality, discourses of recognition, and discourses of language that focus more on social context than language itself.

Making meaning of the girls’ virtual bodily self-representations was only possible by viewing these self-representations in relation to other images and/or texts. By viewing their self-representations in relation to (or in juxtaposition to) other photographs, images, captions, comment boxes, for instance, the girls’ systems of imagery and language became more clear. This is the interplay of *body-image-text* as discussed in Chapter 10.

In terms of how this research guides understandings of the social representations of female adolescents in the 21st century, we have seen that the *negotiated* as well as the

discursive ways in which the female adolescent body is self-represented on Facebook underscores the interrelated acts of ‘consumption’ and ‘production’ that guided all of the girls’ activities on Facebook. This is what Ritzer (2014) calls “prosumption,” a term that has been invoked in Chapter 10 to highlight the inventive, intertextual, and multi-semiotic possibilities of the girls’ practices on Facebook. As well, social representations within the female adolescent subculture are dependent on recognition. Recognition is realized through the effects of interaction with each other, such as through the act of Liking photographs or status updates, or by leaving comments on a friend’s timeline. Conversely, “nonrecognition” and “misrecognition” are realized through acts of *not* Liking, not leaving comments, or simply by not being present on Facebook.

The second sub-question asks: *How can an understanding of this nature inform an understanding of (normative) femininity?* Answering this sub-question required a summation of the social implications related to the girls’ bodily displays of femininity, which was taken up as a meta-theme in Chapter 10. The social implications relating to the girls’ bodily displays included: (1) translating their bodies in line with heterosexual (normative) values; (2) constructing gendered subjectivities in ways that sublimate desire into socially acceptably forms of Facebook critiques of femininity; (3) their subjectivities and ‘authentic selves’ cannot always be read on Facebook; and (4) the girls display their bodies using techniques of comparison and photo-editing. Taken together, these social implications suggest that, first, adolescent females buy into the dominant discourses of femininity and beauty and, second, (normative) femininity is prosumed and re-prosumed within the female adolescent subculture. Oftentimes, female adolescents—or at least the ones in this study—are not aware of how their online performances of femininity work with or against their

‘authentic selves’ or with or against (dominant) discourses of femininity. In other words, the ways the girls represented their bodies on Facebook, as well as the negotiated and discursive meanings attached to these representations, did not always align with their expressed understandings and beliefs of femininity and beauty.

The third sub-question asks: *How do these self-representations get transformed, cropped, Photoshopped, etc. and why?* The girls’ self-representations get transformed, in some instances, through cropping photographs to centralize the body or by using filters to alter photographic elements such as tone, contrast, and colour, so that the photographs appear “picture perfect” and more aesthetically pleasing. More broadly, all of the girls transformed their self-representations by juxtaposing image with text. Most frequently, this meant captioning the photograph with words to ‘explain’ what is going on in the photograph and with whom.

The way the girls caption their photographs on Facebook is also an example of how the girls use language on Facebook in socially recognized and socially acceptable ways—at least within their subculture. The girls often use acronyms and emoticons within their captions, deployed within recognizable ways for their friends to understand. Finally, the languages the girls ‘spoke’ corroborated with the characters they chose to perform and enact on Facebook. Overall, the girls’ use of language revealed much about *who they are* (identities) and *how they exist* (“ways of life”) within their subculture. Always performed on Facebook and read by this researcher, both *who they are* and *how they exist* within adolescent female subculture enabled me to develop what I called Concurrent Identity Formation (CIF).

11.2 REFLECTIONS ON CIF

The second overarching research question asks: **What do these virtual self-representations and the transformations therein tell us about the ‘real’ identity?** The sub-question asks: *By reflecting upon their virtual self-representations and the transformations therein, what do these students have to say about the flows, tensions, and intersections of/between their real and the virtual identities?* Even though these questions have been answered throughout this thesis, especially in Chapter 10, in what follows I want to offer some reflections about CIF and particularly about the girls’ ‘real’ identities.

As noted in the very first chapter of this thesis, CIF has been developed and explored as an *element* of how these girls represent themselves. While CIF is ultimately one of the main contributions of thesis, it was not conceived as a primary research objective. Rather, CIF was theorized as a way to centralize the body within mediated discourses, representations, and ways of knowing and understanding the human experience. During my virtual chats with the girls as well as during my process of data analysis, the praxis of CIF was always gestating in a way to answer the research questions as well as support research findings. As discussed in the previous sections, the virtual chats as well as the analysis of data indicated that the centralization of the body was also dependent on the interplay of the body with other images and texts (body-image-text).

It is worth remembering that this research was purely virtual (except for one phone conversation with Nikki). From this, I was able to draw two conclusions. First, from a methodological point of view, the ‘getting to know you’ process related mostly to participants’ virtual identities. That is to say, I-as-a-researcher could only ethnographically

‘access’ *who they are* and *how they exist* within adolescent female subculture through an intersectionality of body-image-text. The second conclusion is related to this intersectionality. To explain, it is through a ‘reading’ of *text* (how the girls expressed themselves, the meaning they made and the captions they put next to the image), *image* (how the girls displayed and performed their subjectivities, desires and hopes) and *body* (what the girls did in and through their bodies) that I was able to conceive the idea of the girls’ CIF (on-and-off-line).

At the most embryonic level, the girls’ virtual representations on Facebook reveal their identities as in-flux as they navigate their lives at school, at home, at social functions, as well as on social media sites. These sites included predominantly Facebook, but also Twitter and Instagram as a result of embedded platform-sharing capabilities. Put otherwise, technologically, if one of the girls took a picture with their mobile phone and uploaded it to Instagram, she would be able to tap on the ‘Share Photo’ icon in Instagram and choose another platform from which the photograph could be viewed, such as Facebook or Twitter. At the end of Chapter 10, I offered some notable ‘shared moments of identification’ across the girls’ real and virtual identities. This was possible through a triangulation of data sources, including my reading of the girls’ virtual self-representations (through multi-semiotic practice, visual juxtaposition, and discourse/transcript analysis emphasizing emergent themes) as well as the girls’ readings of themselves—that is, their reflections upon their virtual self-representations and the transformations, which was only possible during our virtual chats. Using this combination of methods has helped to understand the richness and complexity of their behaviours from more than one standpoint. Juxtaposing their image (how

the girls represented themselves) with their word (how they talked about and what sense they made out of these representations) is where I gain access to the ‘real’.

To gain richer perspectives of the girls’ real identities, Wilson (2006) would suggest the integration of traditional (offline and face-to-face) and virtual ethnographic methods, “which can aid researchers interested in developing understandings of relationships between online and offline cultural life” (p. 307). This was a challenge in my study as it was strictly virtual. Further inquiry may—or may not—require a combination of virtual and traditional research methods in order to further develop this theory and fully grasp the subculture’s perspectives within both real and virtual contexts. My hesitation regarding the integration of traditional ethnographic research methods with virtual approaches will become clear through reflections on the methodological approaches utilized in this study, to be discussed in the next section. Although there is a certain messiness to CIF, for now, this study can be taken as a benchmark inquiry into understanding concurrent identity formation. At the very least, CIF may be worth re-visiting and re-examining by feminist researchers, who, as Pillow (2003) suggests, benefit from “messy examples...examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of engaged qualitative research” (p. 193).

11.3 REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY

The other main contribution of this thesis is the methodology of ‘feminist virtual ethnography’—an intervention of feminist research practices with virtual ethnography. This approach allowed the participants as well as myself to consider issues of objectivity, subjectivity, and reflexivity while discussing their identities. As the researcher I was also

able to consider these issues during the *process* of research, per my feminist research ethic that strove to incorporate an awareness of the situatedness of the researcher and the researched. By establishing collaborative and non-exploitative relationships with the girls, I was able to avoid objectification as ‘the researcher’ and instead ‘hang out’ with the girls during our virtual conversations and as I observed their subculture on Facebook. While it was easy to ‘see’ the girls’ bodily displays on their Facebook pages, it was sometimes difficult to ‘hear’ their voices during our virtual conversations. This was one of the limitations of feminist virtual ethnography, which posed different kind of challenges to the question of voice within feminism.

Committed to hearing from all the girls and to an ethics of voice, where I was eager to hear what each of the girls had to say about the particular topic under discussion, I was left frustrated at times. Some of the participants did not want to contribute to certain discussion topics due to shyness, a lack of trust (especially at the beginning), or because of technological or situational distractions. Although the participants were adolescents—(etymologically derived from the Latin word *adolescere*, signifying ‘to grow into adulthood’)—I treated all the participants equally, *as adults*, and I did not engage in authoritative or policing behaviours to encourage their disclosures, which could have had the opposite effect, as in *discouraging* their disclosures. On the other hand, there were times when certain participants dominated the virtual conversations. During these instances, it was even difficult for *me* to get a word in edgewise. This is when the ‘unstructured’ aspect of our conversations made for slightly troublesome interactions, since the other voices in the conversation were shadowed during these instances.

However, during these instances the participants expressed themselves most freely and most in depth, in turn providing the richest, most useful descriptive data as seen within their narrative chapters. There were even times when *I* wanted to hear more from a certain participant when she was ‘speaking’ at length and above all other voices—but to be fair and to not disempower the other participants, I always intervened and changed the conversation so it could be more inclusive. Finally, with up to five people attending the virtual chats at once (the girls plus myself), reading and responding to all of the text that was typed into the Facebook Chat box proved to be a challenge in itself. There were some occasions during my transcript analysis that I realized I had unintentionally not responded to certain points made by some of the research participants (and vice versa). Our fingers typed faster than our eyes could read and our minds could process.

All of these limitations allude to what Markham (1998) calls “the paradox of conducting a non-traditional ethnography in a non-traditional nonspace, with traditional sensibilities” (p. 62). If our discussions were to have taken place face-to-face, as would have been the case if this ethnography were conducted within “traditional” parameters, I would have been able to hear, I hope, and respond to all comments made by the participants. However, a purely virtual means of accessing the girls’ subculture provided me with tremendous possibilities for understanding the participants in ways that would *not* have been possible within traditional parameters. First of all, at the time of my research, the girls were in varying states of transition: they were busy finishing their final semester of secondary studies; they were attending important rites of passage such as prom and graduation; in the summer they were all either working or travelling (or both); and all of the girls were getting ready to start university a mere two weeks after the research study ended. Based on their

schedules alone, I can confidently state that four in-person chats would *not have been possible* at the time of this research. Additionally, discussing the girls' Facebook activities and bodily display during our virtual chats required them to look at photographs, images, and text on their computer screens. This means that even if our discussions were to have taken place face-to-face, we would have still spent a lot of time on our computers. If anything, face-to-face discussions of this virtual material may not have provided as rich data because of a potential disconnect or lag between visual screen reading and conversational explanation, as opposed to visual screen reading and textual screen explanation.

Second, chatting with the girls on Facebook was a mere extension of their daily Facebook activity; this is what they *did* with each other and with their friends on a regular basis. As such, the “nonspace” of Facebook Chat provided an excellent venue for building relationships with the girls, despite (or in spite of) the invisibility factor. I would even argue that there is a certain comfortability in building relationships invisibly with a feminist virtual ethnographic approach to research. The girls were able to ‘speak’ in their languages in ways that helped me understand *who they were* and *how they existed* on Facebook.

Another reflection on the process of research relates to the participants' preferred communication styles. Nikki revealed during our first chat that she preferred Skype to Facebook Chat as venue for our virtual conversations. As she put it, she wanted “to see our beautiful faces” during the conversations. While she did not express discomfort with the agreed-upon venue (she was the only one who preferred Skype, so majority ruled), I did make a note in my anecdotal journal about considering the communication preferences of participants. Facebook Chat, at least at the time of the research, is a text-based interface.

Skype, on the other hand, is an interface that can combine text with visual as well as auditory modes of communication.

11.3.1 Researcher responsibility and risky disclosures

Hine (2005) makes the point that just as in face-to-face interactions, researchers in virtual spaces need to both draw on their existing social abilities and develop new talents to address the problematic nature of researcher-researched relationships. They also “need to become adept at creating comfortable spaces for informants and interviewees to share their experiences,” as well as attend to the ethical responsibilities which new forms of research relationship place upon them (p. 18). As the five-month research study progressed, I was able to attend to these researcher responsibilities through acts of familiarization.

While Mann (2006) suggests that familiarity among participants is a limitation of virtual ethnography, I argue that familiarity and the acts of familiarization are essential to virtual ethnographic methods, especially when it comes to mitigating the risks of participant online disclosures. However, as Livingstone (2010) notes, unfortunately the risks of online disclosures are inextricably linked to the benefits. As we have seen in this thesis, particularly in Nikki’s narrative (Chapter 9) as well as in Leila’s chapter (Chapter 7), my understandings of the girls’ experiences of embodiment were at times premised on their “conduct risks” of disclosure—that is, their engagement in inappropriate behaviour, most notably, underage drinking (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2012b, p. 717). As Peluchette and Karl (2008) contend, these risky disclosures can lead to consequences such as school suspensions and criminal charges. It has been suggested that this reckless tendency to engage in risky disclosures is in part due to students’ perceptions that the likelihood of anyone other than fellow students or seeing their posting is remote (Lupsa, 2006).

As a researcher aware of the risky disclosures of certain research participants (Leila and Nikki), it was my ethical responsibility to advise these girls, as well as Geneviève and Irene, to restrict their use of Facebook in a way to lessen the potential consequences of these disclosures. During our second virtual conversation when we chatted about underage drinking, I certainly advised the girls in this manner. As noted in Leila's chapter, it was after this discussion that I noticed she had stopped posting photographs of herself drinking with her friends. Nikki also stopped posting incriminating pictures of herself, largely because of her general lack of engagement with Facebook as well as with the research study after this conversation took place. Using my discretion and intuition, and seeing how the risky disclosures dramatically lessened after my discussion with the girls on the topic of underage drinking, I did not feel that I had a responsibility to respond to these risks by contacting the girls' parents, for instance. Had the risky behaviours continued, this would have been my course of action.

As noted by Christofides *et al.* (2012), "any change in disclosure behaviour is likely to be affected by knowledge of the mechanisms for protecting privacy" (p. 719). From the very first virtual conversation with the girls, we discussed issues of privacy. For instance, during this first virtual chat I asked the girls: "When you post a picture to Facebook, who does it belong to? You, or Facebook?" Even after I noticed a decrease in risky disclosures after our second virtual chat, discussions of privacy continued during the remaining virtual conversations. Overall, while I did not want the girls to view me as the 'policing researcher,' I was firm with my comments and advice when it came to discussing underage drinking, drug use, and even safe sex. I chose to discuss these topics with the girls as adults. My

concern in terms of the photographs depicting underage drinking was not great enough to exercise researcher responsibility so as to report these risky disclosures to parents.

11.3.2 Finding is the ‘action’ in feminist participatory action research (FPAR)

Finally, this section would not be complete without reflecting on the select feminist participatory action research (FPAR) strategies I used within the feminist virtual ethnographic methodology. I have always been weary about the faddish practices and strategies in educational research (such as ‘Community of Practice,’ ‘Professional Learning Community,’ and even FPAR), especially when researchers do not properly engage these practices. Thus, to claim engagement with FPAR requires me, as Reid, Allison, and Frisby (2006) would contend, to find the “action” in my research.

According to Reid, Allison, and Frisby (2006), FPAR blends participatory action research (PAR) and feminist theory “by advocating that women must be involved in all stages of the research process including identifying the problems to be explored, carrying out the research, and interpreting and acting upon the results” (p. 316). I kept these words in mind throughout this research study, and I tried, as much as possible, to conduct the research *with* the participants. While I certainly had research questions that *I* wanted to explore, I was open to the various routes my research *could* have taken. For instance, in this thesis little has been written about the way the girls’ class, racial/ethnic, and cultural backgrounds intersect with their experiences of/with embodiment, and thus, research findings. In part, this is because engagement with FPAR strategies did not allow such discoveries and analysis. From the very first virtual chat, I was eager to learn more about these facets of identity, and I certainly tried, but the girls were always more interested in discussing their bodily displays, their relationships with each other and with their boyfriends, and other elements of their

identities that have been explored in this thesis. As well, it happened that all four research participants identified as heterosexual. Had just one of the girls identified in another manner, I imagine the products of this research as well as the research findings would have been quite different.

The girls were involved in all aspects of the research, including snowball sampling recruitment, identifying the issues to be explored, and carrying out the research. By the latter I mean the girls regularly logged into Facebook—except Nikki—and engaged in our various conversations. In terms of ‘interpreting the results,’ the girls did not assist with my actual data analysis. However, the four chapters of analysis have been constructed using the girls’ voices as much as possible. This always included the girls’ reflections on their own virtual self-representation—in other words, their analyses of themselves.

In one notable example, however, two of the girls ‘acted upon the results’ of the research. With a feminist sensibility, I wanted to understand and trouble what the girls meant by “camwhoring.” When I suggested that the term was problematic and degrading, the girls disagreed at first. It was only through democratic inquiry and collaborative thinking-through that the participants were able to realize that use of the word is irresponsible and actually works in opposition to an ethos of ‘girl power.’ It was Geneviève who defined the term for me during our first virtual conversation. However, it was Leila who had originally used the word in a caption associated with a ‘pretty’ picture of Geneviève (see Chapter 6, p. 188).

This is how the conversation flowed:

Shenin: What does “camwhoring” mean anyways?

Leila: lol

Shenin: No, I’m actually asking...

- Geneviève: It's just what we do sometimes. We put on a show for the camera, but know the pictures will end up on Facebook.
- Leila: exactly
- Shenin: What do you feel about "camwhoring"?
- Geneviève: Well it's not like we're always camwhoring.
- Shenin: No, I mean the word. The actual word.
- Leila: I think its funny.
- Shenin: I think it's a bit derogatory. I mean, you've got the word "whore" in it. The word has a very negative connotation, in my opinion.
- Geneviève: But we don't mean it like that.
- Leila: ok, we are not whores...
- Shenin: I'm not implying that at all, Leila. But I think you should think about the words you use, especially this one.
- Irene: I don't see a problem with it...all in good fun.
- Shenin: Well, maybe just give it some thought. Words are powerful things.
- Leila: im all for girl power!
- Irene: lol
- Shenin: I think the use of the word "camwhoring" works against "girl power." How is the word "camwhoring" empowering for a girl? How does it empower you?
- Leila: just because we use it doesnt mean anything literal
- Shenin: Words don't always function on just a literal level though...I'm just saying...and if you want, just think about it a bit.

Towards the end of the study, two of the girls (Geneviève and Leila) let me know that they had removed the word from their vocabulary. This happened during our fourth

virtual chat, when we were discussing a ‘scary’-looking photograph of Geneviève that Leila had posted to Geneviève’s wall (see Chapter 6, p. 184). When we were discussing this photograph, we were discussing it from a perspective of recognition, that is, the number of Likes it received and why. This is an excerpt from the conversation:

Geneviève: ... Look at me here lololol, trying to escape pretzels from [Leila]!! I like my Facebook to be more personal with just my close friends.

Irene: It’s a great pic, [Geneviève]...hilarious

Leila: yeah

Shenin: I see you’re not camwhoring in this photograph, right?

Irene: She always is! jk

Leila lol. i think you are actually

Geneviève: Actually no. I don’t use that word anymore.

Leila: me neither.

Irene: i never really used the word to begin with but i still do it

Geneviève: well me too, but I just stopped using the word after thinking about it.

Leila: yea, we talked about it.

For me, this was the ‘action’ in using FPAR strategies; our conversation had enabled a critical understanding of the word in a way that reconstructed conceptions of power through language so that power (and language) could be used responsibly. Of course, the girls might not have put it in such words, but at the very least they had thought about the word, and in Geneviève’s and Leila’s case, rid the word from their vocabularies. After all, if words and ‘new’ ways of speaking create worlds, then denouncing words and ‘old’ ways of speaking can help abolish the worlds and discourses that we don’t want to live in any longer.

11.3.3 Writing ethnographic research

On a final note, I will offer some general reflections on writing ethnographic research. Ethnography—be it traditional, virtual, or a combination of the two—is always only a selective account of cultural experience and interpretation as based upon (emergent) themes and patterns. This means the descriptive capabilities of writing ethnographic research is limited and, in some ways, exclusionary. This is extremely problematic *especially* when ethnography converges with feminist research practice that abhors reductionist writing through analytic categorization. As Geertz (1988) put it, “What once seemed only technically difficult, getting ‘their’ lives into ‘our’ works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically delicate...Indeed, the very right to write—to write ethnography—seems at risk” (p. 130). From my embodied feminist researcher position, I was always left wondering the following: What about the data that has been excluded from these partial accounts of the girls’ lived experience? Where do these “leftovers” (Wolcott, 1973) go, and is it possible to somehow feast on them? I hope the answer is ‘yes,’ and I remain aware that the writing of a dissertation is but one avenue to disseminate research findings and unique methodologies of knowledge building.

11.4 WITHOUT CONCLUDING: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

According to Harding (1987b), “Recognition of the importance of using women’s experiences as resources for social analysis obviously has implications for the social structures of education” (p. 7). As “obvious” as this may be, at least to Harding, these implications must be discussed for the sake of bridging the gaps between social theory and pedagogical practice. The present exploration of female adolescent subculture has revealed much about female adolescent social and cultural practices through their virtual self-

representations. This calls to attention to pedagogical implications from the perspective of ‘multiple literacies.’

Multiple literacies theory, or MLT, considers literacies as constructs—social, cultural, historical, and physical assemblage—that “consists of words, gestures, attitudes, ways of speaking, writing, valuing: *ways of becoming in the world*” (Masny, 2010, p. 338, emphasis added). For Masny (2010), “Literacies are actualized according to a particular time and in space in which they operate” (p. 339). The research participants demonstrate their multiple literacies, their *becoming in the world*, through their negotiated as well as discursive virtual self-representations. However, as Masny notes, literacies have “nomadic tendencies” that are not “wed to a context,” but also “involve constant movement” (p. 339). This means that the girls’ multiple literacies do not just exist on Facebook; although their multiple literacies are “actualized” according to a particular time and in a certain space, these are always literacies-in-action, always in states of *becoming*. As we have seen in this thesis, for the girls, states of *becoming* are states of endless negotiation of their identities. The process, here, is not fixed in a certain space, nor does it ever end.

For teachers, this requires a reconceptualization of literacies, identities and pedagogies. First, thinking about ‘literacy’ in the plural is an essential act to understanding students’ shifting capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses outside of the capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses they demonstrate in school alone. What is *not* taught in schools—for instance, the multiple literacies the girls actualize during and through their use of Facebook—is fundamental to their processes of learning. This notion of what is *not* taught in schools is what Eisner (1985) calls the “null curriculum,” which he defines as:

...the options that are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire” (p. 107).

Thinking about ‘literacy’ in the plural and the multiple, as well as the ways in which multiple literacies relate to students’ *ways of becoming* (identities), is particularly important in the 21st century, where youth engagement with social media has fostered “a disengage[ment] from other areas of their lives, mainly the complex context of school” (Kidd & Carpenter, 2014, p. 191). To re-engage students in pedagogical opportunities requires a thinking-through of how the options they are *not* afforded in schools can somehow be introduced in classrooms as “intended” curriculum—or what *is* taught in schools (Eisner, 1985). For Kidd and Carpenter (2014), this means reconceptualizing teaching and learning as spaces that engage students with, among others, especially for the purpose of my research, social media, “thereby connecting the formal academic space with the informal emergent space afforded by social media” (p. 189).

By connecting these two spaces in such a manner, students will have the ability to link their virtual worlds to their ‘real’ worlds, effectively enabling possibilities to “write themselves into being” (boyd, 2008a, p. 12) and play with their identities within a safe and inclusive environment. Furthermore, if students are able to engage with social media in the classroom, this may also provide a space for critical self-mediation, which is understood here as balancing opportunities (for identity, intimacy, and sociability) and risks (regarding privacy, misunderstandings) afforded by CMC (Myers, 2012, p. 51). Although the present study focused on social media as sites of cultural circulation and interpretation rather than as emergent spaces for school learning, the findings of this research study have emphasized the

need for students to engage in critical self-mediation of their online activities so that they are more aware of *what they do* on social media sites and *why they do it*.

While the present study has addressed the gap indicated by Barnett (2009) in terms of reconceptualizing new ways of knowing and representing adolescent identity as it is created concurrently in real and virtual spaces, a future research study can look at the ways in which (female) adolescents negotiate their identities by balancing the risks and opportunities in their lives, especially in terms of how these negotiations manifest into contradictions within their understandings of self, other, and the world. Here, Sonia Livingstone's research about how the changing conditions of mediation are reshaping everyday practices and possibilities for identity is a good starting point of inquiry. Once again, CIF can be used as framework to foster understandings of the negotiated and discursive ways in which opportunities and risks are (or are not) balanced, as well as the ways in which these opportunities and risks are (or are not) translated between the 'real' and the 'virtual.'

According to Knobel and Lankshear (2014), educators who focus on literacies that bring technology, knowledge, and skills together "try to anticipate beyond the present and envisage how best to educate *now* in order to enhance learners' capacities for effective meaning-making and communication in the foreseeable future" (p. 97). There is indeed no better time than *now* to think about ways to enhance and optimize student learning within ever-changing and increasingly complex and diverse classroom ecologies. If this means utilizing social media and CMC as tools within classroom curricula, teaching and learning activities must be designed in collaborative and participatory ways that consider the plurality and multiplicity of literacies and identities, as well as their mobilization in real and virtual contexts.

Youth, and female adolescents in particular, live within a web of technologies where issues such as peer acceptance, body image, and impossible standards of beauty predicate their identities and trouble “the ‘me’ that is me” (Sefton-Green, cited in Weber & Mitchell, 2008, p. 26). These issues, along with Thiel-Stern’s (2009) contention that “femininity is out of control” (p. 20) do not make it easy for female adolescents who are constantly negotiating their identities in real and virtual contexts. Here, the complexities of virtual self-representation are realized, for instance, through normative or complicit requirements of femininity, such as self-sexualization. In this research study, these types of complexities arose from the girls’ struggles with agency, authenticity, and autonomy. Through a theoretically informed practice *with* the girls, it was possible to generate meaning, intent, and implications from these complexities. It is my hope that this research offers valuable insight into female adolescent (concurrent) identity formation, multiform notions of representation, and online performance in social media.

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Appendix A

Call for Research Participants:

I am seeking volunteers to participate in a research study that is looking at young female identities online, namely on Facebook. Participants in this research should fulfill the following criteria:

- i. Adolescent female student of any nationality
- ii. Between the ages of 15 and 19 years of age
- iii. Resides in Canada
- iv. Has an active account on Facebook, which is regularly maintained
- v. Communicates, produces, and consumes information in English on Facebook

I am conducting this study as part of my Ph.D. research, which is attempting to explore what I am calling 'concurrent identities.' By concurrent identities I am attempting to understand the relationship (if any) between online and offline identities. That is, what you do (and who you are) online and offline.

I am interested in engaging you, your Facebook profile, as well as a small group of your Facebook friends (who also satisfies i-v, above), in a six-week virtual study, thus non-intrusive study, which will focus on your Facebook profile, especially how you display your identity, or who you are, online.

As a virtual and non-intrusive study, I intend to (i) take daily screenshots of your Facebook profile for the period of two to six months; (ii) 'hang out' and chat with you informally three times during the study, using Skype, g-chat, MSN Messenger, or another form of instant messaging which allows me to retrieve the conversation for data analysis.

If you consent, our bimonthly chats will be saved as a text file, and notes of our conversations will be made. The length of each chat will vary, but should not exceed 60 minutes in duration. Please note that this research is solely for academic purposes, and you are ensured full confidentiality of your data collected for this research. This means your name or any indication of who you are will never appear in any published or non-published documents; and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Copies of student/parental consent form are available to provide further information on this research along with contact details of my affiliated institution. A consent form must be signed by you as well as your parent(s). Forms only need to be signed by

your parent(s) if you are under the age of 18. Upon understanding and agreeing to the proceedings of this research study. The consent forms will be emailed to you, you will print them off, sign them (include parental signatures if need be), scan, and email back to me.

Please also be aware that the data will be securely stored in my supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa, and that all digital files will be password-protected to ensure that I am the only person who can access the data.

I seek your assistance in this research and would greatly appreciate your participation. Recruitment will be done on a first-come, first-served basis. Do kindly contact me at by email if you are a suitable candidate for participating in this research. Please do not reply to this message through Facebook. If you have any further concerns, you may always refer to my thesis supervisor Dr. Awad Ibrahim (aibrahim@uottawa.ca; phone: 613-562-5872) or the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (ethics@uottawa.ca; phone: 613-562-5387).

Sincerely,

Shenin Nadia Yazdanian

Principal Investigator

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Appendix B

File Number: 02-12-18

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 04/19/2012



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Awad	Ibrahim	Education / Education	Supervisor
Shenin	Yazdanian	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 02-12-18

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: Investigating the Bodily Displays of Female Adolescent Students in Social Network Sites: Towards an Understanding of Concurrent Identity Formation (CIF)

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
04/19/2012	04/18/2013	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A

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Appendix C



Université d'Ottawa
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Participant Assent Form

Title of Project: Investigating the bodily displays of female adolescent students in social network sites: Towards and understanding of concurrent identity formation (CIF)

Shenin Nadia Yazdanian
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Dr. Awad Ibrahim
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Lamoureux Hall 420, 145 Jean-Jacques Lussier
Phone : 613-562-5800 ext. 5872
E-mail : aibrahim@uottawa.ca

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study conducted by Shenin Nadia Yazdanian, a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ottawa. This research study will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Awad Ibrahim.

Purpose of the Study: This project seeks to explore female adolescent identity in relation to the displays and representations of their bodies. This research also seeks to study the tensions, flows, and intersections between 'real' and 'virtual' identities.

Participation: My participation will consist of my usual daily activity on the social network site Facebook. This includes things like: logging in to my account on a daily basis; posting messages, comments, pictures, photographs, links, videos, etc., to my own wall and to friends' walls; and responding to postings and comments made by friends. I will also take part in three virtual conversations with the principal investigator (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian). The duration of these virtual conversations will be approximately 60 minutes. I will be asked questions about my virtual activities on Facebook. The virtual conversations will take place outside of school hours, at a time suitable for all participants. These conversations will take place every 2 weeks throughout the 6-week study. I will also be asked to provide my insight and opinions in relation to my online and offline identities during my engagement with project.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information about my engagement with the project. I have been assured by the principal investigator that if at any point during the study, and for whatever reason, I experience emotional discomfort, that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. It has been made clear to me that I can ask principal researcher not to use certain screenshots for data analysis if I so choose. I am also aware and understand that during any of the three virtual conversations, I may choose to refuse to answer any questions at any point during the conversation that may provoke any sort of emotional discomfort.

Benefits: My participation in this study will grant me the opportunity to explore and interpret social and cultural issues related to youth identity. Also, I will be contributing to a field of academic research (identity formation/identity politics via social network sites) which is presently lacking in the Canadian context.



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Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the principal investigator's (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian's) *doctoral dissertation* (which may be available online upon completion), *conference presentations*, *publications of scholarly articles* and *book* and that my confidentiality will be protected. A pseudonym will be utilized in any written results of the project in order to protect my identity. All data, including screenshot files, my notes, virtual conversation transcripts, and my any other data pertaining to the project will be kept in a locked cabinet within the principal investigator's office. I am aware that screenshots of my personal profile page on Facebook will be captured on a daily basis through the duration of the study. I have been informed that confidentiality and anonymity will be respected because any images of my face and/or body will be blurred and thus unrecognizable, using a blurring software program. I understand and agree that there are no risks to the confidentiality of information shared with the principal investigator (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian).

Conservation of data: The data collected such as screenshot files, transcripts of virtual conversations, and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet within the principal investigator's office. Only the principal investigator (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian) and her thesis supervisor (Dr. Awad Ibrahim) will have access to data. *The data will be kept for 5 years upon completion of the study.*

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be included in the publication of results. Upon my specific request all data gathered prior to my withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by *Shenin Nadia Yazdanian of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Awad Ibrahim.*

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor. I am aware that in order to participate in this study, I must provide my assent for research, but that parental consent must be provided if I am under 18 years of age. Without both parental consent and my assent, I will not be able to participate in this research project.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, 613-562-5387, Email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the assent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

I give permission for blurred screenshots of my Facebook page to be showcased as examples at conference presentations and/or for online journal publications.

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3

Appendix D



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Parental Consent Form

Title of Project: Investigating the bodily displays of female adolescent students in social network sites: Towards and understanding of concurrent identity formation (CIF)

Shenin Nadia Yazdanian
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Lamoureux Hall 346-E, 145 Jean-Jacques Lussier
Phone: [REDACTED]
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Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Lamoureux Hall 420, 145 Jean-Jacques Lussier
Phone : 613-562-5800 ext. 5872
E-mail : aibrahim@uottawa.ca

Invitation to Participate: My child is invited to participate in the above-mentioned research study conducted by Shenin Nadia Yazdanian, a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ottawa. This research study will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Awad Ibrahim.

Purpose of the Study: This project seeks to explore female adolescent identity in relation to the displays and representations of their bodies. This research also seeks to study the tensions, flows, and intersections between 'real' and 'virtual' identities.

Participation: My child's participation will consist of her usual daily activity on the social network site Facebook. This includes things like: logging in to her account on a daily basis; posting messages, comments, pictures, photographs, links, videos, etc., to her own wall and to friends' walls; and responding to postings and comments made by friends. She will also take part in three virtual conversations with the principal investigator (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian). The duration of these virtual conversations will be approximately 60 minutes. My child will be asked questions about her virtual activities on Facebook. The virtual conversations will take place outside of school hours, at a time suitable for all participants. These conversations will take place every 2 weeks throughout the 6-week study. My child will also be asked to provide her insight and opinions in relation to her online and offline identities during her engagement with project.

Risks: My child's participation in this study will entail that she volunteers personal information about her engagement with the project. My child will be assured by the principal investigator that if at any point during the study, and for whatever reason, she experiences emotional discomfort, that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. It has been made clear to my child that she can ask the principal researcher not to use certain screenshots for data analysis if she so chooses. My child is also aware and understands that during any of the three virtual conversations, she may choose to refuse to answer any questions at any point during the conversation that may provoke any sort of emotional discomfort.

Benefits: My child's participation in this study will grant her the opportunity to explore and interpret social and cultural issues related to youth identity. Also, she will be contributing to a field of academic research (identity formation/identity politics via social network sites) which is presently lacking in the Canadian context.



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Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information she will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the principal investigator's (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian's) *doctoral dissertation* (which may be available online upon completion), *conference presentations*, *publications of scholarly articles* and *book* and that my child's confidentiality will be protected. A pseudonym will be utilized in any written results of the project in order to protect my child's identity. All data, including screenshot files, notes, virtual conversation transcripts, and any other data pertaining to the project will be kept in a locked cabinet within the principal investigator's office. I am aware that screenshots of my child's personal profile page on Facebook will be captured on a daily basis through the duration of the study. I have been informed that confidentiality and anonymity of my child will be respected because any images of her face and/or body will be blurred and thus unrecognizable, using a blurring software program. I understand and agree that there are no risks to the confidentiality of the information that my child shares with the principal investigator (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian).

Conservation of data: The data collected such as screenshot files, transcripts of virtual conversations, and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet within the principal investigator's office. Only the principal investigator (Shenin Nadia Yazdanian) and her thesis supervisor (Dr. Awad Ibrahim) will have access to data. *The data will be kept for 5 years upon completion of the study.*

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my child is under no obligation to participate and if she chooses to participate, she can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. I am aware that if she chooses to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be included in the publication of results. Upon my child's specific request, all data gathered prior to her withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, give consent for my child to participate in the above research study conducted by *Shenin Nadia Yazdanian of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, whose research is under the supervision of Dr. Awad Ibrahim.*

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor. I am aware that in order for my child to participate in this study, she must provide her assent for research, but that parental consent must also be provided if she is under 18 years of age. Without both parental consent and my child's assent, my child will not be able to participate in this research project.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, 613-562-5387, Email: ethics@uottawa.ca.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Parental signature needed if student is under the age of 18:

Parental signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

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University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

I do give permission for my child's for blurred screenshots of her Facebook page to be showcased as examples at conference presentations and/or for online journal publications.

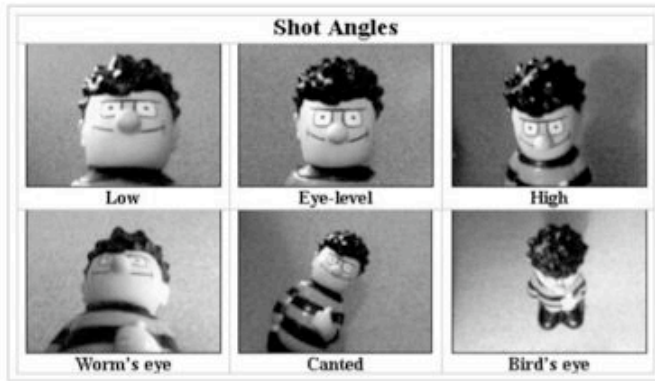
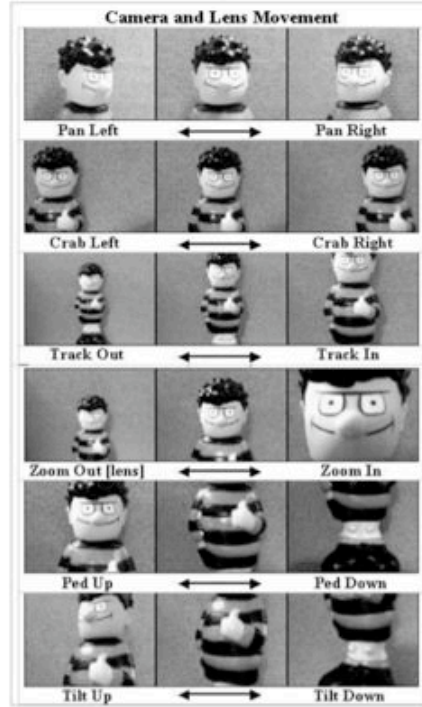
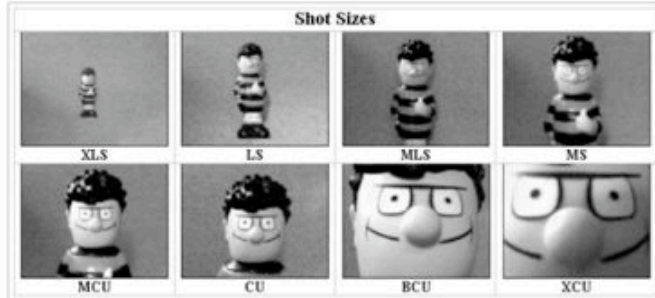
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Appendix E

Camera Shots, Angles and Movement



Appendix F

Tupac Lyrics – “Until the End of Time”

Until the end of time
Until the end of time

Perhaps I was addicted to the dark side
Somewhere inside my childhood witnessed my heart die
And even though we both came from the same places
The money and the fame made us all change places
How could it be through the misery that came to pass
The hard times make a true friend afraid to ask for currency
But you could run to me when you need and I'll never leave
Honestly, someone to believe in, as you can see

It's a small thang to a true, what could I do?
Real homies help you get through
And come to know he'd do the same thang if he could
'Cos in the hood true homies make you feel good
And half the times we be actin' up call the cops
Bringin' a cease to the peace that was on my block
It never stops when my Mama ask me will I change
I tell her yeah but it's clear I'll always be the same
Until the end of time

[Chorus]

So take these broken wings
I need your hands to come and heal me once again
(Until the end of time)
So I can fly away until the end of time
Until the end of time
Until the end of time

Please lord forgive me for my life of sin
My hard stare seem to scare all my sister's kids
So you know I don't hang around the house much
This all night, money making got me outta touch, shit
Ain't flashed a smile in a long while
An unexpected birth worst of the ghetto child's
My attitude got me walkin' solo, ride out alone in my lo-lo
Watchin' the whole world move in slow mo'

For quiet times disappear, listen to the ocean
Smokin' ports, think my thoughts, then it's back to coastin'
Who can I trust in this cold world?
My phony homey had a baby by my old girl
But I ain't trippin' I'm a player I ain't sweatin' him
I sex his sister had her mumble like a Mexican

His next of kin, no remorse it was meant to happen
Besides rappin' the only thing I did good was scrappin'
Until the end of time

[Chorus x2]

Now who's to say if I was right or wrong?
To live my life as an outlaw all along
Remain strong in this planet full of player haters
They conversate but death row full of demonstrators
And in the end drinkin' Hennessy made all my enemies envy me
So cold when I flow eliminatin' easily
Falls to they knees, they plead for they right to breath
While beggin' me to keep the peace

What I can see closer to achieve
In times of danger don't freeze, time to be a G
Follow my lead I'll supply everything you need
An ounce of game and the trainin' to make a G
Remember me as an outcast outlaw
Another album out, that's what I'm about, more
Gettin' raw 'til the day I see my casket
Buried as a G while the whole world remembers me
Until the end of time

So take these broken wings
I need your hands to come and heal me once again, once again
(Until the end of time)
So I can fly away, away, away, away, away, away, away, away, away
Until the end of time
Until the end of time

So take these broken wings
I need your hands to come and heal me once again, once again
(Until the end of time)
So I can fly away, until the end of time
Till the end of time

If an angel comes down and takes me away
Memories of me and my songs will always stay
(Until the end of time)
So I can fly till the end of time
Till the end of time

Song lyrics taken from songlyrics.com

Appendix G

Key Terms

The body is “signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects)” (Grosz, 2005, p. 50). Bodies are volatile and can express the complexities of their interiorities and thus exert identities by making sense of the external world. (3)

Sociology of the body is field of study concerned with theorizing, categorizing, regulating, performing and displaying the body within diverse theoretical perspectives, including openings to multidisciplinary (in this thesis, to cultural studies). Within the sociology of the body, the body is a site of classification, representation and transformation. (3.1)

Embodiment involves “[c]orporeal aspects of agency, ... and focuses on the sensuous nature of human perception, emotion and desire, and the corporeal basis of agency, communication and thought” (Crossley, 2001, p. 3). (3.2)

Authentic self is defined here as a subjectivity that consciously problematizes existing feminine archetypes that may influence agency. (3.2.2)

Subjectivity assumes that a woman is always at least partially “wide awake” (Greene, 1977) as well as in tune with her own perceptions, her own experiences, the meanings constituted therein, and that she is also capable of a degree of reflexivity about herself and her desires. (3.2.2)

Agency is the ability and capacity of an individual to make her own choices with or without the influences of factors such as gender, class, religion, race, ethnicity, etc. In other words, in lieu or in spite of such factors, an individual is able to make choices, and these choices constitute his or her ‘agency.’ (3.2.2)

Femininity as masquerade troubles the notion of ‘womanliness,’ enticing questions of representation and performativity that ask us what is ‘real,’ what is ‘simulated,’ and what is ‘seduced.’ In this thesis, an understanding of femininity as masquerade is one socially

encoded by what I refer to as ‘cultures of technological embodiment,’ where the computer screen becomes the mask behind which women hide, and the online display of the body becoming the masquerade. (3.2.3)

Cultures of technological embodiment are ways of knowing our corporeal, authentic selves as socially mediated in both online and offline contexts. (3.2.3)

Identity is a fluid terminology that takes into account the reality of diverse and ever-changing social experiences (Hall, 1992, 1996). Within this process of change, social struggles are taken up and provide a basis for individuals to become self-aware and thus reflect upon themselves in relation to this process, by giving meaning to their experiences in the world. (3.3.1)

Moment of identification is an instance that “impacts and guides the shape, the form, and the intensity of the ways in which the Self translates the Other and vice versa” (Ibrahim, 2008, p. 238). The *accumulation* of these moments of identification is what guides the process of change central of understandings of ‘identity.’

Concurrent identity formation (CIF) is a notion conceptualized to look into the tension and the relationship between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’; that is, the similarities and differences between what is re-presented online and the off-line identities. To work with and understand this notion, significant to note, I will put an emphasis on the ever-growing tendency to *transform* virtual self-representations through Photoshopping, cropping, or inserting ‘explanatory’ text beneath an image for example. What does this mean for CIF and how one feeds into the other are two very significant questions to ask. Assuming these transformations are calculated and made with reason, and considering it is the ‘real’ self partaking in the process of alteration, CIF would argue, it is worth investigating then the reciprocity and simultaneity (i.e., flow) between real and virtual identity formation when a social network site user transforms his or her virtual self-representations. In sum, CIF works towards understanding the co-existence of the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ by examining the flows, tensions, and intersections between the two.