

If the Walls Could Talk: A Sociolinguistic Inquiry

by

Taylor Marie Young

B.J., Thompson Rivers University, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Linguistics

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Alexandra D'Arcy, Supervisor
Department of Linguistics

Dr. Li-Shih Huang, Departmental Member
Department of Linguistics

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Alexandra D’Arcy, Supervisor
Department of Linguistics

Dr. Li-Shih Huang, Departmental Member
Department of Linguistics

Abstract

Social networking sites are the contemporary *agora*: where individuals share their lives, understand the world, exchange cultural artefacts and tend to relationships. Yet, these sites are paradoxically lauded for their ability to connect lives and disparaged for the effect they have on the quality of language and relationships. Covered extensively across disciplines, including inquiries into identity and gender politics, social networking sites remain under investigated in linguistics. Here, the interplay of identity, gender, and language in a group of adolescent girls on Facebook is explored in the sociolinguistic tradition. This research demonstrates how a discourse analytic framework can determine some aspect of identity from an individual’s online interactions, including gender as constrained by historical and cultural discourses. A collaborative methodology navigates the difficulties of collecting data online, the complexities of gender and identity, as well as provides a commentary on the need for reform in ethical protocol for online research.

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The relationship between thoughts and language is inextricably bound up in some metaphysical self and reality. Buddhist philosophy tells that thoughts form from your world: what you focus on in life grows; what you think about then expands. In that sense, this thesis illustrates the expansion of my thoughts—the focus of my world—especially over the past two years. I am grateful to the people who have been a part of this process, who have shaped my thoughts, and who have made it a success.

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“Language is never innocent; words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings.”

Roland Barthes, 1953

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

"Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics."
— Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own"

The creative charge in the bricks and mortar of Woolf's description was the potential for women's words to find paper or canvass or those very bricks themselves, the potential to be written. Eighty-two years later, women's words have since been harnessed to the pens and brushes Woolf imagined. Yet, women who write and speak publicly take on a contentious role. There is a long history of pseudonyms co-opted by those women who wish their words to be taken at face value, free from the assumptions their gendered names might incur. There have been ghostwriters and writers beneath covers, whose words remain buried from anything more than nightlight. But there is a shorter history of women who write and are read. From Woolf herself, and the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft, Aphra Behn, Emily Bronte, and Jane Austen to Anne Frank, Sylvia Plath, and Margaret Atwood, there is richness in this history. But contemporary writers—at a time when 'literature' is a dirty word most quickly associated with archaic language and library reams—are fewer yet. The most popular female writer of today is fictional: Carrie Bradshaw, of *Sex & the City* fame, writes a successful newspaper column and publishes three books about fashion, love, sex, and marriage. In her most recent movie, she actually sat down to write in but one scene (and only because newlywed tensions were unbearable enough to warrant a 'breather' from her marriage bed for a night), but that is beside the point.

Despite such popularized representations, women writers risk their reputations with words that have long been associated with an abuse of the propriety of language. Men uphold it. Women degrade it. The essentialist axiom that women are 'better with words' is simply revamped for political correctness from the early language myth that women 'talk too much.' In 18th century

England, women's language was considered ineloquent, impolite and incorrect compared to men's, which upheld the standard (Cameron 2007: 25). This belief shadowed the social exclusion of women from the public domain. Ever since, women's words and women who use them publicly have been stigmatized for their forthrightness. They also bear the weight of an albatross for their transgressions against language purity.

D'Arcy describes an "overarching and timeless gestalt" that the language is degenerating (2007: 386), a result of a network of language myths, beliefs, and ideologies. Disentangling fact from fiction is a tedious task, but at surface value the distinction—between fact and fiction—is important for illustrating that social forces are bound up in language and the beliefs about it. Language degeneration is more accurately language change. Women and younger speakers are often implicated in language changes, which are "threatening because they signal widespread changes in social mores" (Miller & Swift 1988: 8).

Shifting social mores inherent to technologically driven language change reflect a multitude of concerns, not excluding women and youth. Beyond pens and brushes, women's words are now harnessed to keyboards and QWERTY pads too. Women speaking in public have increasingly become part of the status quo. Given the onslaught of social networking media, women are no longer seeking a room of their own but have, behind password-encrypted protection, a virtual broadcasting platform tailored to their individual prerogative. Afforded such luxury, such privilege, of what do they write?

Each generation inherits the belief systems of those who have come before them, but the right of each successive generation is the chance to rewrite this inheritance in the shape of its own experience. Social media affords younger generations such an opportunity. It begs the question, what will happen to language when it is neither speech nor writing? Change will happen. What resources will prove timely in communicating with a person removed from physical and temporal space? As for social change, radio and television were no more free of the language myths that existed before them. Gender inequity persists despite their part in social evolution. Might digital technology prove any different?

Using text and discourse methods borrowed from a variety of frameworks to develop a uniform model of online sociolinguistic identity analysis, the guiding questions in this thesis address both linguistic behaviour and social theory about gendered behaviour. Moreover, these

questions are framed by an analysis of computer-mediated interactions within a community of adolescent girls. The specific questions are:

1. What patterns of (gendered) linguistic behaviour are evident on Facebook?
2. How do individuals use this new medium for communication against the backdrop of historical and cultural discourses they are familiar with?
3. How does a community of practice on Facebook negotiate terms for sociability, support and identity?
4. What might an individual's online interactions say about who she is?

These questions are broad. In order to address them, multiple methodologies are borrowed from to satisfy the exploratory and descriptive nature of this research. Methodological and ethical issues will also be addressed to satisfy this project's aim towards laying groundwork for future sociolinguistic analysis of identity online. Ultimately, these questions are answered qualitatively to account for the various context-dependent factors at play; however, it is then not possible to generalize from the small group of participants in the study to individuals or girls more generally. It is simple to delimit contextual settings that reflect varying stylistic choices, but it is more difficult to explain how the concept of gender as a complex social, cultural, and psychological construct is related to sex and, furthermore, how gender affects linguistic variables (Wolfram 1993). The above guiding questions aid in this direction of inquiry.

In order for women to write, Woolf insisted upon a room under lock and key. The technology of two interlocking devices was deemed sufficient for the linguistic and creative emancipation of women in 1929, so what can be expected of the Internet now? This work assumes there is room for creative expression—some declaration of self—somewhere in the cyber universe for women, and it pursues an understanding of how such expression is being accomplished. Perhaps Woolf's successors, the girls, are the best equipped as public speaking revolutionaries. These girls, for whom pen and paper is no longer a privilege, are the progeny of the creative force so powerful as to charge bricks and mortar. The historical and social trajectory of women as prostitutes in public spaces is their inheritance. Who will they claim to be?

1.1 PRELUDE

Researchers in the past 20 years have been compelled to investigate cyber settings, where the traditional conditions for socialization are implicated by new parameters of communication. Early research was guided by the presumed ‘*cuelessness*’ of online interactions. A 1993 cartoon in *The New Yorker* captured the sentiments of net neophytes and creators alike with a caption that read, “On the Internet nobody knows you’re a dog.” Researchers conjectured that, with the corporeal body detached from social encounters online, it was possible for individuals to interact in a “fully disembodied text mode that reveal[ed] nothing” of their physical characteristics (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin 2008: 1817). Others emphasized that, for users engaged in computer-mediated communication (CMC), the lack of an active visual feedback channel actually intensified self-awareness, thus heightening socially constructed identities online (Spears and Lea 1992). Since then, the Internet has been a virtual laboratory for users to explore and experiment with different versions of self (Turkle 1995), an ideal place in which to play with personae without fear of disapproval and sanctions by those in their real-life social circle.

In spite of the original assumptions for anonymity and disinhibited behaviour,¹ two Internet-wide technological trends have largely impacted online communication: increased bandwidth and the availability of a variety of CMC forms through a web browser interface, including nymous networks. These trends have provided greater convenience and ease of access to online communication, which has been implicated in a “lower quality of discourse” that is “noisy, fragmented, and contentious” (Herring 2004a: 29). The technological determinism that fêted the arrival of a fair playing field—free of the shackles of physical appearance and its social and historical trappings—has not come to fruition. Herring offers this levelled summary of CMC:

[A]fter barely more than 30 years of existence, CMC has become more of a practical necessity than an object of fascination and fetish. (Over)use, disenchantment, fatigue, ubiquity, indispensability, and the passage of time all contribute inexorably toward this end.

(Herring 2004a: 30)

¹ Disinhibited behaviour, such as the exchange of hostile message content, is considered characteristic of a context in which anonymity, asynchronicity, and invisibility contribute to a sense that psychological and social barriers normally in place in face-to-face interaction are absent (Suler 2004).

Computer and digital technology has evolved more quickly than researchers can detail its use. New concerns for identity fraud and privacy have ironically taken the place of the earliest troubles over masked marauders in virtual chat rooms. The ‘practical necessity’ of CMC suggests a steadfast social link between individuals’ lives and the virtual spaces in which they conduct them. Facebook is one such site that represents the current issues under scrutiny—namely privacy—but it is an untapped resource for linguistic behaviour as well.

Social commentary about the effect technology has on language is ominous. Individuals with prescriptive language attitudes feel the hybrid modality of CMC undermines language ‘purity.’ Facebook represents a particularly novel hybrid of Internet technologies. The combination achieves a unique multimodal social network that has gained excessive popularity, breaking into everyday social interactions for the exchange of information, as well as into the private and public sectors as a tool for marketing, connecting with consumers and public relations. Such an expansive medium plays host to content that is equally as innumerable. This computer-mediated linguistic behaviour is overtly stigmatized precisely for the ubiquity and indispensability Herring ascribes to it, for the fact remains: as the latest social phenom, Facebook and its content seems hardly more than quotidian.

The underlying and shared assumption that Facebook is teeming with superficiality can be traced to the origins of the medium itself, a genesis based on patriarchal relations. Originally designed as a virtual space to rate the attractiveness of female cohorts, Facebook does not boast a favourable perspective on women. It persists today as a tool to ‘creep’ on other people’s lives (or at least how they have been socially constructed to appear), and has largely been tied to the ‘female need’ for perfunctory socializing and keeping tabs on the community. *The Social Network* (Spacey, 2010), a movie that depicts the creation and rise of Facebook, reflects the overarching association of masculinity with technological ingenuity and business savvy. Its portrayal of women depicts second-class citizens hungry for a shard of the spotlight hogged by their high-status male counterparts:

With few exceptions, women are portrayed as drunken and drug-addled pursuers of men with status, whether it is the buses of women from a lowlier college pulling up for a party at a Harvard social club or the women hanging out as Facebook groupies in Silicon Valley.

(Hagel, 2010, para. 10)

Further social commentary about women and girls on Facebook depicts them as fragile and social narcissists. An article in a national publication links Facebook to women's self-esteem, describing the most insecure of them as more likely to disclose personal information than men, who had fewer friends, photos and hours logged managing their profiles (Bielski 2011). In a computer behaviours study, DeAndrea, Shaw, and Lavigne (2010) examined identity in a content analysis of how Facebook users sought to make certain implicit identity claims, preferring to 'show' rather than 'tell' who they were through cultural references, images, and emphasis on their social ties (Zhao et al. 2008: 1825). Such apparent narcissism is the legacy of the site's origins, conceived squarely out of the hegemonic decree that women are to be seen and not heard, and ultimately valued for their physical appearance.

Facebook, it would seem, is nothing more than a virtual auction block set in the contemporary marketplace for hegemonic femininity and its accoutrements—and predictably so. The media as cultural producer and 'corrupter' plays an antagonistic role in society today. At its worst, the media is called a "hegemonic and seductive public cultural institution" dictated by ideology (Garrison 2007: 186). Feminists have been critical of the media's role in creating the '*post-feminist myth*' that patriarchy is dead (e.g. Gillis et al. 2007). The media's reduction of a political movement into a catch phrase, *girl power*, has simplified and homogenized the differences between *women* and *feminism*, so that a feminist must be white, heterosexual, and middle-class. *Feminist* is the new *f*-word. The term has been vilified for the description of man-hating, bra-burning, radicals who threaten hetero-normativity. In their place, popular representations in the media sell images of so-called independent women (e.g. Lady GaGa), making neo-feminism a marketable commodity that celebrates how women have achieved the goals of their second-wave feminist mothers: financial autonomy, successful careers, and sexual freedom (Gorton 2007). The *girl power* trope perpetuates the idea that a hyper-feminine action hero has triumphed over hegemonic gender. She is the mass-mediated heroine who is exclusively middle-class and white, free of political concerns, strong but unthreatening (because if she is an action *chick*, how much damage could she do?). Girls and women in the media today are expected to be tough, sexy *and* feminine (Stasia 2007). These sexualizing trends on femininity mark the succeeding generations of 'aggressively randy, hard-drinking young females (Munford 2007:268), for whom *feminism* is a vague reference to 'women's equality or something.'

The commoditization of sexualized femininity thrives on the documented affinity girls have in computer-mediated environments. The Internet's expansiveness, accessibility, and decentralized nature make it an oasis of sorts—promising the breakdown of traditional power structures. As such, girls online are a verifiable consumer market. But this depiction of media and the sexualization of femininity deny that women, and girls especially, are cultural producers. Online, they have carved out an undeniable presence and are using it for self-expression, community building, and the export of their wares. Such market power, taken alongside their cultural patrimony, affords potential in analyzing their computer-mediated language. Historically, the spaces in which to achieve 'safe' self-expression have been sparse (Stern 2004: 239), leaving girls in search of a soapbox that will not tumble beneath the consequences of counter-hegemonic behaviour, and one that will simply bear the weight of their self-exploration. Subsequently, their proclivity for online social networking suggests a triad of meaning in (1) their heritage as the silenced sex, (2) the reinforcing effect of community and (3) the social complexity of their linguistic behaviour. Facebook, as the latest paragon for information sharing, opens a window into the newly public lives of girls and tells tales of girls past if the walls could talk—and they do.

1.2 BEFORE: WOMEN, LANGUAGE, GENDER

A comprehensive survey of the language and gender canon is a daunting endeavour, even for the most ambitious reader. It would demand a cross-discipline inquiry into a multitude of established, contentious, and complex concerns represented by innumerable researchers and their respective interests. In an attempt to compartmentalize what is most relevant, this review will address (a) whether there is a gender differentiation of language use, (b) what have been considered features of 'women's language,' (c) societal and ideological influences, and (d) gender performativity. The first concern—gender variation—was markedly considered part and parcel of the physical difference between men and women. Vestigial remnants of this line of inquiry persist today. Yet, such rudimentary investigations into men and women's language remain underdeveloped in the face of perspectives that are inclusive of other variables, including how language variation is related to the social nature of human linguistic behaviour.

Irrespective of linguistic inquiry, that women and men speak differently is held up in a web of language ideology and myth, and remains a familiar tale within folk linguistics. This collection of beliefs about language is accepted as common sense within society, such as women talk more than men and men do not talk about emotions (e.g. Holmes 1998). These folk ideologies serve to regulate linguistic behaviour, as well as explain that behaviour to the ordinary user (Cameron, 1985:35). Folk linguistics is largely a misrepresentation of actual linguistic phenomena in use. Notions about language that fall under a folk linguistic umbrella are imbued with value judgments, which fit social ideas about the prestige and power of certain social groups. These beliefs and judgments persist (however false) so long as they function to reinforce social inequalities (Cameron 1985:33).

At times, sociolinguistic inquiry has itself contributed to myths about gendered difference and their respective judgments (e.g. Gumperz 1982, Tannen 1994, Lakoff 1975). Cameron (1985) has been critical of this tradition, tying sex difference research ‘inevitably’ to sexist ideology for its base assumption that men are the norm from which women deviate. Consequently, findings are interpreted in line with this ideology and thus reinforce the idea that any differences between the genders are reducible to biology. Traditionally, the large-scale sociolinguistic survey has been the main approach toward identifying gender differences. Cameron problematizes this approach threefold: first, researchers find ‘what they set out to find’; second, non-standard variables tend to be described as ‘deviations’ rather than integrated systems; and third, researchers then explain such ‘deviations’ in terms of ideological or stereotypical assumptions about men and women. For example, the sexist explanation that ‘women’s speech’ is a result of their desire to climb the social ladder is couched in an assumption that downgrades women relative to men. Furthermore, societies will frame their definitions of prestige to match its social and sexual hierarchy. Trudgill’s (1972) *covert prestige* qualified men’s use of non-standard language as admirable in relation to women’s use of standard forms (Cameron, 1985). Yet women have no option for *covert prestige* themselves. In pursuing it they are ‘deviants’ with dirty mouths—in need of some verbal hygiene. While Cameron concedes that gender influences behaviour, she adds that such differences are small and in relative frequencies. Furthermore, there are no universal differences of gendered linguistic behaviour, and there is at least as much variation within groups as there is between them. This variation, Cameron explains, results from the way individuals use language to symbolize who they are. Such views of gender as identity practice, performativity, and social

work buttress social constructivist theory in direct opposition to the notion that men and women are inalienably different.

Nonetheless, the neuroscience of today has revamped the sex differences debacle by pointing to ‘hardwired’ differences between the brains of men and women. Cameron sees the brain-sex agenda as an overt attempt at claiming difference (albeit equal) while covertly confirming the intellectual inferiority of women (Cameron 2011). Such ‘hardwired differences’ are recycled folk linguistics: women’s proclivity to talk, make plans and share emotion are attributed to their evolutionary role as gatherers and fire tenders. Men refrain from these verbal pursuits. Their talk is clipped to efficient utterances to ‘get things done’ because their heritage as hunters allows no time to mince words. Cameron argues there is no evidence to support such claims. She debunks the talk myth by pointing to context: in casual circumstances, men and women are found to talk an equal amount, whereas in formal situations men do indeed speak more than women. Moreover, same sex and mixed sex contexts reveal differences in the amounts men and women talk. There is a long history of men in public speaking situations, where their talk is intersubjectively about power, status and ‘having something to say.’ Women, in contrast, have a shorter history of speaking in public and still today are often hesitant to step into the orator’s spotlight. To put this in perspective, consider the priorities of the Republican campaign advisors who felt it judicious to pay Sarah Palin’s make up artist more than her foreign policy advisor. The history of women’s silence reflects a vein of feminist and women’s studies concerned with the search for an ‘authentic’ voice (e.g. Mahoney, 1996). Surveying the canon of feminist linguistics here is both starkly naïve of the sheer depth and breadth of feminist work on women and language, as well as beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, how speech behaviour reflects or perpetuates patriarchal norms of society provides insight directly related to assumptions about gendered language difference.

1.2.1 Gendered Explanations: Deficit, Dominance, and Difference

Three broad frameworks have been applied to understanding language and gender: deficit, dominance, and difference. Perhaps most archaic of the three, the *deficit* framework espouses women’s language as deficient in comparison to men’s, as literally as Eve was imagined to be the diminished copy of Adam (who was in turn a lesser version of god). Women’s language then

results in denigrated ‘ladylike’ usages of men’s language. Within such a framework, women can only *use* the language of men, parroting it to insipid and powerless effect.

The second framework for understanding gendered language is about *dominance*. In contrast to the previous explanation, women within this framework are theoretically *capable* of producing vital language. However, they often fail to do so as men take the upper hand in conversation (via interruptions, failure to take up women’s conversational gambits, volume of words, semantic degradation of women, and so on). This verbal stranglehold is seen as the social result of men’s hierarchical dominance. The dominance framework enacts a social dimorphism, which conveniently mirrors the physical one (Bergvall, 1999: 277). Brawn literally equates to brains and results in negative evaluations of women’s language. Lakoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place* (1975) captures the founding assumption of the dominance framework with its assertion that women have different ways of speaking that both reflect and reproduce their subordinate position in society. Lakoff’s observation that women’s speech is rife with devices such as mitigators (*‘sort of’, ‘I think’*) and inessential qualifiers (*‘so beautiful’*) was used as evidence for how women’s speech actually functions to make them tentative, powerless and trivial speakers, thus disqualifying them for positions of authority. In the Lakoffian view, language is a tool of oppression that is learned and imposed on women by societal norms, which consequently keeps them in their ‘place’. Lakoff assumes that the differences between men and women are due to a history of oppression and subordination. In a vicious circle, women continually defer to men’s norms, are socially marginalized, and speak to reflect their insecurity, thus reinforcing their social position (Cameron 1985: 53).

In contrast, a sub-cultural view of difference equates socialization patterns with the learned behaviours between men and women. In this case, social learning generates norms for feminine and masculine identities and gender roles. This third framework turns to sociocultural influences—much akin to stylistic preferences that distinguish national cultures—that factor into the linguistic behaviour between genders. Within this framework, the cultures that girls and boys live in are as different and analogous to the subcultures of class, race, and regional dialects (Tannen 1994). Speech as a means for contending with social and psychological situations is different for men and women due to their different cultures. Consequently, their different cultural understandings are responsible for a ‘cultural miscommunication’ between them about what constitutes friendly conversation, rules of engagement and the rules for interpreting another’s

speech behaviour. This cultural explanation of difference borrows from anthropological work that describes how men and women spend most of their lives spatially and interactionally segregated (Monaghan & Goodman 2007).

Despite the explanations in these three frameworks, perhaps the key is not in understanding difference but instead lies in deconstructing the value judgments attached to such difference (Cameron, 1985:53). If so, understanding ‘women’s language’ is not a quest to dissect how it deviates from men’s language but rather involves inquiry into how the differences are perceived and the consequences of these perceptions. The researcher might ask, ‘what do sex differences mean in society?’ and find the answer to be a negative value. In other words, the question is no longer ‘what does she say,’ but ‘what does what she says signal,’ and considered in a social context, ‘is that signal positive or negative?’ The desire to surmount the dichotic notion of gendered language reflects an equal desire to desert essentialist understandings of who or what something is. Bergvall (1999) suggests that linguistic researchers dismiss the ‘alien interpretation’ of how men and women interact (in reference to the famed *Men Are From Mars Women Are From Venus* (1992) publication by John Gray, which offers advice to heterosexual couples for improving their relationships based on the idea that men and women are diametrically opposed in terms of communication styles, emotional needs and personal values). In so doing, Bergvall surmises a high degree of mutually intelligible talk between men and women, thus leaving researchers with a more interesting task: to disentangle the interplay between gender and language in the context of other social variables (1999: 276).

Over two decades ago, Cameron had already dismissed the choice between understanding how women’s language, their identity, and their position in society relate to either difference or dominance hierarchies (1985: 166). These frameworks simply do not stand up to the intricacies of gender as it has been investigated in sociolinguistics, feminist studies, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines. In response, researchers have become concerned about the way language functions as an indexing system. Yet, few features of language directly and exclusively index gender (Ochs 1992: 340). Moreover, gender is implicated in other social identities so complexly that extracting it—or expecting to find static and monolithic behaviour—is utterly contentious in the realm of current language and gender research. A third wave of sociolinguistic work has addressed the complex way linguistic behaviour is linked to variation, style, and locally specific

factors (Eckert 2000). This work has also encompassed historical trajectories of experience, local and cultural norms, and issues of power.

Such has been the task of researchers working to understand how language is continually constructed in practice. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) have drawn attention to what people *do* with language and how linguistic and other social resources can be transformed in the process. In other words, the search for correlations between linguistic units and social categories of speakers has refocused on the gendered significance of a particular or ongoing discourse. This demands more than a simple one-to-one mapping of linguistic phenomenon and social category, and requires a historical consideration of the character of language as well as the interactive dimensions of its use. However, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet do not discount linguistic units entirely. Researchers must be wary of ignoring the relationship between function and the situated use of speech, sounds, and words without forgetting that they are neither fixed nor immutable (2003:4).

The search for *indications* of gender has not excluded the quest to give it a name. Attempting to find a singular and agreed upon definition for gender would demand an interdisciplinary agreement between diverging theorists with varying social, political and theoretical prerogatives. As a result, gender has been described in terms of its innateness, such as in debates about biological sex and inborn physical difference. Researchers have also described gender as a product of the autonomous individual, constructed through linguistic means in practice. ‘*Male*’ and ‘*female*’ have also been called the ascribed labels of gender (Bergvall 1999). Perhaps simple at surface value, the gender construct has been informed by ideology and hegemonic belief systems, underlying social roles, and assumptions about gender roles and behaviour, to name a few. Leaving behind the earliest paradigmatic breakdown of gender as sex (and language the *de facto* reflection of such), sociolinguistic work in particular took up concerns for gender as it functions to signify identity (and not biological sex or monolithic social categories). This link to self-representation emphasized the social symbolism of gender achieved in language (e.g. Ochs 1992). Cameron (2007) discusses gender as a symbolic identity tool, strategically used to create locally and culturally important distinctions. Individual men and women manipulate linguistic behaviour in their attempts to display, symbolize and stylize their identity—gendered and otherwise. Linguists and gender theorists do not neglect notions of gender that are far less pragmatic. Bourdieu’s (1977) *habitus* described a set of beliefs and

dispositions that a person develops as a result of her accumulated experience in a particular place in society. Butler's (1999) theory of identity described the effect of gender as the stylization of the body, and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler 1999 in Munford, 2007: 270).

These ideas that capture the performativity of gender are particularly useful for destabilizing the hackneyed assumption that there is a natural gender or some subject who emerges from an internal essence. Though highly metaphysical, Bourdieu and Butler's ideas suggest that a chimera of gender emerges as a result of repetition and ritual of the body, which is in itself partly understood as a culturally sustained temporal duration (Gillis, 2007: 176). If gender is defined by cultural terms, it can then be defined as a social arrangement. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), gender, and specifically its dichotomy, is at the centre of the social order. Gender is ubiquitous and defined in a 'pattern of relations' that develops over time and amounts to the social understanding of male, female, masculinity, and femininity. Gender is institutionalized in public spaces, art, clothing, movement and so on. Embedded in the experience of the social world, gender exists in everything from the smallest interactions to the overarching organization of society. Participating in society results in the continual performance of gender and a strengthened idea of gender itself (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 33). The dichotomy between male and female, in this sense, is an accomplishment of human organization. For language and gender researchers, language exists as a tool to build and support these categories.

1.2.2 The Stereotype, Hegemonies, and Ideologies

Due to their continual reflection of daily interactions, language and the social world are in flux. This places the small shifts in linguistic resources, those deployed in day-to-day activity, at the centre of changing practice and changing ideologies (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003:55). This is promising for the potential of subversive gender behaviour, yet the gender order is stubborn in its organization of dichotomy and reinforced with structures of convention and ideology.

Gender ideology is the set of beliefs governing people's participation in the gender order, as well as how they explain and justify that participation. For example, a husband does not have an aversion to the vacuum cleaner because cat litter on the linoleum does not particularly bother

him—but because ‘he is a man.’ Gender ideology is what people fall back on to explain the nature of maleness and femaleness, including the extent to which behaviour is (un)justified, natural, expected, a matter of necessity and so on. Stereotypes closely relate to ideology. Famed feminist Germaine Greer wrote of *The Eternal Feminine*, the female stereotype who owns all that is beautiful (including the very word *beauty* itself) and for whom all exist in the aim to make her more beautiful (Greer 1971:51). Exemplified in this stereotype are the pervasive and perpetuating ideas of *beauty* and *femininity* implicit in gender ideology. *The Eternal Feminine* is the cultural ruler and sexual object sought by all, including women in their pursuit for male approval and desire. This feminine stereotype is omnipresent throughout history, art, literature, and society. In poetry, she is scripted much the way she is depicted in painting. In other words, the gender ideology of femininity is mirrored in linguistic representations that describe consumption or the utilization of femininity. For example, the linguistic emphasis on the vulgar consumption of women—that is, the penetration of women during sex—centres on *poking* (e.g. *fucking*, *screwing*, *rooting*, *shagging*). Here language is symbolic of gender ideology, corroborating an ideology in and of itself.

Language ideology informs beliefs that certain people speak certain ways, including the prescriptive ideas about how they *should* speak, and how they explain or justify particular linguistic behaviour. Traditional ideas about the communicative inadequacy of young black children in largely white, middle-class schools were not governed by an understanding of African American Vernacular English but by the language ideology that described black children’s language as a ‘deficient’ form of the English being taught in school. Equally so, ideas about ‘women’s language’ are not accurate reflections of how women actually use language. They represent the linguistic (and gender) ideology constructed through history via discourse. For example, the metalinguistic discourse about ‘women’s language’ in Japan, including social commentary about its aesthetic appeal and linguistic patterns in media and fiction, determine the strict understanding of and explanation for how women speak. When large audiences consume the repeated reproduction of a particular feature by female characters—as in the *manga* and *anime* subcultures—those features become associated with feminine identities (Nakamura 2006).

While such ideologies inform individuals’ *beliefs*, hegemony focuses on routine *structure* and derives a power in the everyday repetition of behaviour (see Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 43). Hegemony includes widespread ideas and assimilation

of behaviour into the organization of social life. Along this plane, hegemonic femininity is a theoretical conceptualization that encompasses how women's language and gender are understood in a hierarchical relation to men's: "[hegemonic femininity] consists of the characteristics defined as *womanly* that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" [emphasis added] (Schippers 2007: 94). The power of ideology and the conventions built into hegemony wield a pervasive influence over individual thoughts and actions, resulting in the patterning that persists over generations and across the development of a person's lifespan. The power of hegemonic femininity suggests a stark polarity between masculinity and femininity that is unlike the unity and symbiosis of other splits, such as the Eastern idea of *yin* and *yang*. Rather, hegemonic femininity ominously suggests a danger for those women who do not subscribe to its ascendancy of masculinity. Threatening to upend the hierarchy holds dire consequences for those women who attempt to embody aspects of hegemonic masculinity. They are seen as "'pariah femininities' who are stigmatized for their assertiveness, homosexual desire, permissive sexuality, and so on" (Schippers 2007: 11-12).

The idea of hegemonic femininity is useful to linguistic inquiry. The relationship between ideology, history, hegemony and its subsequent practice liberates women and their linguistic behaviour from some essential 'womanly' nature, ultimately freeing their language as an autonomous resource (Nakamura 2006). While 'women's language' is an ideological construct with normative force, the diversity of practices that might devolve from this ideal reflects the agentive force within each individual speaker. This is particularly useful to language and gender analysis, which might utilize hegemonic femininity—for its explanation of womanly characteristics that establish and legitimate the hierarchical relation between femininity and masculinity (Charlebois 2008)—as the yardstick to measure so-called deviants (e.g. Young & D'Arcy 2010, Bucholtz 1996). If there are 'deviants' in linguistic practice, a continuum of gendered practice must be recognized, which balances on the fulcrum that gender is defined and constructed in multiplicity.

1.2.3 Constructing a Gender Performance

Gender exists in terms of a social construct and operates in complex and contested association with the biological construct of sex (Bergvall 1999:274). Issues of innateness, ideology, and construction all play into the variety of gendered linguistic practice. This social practice may align with existing social order, such as it does when women forgo their education to raise children in the home. In contrast, women may resist the social order by participating in a variety of non-traditional practices. Profanity or language considered otherwise taboo for women is but one example of the linguistic resources available to them in non-traditional practice. Thus, gender does not simply exist but is continually produced, reproduced, and changed through performance and gendered choices. Through these performances, individuals may project their own claimed gendered identities, ratify or challenge others' identities, and support or challenge systems of gender relations and privilege (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 4). The various ways that individuals cobble together a gendered performance results in *fashioned selves*. *Fashioned selves* consist of a plethora of linguistic features: everything from lexical items and grammatical gender marking to intonation contours, tone of voice, and even gaze, posture and facial expression. Some of these are utilized automatically as products of ingrained habit (recall Bourdieu's *habitus*), while others are employed strategically as conscious linguistic acts. Collectively, these tools accomplish a linguistic *style* (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003:305).

At the core of gender performativity is stylistic practice, as it is constructed over time through the deployment of any number of linguistic phenomena and over a series of interactions. While the repetition of a certain linguistic behaviour amounts to more stability of that feature in an individual's repertoire, *style* is not static. The interactive, dialogic nature of face-to-face and social interaction allows for a multitude of styles to emerge in practice within an individual. Gender performance necessitates an audience, which brings to the fore questions of legitimacy, validation, and approval. Hall's (1995) work on illegitimate performances, such as those of phone sex workers, explores the possibility that individuals who are not authorized to claim a particular identity do, in fact, perform unconventional identities through linguistic practice. India's *hijras* are ritual performers who have been described as both eunuchs and hermaphrodites. Generally raised as boys, these individuals embrace maleness and femaleness through a linguistic style that is identifiably neither, and in so doing lay claim to 'illegitimate' identities (Hall 2003).

The possibilities for legitimacy and performance suggest that there is a conflict with what is achieved in practice and what is an authentic or ‘real’ self. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet arbitrate this suggested incompatibility by claiming personal reality does not come from within, rather from participating in “the global performance that is the social order” (2003: 320-21). The performance is a constellation of acts that aim at a style, which the performer believes she is, wants others to believe she is, or hopes to be.

Discourse on language and gender, ideology and hegemony, style and performativity, and so on depend on the base assumption that language is not ‘all that matters’ socially (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 5). Questions about simple differences between men and women are, in actuality, inquiries into the kinds of linguistic resources used to fashion gendered identities. While the earliest accounts for linguistic gender differences were traced back to the reified patterns of millennia ago when women were gatherers and men were hunters, postmodern life in a technological world resets the focus away from physical dimorphism (Bergvall 1999: 274-5). In order to arrive at any full characterization of gender, a multi-methodological approach is needed in the study of language and gender, one that meets at the intersection of macro- and micro-level analyses (1999: 288).

1.3 IDENTITY IN INTERACTION

“My colleague [...] has concluded after a review of the literature that the term ‘identity’ has little use other than as a fancy dress in which to disguise vagueness, ambiguity, tautologies, lack of clinical data, and poverty of explanation”

– Robert Stoller (1968: x)

The need for a social identity is inescapably a public process; hence, much of language and identity work has focused on how identity is constructed in interaction. Interaction makes dialogic demands on the identity process, which involves both an identity ‘announcement’ made by one individual and potentially the identity ‘placement’ made by others who can endorse or reject it. When there is mutuality in interaction, or a “coincidence of placements and announcements,” positive identity is achieved (Stone 1981:188 in Zhao et al. 2008: 1817). Goffman’s (1959) definition of *face* is a popular understanding of identity. Like *style*, others

might accept, challenge, or deny a certain identity claim in the intersubjective negotiation of face. Individuals are concerned with presenting or performing a self that is likely to be received as desirable or that others will acknowledge and support. The particulars of a self that are likely to be received and, crucially, expected change across situations and communities. To meet this demand, individuals make strategic moves to acquire and project a certain persona. The decisions that amount to the ratification or rejection of another's projected persona are shaped by gender roles and ideology.

Goffman's idea manifests in the localized face-to-face interactions of individuals. To recall legitimized and illegitimated identities, the presence of the corporeal body in these interactions prevents identity claims that are inconsistent with visible physical characteristics. The shared knowledge of an individual's social background and personality also factor into the audience's evaluation of a specific identity claim. In face-to-face interactions amongst strangers, background and aspects of personality may be hidden or disguised, but identity claims remain delimited by the manipulation of physical settings, appearance, language and manner (Zhao et al. 2008:1817). Where language is concerned, a variety of frameworks are employed to understand how discourse is involved in the construction and performance of discursive identities, namely footing, positioning, and voice.

Frame analysis is used to conceptually understand how people construct meaning from moment to moment in discourse (Goffman 1974). *Framing* is how interlocutors signal their definition of a situation. Whether two people in a conversation believe they are discussing a narrative, sharing a report, exchanging gossip, or debating an argument lies in the frame: how they signal their belief of what they are doing. Speech acts and other paralinguistic and communicative cues accomplish the frame, while footing and positioning vary within the frame and are specific to individual discourse moves on the part of participants. *Footing* concerns the alignment interlocutors take toward each other and toward the content of the talk. It occurs in a flow of signals that distance and ratify two interlocutors' within the joint frame of a conversation. Analyzing footing is useful for examining subtle shifts within a specific conversation or topic. More specific to each individual is *positioning*. Positioning encompasses the strategic interactional moves of interlocutors and how they take up interactions in location to the other (Ribeiro 2006). A third concept, *voice*, is perhaps more familiar in terms of literature and composition studies. Nonetheless, Ribeiro addresses voice in interaction as the psychological

notion for a speaker's implicit meaning or their implied knowledge. Voice captures expressive variation as well, such as how physical voice literally comes across in conveying differences of emotionality and rationality (e.g. long pauses versus accelerated pace).

Through changes in an individual's voice, footing and positioning in interaction, others come to recognize their stance, or 'socially recognized disposition' (Ochs 1990: 2). Aside from furnishing the rather abstract idea of identity, the concept of stance is important to understanding why speakers use particular linguistic variants within and associated with a larger social group (Drager 2009: 18-9). For example, in her sociolinguistic ethnography of a group of New Zealand high school girls, Drager (2009) divided individuals into 'constellations of stance' depending on particular linguistic variants analyzed acoustically. The constellation made up an "aggregate of individuals or groups of individuals who share at least one common stance," such as the Common Room girls, who, for example, collectively felt they were "normal," "normal" was good, and that people who did not value social mobility "were not going to go far" in life (2009: 55). Stance as a matter of social viewpoint and partly constructed in language exemplifies the usefulness of analyzing the footing, positioning, frame and overall position speakers take in interaction.

Collectively, identity is the summation of a speaker's own combination of linguistic variables and non-linguistic factors—what Drager (2009) refers to as *personae*, located within a larger social landscape. The idea that individuals are in command of multiple senses of self or personae, is familiar. Zhao et al. (2008) traces it to psychology and sociology, including Goffman's (1959) distinction between the public self and the individual, inner self. "Possible selves" have been described as the potential for an individual in terms of lifespan development and lifestyles (Markus & Nurius 1986). And finally, Zhao discusses Higgins' (1987) distinction between ideal, ought, and actual selves. In this triad, the ideal self contains qualities to be ventured at; the ought self delineates qualities one feels obligated to possess; and the actual self encompasses such qualities that are actually expressed to others in the present (Higgins 1987 in Zhao et al. 2008: 1819). Without doubt, *identity* exists in multiplicity.

Selves in performance, in multitude, and as accomplishments of style and stance, encompass an important sociolinguistic tradition of language and identity work. This tradition sets down within a larger social landscape, in which identity (gendered and otherwise) has been an interactive and intersubjective undertaking. Due to the social setting of this work, it has been important to distinguish between public and private selves. Where sociolinguistic analysis is

concerned, public selves best represent the interconnection between individuals (including their personal histories and behaviours) and social processes (e.g. ideologies and institutions) in the presentation of identity. Whether directly or indirectly, identities are the result of reciprocal positioning. The interactive work shared between two speakers either increases or decreases the social space between them. The idea of positive and negative identity practices (Bucholtz, 1999) is an apt illustration of this concept. Positive practices draw speakers together by defining who and what they are. For example, a linguistic feature may be employed to index 'cuteness' (Young & D'Arcy 2010). Negative practices, in contrast, are those that distance individuals from a particular identity or the claimed identity of their interlocutors (e.g. face threatening acts). Bucholtz underscored the importance of identity and interaction in later work and provided five principles for its undertaking (Bucholtz & Hall 2005): (1) *emergence*, or that identity manifests as an effect of complex social and cultural structures and not as a static category; (2) *positionality*, or that identity depends on the position an individual takes up in a particular interaction; (3) *indexicality*, or that identity is marked by indices, such as code-switching, discourse particles, or acoustic variations; (4) *relationality*, or that identities require real meaning in relation to other social actors; and (5) *partialness*, or the idea that identity is a kaleidoscope of factors and never wholly representative of an individual.

Chapter 2 THE VIRTUAL FACTOR

The activities that construct social meaning and help individuals situate themselves within the world are no longer relegated to ‘real’ life. Today, you cannot be a dog on the Internet without everyone knowing. The ‘net’ has entered the day-to-day lives of most people, coming to be an important place for the negotiation and understanding of social relationships in their lives (Androutsopoulos 2006). The opportunities for online interaction are growing, as is the complexity and degree of socially meaningful behaviour online. These technologies provide a variety of online contexts, some of which are rich with opportunities for highly interpersonal and interactive behaviour. In response, net-based research has demonstrated that CMC is not predicated on an environment totally devoid of social selves nor of the social constraints impinging upon them.

2.1 WEB-BASED RESEARCH

Major areas of web-based research within linguistics have included classification, pragmatics, interaction, and discourse analysis, and so on. Classification has endeavoured to characterize and label CMC language, which tends to be informal and context-dependent, conversational in style, and like a hybrid ‘written speech’ (Herring 2004b). Researchers investigating discourse patterns have delved into interactional phenomena such as turn-taking, repairs, politeness, and speech acts, as well as broader analyses into discourse as a whole. Those in neighbouring disciplines have found the computer screen to be a useful lens with which to study human behaviour and theoretical ideas like community, identity, influence, performance, and power. Lastly, the ever-looming ‘threat’ to the integrity of the English language continues to motivate inquiries into computer-based language, primarily targeting the IM and SMS messages of teenagers.

Countless articles suggest that technologies like text messaging and web-based social networking are leading to the breakdown of English (e.g. O’Connor 2005, Axtman 2002). Despite these persistent concerns, quantitative analyses of college students’ IM conversations and text messages have revealed that abbreviations, acronyms, and even misspellings are

comparatively infrequent (Baron 2009). Thurlow (2004) called popular discourse on language degradation largely exaggerated after an examination of linguistic forms and communicative functions in a corpus of 544 participants' text messages. The results soundly concluded that young people were found to be "linguistically unremarkable and communicatively adept." Text messages and other forms of CMC have been applauded for their brevity and speed, paralinguistic restitution, and phonological approximation. For example, in defense of emoticons, Dresner and Herring (2010) identify how the typographic symbols of smiles and frowns also function as indicators of non-emotional meanings (mapped onto facial expressions) and as illocutionary force indicators (that do not map conventionally onto facial expressions). Herring notes that abbreviations and non-standard spellings are not novel, recalling how they function as semi-private code reminiscent of the 'encrypted' notes, special alphabets, and writing permutations of previous generations (2004a: 32-3).

In response to questions about digital media changing language, Baron says that minor shifts in vocabulary and sentence mechanics are all that is representative of the language decay purists foretell. However, she does describe a shift in attitude towards linguistic rules that is less stringent on adherence to 'correct' grammar and language consistency, and a shift towards more control over linguistic interactions. The former is concerned with the degree to which digital media affords users management privileges over their linguistic behaviour. Consider that interaction on many social networking sites includes options for appearing to be offline or unavailable, personalized font, and a set of emoticons to match a swathe of psychological states. Even the decision between calling, texting, or e-mailing exemplifies the degree to which individuals can now decide the minutiae of their linguistic communication (Baron 2009).

2.1.1 The (Tr)end of Gender?

The origins of gender inequality online are traceable to the early computer-engineering field, where women were scarcely employed. Today, men disproportionately fill the roles that require technological expertise, such as network administrator. Furthermore, the axiomatic association of technology with masculinity has largely reinforced the gender imbalance. Connell (1995) describes the *technical* masculinity of the upper middle-class man, who is central to global power. With his scientific, political (and indirectly physical) clout, the *technical* masculine man

defines himself primarily in a trim suit, with clean and callous free hands, and by wielding his financial power in the global market place. Burgeoning from the highly male-centric origins of the Internet and despite early predictions of a genderless online platform, gender and the gender order remain a reality in cyberspace (Thomson & Murachver 2001). In fact, gender has been found to predict certain online behaviours more often than other macro-level categories (e.g. age) (Herring 2003). Virtual gender differences were found in an asynchronous setting, where males were reportedly more likely to post longer messages, begin and end discussions in mixed-sex groups, assert opinions strongly as ‘fact’, use crude language and take up an adversarial position. Similar to offline findings, women online apparently qualify and justify their opinions, apologize more, and align themselves with their interlocutors (Herring 1992, 1993). In the case of a textually enacted rape (online), this writer tells how the ostensibly body-less cyber world is not impregnable to the binary and bawdy gender system:

To participate, therefore, in this disembodied enactment of life's most body-centered activity is to risk the realization that when it comes to sex, perhaps the body in question is not the physical one at all, but its psychic double, the body-like self-representation we carry around in our heads. [I]t's one thing to grasp the notion intellectually and quite another to feel it coursing through your veins amid the virtual steam of hot net nookie [...] recognizing in a full-bodied way that what happens inside a MUD²-made world is neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally meaningful.

(Dibbell 1993: para. 16)

Here is the argument for the conflation of *speech* and *act*, founded on the observation that linguistic behaviours online are not so much figures of speech but instead commands that “make things happen, directly and ineluctably, the same way pulling a trigger does” (Dibbell 1993). In this account, words are ‘incantations’ imbued with the power of gunpowder.

Undeniably, technology has impacted the relationships between sex, gender, and the body. This was particularly true of the Internet for its promise to dissolve gender/sex boundaries, which included the hope that—without a body—women could be free of the phenomenological associations of those bodies. Some excitedly hypothesized about a “network of lines on which to

² MUD is the acronym for multi-user domain.

chatter, natter, work and play; virtually bring[ing] a fluidity to identities which once had to be fixed; and [providing] a tactile environment in which women artists can find their space” (Plant 1995 in Gillis 2007: 170). Other supporters lauded the *natural* order that women might take up online, emphasizing with fairly essentialist ideas that women would find an extension of ‘the modes of networking common’ to them on a medium that was more attuned to their ways of working in the world (Pollock & Sutton 1999, Spender 1995 in Gillis 2007). In other words, for its superbly communicative functioning, the Internet would be the ultimate (virtual) hen house in which to create community, exchange gossip and, all importantly, ‘keep in touch.’

Skeptics of the possibilities of such *cyberfeminism* argue the reality of online experiences for women are far removed from being powerful or transgressive of gender. Rather, the potential for truly empowered online interactions is limited by the specificities of women’s embodied online experiences:

The body circulating through cyberspace does not obviate the body at the keyboard: while these may not be exactly the same body, they are both embodied identities, embodied within the specifics of place, time, physiology and culture, which together compose enactment.

(Hayles in Gillis 2007:174)

More succinctly, the absence of the physical body online does not obfuscate the gender order but intensifies it. Users exaggerate their societal ideas of femininity and masculinity “in an attempt to gender themselves” (Gillis 2007:167). Though gendered behaviours are apparent and mirror those of offline society, the gender gap is perhaps closing.

With serious concerns about inequality of access and control at the wayside, some picture women in the driver’s seat of the social media revolution. Worldwide, statistics show that women outnumber men in their use of social networking technologies, including the time spent in social media space (Blakley 2011). If companies hire more women to reflect and connect to this market, and if new media manages to dominate old media, might women be influential in determining the media landscape? Blakley’s argument falls flat, concluding that future entertainment media will be data driven by ‘taste communities’ (aggregates of people determined by the interests and passions indicated by their ‘click stream’). Subsequently, if more women are online and being defined by their presumably invariable interests and pursuits, the old school demographic system

of the media will have to give way to lesser rigid ways of identifying ‘woman’. Blakley (2011) predicts ‘silly’ stereotypes will be dismantled in favour of the diffuse interests of women.

The suggestion that social media or CMC represent the end of gender is prematurely made in a few ways. Short of considering that individuals would even desire to be gender-less online, it ignores the pervasive influence of social structures. It also neglects embodied habits of behaviour that may resist even the most sensational technological revolutions. All texts carry markers that identify their authors to some extent. Much the way the physical voice denotes particular things about the speaker (e.g. a rasp suggests a history of tobacco use), signatures, nicknames or usernames, and lexical and style choices can all provide information about the offline identity of the user.

To further problematize the ‘end of gender,’ other research demonstrates that gender may be more interesting to play with than do away with altogether. Online interactions can upset hegemonic expectations for femininity (Young & D’Arcy 2010) or aim at faking gender altogether (e.g. Herring & Martinson 2004). In the 90s, *cyberfeminists* came to the fore as *cyber-* and *webgrrrls*, who claimed to manipulate technology in order to resist patriarchal traditions. The *grrrls* did not blame men for the gender imbalance—as much as they accused previous feminists of so doing—but rather focused on strengthening and enjoying their femininity (Gillis 2007). Cyberfeminism (and its affiliation with ‘girl power’³) has been criticized for its lack of political grounding. Nonetheless, the identity of a *cybergrrrl geek* is an interesting example of how the Internet allows female identities characterized by power and intelligence, if only for those women with the computer and media prowess and a desire to subvert the gender imbalance (DeLoach in Yates 1997). From what is demonstrated in CMC work on faked gender, unexpected gender, and empowered gender performances, the Internet does not mean the end of gender at all—nevermore is this the case than when offline anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

³ This analysis references *girl power* as a negative social construct, one that has been called the ‘insidious indoctrination’ of the construction and marketing of ‘girl.’

2.1.2 A Third Modality

The dividing line between what is offline and what is online has blurred. This phenomenon is representative of a technological shift that may be implicated in shifting social behaviour (Blakley 2011). In the 80s, the role of communicative skills was altered by the introduction of telecommunications, which required the ability to manage and adapt to diverse communication situations (Gumperz 1982). As traditional modes of interaction and relating to each other were changing, it became essential to be able to interact with a variety of people in order to acquire even a small measure of personal and social control. Old forms of plural society in which the family lived in island-like communities—surrounded by and supported by others of similar ethnic or class background—gave way to networks of people conglomerated in sprawling cities and suburbs. This effect of technology on social organizing is not new, and it foreshadows the current trend with social media. The widespread availability and commercialization of the Internet, and its resultant social networking boom⁴, illustrates how technology puts demands on communicative skills. New modes of computer-mediated interaction are habitual, instant and subject to the rapid evolution of technology. They are not relegated to the work place any longer. They also function on a personal level as resources to build and invest in an individual's socio-symbolic capital.

Technological specialization complicates life by erecting a 'communicative maze' in society where there are no previous value judgments (Gumperz 1982: 4). The principles of rhetoric to judge performance are in a state of negotiation as the technology evolves. For example, Facebook is both an effective way to communicate with others at the same time that it is in conflict with certain cultural imperatives for modesty and emotional discretion for young women in some conservative Arab countries (Leage & Chalmers 2010). However, despite concerns for social disinhibition, the Internet is not a Wild West of deviant behaviours, and individuals are expected to behave according to established norms. Conformity is rewarded (e.g. through membership in an online chat room), and threats to conformity are punished (e.g. videos on the multimedia site YouTube can be reported and removed for explicit or otherwise offensive content). Online interactions are especially guided by a social order in the case that individuals

⁴ MySpace, Friendster, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn were all established after 2001.

are not anonymous. The nymous online world has been identified as a third type of environment, one in which people are known to their audience and tend to express versions of their ‘hoped-for possible selves’ (Yurchisin et al. 2005). Relationships in this environment are ‘anchored’ because individuals can be held accountable for their behaviours (Zhao et al. 2008: 1831). This accountability ties individuals to presentations of themselves that are in line with normative expectations.

This new environment, the networked public, is characterized by four properties that set it apart from the offline, face-to-face interactions of public life: persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisibility (boyd 2007). In the networked public, even the most mundane of communications is recorded. Whereas records of face-to-face interactions are mostly relegated to official proceedings and traditional media, online interactions are not ephemeral. The extended existence of certain linguistic behaviour may have consequences for users (e.g. confrontational speech acts), especially when they are sought as ‘textual’ evidence. The second characteristic captures this possibility: search tools allow users to find records of past communication. In addition, boyd (2007) points out that such tools allow users to find others like them online, aiding in the development of virtual communities. Not only do records of online communication persist, they are replicable. This third characteristic makes written communication available to a mass audience immediately. Easily copied verbatim, reproductions of online communication can often be difficult to distinguish from the original. The copies provide easily accessible and persistent evidence of communication that might otherwise be attributed to hearsay or misinterpretation. And finally, the networked public is in constant flux, as a web of invisible audience members move into and out of contact with online texts. Online, it is impossible to ascertain who will be on the receiving end of a message. Not only is this the case because interactions are not face-to-face, but the persistence, replicability and searchability of online communication make it available and easy to intercept across time and place.

These characteristics fundamentally alter the social dynamics of interaction by complicating the ways in which people interact online (boyd 2007). The Internet, in an era of technological leapfrog, demands coordinating behaviours in both off- and online worlds. To further complicate the issue, this new landscape is implicated in new value judgments for behaviour and principles with which to judge performance. Due to the relative unfamiliarity of CMC and its ever-evolving nature, the rhetoric guiding online behaviour cannot rely on dogmatic

standards for tradition or cordiality. And unlike previous mediums that held narrow opportunity for inappropriate behaviour (e.g. the telephone), the Internet affords users control over content to a greater extent than ever before (Herring 2003). Ordinary users, who create posts, comments, notes, blogs, and more, heavily influence communicative content online. Particularly for linguistic behaviour, which is always implicated in acts of identity (Cameron 2007), the networked public offers a new environment with new possibilities, particularly for women.

Similar to the early assumptions about a leveled playing field on the net, CMC is often highly gender-stereotypic. The historical burden of women in the public sphere is that of the interloper: playing by the gatekeeper's rules, risking reputation, and keeping in the shadows to avoid persecution. Traces of this role linger on, as is demonstrated by the idea of the outspoken and assertive 'bitch' or the commonly held belief that women are not funny:

The humorist is at odds with the publicly espoused values of the culture, overturning its sacred cows, pointing out the nakedness of not only the Emperor, but also the politician, the pious, and the pompous. For women to adopt this role means that they must break out of the passive, subordinate position mandated for them by centuries of patriarchal tradition and take on the power accruing to those who reveal the shams, hypocrisies, and incongruities of the dominant culture.

(Walker 1988: 9)

History has women in the domesticated realm and men in the marketplace; and when in public, women have been in confrontation with the power of patriarchy. However, the networked public is one to which women are flocking. Girls especially have found a social vendor online in social networking sites, where the currency of their words is in high demand.

2.2 MEDIATED ADOLESCENCE

Social networks are unique among other web-based mediums. First, they allow individuals to create profiles that are public (or semi-public within a bounded system). Second, they display connections with other members of the community. And third, they allow users to find other users through a virtual networking system (DeAndrea et al. 2010: 429). For young people, the

Internet—and social networking sites in particular—has offered an unparalleled chance at self-expression (Herring 2004a). By 2005, the large-scale popularization of social networks like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter made them common destinations for adolescents. They are now essential to gaining status at school (boyd 2007) and persist as communicative resource particularly germane to the ever-evolving youth culture. Navigating social landscapes and fine-tuning interpersonal communication online is a tacit skill for the computer generation. Text messaging is akin to note passing and talking on the telephone. Blogging is simply a revamped and computerized version of writing in a journal.

Youth have been engaged in CMC from the beginning and relate to neither utopian nor dystopian notions of the cyber world, unlike older generations (Herring 2004a: 33). Instantaneous and habitual communication is not a novelty, rather a quotidian familiarity that supports their social world at a basic level. Teenagers have been crowned the “*defining users* of [the] digital media culture” [emphasis added] (Mazzarella & Atkins 2010) with almost three quarters of young people aged 12–17 online. As a result, youth are learning about each other, constructing a sense of self, making sense of cultural cues, negotiating status and organizing the social hierarchy on a daily basis. Social networking sites support these endeavors in their fundamental design: to share information and locate others in the social world. For this reason, youth online represent an especially active group of identity producers.

2.2.1 Adolescents Under the Linguistic Lens

Adolescents are considered major agents of linguistic change. Due to their transitional place in the social and cultural space of society, adolescents are well equipped to respond to changes in the conditions of life (Eckert 2003:391). Identity is especially salient for adolescents, as they move away from family-based identities toward ones based in a newly organized and influential peer social order. Based on offline research, adolescents generally aim to accommodate their larger peer network and negotiate their place in the emerging heterosexual market place (Eckert 2003). Whether in their self-presentation or self-disclosure, adolescents often follow cultural prescriptions for masculine and feminine behaviour and communication styles (Stern 2004). Moreover, the various styles are indicative of their place in the social order and their perspective from within it.

The outside influence on youth has been attributed to the ‘industrialization of adolescence,’ which Eckert (2003) describes as the ideology and social construction of a life stage characterized by social crises, psychological distress, the search for self and general unrest. The development of universal institutionalized secondary education has created a period in which individuals are categorically *teenagers*, although youth and adolescence are not highly salient life stages in all cultures (Bucholtz 2002). Bucholtz criticizes the concept of adolescence—code for growth, transition, and incompleteness—for its contrast to adulthood, which is associated with completeness (2002: 532). She praises views of youth culture that can account for both ideological realities and the flexibility of identities by drawing on theories of practice and performance (2002: 544).

The ‘institutionalization of adolescence’ has achieved the systematic programs and ‘routes’ of modern education. Universal standards for mandatory education have isolated young people from adult society by excluding them from the workforce and literally confining them to age-homogeneous, adult-dominated institutions (Eckert 2003). This results in a *social hothouse effect* (Eckert 2003: 382) as competition arises for resources, recognition, and power in the establishment of a peer-based social order. Such conditions intensify identity work, as individuals feverishly renegotiate roles and relations that are, most saliently, reorganized in terms of heterosociability. Within the education system in particular, adolescents are exposed to traditional gender roles and arrangements that reflect traditional concepts of romance and heterosexuality. The strict categorization of what is male and what is female is maintained via monitoring and policing activity, which is undertaken primarily by adults but also taken up amongst peers. Normative conditions are determined on the axis of gender and focus on language. Consider both the folk beliefs surrounding the use of the lexical item *like*, as well as the diatribe directed at the teenage girls ‘responsible’ for it (D’Arcy 2007).

2.2.2 Sticks & Stones: Slang, Labels, and Insults

The use of standard and vernacular language is particularly important for adolescents in constructing individual stylistic practice (Eckert 2003). Standard language has institutional status, meaning it is associated with education ideology, homogeneity, and conservatism. In contrast, vernaculars are associated with local orientation, diversity of contact, and anti-ideological

stances. For example, Eckert's (1989) research on jocks and burnouts showed how young women were the most adamant users of standard forms if they identified with the school's corporate culture, while the non-standard forms were most aggressively pursued by the girls who were not middle-class and who did not aspire to its cultural prescriptions (e.g. cheerleading). The general pattern has reflected boys using more nonstandard forms, expletives, and sexual references. However, the case of the girl burnouts demonstrates that the frequency of a linguistic feature does not necessarily indicate gender or even femininity, rather status and group identity. And because women may have to use linguistic extremes in order to solidify their place, the girl burnouts were more extreme in their adherence to the norms of burnout speech (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999: 195).

Labels produce social distinctions, for the existence of a term creates a category. The category is incorporated into discourse as a tool for social organizing. Thus, labels draw lines of difference and impart social meaning in their use (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003). For example, labels are imbued with gender. Hegemonic categories such as *jock* and *burnout* are primarily defined in terms of males. While bending gender labels is possible, it requires more social work (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999). For example, a female can be a jock but will likely have to demonstrate marked behaviour to gain acknowledgement of belonging to the category, and perhaps not without compromising notions of her sexuality or 'innate' femininity along the way.

Labels can be co-opted for subversion as well. Bucholtz's (1996, 1999) work with a group of girls who do not subscribe to prescriptive expectations of popularity and heterosocial success appropriates the term *nerd*, typically undesirable, for positive purposes. Some labels have specific male and female versions, while some are gender neutral. The dearth of labels available for the positive description of sexually active women demonstrates the ideological constraints built into the lexicon. Men are *studs*, *players*, *stallions*, *ladies' men*, *Romeos*, *Don Juans*, *Casanovas*, *lovers*, and more; while at her most triumphant, a woman is *sexy* (if she is also discrete). However, the lexicon for negative descriptions of sexually active women provides a litany of terms without noticeable reigns on creativity (consider *slut*, *whore*, *tramp*, *ho*, *bitch*, *hoochie*, *prostitute*, *nympho*, *floozy*, *minx*, *vamp*, *wench*, *Jezebel*, *sleaze*, *slag*, *sexpot*, *sperm receptacle*, and so on). This discrepancy adeptly shows how labels and language are important means for producing and maintaining social distinctions.

In her book about the sexual double standard, Tanenbaum (2010) discusses why girls use insults like *slut* against one another. Girls, complicit in the gender order that pits girls against girls, resort to competition as a result of the hegemonic circumstances outside of their control. *Slut* and other linguistic resources are used to combat the “pervasive idea that girls are inferior to boys, mixed messages about being both feminine and ambitious, [and] a ludicrously restrictive beauty idea” (2010: 200-1). This idea of beauty is, at its most extreme, a myth. True to competition, the constant comparison girls engage in achieves a “divide and conquer” socialization (Wolf 1990: 284), through which girls resort to verbal attacks and insults in substitute of physical fisticuffs. Even when seemingly cooperative, girl-girl linguistic interaction can be covertly competitive: developing “social hierarchies, manipulating exclusivity through the establishment of cliques, and through active participation in the heterosexual market” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 126).

2.2.3 Girls Online

Adolescence is a time when individuals struggle to find a place where they can express themselves; this has especially been the case for girls (Stern 2004). Due to the culturally defined and gender appropriate behaviour expected of them, girls learn from various sources (e.g. the media) that speaking out has consequences. Simone de Beauvoir described adolescence as a Bermuda Triangle for girls “who were the subjects of their own lives [and] become the objects of others’ lives” (1952). It is a basic conflict between their ‘autonomous selves’ and the need to be ‘feminine.’ This crisis of confidence is well documented (e.g. Pipher 1994, Tanenbaum 2000), yet Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) are careful to point out that this developmental trajectory has been composed primarily of statistics on white, middle-class girls. Representative of only a small segment of the population, this phenomenon and its resultant effects on girls and femininity is but a singular effect of gender ideology. Statistics drawn from other social categories are scarce but do suggest that experiences within the same life stage are not homogenous, thus underscoring the importance of the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities. Stokes (2010) discusses the ways in which black adolescent girls use the Internet and touches on themes that have not been included in previous work, such as hip hop music and culture. However, Stokes laments the observation that many black adolescent girls derive their identity and overall sense of self worth

from “their physical appearance, material possessions, and sexual appeal, which is defined within the constructs of males’ desire and fantasies.” She concludes with a suggestion that media be co-opted as a supportive and safe space for girls to become creators and agents of their own media with “transformative resistance strategies” that can challenge sexualization and hegemonic gender roles (2010: 64-5).

That girls can use the Internet to negotiate and explore identity in a public way is well documented in various fields, namely psychology and women’s studies (e.g. Mazzarella 2010). Linguistic and other resources have been documented as pieces in the construction of an electronic self (Miller 1995). Wynn and Katz (1997) described home pages as ‘windows’ into the selves constructed for random viewers. Chandler and Roberts-Young (1998) suggest the very public nature of these mediums actually encourages more thoughtful self-reflection and subsequent presentation. In a qualitative content analysis of home pages, Stern (1999) concluded that texts reflect the selves girls think they are, the selves they wish to become, and the selves they wish others to see. Home pages are used strategically to present information in the construction of a personal persona, but they are constrained by individual resources, personal histories, and the individual’s position in the social order.

Central to Stern’s analysis of girls’ identity practices online is *self-disclosure*. Stern describes self-disclosure as the presentation of personal information to others, which might include exchanges that refer to the individual discloser’s emotional and physical states, dispositions, or events in the past, present and future. In this sense, instances of self-disclosure are always functional: either by revealing a basic concern of the discloser or by accruing some benefit for her. They are valuable for their ability to (a) acquire social control, (b) achieve self-clarification, (c) accomplish self-expression, (d) attain social validation, and (e) develop relationships (2004: 221). These interactive strongholds (control, clarification, expression, validation, and relationship building) are imperative to navigating the social world of adolescence. Moreover, the interactional work undertaken on their behalf is valuable fodder for the sociolinguistic analysis of gender and identity.

Chapter 3 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Almost since its publication, Lave and Wenger's book (1991) has been instrumental for its introduction of the theoretical construct 'community of practice.' This concept originated as a means of examining a natural method of learning, which has been likened to an apprenticeship, based on ethnographic work with Vai tailors in Liberia. The apprentices learned their trade as "part of an ever-evolving integration into the more general practices of the community," (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999: 188), as opposed to as a set of isolated skills. Wenger set out three dimensions of a community of practice (CofP) (1998: 76):

- (a) mutual engagement
- (b) a joint negotiated enterprise
- (c) a shared practice of negotiable resources.

Mutual engagement involves regular interaction; for example, a marketing team that meets regularly to report on monthly progress, works intensively in smaller groups to finish a project, and runs into one another casually by the water cooler. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) call mutual engagement the basis for the relationships that make the CofP possible. A joint negotiated enterprise involves pursuing an interest in a domain, where members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. A joint enterprise allows individuals to build relationships that enable them to learn from each other (Wenger 2007). The last dimension, shared practice, encompasses resources accumulated over time that are used to negotiate meaning within the community. Such resources might include terminology and linguistic routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, symbols, and more (Wenger 2007).

The process of joining a new group involves learning to perform appropriately. Different expectations hold for different types of membership, where core, peripheral, and marginal members hold different positions depending on whether that position is temporary or dynamic. Over time, the mutual engagement in a joint enterprise results in a "shared repertoire of joint resources for negotiating meaning" (Wenger 1998:85). The community of practice notion, then,

“inevitably involves the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence” (Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999: 174). The CofP concept was introduced to language and gender research and redefined as:

An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

(Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464)

The original notion of a CofP was developed as a theory of learning, and does not apply the same way in sociolinguistic research. For example, the idea of an apprenticeship is not considered a core feature of a CofP within the sociolinguistic tradition. Moreover, the idea of a joint enterprise or shared goal is also problematic from a sociolinguistic perspective; “it seems likely that what precisely constitutes a shared goal or joint enterprise will have to be specified more fully in order for the notion of the CofP to be useful” outside theories of learning (Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999: 175-176). Finally, the distinction between members (core, periphery, and marginal) has not been applied as rigorously in social sciences research; Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999) believe the distinction has yet to be shown as salient in synchronic studies of linguistic behaviour (1999: 182).

Despite these differences, this framework has been important for its emphasis on both establishing identities and managing social relations, particularly for language and gender work situated within aggregates of people. As Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) outlined, the CofP recognizes that gender is neither fixed nor pre-existing. This framework also considers how gender interacts with other aspects of social identity, and challenges earlier assumptions and generalizations about gender variation, which were often based on studies of small, Western, white and middle-class populations. On this note, CofP researchers undertook studies of local communities across a range of social settings, countries and languages.

Crucially, the CofP framework allowed researchers to account for variability in (gendered) identity practices by focusing on the constructive practices of a group (Bergvall 1999: 278). Intra-group variation is not a case of normative and deviant behaviour but the mutability of various gendered linguistic display. This approach, with its attention to detail, allowed

researchers to discuss subtle differences and unexpected instances of ‘woman’ and ‘man,’ ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity.’ Moreover, the CofP framework is well suited to address complexity, flux, and contested identities, and has been especially able to explain the construction and enactment of gender in studies among adolescents (e.g. Bucholtz 1996).

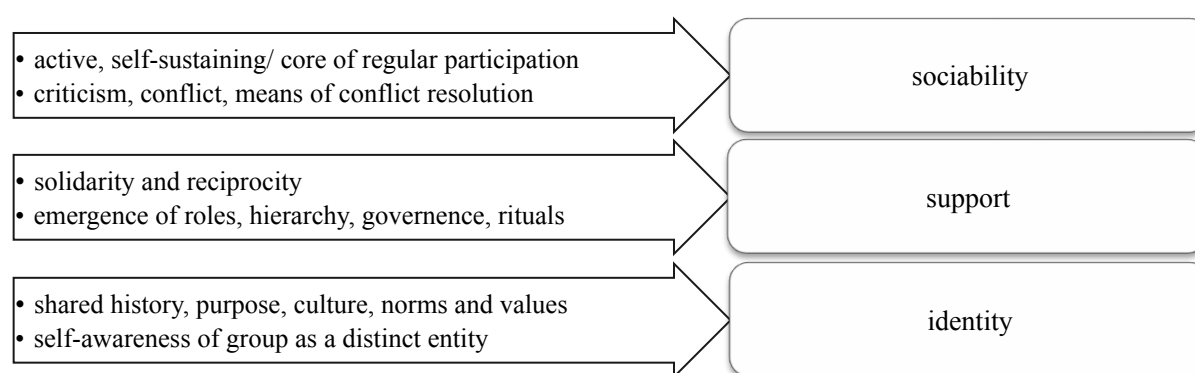
3.1 COMMUNITIES (VIRTUALLY) RE-IMAGINED

Two decades old, the CofP framework has undergone adaptations to meet the requirements of various disciplines and research sites. Particularly for computer-mediated environments without delineated space and embodied users, the idea of a community demands a tailored definition. The earliest research suggested that online communities were less authentic for their lack of a contained place. *Imagined communities* (Anderson 1991) were proposed: a modern day collective of people that does not rely on daily face-to-face interactions. This idea was extended to *virtual communities* (e.g. Paolillo 1999), which develop around a shared cultural text, experience, discourse, and identity. These, as opposed to cultural artefacts, create a sense of belonging. In contrast to the traditional idea of community, bonds are created through the evolution and maintenance of ‘functional communicative spaces’ in virtual communities (Bell 2001). In Paolillo’s (1999) investigation of language variation and virtual speech communities, members on a specific ‘channel’ participating in Internet Relay Chat were considered part of a virtual community. Participants were widely distributed geographically and interacted principally online, yet their mutual engagement and shared norms bound them together as a community.

The virtual community is relevant across disciplines, and various descriptions accommodate this fact. In social science research, the term refers to a group of people who associate themselves over time with a computer-mediated environment. This idea of community emphasizes the social behaviour of a group. In the humanities, the phenomenon of online group formation is analyzed with historical and theoretical implications of the terms. And in technology-focused fields, a virtual community is simply the technology that stages and influences the formation and activity of online groups (e.g. listserv). Collectively, these definitions capture shared criteria (detailed in Table 1). Most importantly, virtual communities have a shared sense of identity, the existence of norms or protocols, and regular interaction of some duration that takes place over the Internet through a common mechanism. The term

‘virtual (or online) community of practice’ is used throughout this work to reflect the criteria in Table 1 as a community of practice with an emerging shared cultural text, experience, discourse, and identity on Facebook. The term ‘virtual community of practice’ is meant to emphasize the social behaviour of the group discussed in this paper. While informed by the original notion of a CofP, it does not intend to refer to the exact criteria of Wenger’s (1998) construct. The acronym (CofP), which is namely associated with the original theory of learning and offline communities, will not be used to describe the virtual community of practice discussed in this paper.

Table 1. Criteria for an online community of practice



(Herring 2004b: 14-5)

If it is assumed that discourse shapes social reality then the discursive practices of a certain group make up their partial reality, or what constitutes a community (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant & Kelly 2003: 174). For example, Vickery (2010) describes how girls online use home pages and blogs as a space to negotiate their identities, and subsequently construct communities. Such communities are fluid, temporal, and evolve in response to the redefinitions of its members, who develop norms for behaviour around discursive constructs, such as gender (Baym 1998: 185).

Language plays a key role in the creation and maintenance of social groups, including adolescent peer groups (Eckert 2003). Linguistic behaviour taken to be representative of specific groups is bound up in ideological and hegemonic constraints, which contribute to group discourse and the group’s cultural history. The specific linguistic resources available to individuals are informed by these sweeping influences. However, the variation that ultimately results, particularly intra-group, represents individual attempts at performativity and style. CMC is a rich

site for investigation due to its collection of abundant and enduring linguistic behaviour. It represents a new modality, one with various contexts yet to be investigated. Adolescent girls are a particularly interesting group, for their institutional and historical place in society, as well as for their proclivity for social networking. Facebook is especially popular among older girls: 89% of 15- to 17-year-old American girls have a profile on a site like Facebook (Lenhart 2009). Mass-mediated ideas of '*girl power*' have found social tender in a depoliticized post-feminism push. Bra burning does not hold the same symbolic power it did four decades ago, but Buffy the Vampire Slayer acquired a cult following by kicking ass in stilettos. The sexualization of '*girl*' and '*feminine*' is pervasive. How do girls today mediate between a history that denies them a public voice and a reality that is increasingly public? This paper will address whether their interactions online are largely reproductions of the gender order, and if girls subvert these expectations. The analysis is located within a virtual community in order to find patterns in specificity and context.

3.1.1 The Facebook Community

Compared to the surfeit of work into CMC and technologically mediated 'spaces' for identity construction and interaction, Facebook features less often under the microscope, particularly in sociolinguistics. It represents a new site for inquiry, as well as an interesting medium for its hybrid of technological features. The combination achieves a unique, multimodal social network that has gained excessive popularity. According to Herring (2004b), CMC researchers should specify the type of space from which they are collecting data, keeping in mind that the design and format of language affects interaction. Eight factors characteristic of Facebook as a communicative medium are delineated in Table 2 for contextual purposes in order to set out some of the case boundaries of this particular community:

Table 2. Case boundaries on Facebook

<i>factors</i>	<i>characteristics</i>
participation structure	asynchronous and synchronous
participant characteristics	nonymous, potentially infinite
purpose	information sharing, social networking
topic	unlimited
tone	varied, dependent on the frame of an interaction
activity	responding, commenting, announcing, explaining
norms	emergent
code	English (for the purposes of this study)

(Adapted from West 2010: 6)

The variety of communicative avenues set out in Table 2 illustrates how Facebook supports multi-modal interactions across various contexts. It is suggested that norms include expectations for responding to members' updates and creating posts for others to respond to (West 2010:8); however, due to the medium's short history and the flux of technological advancement, expectations for Facebook behaviour are still negotiable. The norms characteristic of this case will be addressed in Chapter 5. West (2010: 8) argues that posts often follow a topic flow limited by the texts around them, but this paper will show that this does not mean topics are narrowly pursued. The participants in this study use Facebook to discuss a variety of topics. The present analysis will be concerned primarily with the activity on participants' Walls, which includes Status Updates (personalized posts generated by users), and other members' comments and responses. Primarily then, the analysis is concerned with linguistic behaviour and social interaction that is guided by the asynchronous and anonymous aspects of the medium.

Originally established at Harvard as a network for intra-campus communicating, the display of real names and institutional affiliations makes Facebook fully anonymous (Zhao et al. 2008: 1820). Recently customized privacy options further make anonymity between users a predominant characteristic of Facebook; for example, users can control what content is available to specific audiences. Users can also block individuals from viewing their profiles. Unlike other CMC mediums, the network of people a Facebook user interacts with represents a complicated constellation of social relationships that fall again within nested networks. This makes Facebook a virtual community that overlaps and is anchored to a variety of offline social spheres.

The anonymity of Facebook contributes to social work and linguistic behaviour that is highly motivated by positive interaction, as people are constrained by an accountability to their

networked friends. Deviant behaviour may have ‘real’ life consequences when the virtual community is also connected to offline social circles. Thus, an important aspect of the Facebook environment is the accomplishment of positive facework, according to West (2010: 4). She describes how Facebookers use local texts in order to narrate something about the self and to create a sense of in-group. The result is a loosely associated community that relies on intertextuality for positive facework. The structure of Facebook prompts intertextuality, as users reuse and recycle the words and frames from earlier texts. Norms include the presentation and maintenance of an online ‘face’ and the frequent tribute to other members’ ‘faces’ in order to stimulate community interaction (West 2010: 16-7). With a high degree of control over their pages, users work tirelessly to present, maintain and ratify their and others’ positive face. For example, emotionally exaggerated greetings (e.g. ‘hey!’ ‘what’s up!?’) paper users’ Walls, and offensive, unnecessary, and unwanted posts can be removed. Users even engage in virtual ‘track covering’ by undoing actions or removing notice of having undertaken certain actions.

Facebook is not associated with highbrow language. West describes linguistic behaviour on the site as informal and ‘youthful’ dialogue that is social in function and light in tone, with shortened syntax and phatic, hasty messages (2010: 20). Facebook exchanges are often made to resemble excited speech via the use of repetitive letters and punctuation. West sees this as “crucial to the heartbeat of the Facebook community” and its shared initiative to maintain relationships (2010: 21). West even argues that Facebook is not equipped for ‘serious talk’ about potentially face-threatening topics (2010: 24). The discussion in Chapter 5 will account for data that is contrary to West’s assertion. However, it is true that Facebook linguistic style and the availability of certain functions (e.g. the ‘Like’ button) make opportunities for positive politeness and relationship maintenance rife on the site. The notion of positive facework will not be discarded, as Facebook is a social medium manipulated by social actors. Individuals in this analysis will be referred to as *speakers* even though they are not engaging in speech as it is traditionally imagined. Other potential labels (like *users* or *typers*) denigrate the social work these individuals are doing as speakers under sociolinguistic analysis. Without ranking speech over writing, the term *speakers* better captures the tradition of sociolinguistic inquiry, as well as pays homage to the qualities of *speech* entailed in computer-mediated linguistic behaviour. Ultimately, this analysis will attempt to show that the linguistic behaviour on Facebook is socially complex and reflects both dominant representations of girlhood and the autonomy of individuals.

Chapter 4 METHODOLOGY

*“A male colleague challenged me when he scoffed, ‘Talking on the phone is hardly ethnography.’
But how could it not be when a large part of what girls do is to talk one-on-one, and at great
length?”*

- Women Without Class, Julie Bettie (2003: 28)

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The opening quote to this section illustrates the preference in traditional social sciences for quantitative ‘hard’ data. Bettie’s ethnographic work on girls, race, and identity involved great amounts of time spent simply talking with her participants. She concluded, “Since girls do ‘girl talk,’ often in sets of twos and threes, this was equally ethnography, as she was ‘doing’ high school girl identity” (2003: 28). Web-based social networking has met, if not overtaken, phone talking as an important part of ‘high school girl identity.’ Like Bettie, I set out to *do* such an identity by observing the interactions of a group of high school girls on their Facebook profiles, much the way teen girls ‘creep’ on Facebook by observing their friends’ interactions. The result is effectively a case study that borrows from participant observation and ethnographic tool kits to construct a methodology suitable for this novel research inquiry. This collaboration of methods, which includes observation, a questionnaire, and discourse analysis within an interactional sociolinguistic framework, leads to a “more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities” (Golafshani 2003: 604).

4.1 DESIGNING A COLLABORATIVE METHODOLOGY

This paper satisfies case study characteristics, as it is an “exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or case [...] over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell 1998: 63). Moreover, a case study is an “investigation into a contemporary phenomenon” (computer-mediated gender and identity) “within its real-life context” (on Facebook) (Yin 1989 in van Lier 2005: 196). The multiple sources of evidence include a questionnaire to solicit general attitudes towards the participants’ use of Facebook, brief discussions with a participant liaison and some members in the community, Status Updates, other Wall activities including comments and responses, exchanges posted under images, and other

information provided on participants' profiles. It is bound by a two-month data collection period within a single network of Friends on Facebook. However, true to van Lier's (2005) discussion about the complications in identifying case 'boundedness,' the parameters of this case cannot be strictly delineated.

The networked, persistent and cumulative nature of Facebook interactions makes determining the bounds of this case difficult for two reasons. First, the potential for intervening third parties to contribute to data is unavoidable; however, the analysis focuses on core and periphery members in an attempt to create case boundedness. The original five girls who agreed to participate are considered core members; however, within their group there is a hierarchy of roles, as well as within their Facebook networks more broadly. Periphery members are individuals who are active within the girls' Facebook network, and who later gave third party consent to include some of their posts in the analysis. This delineation of members does not reflect Wenger's (1998) description of dynamic and temporary members. Second, the fact that Facebook Walls function as cumulative histories of interaction allowed data to be collected beyond the temporal scope of the data collection period. In other words, the medium allowed for the collection of data that was *generated* over a four-month period within an *actual* two-month period of time. The four-month history these data make up is arbitrary in terms of the community and simply a result of how efficiently I was able to observe, document, and analyze data within the time frame of this project. To meet van Lier's (2005) assertion that a case "must be the unit of analysis, in which there is a 'heart' or focus of the study," this study's case centers on participant's Status Updates and Wall interactions as single utterances or turns (Miles & Huberman 1994: 25-27 in van Lier 2005).

Perhaps most characteristic of case studies is their contextual nature, making boundedness and the degree of intervention two problems in designing case studies (van Lier 2005: 197). While the issue of boundedness was subsequently a result of the ethical protocol for this project, as well as its scope, the degree of intervention was designed to reflect ethnography of communication and interactional sociolinguistic frameworks. This research involved little to no intervention, as participants were free to interact within their Facebook network undisturbed, while I observed their interactions the way they were intended to be received—from the other side of a computer screen.

Interactional sociolinguistics focuses on how discourse is produced by culture. Gender, in this framework, is often equated to a cultural construct, making comparisons between men and women commonly the point of inquiry. Interactional sociolinguists, assuming culture underlies discourse, consider how it shapes language use. In contrast, an ethnography of communication framework focuses on how individuals contribute to culture, in other words, as discourse producers. This framework, similar to interactional sociolinguistics, puts analytic emphasis on discourse; however, its origins in anthropology put its focus on understanding discourse from the perspective of individuals within the culture by considering speakers' own systems of discursive classification (Bucholtz 2003). The questionnaire employed at the beginning of the data collection process, as well as short discussions with participants, and observations of participants' Walls constitute the ethnographic aspects of this project. The use of discourse analysis notions and methods (e.g. positioning, framing, intersectionality, indexicality, and so on) represent the interactional sociolinguistic tradition.

Ethnography, in a sense, is case study when it satisfies the requirements for a case (van Lier 2005: 197), including a contemporary phenomenon, a real-life context, a bounded system where phenomenon and context are difficult to distinguish, and data collection involving multiple sources of evidence. Data collection varies depending on the emphasis and extent of the methodology. For example, more observations are incorporated into ethnography, while more interviews cater to grounded theory; only interviews are used in phenomenology; and multiple forms of data collection characterize case study (Creswell 1998: 64). The focus of this case, gender and identity on Facebook, deserves study for its uniqueness, thus making it an intrinsic case study (Creswell 1998:62). However, the use of observation, consideration of discourse from speakers' perspectives, and qualitative and interpretive methods are in line with the ethnography of communication framework, which concerns itself primarily with local understandings of cultural practice (Bucholtz 2003). Lastly, the discourse analytic methods used to construct a narrative about gender and culture as it pertains to the linguistic behaviour of these participants are borrowed from interactional sociolinguistics. By these considerations, this research is an example of an ethnographic case study in the sociolinguistic tradition of analyzing gendered identity.

4.2 CREEPIN' A LA HIGH SCHOOL GIRL

The social meaning of online data is not readily transparent, as text is left *in situ* and to the devices of audience interpretation. This is a reality of linguistic research into computer-mediated discourse. Accordingly, this work aims at “thick description” (Geertz 1973), that is, one that explains both behaviour and context, such that the behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider. In this way, the description will elucidate the context and relevance of specific phenomena in constructing gendered identity online. The relationship between linguistic variants and a speaker’s style has been investigated via qualitative methodologies, which consider style as a composite of components like lexical choice or a particular vowel realization. These components are socially meaningful, dependent on other variables, and in flux (Drager 2009: 10). The current methodology has been designed to approach ‘components of style’ qualitatively by seeking out linguistic resources employed in performing (any number of) femininities online, and asking what factors may influence style, including gender ideology, local or community norms, and interactive contexts.

This methodology is also designed to accommodate traits of CMC and does not rely strictly on other theoretical approaches. While the premise that word choice or linguistic behaviour is potentially relevant beyond the requirements of grammar remains intact (in other words, that it has pragmatic purpose), the analysis also takes technological affordances of CMC systems into account and addresses common phenomena of the medium (e.g. the option to ignore your interlocutors entirely). Due to the relative novelty of social networking sites in sociolinguistic analysis, I emphasize interpretive methods rather than rely on survey techniques to enumerate behaviours, although I do not neglect quantitative evidence. Moreover, due to the highly contextualized nature of speech interactions, generalizing about abstractions like gendered identity based on a gross variable (e.g. sex) is problematic (Cameron 2003). Primarily, I am concerned with identifying tendencies in language structure and linguistic behaviour that—although produced subconsciously—are not sufficiently free of broader phenomena, as this work is informed in part by the interactional sociolinguistic tradition. First, I aim to find typical instances of situations or key lexical choices that are important given consideration of broader factors (e.g. normative femininity). Second, these instances are never considered separate from the backdrop of culture. Third, the possibility of speaker autonomy is not neglected in

interpreting the participants' linguistic behaviour on Facebook. And fourth, the use of a questionnaire, brief interactions with some participants, and observations of participants' Facebook profiles in general contribute details and background information about whom the participants see themselves and present themselves as online. Collectively, this methodology allows me to provide an informed narrative about a small community of girls on Facebook, and reveal insights into their negotiation of gender, technology, and adolescent culture.

4.2.1 Instruments and Participant Observation

There were five core participants in this project—Finn, Teddy, Stella, TJ, and Jacquie⁴—all of whom are 16-year-old girls in a small British Columbian city, with the exception of Jacquie, who is 17-years-old. Participation included completing a questionnaire (Appendix 1) and joining the Facebook group created for this project (Appendix 4 details the steps taken in creating this group). The questionnaire's primary goal was to determine if the girls recognize Facebook as a useful social tool and the extent to which they feel interactions are representative of identity. Originally, six potential participants filled out the questionnaire, but only five completed it in its entirety and continued participating in this research. The Facebook group created for this research functioned primarily to disseminate information to participants about the project. As group administrator, I was able to view members' Facebook interactions. As members, participants could potentially contribute to content on the group page, such as posing a question to the researcher or making comments to other members. However, they never did: the project was not presented to them as an interactive venture with the researcher and they already had access to one another's Facebook pages.

Without contributing to the interaction, I observed participants' Facebook profiles primarily to collect Status Updates (SUs), but also the comments and interactions that are generated from these updates and other shared information. I copied interactions from the site and entered them into a spreadsheet, where identifying information was anonymized. I also took notes throughout the data collection process to record patterns I observed (e.g. in topic), as well as indications of cultural themes (e.g. normative femininity), and various questions that came to

⁴ All names are pseudonyms and all identifying information has been altered to protect participant anonymity.

mind while observing participants within this network. I created a spreadsheet for each girl, as well as for miscellaneous interactions involving several individuals. Each spreadsheet was organized to categorize different phenomena, and collectively they constitute a database of Facebook posts, responses, and interactions spanning two months of data collection.

Interactions from the girls' friends make up some of this analysis. Due to the networked nature of this site, these third party interactions make up a valuable part of the community. For this reason, periphery members appear in the analysis. If a specific third party interaction was deemed particularly exemplary of a girl's linguistic style or some pertinent phenomenon, I made an effort to include it in the analysis. Efforts were made to replicate the exchange as closely to its original version as possible by describing the context, the individual's relationship to the girls, and paraphrasing. However, at times this was not sufficient and third party permission was gained from seven of the girls' friends (5 females, 2 males) during the data collection process under restricted terms. These terms ranged from only using a specific interaction to having access to a third party's Wall and the whole of her Facebook interactions. The terms depended on the third parties' preference, their interest in the project, and how comfortable they were with sharing their Facebook interactions. These concerns are discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

The periphery members' role in the community as it is illustrated here is a result of being involved with the girls on Facebook, as well as their willingness to participate in this project. Nonetheless, the five girls are the pivots, the community representatives, from which various interactions spin off. Their five Walls alone were sufficient to provide a thick description of this community: to watch their interactions entailed the interactions of hundreds of their networked friends. In this way, I *did* high school girl on Facebook, browsing from Wall to Wall, observing the messages that plastered them, and seeing how other members in the community reacted to them. Due to the supremely networked nature of the site, this method reaped a limitless number of linguistic acts from a wide net of teens online.

4.3 ANALYSIS STRUCTURE

Observing participants' interactions was mainly concerned with identifying linguistic patterns for later content and interactional analysis. Patterns were identified at both stylistic and structural levels. Stylistic patterns include vernacular and non-standard forms, slang, and the *flavour* of

Facebook interactions more generally. Structural patterns include such phenomena as emoticons, abbreviations or shortened forms, hedging modifiers, intensifiers, and discourse markers.

I organize a content analysis around SUs, taking cues from the semantic currency of certain patterns. The Status Update function is a foundation of Facebook, which has brought *self-disclosure* in the third person to new heights. In no other context is it socially acceptable for a person to describe herself in the form *self + is awesome*. The structure of Facebook, which tags each SU with the speaker's first and last name, encourages this novel linguistic style, lending emphasis to the *self-disclosure* aspect of SUs as statements of how the individual sees herself and how those in her network receive her. Further, this analysis demonstrates that SUs function in varied and socially complex ways. The SUs collected ($N = 274$) are organized into four types, not unlike speech acts, that I label *fishing*, *gossiping*, *tacking*, and *soapboxing*.

Fishing posts, similar to Stern's description of *self-disclosure*, function to build and develop relationships and to attain social validation (2004: 221). Crucial to this analysis and Facebook interactions, *fishing* occurs with the motivation to engage others. Facebook is an ideal place to *fish*, as the structure of the site encourages comments and responses as acts of social maintenance (West 2010). *Fishing* updates usually reference an emotional state, event, or person (often the speaker herself), while strategically leaving information absent so as to engage the audience (e.g. '*people sometimes tsk tsk*' [Finn/SU/f]). These posts function to foster social validation because they explicitly invite questions, encouragement, reinforcement, or revelations of common ground between the speaker and the audience. Indications that the audience accepts or supports these posts are evidence of the social validation process at work. In contrast, indications that an individual disagrees with or does not like one of these posts, or say, a speaker's *cast*, demonstrate how negative facework can occur on Facebook (most often this was expressed by commenting with '*gay*' on the speaker's post). *Fishing* might also include posing questions (direct or indirect—musing, so to speak), plan making, and quests for advice or reactions. *Fishing* posts might also include references to the speaker's current activity (e.g. '*the bachelor + popcorn! mmm*' [T.J./SU/f]).

A second type of SUs is simply labelled *gossiping*. These posts include reports about other individuals involving details unconfirmed as true (e.g. '*Connor's a whore :)*' [Stella/SU/g/]). This category has been included to reflect what general commentary describes of

Facebook interactions. However, later analysis will address whether such commentary is misdirected.

The third type, *tacking*, includes SUs that are purely intended to exchange factual information and do not require a response. Expectations for response are also lowered. These posts are largely devoid of social complexity and are pragmatic in nature: a PIN or phone number, Twitter address, or city name. Such information *tacked* on the speaker's Wall is likely useful for some members of the audience. In comparison, information that indicates a speaker's current state (e.g. '*showering*') does not constitute *tacking*, as it is not immediately relevant to individuals in the Facebook network. Such posts constitute instead *fishing*: whether provocative or mundane in nature, they encourage reactions and push boundaries or simply seek out like-minded individuals respectively.

The fourth type of SUs is categorized as *soapboxing*. These posts are akin to instances of *self-disclosure* that function for self-clarification or self-expression (Stern 2004: 221). In contrast to *fishing*, they do not appear to necessitate or invite a response. Examples of *soapboxing* include quoted lyrics from songs or poetry, expressions of a certain sentiment, moral or value, and utterances that position the speaker somehow. In other words, *soapboxing* paints the speaker in some light: speaker versus other, speaker as leader, speaker as martyr, or speaker as particularly romantic, besotted, brave, or informed. *Soapboxing* might include more direct statements of identity, much like branding. For example, a SU that reads, '*Mike's Hard Lemonade* ♥' indicates the speaker identifies with (if not simply likes) the beverage brand and what might be associated with it—drinking, hot summer days, or holidays.

The content analysis of SUs aids in describing how participants are managing their contribution to their Facebook Walls. The comments and interactions that SUs generate provide ample linguistic behaviour that is revealing of community norms, participant quirks, and sociolinguist phenomena that is best addressed at an interactional level.

In opposition to the assumption that Facebook is a shallow pool for artificial interactions, the analysis presented here demonstrates that Facebook hosts interactions that are, in fact, characterized by relative complexity, especially in light of the communicative 'limits' computer-mediated interaction supposedly necessitates. What might first be construed as 'empty' linguistic behaviour can actually be explained as intentional moves imbued with expectations for reciprocity (and so validation or in-group establishment) or conflict (thus, negotiation,

repositioning, labeling). Taken together, content and interactional analysis will be used to discuss how Facebook functions as a virtual community for Finn, Teddy, Stella, TJ, and Jacquie. Their linguistic patterning and discourse behaviour functions collectively to establish a shared structure, meaning, and norms amidst regular participation and engagement online. At the discourse level, interactional analysis also facilitates commentary on broader themes, such as language and gender ideology. From this perspective, my analysis will provide insights into how the participants negotiate issues between their social world and their agency as individual social actors.

4.4 THE GIRLS

“. . .yes we do use Facebook a lot. When we have parties and such we always post all the pictures on Facebook and everyone looks at them. Everyone comments and such and we all talk about it at school if we have seen a certain picture or so. Especially with like party events. That's how you get huge parties going. Just invite everyone off from Facebook. Also relationships. If it's on Facebook it's super serious and then when someones [sic] relationship status changes IT'S A SUPER BIG DEAL. So the answer to your question is yes. We use and talk about Facebook a lot. Hah.”

- Finn

The following vignettes are designed to provide supplementary information about the participants in order to contextualize individual and cultural understandings of this case. They are to be taken as representative of the participants as teenage girls, not detail-specific renderings of their actual identities. The details illustrate how the girls described themselves and their interests in the questionnaire (see Appendix 2), on their Facebook profiles, and how I came to know them through the participant liaison and by my own observations. Some of the information has been changed or modified in order to protect anonymity.

4.4.1 Finn

Finn is the common thread that ties together the core participants, as she was the original person I approached during the recruitment process, and was thus responsible, as a participant liaison, for contacting friends she thought would be interested in the study. As a hardworking student interested in both sports and arts, she had access to a variety of different friends, who eventually

made up the participants. At the time of this project, she was competing in the Miss Riversdale Pageant with Jacquie and Teddy. She is a strong athlete who is often playful and upbeat in nature. Finn has a long-term and long-distance boyfriend, who, as will be seen, is the muse for many of her SUs. By her own description, her Facebook interactions communicate what she looks like, how she feels, and whom she most often speaks with. While she is the shared factor amongst the core participants, she is no juggernaut on Facebook, where her linguistic action is neither particularly prevalent nor exceptional relative to expectations for online ‘girl’ behaviour. For example, while crude language does feature within her networked interactions from other individuals, Finn herself fulfills more normative expectations for female linguistic behaviour. Finn’s strongest connection is to Teddy, who features most often within Finn’s Facebook profile.

4.4.2 Teddy

Much like Finn, Teddy’s linguistic work on Facebook is not, at first glance, exceptional. In terms of hetero-normative behaviour, Teddy tows the line with posts about romantic love and life lessons narrowly ambiguous enough to avoid directly referencing her boyfriend. Her involvement in the Miss Riversdale Pageant fuels much of the content on her Wall, including SUs to announce competition events and ticket vendors, and photo albums detailing behind the scenes minutiae. Overall, her linguistic style affects a behind-the-scenes type of girl, which matches her daily interests at school. For example, she manages the boys’ lacrosse team, and simply describes her interests as ‘exercising and socializing;’ yet, she has a varied musical taste for reggae pioneer Bob Marley, country crooner George Canyon, and fallen pop prince, Chris Brown, who is most famously known for his physical abuse of his pop star girlfriend.

4.4.3 Stella

Stella is an outlier in relation to the rest of the girls. If hegemonic femininity is the yardstick, then Stella does not measure up with her linguistic behaviour on Facebook that is often a philippic against her interlocutors. Largely aimed at boys in jest, her utterances provide colour and fuel the suspicions that social media and ‘girls today’ are equally at risk for degradation. Nonetheless, Stella is not immune to the cultural taste for romantic love, and like the other girls she participates in school organizations. She describes her interests in mundane terms: hanging out, relaxing, watching movies, and ‘occasional’ partying; although a sample of her photo album

captions includes in no particular order: “*just another drunk night,*” “*shots,*” “*awww yeea, shot gunnin’ yeeahh,*” and “*never gonna drink again.*” She says, in line with her linguistic personality on Facebook, that her profile shows “everything” that she does. She posts what she “wants to,” including where she goes and with whom she goes there. Stella is the most voracious user of profanity and slang of the core participants, a characteristic that suits her tell-it-like-it-is linguistic style.

4.4.4. T.J.

T.J. is the group jock. While the other girls are involved in sports, T.J.’s athleticism is a defining part of her identity. The majority of her linguistic behaviour on Facebook is dedicated to her field hockey season, including the content of her photo albums, and SUs detailing tournaments, road trips, games, and injuries. She lists her favourite professional teams on her profile, with links to star players’ web pages. The person T.J. most wants to meet is Marti LaBeouf, the famed and heavily endorsed female star of the professional field hockey world. Linguistically, T.J.’s style is moderate compared to the other girls. For example, while she swears, she does not direct crude language to anyone in particular—unlike Stella. But her utterances are noticeably devoid of the intensifiers and qualifiers that pepper both Finn and Teddy’s language. While Teddy is likely to peg her comments with diminutives like *silly*, *kiddo*, *honey*, and *gurl*, T.J. does not use address terms, and she opts for more direct comments without mitigators (e.g. ‘*illl makee a man! outta you !*’ [T.J./R/F]).

4.4.5 Jacquie

Jacquie, at 17, is the oldest participant in the group. Unlike the other girls who are all in grade 11 at MacIsle Secondary⁶, Jacquie attends nearby Farvale High. While she knows the other girls by virtue of being in shared social circles, she does not regularly see all of them in her offline life. Jacquie is most strongly connected to Finn, her neighbour, and also participates in the Miss Riversdale Pageant with her and Teddy. She belongs to the school newspaper, a jogging club, and attends dance class. Her linguistic activity on Facebook is subdued. As the least active poster,

⁶ All place names are pseudonyms.

Jacquie's Facebook profile is modest by all accounts, including her use of slang, aggressive language, and her willingness to engage in conflict—bluffed or authentic.

4.5 CLASS

Julie Bettie identifies *class* as the neglected variable within the ethnographic tradition (2003). Bettie considers girls' experience of class difference and identity by documenting what she calls their "common-sense" categories (2003: 7)—not unlike Drager's (2009) concept of *stance*—created and applied to understanding sameness and difference among peers. In other words, an individual's experience of class supports their taken-for-truth renderings of who they are and where they belong in the world. Without interviewing all of the girls directly and at length, this study does not attempt to identify their 'common-sense' categories in detail. However, ideas about how they perceive sameness and difference between themselves and their peers can be roughly inferred from a sketch of their schools and hometown.

All of the girls live on the lower-income shore of Riversdale—the Oldtown. The Oldtown is stigmatized for its blue-collar residents, dilapidated properties, small, family-run businesses, and gang activity. It is also disconnected from the rest of the city by a bridge. Both Farvale High and MacIsle Secondary are known for their diverse student bodies from single-parent homes living at low-level socio-economic standards. Shared assumptions about this area of the city (e.g. it is the 'rough' side of town) normalize class inequality, hence institutionalizing ideas about class and regulating class 'performances' (Bettie 2003: 51). In other words, while class is undoubtedly a material matter, class specific styles of speech, dress, activity, and so on may constitute a performance, much the same as gender. Other ethnographic-related work (e.g. Bettie 2003, Drager 2009, Mendoza-Denton 2008) has incorporated analyses of various resources for style, from variations in vowel realization to the length of eyeliner. While this study follows in the theoretical footsteps of such work, the scope of the project does not allow for such detailed analysis. For this reason, the variation and manipulation of non-linguistic phenomena are mostly set aside in order to give currency to linguistic phenomena. However, certain non-linguistic descriptors (e.g. class, hobbies, sexuality) deserve attention.

While the girls all live in the predominantly working-class Oldtown, their interactions on Facebook reveal symbolic class distinctions in 'cultural capital' between the working- and middle-class divide the girls seem to straddle. Their *class* on Facebook is performed 'up' in their

portrayals of life as a ‘party,’ with plenty of leisure time to spend with each other, acquiring material possessions, snapping pictures, and playing or discussing sports. Bettie (2003: 150) links sports to upwardly mobile girls from working-class families, who hold athleticism as hope for a college scholarship and a better life. Despite their upwardly mobile performances, most of the girls hold part-time jobs in the service industry. Much like the working class girls in Bettie’s (2003) research who are concerned with education, employment, and avoiding exploitive relationships, the Facebook girls are not geared towards domestic futures. All but two of the girls’ parents are divorced, and neither Teddy nor Stella sees their father. Their mothers are employed in the service industry as waitresses and childcare workers, or in health care and education as support workers. Jackie’s father works in the service industry as well, and T.J.’s father is a labourer.

All of the girls identify as white⁷ and primarily take up the normative roles of middle-class, white society with a focus on fashion, beauty and heterosexual romance, which will be further discussed in section 5.3.1. None of them seem to outright reject official school activities, which are by association middle-class cultural norms, though this is not to say they immerse themselves in school-sanctioned undertakings, as demonstrated below:

- (1)
- (i) school = bullshit. :) [Stella/SU/s]
 - (ii) it isn't homework unless it's due tomorrow. [T.J./SU/s]
 - (iii) chemistry officially just shot me through the chest. X_X [T.J./SU/s]
 - (iv) it should be a crime to be in school while its this nice outside .. High school drop out ? :) [Stella/SU/s]

These girls are by no measure ‘good’ girls who pursue academic excellence diligently in the front row. McRobbie (1994) says the non-cooperation of girls’ resistance involves staying quiet in class, primping in the girls’ washroom at break, and vying for the team captain’s attention. This, she suggests, allows for the same hierarchical negotiating accomplished with fistfights in the

⁷ In a questionnaire, the girls were free to provide a description of their ethnicity, which may have included their interpretations of family origin, nationality, phenotype, or cultural association, in a free-answer response. This design was intended to accommodate the potential for the discursive construction of ethnic identity as examined through discourse analysis (e.g. Lo 1999).

parking lot like the boys. Yet, critics have suggested that encouraging and educating girls in competitive heterosexuality simply perpetuates the “sexual auction block” (Bettie 2003: 47). When Stella equates school (in its entirety) with ‘bullshit’ her “non-cooperation” is not silent but active. This is but a small example. Perhaps reticent to stir up a real revolution or maybe due to the trace matter of femininity she tacitly understands to be acceptable, Stella mitigates this utterance (with the emoticon). These first examples introduce how textual analysis of Facebook interactions can be revealing of much more than positive facework.

Chapter 5 DISCUSSION

*These walls keep a secret / That only we know
But how long can they keep it?
- 'If Walls Could Talk,' Celine Dion*

5.1 WRITING(S) ON THE WALL

5.1.1 Questionnaire

Facebook has a bad rap. The commonly shared assumption about its superficiality draws concerns about it as a meaningful place for interaction. To mitigate these concerns, I designed the questionnaire (Appendix 1) to collect background information in order to understand the girls' involvement with and attitudes about Facebook.

Social networking sites online have become Generation Y's Greek *agora*, the public open space. Facebook connects the girls to their offline lives. Based on their questionnaire responses (Appendix 2), their interactions on Facebook do not occur in a vacuum but are strategically undertaken within the context of their 'real' lives. The girls reported accessing their Facebook accounts from a few times a day to 'too many times to count.' When on Facebook, five of the girls name photo tagging/commenting or the Wall to be the most useful functions, while SUs (50%) and photo tagging/commenting (50%) were deemed the most interesting part of Facebook. This points to the importance of linguistic behaviour on Facebook. While previous work has suggested Facebook is ultimately a visual resource (DeAndrea et al. 2010), this group of girls is most interested in what their friends are saying or, according to Facebook: what's on your mind. Four of the girls change their SUs a few times a week, but it was not unusual to see some of the girls updating their status several times in a day to reflect what was happening in their offline lives. Stella was the most frequent updater (see Table 3). Four of the girls named the most important reason to use Facebook as 'to stay connected with my friends,' and all but one agreed that the site is a good way to keep in touch, to make plans with friends, to get opinions, feedback, recommendations, or explanations, and to announce news.

The girls are aware of the potential negative repercussions associated with Facebook. Three of the girls reported some version of an ‘argument’ resulting from Facebook activity. They named Facebook ‘risks’ as gossip, rumours, fights, making personal information available, impressions for future employers, being misunderstood, and social disinhibition. While four of them strongly agreed that what happens on Facebook is often talked about offline, they were divided about whether or not they had to ‘be careful’ with what they said and did on Facebook (3 ‘strongly agree,’ 2 ‘kind of agree,’ 1 ‘not really agree’). Overall, the girls actively use Facebook with an awareness of its social function, and with some acknowledgement that it is an important part of their social lives.

This project sets out to show how linguistic analysis can determine some aspect of identity from a person’s online interactions. While divided, four of the girls felt they use Facebook to ‘show people what [they] want them to see.’ Four of them agree that their Facebook interactions are ‘kind of’ a good reflection of who they are, and two respondents ‘strongly agree’ that their interactions on Facebook are good reflections of their identity. They also unanimously agreed that they turned to Facebook when they wanted to know more about someone else. Nonetheless, they are not naïve to the performative nature of Facebook interactions, and demonstrated mixed opinions about the authenticity of identity online. In contrast to widespread notions of social disinhibition online, five of the girls do not really agree that they feel freer in their online interactions and they did not feel their online interactions were especially aberrant from their ‘real’ selves. Although five of the girls strongly agreed that it is important to act the same way on- and offline, they also kind of agreed that ‘nobody’s Facebook page is a perfect match to who they really are.’ Half of the respondents strongly agreed that ‘some people act different on Facebook than they do offline’ to some degree.

5.1.2 Linguistic Patterns on Facebook

Despite accounts of Facebook’s ostensibly flippant linguistic nature, there is an alternative explanation. Patterns on Facebook represent linguistic behaviour that is simply accommodating the medium. For instance, the repetitive use of punctuation and other characteristics do not necessarily indicate ‘youthful’ speech, as West (2010) describes it. Rather, the style and structure of Facebook interactions represent characteristics of unplanned speech used to conform to the medium’s structure and tone. For example, the tone, activity, and norms of Facebook affect the

stylistic and structural patterns of speakers on the site. To accommodate the varied yet consistently informal tone, speakers use repetition and simple active sentences, string clauses together with *and* or *but*, juxtaposition clauses without overt links, use fragmented syntax, and delete subjects and referents. Linguistic *activity* on Facebook is composed of responses (to direct and indirect questions), comments (i.e. opinion giving), announcements, as well as phatic speech for the sake of general socializing. To accommodate this, Facebook text patterns heavily with deitics (*this, that, there*), and hedges (*well, sort of/sorta, kind of/kinda, just*), discourse markers (*ya/yeah/yea, ha, oh*), and is made to resemble excited speech via the use of repetitive penultimate letters/syllables and punctuation. Moreover, computer- and digitally-mediated language accommodates habitual exchanges (hence brevity and stacked clauses that are each directed at different audience members) and budgets for space limits. Neither speech nor writing, online linguistic behaviour is indicative of a bricolage of styles—a makeshift creation that is influenced by a diversity of resources and factors, including lack of face-to-face cues and intertextuality.

West describes the linguistic behaviour on Facebook as ‘youthful’ dialogue (2010: 20). This is problematic for the participants at hand even despite their youthfulness. First, who are ‘youth’? Bucholtz (2002) problematizes the term *youth* for its lack of universality. And if referring to ‘youth,’ to which country, ethnicity, and class do they belong? Considering this, simply describing Facebook language as ‘youthful’ is obscure at best. Second, if the term is used, how to account for the fact that this style is not restricted to ‘youth’ on Facebook? The age sample of this study is narrow, so to fully address this concern is not possible in this analysis. However, any fleeting observation of Facebook speakers across the lifespan will admit an abundance of linguistic features West describes as ‘youthful.’ Instead, I suggest the linguistic style of Facebook is impromptu and characteristic of informal speech. ‘Youthful’ suggests underdeveloped or unrefined, while Facebook-*ese* as ‘impromptu’ and akin to unplanned speech more accurately supports the fact that adolescents’ linguistic interactions are not simply juvenile or superficial. Language on Facebook is strategically employed to meet the parameters of the medium as well as the expectations of the audience.

5.2 INTERACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Despite the qualitative and exploratory nature of this work, tokens (SUs) were considered quantitatively to the extent that they inform the interpretation of how the participants were using Facebook to construct identities online. Moreover, including these data is in line with Yin's (1989) definition of a case study, which emphasizes the use of multiple sources of evidence. A summary of these data is included in Table 3. These data are supplementary to the analytic methods employed in the sociolinguistic tradition.

5.2.1 Quantitative Considerations

Table 3 (see next page) is but an example of the quantitative data that can be gleaned from social networking sites to augment sociolinguistic analyses of linguistic interaction on Facebook. It is not exemplary of the numerous variables that need to be taken into consideration when doing social media research, such as time, multiple media (e.g. synchronous and asynchronous), frequency of exchange, relational multiplexity (i.e. the number of relations maintained), size of personal network, and so on (e.g. Haythornthwaite 2000). Nonetheless, these data and how they break down between the girls are used as secondary evidence to support how they interact on Facebook. For example, with the most SUs ($N = 143$), Stella is considered the most active participant in the group, where 'active' is understood as Facebook activity that directly relates to others in the network. In other words, this study does not account for how active participants were at a more private level on Facebook, such as how often they engage with others on the synchronous private chat function. The activity relevant to this study was primarily SUs and Wall posts, where a token is taken to be a single SU, and each token is able to generate other data, namely comments from networked friends on the participants' Wall and *Likes*. Each token is categorized according to type: fishing, soapboxing, tacking, gossiping (see section 4.3 for coding methodology).

Table 3. Quantitative breakdown of status updates

	<i>SU*</i>	<i>fishing</i>		<i>soapboxing</i>		<i>tacking</i>		<i>gossiping</i>		<i>'Likes'</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>Finn</i>	31	20	64.5%	9	29%	2	6.5%	0	0%	118	19
<i>Teddy</i>	21	11	52%	8	38%	2	10%	0	0%	89	38
<i>T.J.</i>	66	35	53%	28	42.5%	3	4.5%	0	0%	95	33
<i>Jacquie</i>	13	8	62%	5	38%	0	0%	0	0%	30	15
<i>Stella</i>	143	78	54.5%	56	39.2%	8	5.6%	1	0.7%	335	161
<i>total</i>	274	152	55.4%	106	38.6%	15	5.5%	1	0.5%	667	266

* *Status Updates*

This work does not address the Facebook *Like* function in detail. However, the sociolinguistic value in opting to *Like* something on Facebook is roughly equivalent to backchanneling offline, and provides an important interactional resource for community members. Commonly, speakers even *Liked* their own comments in an act of self-affirmation. It was also not unusual to find an interaction between two speakers engaged in what I call *Circular Liking*, whereby each utterance is affirmed by its recipient by using the *Like* function (in addition to some verbal acknowledgement or acceptance of that utterance). The *Like* function may not be used exclusively for positive facework either. While a ‘backchannel’ *Like* may be supportive and encouraging, the same resource might also function as the bare minimum effort at social maintenance, suggesting an ‘obligatory’ *Like*. Further investigation might also reveal *Like* behaviour in a passive aggressive or sarcastic context, suggesting the potential for a taxonomy of *Likes* available to individuals on Facebook.

In a small side investigation, I developed an equation for social ‘pull’ on Facebook, where ‘pull’ or influence within the network was determined by dividing a participant’s total number of SUs by the number of *Likes* and comments she generated from those SUs. For this study, social ‘pull’ means how influential an individual is within her network, where influence reflects her ability to engage others with her linguistic behaviour—perhaps she is insightful, provocative, or simply voices thoughts that resonate with her community. *Likes* were weighted at .5, as they require less effort to produce than a comment (weighted at 1). The comments provided by each

girl on her own post were not included in the equation. In other words, if her SU sparks an interaction with a friend and each individual (the girl and her friend) contributes 2 turns to the exchange, the score will be 2 to reflect the friend's turns (and not the total 4 that made up the interaction). In this way, the scores reflect how engaged others become in her linguistic activity online, and not how avidly the girl maintains interactions on her own terms. An example of this equation is provided below:

$$\frac{z\text{SUs}}{x \text{ Likes } (.5) + y \text{ comments } (1)}$$

This equation calculates a quotient, or social 'pull' score, that results from so-called *instigated* activity (SUs) against *generated* activity (*Likes* and friends' comments). It does not account for long interactions generated by a single SU, nor does it account for who was *Liking* and commenting on SUs, which would likely skew the results if a particular girl always generated activity from the same person. The greater the ratio of the generated activity (denominator) to the instigated activity (numerator), the lower the score. In other words, a lower score corresponds to more social 'pull' (Table 4).

Using this equation, Teddy's score (.25) ranks her as the most 'influential' in this group of girls. Finn (.40), Jacquie (.43), and Stella (.44) fall in the middle, while T.J. lags considerably further back (.82). For T.J. in particular, this score is representative of her lack of 'pull' relative to other girls. Her SUs often go unacknowledged, yet she is the second most avid poster among the girls. It is also interesting to note that T.J., with the least social 'pull' actually has the greatest number of friends ($N = 813$). It seems more likely that a greater amount of friends would correlate with more activity and engagement online; however, this analysis suggests that quality of relations is more important over quantity with respect to engaging others in this online community of girls.

Table 4. Status updates as social 'pull' indicators

	<i>SU*</i>	<i>'Likes'</i>	<i>comments</i>	<i>social 'pull'</i>	<i># of Friends</i>
<i>Finn</i>	31	118	19	.40	789
<i>Teddy</i>	21	89	38	.25	725
<i>T.J.</i>	66	95	33	.82	813
<i>Jacquie</i>	13	30	15	.43	630
<i>Stella</i>	143	335	161	.44	585
<i>total</i>	274	667	266	<i>(average)</i> .47	3,542

* *Status Updates*

These numbers, and the quantitative data in general, are a rough representation of the degree to which the girls are active and influential on Facebook. This social 'pull' analysis is largely exploratory and subject to refinement. For example, incorporating factors such as the size and composition of the girls' network would generate a more valid representation of their 'pull.' There are a number of contributing variables (e.g. multiplexity of relations, purpose for using Facebook, frequency of interactions, number of friends) that are not factored into this equation. Incorporating such factors extends beyond the purpose of this sociolinguistic inquiry. Nonetheless, the potential to analyze linguistic behaviour online is not exclusively qualitative.

In keeping with an interactional sociolinguistic tradition, this work focuses instead on examining *how* language is used among individuals, *how* linguistic resources and choices are details that construct meaning against a cultural frame of reference, and *how* implied meaning can be derived from such details of a contextualized interaction and applied to interpretation (Bucholtz 2003). While quantitative data can aid sociolinguists in analyzing social hierarchies within communities of practice online, it is the patterns, norms, and overarching discourses that are more relevant to discourse analytic methods, such will be used in the discussion of this Facebook community.

5.2.2 Interactional Sociolinguistics

The patterns, norms, and discourse themes that are addressed in this discussion contribute in some way to the sociability, support, and identity criteria for an online community of practice (Herring 2004b: 14-5). By focusing on such criteria of a community of practice, the analysis considers participants' practice—what they *do* with language—as indications that they belong to a group; and furthermore, the framework offers sociolinguists definitions “within which to examine the ways in which becoming a member of a [community of practice] interacts with the process of gaining control of the discourse appropriate to it” (Holmes & Meryerhoff 1999: 175).

The ‘appropriate discourse’ may include, for example, in-group slang or norms for policing other member’s behaviour. By identifying discourse patterns and what might mean ‘sociolinguistic competence’ to a particular group, the analysis represents the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics, which relies on interpreting implied meaning through the use of linguistic resources, interaction details, and a cultural frame of reference. These include patterns in topic trends, norms for criticism and conflict, which will be addressed in this section. The cultural values and shared history of this community (that inform a broader discourse) will be discussed in section 5.3.

Emotive and positive speech is considered “crucial” to the community and its shared initiative to maintain relationships (West 2010: 21). In fact, West goes so far as to suggest that Facebook is not equipped for serious talk about potentially face-threatening topics (2010: 24). However, there is empirical evidence in this case data to demonstrate that Facebook interactions are not token utterances or used solely to engage in positive facework. An analysis of the content of the girls’ SUs reveals that they are using Facebook to tackle serious issues (Table 5, see next page). Tokens were coded as ‘weighty’ when they addressed issues such as relationships, sexuality, death, world events, drinking and drugs, or references to morality (e.g. *Two wrongs never make a right* [Stella/SU/s]). Other SUs, which consisted of announcements, general thoughts about the day, popular culture, celebratory messages, and so on, were categorized as ‘non-weighty.’

Table 5. Status updates and content

	<i>status updates</i>	<i>weighty</i>		<i>non-weighty</i>	
<i>Finn</i>	31	14	45%	17	55%
<i>Teddy</i>	21	9	43%	12	57%
<i>T.J.</i>	66	15	23%	51	77%
<i>Jacquie</i>	13	7	54%	6	46%
<i>Stella</i>	143	51	36%	92	64%
<i>total</i>	274	96	35%	178	65%

Contrary to West's (2010) suggestion that Facebook is not equipped for serious talk, the girls in this community use their SUs to generate arguably 'serious' talk roughly one third of the time (35% ; $N = 96$). This is not surprising when considered in light of the key role social media and social networking sites play in the lives of adolescents today, as a space to 'hang out,' learn about each other, construct a sense of self, make sense of cultural cues, negotiate status and organize the social hierarchy.

- (2) (i) I say no to drugs, but they don't listen. [Stella/SU/s]
- (ii) "Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal. Rip grandma, I love you so so much. [Teddy/SU/f]
- (iii) The Girl you just called fat? She has been starving herself & has lost over 30lbs. The Boy you just called stupid? He has a learning disability & studies over 4hrs a night. The Girl you just called ugly? She spends hours putting makeup on hoping people will like her. The Boy you just tripped? He is abused enough at home. There's a lot more to people than you think. Put this as your status if you're against bullying. [T.J./SU/s]
- (iv) kiss me - infect me with your love. [Stella/SU/s]
- (v) osama bin laden is killed. thank god. i hope that the war is going to be completely over!!!! this is HUGE news [Finn/SU/f]

The examples in (2) reveal a degree of sophistication, vulnerability and self-awareness in the girls' interactions online that is not unusual for this group—this is not gossip. Moreover, as seen in Table 3, the percentage of SUs that constitute *gossiping* is less than one per cent of the collected SUs (0.5% ; $N = 1$), which is noteworthy only for its remarkable non-existence.

To qualify as *gossiping*, a girl's post must report details on another individual unconfirmed as true. The possibility for this kind of linguistic behaviour was considered to address general commentary about Facebook as a place for gossip and voyeurism. The latter is undeniable, but the girls and their networked Friends are not gossiping on Facebook—at least not through their SUs, Wall posts, and photo comments. In fact, the one token categorized as *gossiping* (*Christopher likes men :) [Stella/SU/g]*) is mitigated immediately by the smiley face emoticon, and so is likely in jest. Moreover, the fact that this post generated neither *Likes* nor comments in response indicates that it was inconsequential to her networked audience and unworthy of acknowledgement, as SUs are created namely to generate reactions for others in the network (West 2010). This announcement in particular, if it were serious, would likely generate a flurry of activity for its reference to homosexuality. Heterosexuality is a guiding hegemonic yardstick within the tradition of the sexual market place, and its reinforcement within this community will be addressed again in section 5.3.1. However, Stella's jest at 'outing' Christopher from the metaphoric closet—and the network's disregard of it—suggest that gossiping with serious intentions in full 'view' of the rest of the network is not an accepted practice within this community.

The lack of traditional gossip is not surprising considering the argument that Facebook interactions are more complex than social commentary admits. West's (2010) observation that interactions are characterized by positive facework cannot entirely be denied considering the networked nonymity of the site. As well, boyd's (2007) description of the networked public and its invisible audience determines that it is impossible to ascertain all of whom receive online utterances, thus relegating the gossipier to more private realms.

The positive facework accomplished on Facebook satisfies the medium's norms as well as the girls' virtual community norms for sociability. Particularly for girls like Finn, Facebook is a place to reinforce relationships. She has the second greatest number of friends ($N = 789$); she has the second greatest social 'pull' amongst the girls (4.0); and she uses the majority (64.5%) of her SUs to *fish*; in other words, to build and develop relationships and to attain social validation.

The following interaction (3), which begins when Finn comments on a friend's picture, exemplifies Finn's ability to reinforce relationships using Facebook:

(3)

- Finn** Heyy stephhh!!!! nice belt ;) looks familiar
- Steph** Hahahahaha I looove ur belt! :S want it back?
- Finn** hahaha no its totally fine because actually the other day i was at the place i bought it and was like OMG they had one left from last season and bought it hahah now wwe match :) you can have that one baby
- Steph** Omg ur the greatest! I never buy belts, but I love ur old one!!!
- [a third party interjects with an accusation that Steph is a thief]*
- Steph** Hahahaha nooo! She left it, I just "forgot" to give it back to her... Lol. Thanks mumma. Luv u too =)
- Finn** hahahah its okay now were matching! its probally getting old though now eh? mine i just dont even bother to take off my pants anymore because i dont wanna ruin it haha
- Steph** Yea the one is sooo worn out lol, but only on one side so it looks even worse haha! But I don't care I still like it ;)
- Finn** hahaah ill go and see if they have any more and then ill give it to you when i see you in Calgary haha. im not to sure they will have another one because i beleieve that the one i just bought was the last one.. and i was so surprised to see it haha, but ill go and look :):)
- Steph** Ur the bestest! =)

This is an extreme example of positive facework for the amount of reinforcement Finn uses to ensure a positive relationship remains between her and Steph. She opens by framing the interaction with overt friendliness [e.g. Heyy stephhh!!!! nice belt ;)] and continues to do so with consistent steps (i.e. footing) toward her interlocutor: *hahaha no its totally fine . . . now wwe match :) you can have that one baby. . . hahahah its okay. . . eh?*). As though her efforts were not enough, Finn's final utterance is an offer to return to the same store and find Steph a replacement for the original belt Finn has already given her, tagged with the double emoticon :):).

Steph matches Finn with reciprocal footing by affecting heightened emotion with in-group references, terms of affection and repetitive syllables [e.g. **Omg ur the greatest!** . . . Yea the one is **sooo** worn out **lol** . . . **Ur the bestest!** =)]. Though this exemplifies positive facework at the utmost, it is not devoid of confrontation. The third party interloper, who states that Steph is a thief, does not belong to the original frame of the conversation and barges in without mitigating her attack. Finn ignores her altogether and Steph immediately ‘clears the air’ with an explanation of how she came to have Finn’s belt.

Facebook as a virtual community must have norms for sociability. The previous interaction shows the positive facework expected of this medium. But norms for sociability include norms for conflict, and demand that the medium equip active and regular participants with ways to express criticism, hold conflict, and negotiate means for resolution. The SUs that are contentious, confrontational, and able to generate reactions from the network are ubiquitous—much of *fish* is intended to be just this. And to that point, the girls are most often using their SUs to *fish* on Facebook (55.4% ; $N = 152$), which suggests that they are comfortable using the medium for linguistic sparring and have established norms for sociability to do so. Facebook’s function, in this case, extends beyond positive facework. Consider the examples of face threatening acts (in reference to Brown & Levinson 1987) in (4).

(4)

- (i) thinks Tom needs to act his age not his shoe size!! [Teddy/SU/f]
- (ii) Your life’s a joke. [Stella/SU/f]
- (iii) wow, that was gino⁸ [Speedracer⁹/C/F]
- (iv) YOUR MOM [Stella/R/M]
- (v) I hate Marcus [Jacquie/SU/f]
- (vi) YOU ARE SUCH A EFFING DOUCHBAG> [Stella/C/M]
- (vii) ew Jason [Jacquie/C/M]

⁸ Gino: someone who affects status and prestige but is seen as inauthentic, often implies someone is stupid, tacky, or inconsequential.

⁹ *Speedracer* is a pseudonym for an active male in the community whose Facebook persona was typically that of an instigator. His linguistic style was direct and often sought confrontation with the girls for its unmitigated, edgy nature. However, their interactions usually ended amicably, which I suspect were upheld by positive offline relationships.

- (viii) [*a male tells Finn she has just been 'chugged' in the face*]
Hahahahah I loved it [Finn/R/M]
- (ix) [*a male tells Finn her 'dumb' behaviour better be due to drunkenness*]
no.. were just that dumb :) [Finn/R/M]
- (x) Finished my peach juice. Kill yourself. [Stella/R/F]

There is a range in the severity of these threats, boasts, and assertions. When Stella ends an argumentative interaction with another girl in (x), saying, “*kill yourself*,” it is understood within context that their friendship is not at stake. Nonetheless, when the girls avoid tagging these threats with emoticons and heart symbols, it is illustrative of their willingness and the medium’s ability to host confrontational interactions. Not all utterances are as abrasive. Often a disclaiming comment or hedging emoticon mitigates them. For example, “*Okay. PS you’re a loser. But you’re pretty :) so its okay*,” [T.J./R/F] is a direct attack on another girl’s social credibility that is ‘softened’ by the hedge that she is pretty, which ostensibly equalizes being a ‘loser’ in this context. Interactions like this are typical of the medium where threatening comments without non-paralinguistic and voicing attributes (used to decode intended meaning) fly dangerously in the face of audience members.

The norms for sociability and linguistic behaviour within this community are negotiated overtly as well. Blommaert et al. propose that the notion of policing is possible in the language domain as the production of “order—normatively organized—[...] infinitely detailed and regulated by a variety of actors” (2009: 203). The detail and regulation may come from a monocentric or hegemonic view (e.g. government) but not exclusively so. For instance, new media (e.g. the Internet and computer games) create “translocal moments of activity and awareness in otherwise strictly local environments” from which norms develop (2009: 204). Leppänen and Piirainen-Marsh (2009) examine how young new media users construct norms for bilingual language use through gaming, where the resources of more than one language help create local meanings and negotiate situated identities. This research suggests that individuals within new media are social agents who are able to appropriate contextually available linguistic resources to negotiate the norms and policies relevant to them (2009: 261). In the same way, the girls and their networked friends *police* the use of certain linguistic behaviour by their peers.

Through this mechanism, the girls' peer group finds it more acceptable, for example, for girls to direct misogynistic insults (i.e. *slut, bitch, ho, gay, fag*) towards boys and other girls (see Table 6). Boys very rarely directed such insults towards girls and never within a serious frame. Rather, insults from the boys were not sexual in reference (e.g. *gino*) and, when insulted, they did not retaliate in the same flavour, as illustrated in (5).

(5)

Teddy your daft [*directed at her boyfriend, Tom*]
 [*Another girl calls Tom a string of invectives that reference female sex organs*]
Tom ur immature

Intra-girl and girl-on-boy insulting is acceptable and fairly prolific within this community, although no quantitative analysis was used to establish a rate of frequency¹⁰. Manipulating the available linguistic resources also contributes to the norms and policies relevant to these speakers in various contexts. The use of capitalized letters and lengthened penultimate syllables suggests heightened emotion, and also mimics the physical voice and its ability to convey nuances of emotion and intention. Spelling alterations also establish a community norm. For example, *bitch* is often spelled as '*betch*' in the interactions of this group. The motivation for this spelling is unknown, but perhaps it is used to more closely resemble the backed and lowered vowel realization of [i] in their offline community. Regardless, speakers manage to weaken the term by altering the spelling, as do other realizations like '*b!tch*' and '*b*tch*', and removing spaces to confer a nonchalance in tone.

¹⁰ Much of these interactions occur as comments posted on other friend's Walls and were generated by a wide variety of third parties. Acquiring ethical clearance to address the breadth of insulting and profanity was beyond the scope of this research.

- (7) **Speedracer** you're* we have tennis practice 2moro sir.
[the friend reiterates Speedracer has misspelled '2moro,' using the star diacritic ()]*
- Speedracer** it's not like I spelled it wrong man. Learn when to correct and when not to
[the friend reiterates the misspelling of '2moro,' calling it a non-word and indicating that the conventional spelling (tomorrow) takes the same amount of time to type and saves speakers from looking like 'morons']

This example (7) and previous illustrations of *policing* provide evidence against the suggestion that computer- and digitally-mediated communication is the ruination of the English language. There is a clear debate over the proper use of language in this community. Such negotiations also influence community norms for networked members.

A final example of *policing* on Facebook involves a kind of virtual 'cold shouldering.' Creating posts for others to respond to (or at least with the expectation that they will) is normative behaviour on Facebook, especially as a site designed specifically for the exchange of information. This considered, when posts do not generate responses or when questions go unanswered, there is a social tax levied against the unanswered speaker.

- (8) **Teddy** so far, Nicholas and I have counted 30 inter mingling relationships this year..
[a female friend asks for the definition of 'inter mingling' and goes unacknowledged]
- (9) *[a friend comments that she swallowed her gum during the shooting of a posted video. The video depicts the girls taking shots at a house party.]*
- Stella** hahahah, at least you remember something!
[she counters that she, in fact, remembers everything]
- Peach** you would swallow...

In example (8) Teddy makes a general statement to her network by framing her utterance as an observation with the adverb phrase (*so far*). While she mentions a friend in the observation, she does not direct this statement to him, thus opening the floor for comment. The reference to a created type of relationship further invites members of the audience to take up the interaction. The reference (*inter mingling relationships*) suggests in-group knowledge because the definition is not provided. Nonetheless, true to the aim of *fishing*, this reference is actually an invitation to the audience to take up the frame—and not surprisingly someone takes the bait. Teddy chooses not to answer, denying this person’s right to take up the interaction at hand. Teddy’s motivation is unknown. Likely, the friend who attempted to pick up the thread was not, in Teddy’s estimation, a social equal to be sharing inside jokes so brazenly. Regardless, she reinforces a norm for sociability on Facebook where a non-answer can be a passive act of social shuffling.

Similarly in example (9), both Stella and her friend exclude Peach by choosing not to acknowledge her contribution to the interaction. Peach enters as a third party who was not present during the making of the video being discussed. She attempts to reframe the interaction, which was jovial in tone, with a sexual reference that is also confrontational. Stella and her friend’s dismissal is resonant for they ignore what is both an intrusion on their interaction and a face-threatening utterance that is imbued with derogatory sexual relations. Failing to answer a direct question, especially one posed near to a particular post (temporally and physically), accomplishes a kind of social policing. Choosing not to acknowledge third party comments also controls an interaction, whereby ignoring her comment denies her as a ratified participant in the exchange.

There are appropriate contexts where leaving comments unanswered is not exceptional, as illustrated in example (10):

- (10)
- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Stella | McDougall your a joke |
| Speedracer | you're* |
| Stella | im sick of you |
| Speedracer | i get sick when i see you. |
| Stella | how about you move to the front of the class tomorrow, i dont really like jackass's sitting beside me :) |

In the above exchange, Speedracer initiates a contentious frame by *policing* Stella's use of possessive 'your'. The interaction unfolds in jest, and finishes with Stella's 'request' that Speedracer not sit next to her in class tomorrow. Speedracer does not answer, thus ending the exchange; but his failure to acknowledge Stella's final utterance is not remarkable. In this instance, Stella's mitigating emoticon is enough to wrap up what is not an unusual instance of verbal sparring between Stella and Speedracer. It sets a friendly tone; both Stella and Speedracer recognize that their exchange has been in jest, and there is no expectation that it continue. However, the virtual 'cold shoulder' can be a clear and effective manoeuvre that indicates hierarchical relations online. These (non) acts reinforce which speakers are welcomed into the fold of a particular interaction and whether their contributions are deemed interesting to the other speakers.

The girls' shared reason for communicating ('to stay in touch with friends,' 'to gossip,' and because 'everyone uses Facebook'), their norms for sociability, and their regular interaction online satisfies Herring's (2008) criteria for a virtual community. To summarize, the patterns of linguistic interaction on Facebook suggest that the girls and their networked friends are guided by norms. Such conventions guide criticism (e.g. the taboo on misogynistic insults from boys to girls), conflict (e.g. mitigating abrasive comments with emoticons or tagging them with hedges), solidarity (e.g. using the *Like* function, terms of address, aberrant spellings, and so on), as well as reciprocity, or lack thereof, as in the case of the virtual 'cold shoulder'. Their shared identity, which may be defined as 'friends,' 'Facebook friends,' 'MacIsle Secondary students,' or 'youth' includes a shared history. This group's status as a community is fluid, temporal, and evolving. Specific to this analysis, the girls' norms for behaviour around discursive constructs such as gender reflect the shared history of a larger networked group on Facebook as well as their legacy as young white women in a working-middle class community. As such, this group cannot be analyzed without considering the historical and theoretical implications associated with the group through their discourse.

5.3 GENDERED IDENTITIES

The established ideas about what is masculine and what is feminine are not necessarily predictive of how language and gender play out online. This discussion addresses how the concept of gender as a complex social, cultural, and psychological construct is related to sex (Wolfram 1993), as well as how it is constructed online in this community. Ultimately, ‘identity’ is not in reference to a static personhood, and ‘gendered’ cannot delimit either ‘male’ or ‘female.’ Each speaker’s gendered identity is, indeed, a reference to whom she presents herself to be; but it is, at any given moment, susceptible to the flux that is linguistic style and locally specific interaction.

5.3.1 Reinforced Heterosexuality

This section discusses the linguistic behaviour and styles of this community as they reinforce or reflect hetero-normative behaviour. Heterosexuality, as a yardstick, has been chosen for continuity with the literature (e.g. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003), and does not reflect any hetero-centric assumption on the part of the researcher. All five of the girls self-identified as heterosexual in the questionnaire.¹²

Heterosexuality and hetero-normative behaviour are typical of Facebook interactions within this community. For example, the traditional standards for beauty are regularly reinforced visually on Facebook. Profile pictures are updated regularly, depicting moments of glamour or, at least, ‘looking cute.’ Comments on and discussion of these images are exchanges of beauty information, encouragement, and evaluation of how well the subject is faring within the heterosexual marketplace. All of the girls wear makeup, although there is a continuum from heavily made-up to natural (Stella to T.J. respectively). With three of the girls involved in the Miss Riversdale Pageant, new photo albums are frequently created to document the competition with images of group shots, self-portraits, (un)dressing, making-up, gowns, sashes and smiles. Announcements about the pageant center prominently on Teddy’s Wall, as do votes for confidence and encouragement from friends. This active participation in the heterosexual market

¹² The questionnaire requested ‘sexual preference’ in a free-answer response (to mitigate concerns for honesty and willingness to disclose information to the researcher). In other words, the girls did not have to choose between three or four descriptions, such as ‘gay,’ ‘straight,’ or ‘bisexual.’ They were free to choose, in their own words, a description of their sexuality. They were also encouraged to answer freely, reminded that there were no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers, and requested to complete the questionnaire alone and without parental or peer observation.

establishes a place for the girls socially, but, more importantly, it also evaluates their global market worth; this behaviour and hierarchical rankings are not, unlike boys, overtly competitive (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003:126). Though not pageant participants, both Stella and T.J. engage in hetero-normative behaviour as well. The most salient example of such behaviour is the practice of posting self-portraits and the interactions that ensue.

The self-portrait is ubiquitous on Facebook, particularly amongst this community of girls and their friends. It is characterized by an image of a girl alone before the camera. It is usually taken by skilfully centering herself before the lens and snapping the picture with one hand, resulting in angled images and the flattering ‘up gaze.’ The comments on such images generate a pattern of references to traditional standards for beauty (see Table 7). Moreover, the activity constitutes ritual behaviour for its frequency and shared patterning of behaviour (e.g. reciprocal compliments and gratitude as demonstrated in Table 7). The ‘self-portrait ritual’ provides a venue for preening, display of beauty, approval, and reinforcement of hegemonic feminine values like beauty and congeniality.

While all of the girls participate in the ritual equally, their relative success—or how they are received by their network—is markedly different. Jacquie, who subscribes most adamantly to traditional femininity, is the most celebrated portrait ‘performer.’ She receives the most comments and they are exclusively complimentary. The most active, Stella, participates in the ritual most often; however, she generates approximately a third of the comments Jacquie does and they are often negative in tone. Boys most often weigh in on her self-portraits with attacks on her ritualized attempt at ‘beauty.’ T.J.’s self-portraits also earn criticism from boys, although in lesser severity (see Table 7). Overall, her portraits earn comments few and far in between from either boys or girls. There is a debate to be made for the value of the negative comments. For T.J., who goes virtually unnoticed in comparison to Stella and Jacquie, these ritual performances earn small currency in the heterosexual market. Finn and Teddy, the two girls with boyfriends, are fittingly ‘off the market.’ Finn’s self-portraits, equally as able to uphold the conventional standard for feminine beauty, go unacknowledged. Teddy rarely posts self-portraits, and those she does lack overt airs of sexualized femininity. Both of these girls are ‘spoken for,’ and their absence from the self-portrait ritual supports that specific status within the heterosexual market place.

Table 7. Ritual self-portrait comment patterning

<i>performer</i>	<i>comment pattern</i>	<i>example</i>
Jacque	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ intensifiers ▪ superlatives ▪ variety of positive adjectives ▪ emoticons ▪ self-deprecation 	<p>(<i>really, so</i>) (<i>cutest</i>) (<i>pretty, beautiful, gorgeous, cute</i>)</p> <p>:O ♥ :) =) “<i>stop being so pretty!</i>”, “<i>hate you</i>”, “<i>making the rest of us look bad</i>,” “<i>you’re hard on my self confidence</i>”</p>
Stella and T.J.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ references to disgust ▪ sexual propositioning ▪ tempered adjectives ▪ face-threatening 	<p>“<i>think Im gonna vomit</i>”, “<i>GROSS :)</i>” “<i>do me?</i>”, “<i>lets be lovers again?</i>” (<i>hot, good, fine</i>) “<i>haha what kinda face is that?</i>”</p>

The linguistic behaviour of the self-portrait ritual is typical of the competitive sphere within which girls jockey for position. As Eckert points out, consensus building within conversations does not necessarily indicate building connections. The “cooperative competition” of self-portraiting allows the participating girls to negotiate their individual symbolic capital. Through the ritual, ‘beauty’ is “an economy in which women find the ‘value’ of their faces and bodies impinging, in spite of themselves, on that of other women’s” (Wolf 1990: 204). The performer, if successful, remains at the top of the hierarchy—literally and figuratively—with her picture the focus of the page and subsequent comments stacked below. It is taboo for her to post ‘*I am beautiful*,’ as a girl will rarely state her beauty superiority “but her friends will do it for her” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 126). The self-portrait ritual allows girls to overtly evaluate one another and themselves, while engaging in covert girl one-up-manship.

Other evidence for the reinforcement of normative femininity on Facebook is the pervasiveness of references to romantic love and its traditional trappings. A primary component of normative femininity is an emphasis on relationships (Mazzaraella 2010). While only two of the girls are in relationships, all of them claim to be interested in men and express this position frequently. The girls’ SUs demonstrate a clear vein of romantic love in this community, particularly when *soapboxing*.

As self-declarations, *soapboxing* statements are often borrowed from or reference popular culture (e.g. song lyrics), contain some message about the ‘rules’ of love, and most often depict

the speaker as either a lovelorn ‘warrior’ or a lustful ‘prisoner of war’—the love war, of course. Table 8 illustrates the positions girls take up as normatively feminine individuals entangled in romantic love:

Table 8. Soapboxing and romantic love

<i>speaker</i>	<i>message</i>
Finn	I love you this much, tonight there'll be no distance between us
Stella	we'll just keep running from tomorrow with our lips locked.
Teddy	No man is worth your tears, and when you find the man who is, he'll never make you cry.
Finn	i promised id sing to you, whenever the music dies
Stella	Your kiss forever on my lips.
Teddy	You know you're in love when you have nothing to prove.
T.J.	You keep pushing me away, oh but nothings going to change
Teddy	You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams.

The girls take up their expected roles in the heterosexual market place by emphasizing their ‘battle’ for love—the ritual competition amongst girls as they vie for the attention of boys. Teddy and Finn’s profiles are replete with messages to their boyfriends, proclamations of their love, and announcements about milestones or gifts. The other girls also include proclamations of their love or, more accurately, their frustration with the pitfalls of unrequited love, as in example (11).

(11)

- (i) And now my heart stumbles on things I don't know [Jacquie/SU/s]
- (ii) don't you wanna stay here a little while, don't you wanna hold each other tight,
don't you wanna fall asleep with me tonight. [T.J./SU/s]
- (iii) She said if you love me let me know, if you don't - let me go [Stella/SU/s]

Such content—references to love, beauty talk, and negotiations about the difficulties faced within the heterosexual market—are rife within this community network. In this sense, the girls’ gendered identities are performed along hegemonic lines and characterized by a linguistic style that is identifiably ‘girly.’ The linguistic variables of this style were not quantified. During the data collection process, linguistic behaviour and patterns that were noted to be particularly ‘girly’ was tagged. At a later stage, these instances were organized into categories that represented different linguistic tools to construct a traditionally feminine style (see Table 9 for examples). However, each example may illustrate more than one linguistic resource. For example, ‘*Bahahahahahah love you to my little cherry ;) ♥*’ [Stella/R/f] illustrates the use of (a) voice diacritics¹³ with the onomatopoeic and extended ‘*baha,*’ (b) the use of emotive utterances with ‘*love you*’, and (c) the use of diminutives with ‘*my little cherry.*’

This girly style of feminine includes positive politeness, emotive utterances, and suggestive or collective forms (e.g. *we, let’s*). It is often employed when the girls compliment each other, and therefore build on their relationships. Finn and Stella’s use of this style is clearly illustrated when they address one another, as two close members within the community. This style is also typical of interactions that occur during the self-portrait ritual. It is not characteristic of confrontational interactions, or when the girls are affecting an aggressive stance (which will be addressed in section 5.3.2.). However, for girls like Finn, linguistic resources that are traditionally considered feminine, such as the use of intensifiers, are reliable tools for expressing emotion: ‘*You and your friends need to grow up. **Seriously***’ [Finn/R/M]. In this example, the intensifier, ‘*seriously*’ aids Finn in communicating an adversarial position to the ex-boyfriend of a friend. While hostility is not considered traditionally feminine, the way in which Finn expresses this quality is not free of ‘women’s language.’

‘Girly’ and the girls’ linguistic behaviour on Facebook resembles traditional observations about ‘women’s language, particularly in light of these kinds of linguistic variables:

¹³ ‘Voice diacritics’ is the umbrella term I use for the repetitive use of letters to mimic lengthened syllables, the deletion of spaces, the use of capital letters and alternative spellings, and so on. Collectively, they indicate the manipulation of ‘voice,’ as its expressive influence in ‘real’ speech is communicatively and socially important

- (12) **Teddy** I *don't know if I like* being called your old lady from sal :p ♥
 Tom Haha yea u do
 Teddy I **dunnnoooo**, he punched me yesterday!
 Tom Sal did
 Teddy Ya lol
 Tom Haha
 Teddy *Kinda hurt*

Teddy frames the interaction as a narrative by referencing a past event. More specific to hegemonic femininity, she positions herself unassertively by hedging her statement (*I don't know*) and conceding a passive footing (*being called your old lady from sal*). She reinforces her traditional stance with playful and sweet emoticons. Tom's response entails expected male behaviour: contained and lack of emotion, shortened or clipped responses, and the absence of exclamation and question marks. It is wholly perfunctory. In contrast, Teddy's attempts to engage her boyfriend in this conversation are threefold: first, she airs a social grievance in the disparaging 'old lady' term; second, she hopes to capitalize on his (presumed) instinctive desire to protect her by claiming that she has been physically hurt; and third, she makes a final emotional bid with 'kinda hurt,' the hedged obliqueness of which further supports her tentative footing. Despite such efforts, her boyfriend effectively ends the interaction by choosing not to reciprocate. Tom is the *man*. He is conciliatory and receptive to his new girlfriend, but not enough to be moved beyond two- and three-word utterances. Teddy is unsuccessful in her attempt to engage her boyfriend, and is instead left with her status as the *old lady* and its less than glamorous social position.

The linguistic qualities deemed 'girly' in these examples characterize much of the interactions within this community. However, they do not prove that these girls use 'women's language' because they are girls and it is their *de facto* style. This linguistic behaviour reflects instead their place in the class system, their ascribed gender role, their willingness to perform by the rules of the market, and their recognition and reinforcement of community norms, such as the social currency of smiley faces and hearts.

Boys' contributions to the community were not the focus of this analysis, though cursory observations reveal patterns of traditionally masculine behaviour that reinforce heterosexuality as well, such as Tom's contribution to example (12). Other hetero-masculinity is evidenced through labeling. Several of the boys in the community have created their Facebook identity with hyper masculine names. With the addition of a middle nickname, often imbued with sexual innuendo, the boys perform hegemonic masculinity by christening themselves Jeffrey 'LetItSlide' Lester, Daniel 'WarHawk' Dunn, Brian 'Poppa' Pearson, Chris 'Cash' Belanger, and other riffs on this theme.

In the same way, the term *gay* is used as an insult, and thus references the 'acceptable' dichotomy between male-female relationships. In this community, aberrations from heterosexuality are unbecoming, and both the girls and boys use '*gay*' in reference to anyone deemed worthy of it. However, '*gay*' as an insult is used mildly here, and recipients of it are expected to swallow their pride and take the label in jest. In this community, the adolescent heterosexual standard for the term *gay* is typical, having lost its indexical power with the blunting of hackneyed usage. Much the same for *soapboxing* about love or the inescapable heart symbol, these linguistic tokens have specific meaning and norms for use within the community. These ones in particular reference a cultural and historical discourse on gender that is predictable. Nevertheless, they are not exhaustive as a representation of gendered Facebook activity.

5.3.2 Dissident Femininity

“The same [girls . . .] are also, at other times, sexual marauders and adventurers, cultural analysts and subversives, fantasists and sapphists, egoists and conquistadors”
(Wolf 1997: xvii)

Hegemonic masculinity constitutes the same ideological standard for men that hegemonic femininity does for women. The stereotypical understanding of 'being a man' is usually some combination of "heterosexuality, toughness, power and authority, competitiveness and the subordination of gay men" (Baker 2008: 130-31). Self-promoting language is typically attributed

to boys. They thrive on in-group teasing and labels. The creativity of their sexual referencing goes unmatched. They brag: the horsepower of their cars; the distance they can urinate; the notches on their bedposts.

(13)

- (i) bro my shins gonna be a bruised up motherfucker after our collision on the turf today hahaha first battle wound of the season
- (ii) F'd up mah hand
- (iii) **A** Shoot da hoops ?
B Bball it up ya?
A No. Not enough time
- (iv) Just some footy at lunch

The utterances in example (13) are typical of self-promoting language and the war themes that course through male-dominated discourse of such things as sexual conquest, athletic prowess, and verbal debate (Connell 1995). Yet, these examples are particularly interesting because they were all posted by the girls in this community.

To depict the girls in this community as poisoned by a culture and a history of gender inferiority would be misleading of the complexity of the selves they present on Facebook. An *oeuvre* in feminist and women's studies supports this (e.g. Wolf 1997). In spite of the evidence to support the gender imbalance or ingrained gender behaviour in this community, the girls and their friends are also the *conquistadors* Wolf describes in the opening quote. As for Facebook, normative femininity is not a compulsory outcome within a communicative medium (and life stage) that places gender, status, and heterosexuality at the fore.

In *Women Without Class* (Bettie 2003), the smoker's pit was a communal spot for gender benders to overtly question and play with ideas about suitable sexuality. Punk was the sub-cultural style juxtaposed to normative conventions of femininity at the time. In the girls' community online, subversive styles find support on an individual's Wall, where like-minded friends reciprocate comments and literally *Like* her activity. The Wall is versatile. From profile to profile it can be as pragmatic as a leadership class bulletin board or as subversive as the smoker's

terrain where outliers with shocks of neon hair, black eye liner, and nose rings let fly middle fingers as often as crude language.

Punks, and their rejection of normative conventions, are an example of *dissident femininities* (Bettie 2003). Performances that oppose conventional ideals by aiming at ultra-femininity and/or anti-femininity are dissident. *Ultra-femininity* aims at overt sexuality to subvert adult authority with a ‘shock and awe’ tactic. *Anti-femininity* involves rejecting standard femininity by affecting male adolescent discourse (2003: 133). While this analysis is concerned primarily with text, the images of these girls are telling as well. There is a continuum of ultra-femininity performed through the use of profile pictures and album content to match the continuum of anti-femininity achieved linguistically. The girls’ varied aims at dissidence are demonstrated by their use of expletives, sexual reference and lewd language, and a forceful, confrontational stance.

In example (14) a particularly dissident anti-femme, Skylar, posts an unflattering picture of herself pointing menacingly at the camera with a toy rifle in hand. A mock self-portrait ritual ensues, in which conventional ideas of feminine beauty are rejected and parodied by taking up a male adolescent discourse:

- (14) [a female tersely announces that she would ‘fuck’ Skylar]
Skylar hahaha id do me
Jacquie Me too holy
 [the original female suggests a ‘group bang’]

Gone are intensified compliments (e.g. *soo pretty*), fawning and adulation. These girls appropriate the penetrative power of male sexuality to such an extent that gang rape (in jest) is the suggested outcome. This is *dissident femininity*. However, the true revolutionary power in their non-conformist behavior is debatable, as their sexual references are made from within the male hierarchy. ‘*Fuck*,’ ‘*do*,’ and ‘*bang*’ all reference the consumption of women for their lexical intimation of violent sexual conquest. They appropriate the hegemonic male ‘voice’ with which women are made the sexual object. They do not perform aggressive sexuality from their own perspective, likely because it is not available to them.

Wolf describes the female first person sexual as “that most unladylike of voices, [...] that voice turns you into a slut” (1997: xxii). Social commentary presents female sexual experience in a sterile way—“that has little to do with the ambiguities of real female lives”—so that girls’ are faced with a false dualism in which there is good and evil, villains and saints, sluts and virgins. The girl jocks and the girl burnouts (Eckert 1989) were the most extreme speakers in their groups because, as sociolinguistic commentary has discussed, they have to work harder for the same status boys are attributed by virtue of being male speakers. When the girls in this community want to subvert their traditional female trappings, which are hardly effective for expressing power or prestige, they resort to their hegemonic opposite. At one end there is romantic love and references to hypnotic, soul-wrenching adoration. At the other lies the anti-femme’s approximation of male sexuality.

The continuum is short. While Finn and Teddy are discrete in their approximation of female ‘beauty,’ Stella is ultra feminine in her made-up physical appearance. Where Jacquie’s most explicit expression of aggression is ‘*holy*’ (15), Stella and girls like Skylar spit invectives with such jarring blatancy that the effect is almost a parody. In fact, it is parody: their ‘femaleness’ is exaggerated to lengths befitting of burlesque in their physical appearance, while their ‘maleness’ is extreme in their direct and profane linguistic behaviour.

(15) Holy so annoying [Jacquie/C/F]

(16) date like a man so you don't get played like a b!tch [Stella/SU/s]

(17) LOL me: I was feeding that bitch shots [Skylar/R/M]

The shades of grey between examples (16), (17) and anything contrary to it, like example (15), are few. In other words, the girls’ resources to express taboo topics (such as sexuality, power, and aggression) are limited to the use of overt claims of aggression, imperatives, and explicit language. The other girls are less strident in their efforts to challenge norms. Thus, their gendered selves are not as transparent. They are not ‘sluts,’ their pictures and interactions would seem to suggest, but wherein lies their sexuality, their sense of power or strength? Romantic love and these girls’ declarations of it pale in comparison to the overt claims made by their rebel peers. Within this community, these girls seem held to the familiar dualism Wolf suggests: good or bad;

soapboxing country song lyrics (e.g. ‘*All I think about is how to make you think of me, and everything that we should be*’ [Teddy/SU/s]) or quoting rap rhymes (e.g. ‘*i get it in*’ [Skylar/SU/s]).

The potency of profanity is tempting to focus on because, like a flare, it immediately draws attention to the situation at hand—*shit*, *fuck*, and *bitch* snap the audience to attention. This is the emotive power of obscenity. Within this community, it is indexical of counter hegemonic behaviour. But not all of the girls aim at such male adolescent discourse to break the mold.

(18)

- (i) there is no such thing as a mans job now, - a woman can do whatever she wants to do [Finn/SU/s]
- (ii) Guys are nothing. Love you baby, see you tomorrow ♥ [Jacquie/R/F]
- (iii) I really wanna play field hockey in the rain tonight !!!!!!! [T.J./SU/f]
- (iv) who can sell me GOOD weed sometime dis week. [Skylar/SU/f]

There are more subtle ways to perform dissident femininity. Discourse and interactional moves that deconstruct expected behaviour can be as illustrative of anti-femininity as lexical choice. Without profanity, these examples all upset the gender imbalance in some way. Skylar’s emphasis on ‘GOOD’ weed (18: iv) reveals a rather ‘unfeminine’ assertiveness, as well as her ability to rank the quality of marijuana. Her use of non-standard ‘*dis*’ is also indexical of dissident femininity. T.J.’s emphatic announcement in example (18: iii) emphasizes the importance of sports in her life: she would rather sweat and compete in the rain and mud than anything else. Even Jacquie, steadfast in her careful choice of words on Facebook, soft, at all times polite, and imperturbable, makes clear her priorities with ‘*guys are nothing*’ (18: ii). Finn frames her utterance with conviction and without hedges, voice diacritics, or extra frills—‘*a woman can do whatever she wants to do*’ (18: i). It is important in sociolinguistic analysis to consider just how she does it by accounting for the contextual factors at play.

The following conversation (19) takes place below a picture Stella posted of a kitten in a basket. The image is titled 'Crazy Cat Lady Starter Kit' and captioned with, '*who needs men?*' Stella is 'tagged' as one of the kittens:

(19)

- Stella** Story of my life.
- Kat** I knew there was a first step!
- Stella** Now, second step..
- Kat** Kill all men?
- Stella** Well why can't we just make that the first ?
- Kat** Because the kittens are cute, and I want them now!!
- Stella** Well.. I have a fat cat that rapes all men, and you just have a fat cat, so its kinda like the first step.
- Kat** This cat lady thing is confusing... But in an odd way, much easier than men
- Stella** Agreed.
- [a male friend enters the conversation to tell the girls they have too much time on their hands]*
- Kat** Oh probably
- [he warns that, if she gets a cat, it's a sign that she's in dire straits]*
- Kat** I already have a cat smartass...
- Stella** And its 400000000 pounds

[another male friend enters to 'clear' the air: cats are more complicated than men; women need only to 'show some skin' and men will be at their mercy]

Stella frames this conversation as some kind of grievance. Kat is on the same page, in fact she even positions herself as complicit to this frame, suggesting their life 'story' has a shared solution (*I knew there was a first step!*). Each girl contributes to the unfolding

interaction by negotiating their ‘plan’ to achieve Crazy Cat Lady status. Despite interruptions from boys, the girls stand firm on their position that they are better off without men. Kat plays down the first interruption (*‘oh probably’*); she outright rejects the second attempt to foil their plan (*‘I already have a cat smartass’*); and finally both girls virtually ‘cold shoulder’ the third intrusion, which attempts to draw them out with a heteronormative male imperative (*‘show some skin’*). In so doing, they dismiss the reduction of women’s power to male-envisioned sexuality. At 16-years-old, they are sensitive to the appeal in being a Crazy Cat Lady, or are, at least, toying with the idea of being one.

Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) principles for analyzing identity in interaction are useful to demonstrate how mapping linguistic variables onto speaker sex would neglect more subtle instances of gendered identity. First, the girls’ presentations of self emerge out of the effects of complex social and cultural structures—so their contemporary selves are not free of the white, lower middle-class community in which they live. Second, their identities at any one time depend on the position they take up in an interaction. The intra-group variation of their linguistic style demonstrates shifting positions and the linguistic resources used to match them. Third, the girls’ identities are indexed through a variety of resources such as the altered spelling *‘betch.’* Fourth, how the girls choose to self-identify is in relation to one another. The magnitude of Stella’s use of profanity is fully realized when juxtaposed with Jacquie’s conservative expressions for disapproval (e.g. *‘holy’*). And fifth, the gendered identities of these girls are only partial representations of the factors that contribute to their social constructions of gender and self, and never wholly representative of each individual (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). The instance in which Stella and Kat take up anti-hegemonic positions while discussing the Crazy Cat Lady Starter Kit (example 19) does not represent a static attitude towards men, rather the intersectionality of identity, which is subject to a flux of contexts, positions, individual choices and cultural influences at once.

5.4 SUMMARY

In light of this discussion, the specific research questions outlined in the introduction can be answered more specifically:

1. What patterns of (gendered) linguistic behaviour are evident on Facebook?

Within this case, patterns of gendered linguistic behaviour both uphold and oppose traditional expectations for ‘women’s language.’ All five of the girls’ linguistic behaviour is identifiably ‘girly’ to a certain extent. However, intra-group variation exists and each of the participants uses a linguistic style that is uniquely her own. Furthermore, linguistic behaviour on Facebook is illustrative of informal, unplanned speech. It is also a product of the medium, in which brevity, speed, paralinguistic restitution, and phonological approximation are valuable tools.

2. How do individuals use this new medium for communication against the backdrop of historical and cultural discourses they are familiar with?

This research illustrates how speakers on Facebook are complicit in recreating, or echoing, the cultural and historical discourses that are a part of their shared history, particularly as white, lower to middle-class girls in a small city. However, Facebook is a space that affords its users the tools to construct their online personas apart from what is expected of them against a hegemonic yardstick, when their autonomous selves deem that desirable. In other words, Facebook as a medium is not wholly responsible for the reinforcement of hegemonic femininity or binary male-female gender constructs. It is, rather, the medium or platform for social actors to engage in the social work they understand to be appropriate or advantageous to their sought after identities. In fact, there is evidence in this discussion that Facebook is an ideal medium with which to challenge the historical archetype of women orators as interlopers.

3. How does a community of practice on Facebook negotiate terms for sociability, support and identity?

This community of practice on Facebook is unique, in terms of virtual communities, for the nonymity on which Facebook is predicated. While a particular group on Facebook may consist of members widely distributed geographically and interacting principally online (e.g. a political group and its members across the country), this case is illustrative of a group of girls who use Facebook primarily for interacting with friends from their offline lives. It is a community that represents a complicated constellation of social relationships—that are not exhaustively represented by the core participants alone—that fall again within nested networks. It overlaps and is anchored to a variety of offline social spheres, including family, clubs, school, and beauty pageants, to name a few. This virtual community of practice has a shared sense of identity that is namely informed by participants' shared history as friends, students, and adolescent white girls in a lower- to middle-class structure. Shared cultural artefacts, such as exchanges over video links, images, and SUs proclaiming a particular stance, further bolster group identity and are evidence of their shared purpose to connect with one another, as well as their shared culture. This community's standard for sociability is negotiated jointly by its members, and is demonstrated in the existence of patterns for conflict (e.g. intra-girl misogynistic insulting), of norms for spelling, exchanging information, the use of voice diacritics, and so on. Other protocols, such as the virtual 'cold shoulder' and policing each other's use of language, demonstrate the emergence of roles, hierarchy, and, in a sense, governance of behaviour within the group. This idea of community emphasizes the social behaviour of a group, and it is analyzed in consideration of the historical and theoretical implications of gender and identity.

4. What might an individual's online interactions say about who she is?

Contrary to the earliest assumptions about computer-mediated behaviour, it is not devoid of cues as to the 'authentic' identity of the speaker. The online interactions of the girls in this case speak to the possibility of identity construction via social networking sites, specifically Facebook. Their linguistic behaviour illustrates how they situate themselves within a broader historical and cultural discourse. It is telling of whom the girls believe their audience to be, what their offline life consists of, including friends, family, hobbies, interests, and day-to-day activities, as well as whom these girls wish to be perceived as. From an ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspective, the online interactions of an individual are, in general, a representation of social actors within locally and cultural specific contexts. These girls are not passive recipients of a legacy of gender imbalance. Certainly, the gender factor is at play online, but computer- and digitally-mediated interactions do not achieve an erasure of gender boundaries. This case demonstrates, rather, that with Facebook and with the generational proclivity to 'live' their lives online, these girls are equipped with tools to carve out their own experience.

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The ethnographic approach of this case has highlighted participants' competence as social actors through local understandings of their language use; "it therefore contributes to the feminist project of calling attention to women's abilities and agency, while reminding scholars that gendered language use is not everywhere the same" (Bucholtz 2003: 48). Especially in the context of girl-girl interaction, the participants in this case "do not define themselves only in relationship to boys in a heterosexual matrix; 'one can *become a woman* in opposition to other women'" [emphasis added] (Alarcon 1990: 360 in Bettie 2003: 5). Their behaviour may suggest they are exceptions to the rule: deviants and not *pure* representations of Greer's (1971) description of *The Eternal Feminine*. From an ethnographic perspective though, they represent how gendered language use is locally specific and subject to variation.

The interactional sociolinguistic framework emphasizes that speakers are largely constrained by the male-female binary—a cultured construct they learned as children.

However, it does allow for the possibility to transcend this system: “only through conscious awareness and effort” (Bucholtz 2003: 50). This possibility, and one that is evident in this case, again highlights the competence of speakers as users of discourse. The girls’ use of traditionally expected language (see Table 9 for examples of ‘girly’ style), dissident displays of femininity (e.g. misogynistic insults), negotiations about language use (policing and virtual ‘cold shouldering’), and the general patterning of their language on Facebook are all evidence of competent speakers who understand (or are coming to understand) the interactional rules appropriate to locally-specific contexts and the style they wish to achieve. Style is not a facade behind which the ‘real’ self stands. It is the manifestation of a self we present to the world (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 306), a manifestation drawn from pressures larger than the individual and the creative proof of the variation that is true of language and its speakers.

Chapter 6

RETROSPECTIVE: METHODS AND ETHICS

The wildfire of new and increasingly popular social media sites has undoubtedly brought a wealth of unfamiliar issues to face researchers across disciplines. Creative methodological possibilities abound, as new computer- and digitally-mediated communication has provided a social sphere as yet unseen. The norms for sociability are themselves still in their infancy, suggesting that all of the possibilities for investigating them are also yet to be realized. Opinions abound as to the appropriate ethical measures required for the communicative and methodological evolution in online communications. A common thread within the literature contests that Internet research is different from other forms and, as such, deserving of unique methods (e.g. Rutter & Smith 2005). However, Orgad (2005) reports that researchers' methodological reflections are often excluded, resulting in a persisting obscurity around the problems, challenges, and opportunities that researchers are faced with in online research. This chapter will consider the ways in which Internet research does indeed differ from traditional methods of offline inquiry and the resultant considerations that are advisable to future work.

6.1 PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE

One of the most pressing debates within Internet research wrestles over the public versus private nature of online interactions. There are various descriptions of each. For instance, a distinction has been made between private and public interactions according to the type of CMC setting, where one-to-many discussion groups (e.g. listserv) might be considered public and one-to-one discussions (e.g. e-mail) deemed private (Johns et al. 2004). However, the effort to categorize all online communication along such discrete lines is problematic for the indiscretion that often, in reality, characterizes computer- and digital communication. Nonetheless, an invisible audience differentiates the networked public from the traditional public (boyd 2007). Invisible audiences thrive on the permanent,

searchable, and replicable nature of online content. So while an individual may intend on private interaction, it remains tenuous considering the reality of the Internet.

6.1.1. The Illusion of Privacy

Facebook interactions are arguably like public diaries. However, while adolescents freely give up information online, there is little evidence in the literature to suggest that they have an understanding of the public nature of the Internet. Little research has been done to accurately reflect how adolescents perceive the nature of the Internet. Barnes (2006) questions whether, in an age of digital media, privacy is a realistic possibility at all. A review of Facebook's Privacy Policy clearly presents the complications entangled in any hope for privacy online.

Facebook is resolute in its effort to inform people that “one of the primary reasons people use Facebook is to share content with others”

(<http://www.facebook.com/policy.php>). The company implores its users to be aware of privacy settings and how their information is being shared on the site. In addition, Facebook warns its users that some of the content they share and the actions they take will show up on friends' home pages and other pages they visit. Users are also reminded that copies of their content may remain viewable elsewhere to the extent it has been shared, used, copied, or stored by others, “even after you remove information from your profile or delete your account.” This policy clearly states that users' content is subject to other users' privacy settings. And finally, Facebook warns that despite privacy options, “no security measures are perfect or impenetrable.” In other words, Facebook does not ensure that information shared on the site will not become publicly available.

Furthermore, the company rescinds responsibility for third party circumvention of any privacy settings or security measures on Facebook.

Despite these clear statements regarding the public nature of Facebook content, the boundaries between public and private remain unclear. This is namely a result of the discrepancy between the legal protocols that dictate privacy issues on social media sites and the actual perception users have of their interactions online. In one attitudinal survey designed to collect data about student attitudes towards Facebook, the results were neutral: “there were no clear privacy attitudes related to the student's use of Facebook.

The only significant finding discovered was a strong disagreement with the statement: ‘everybody should know everything about everyone else’” (Barnes 2006: para. 20). Again, in response to the statement: “Facebook respects my privacy,” students responded neutrally on a Likert scale. A disconnect exists between the way users report how they feel about the privacy settings of their social media profiles and how they react to an unexpected ‘breach’ of privacy (Barnes 2006).

In an experimental study using chat rooms, researchers measured how participants reacted to being informed and invited to participate in a study on language use (Hudson & Bruckman 2004). They concluded that individuals in chat rooms generally do not approve of being studied without their consent. However, the researchers questioned, “what exactly do subjects’ reactions indicate about their thoughts or feelings?” (Hudson & Bruckman 2004: 135). Problematically, the reactions did not represent every one in each polled chat room—only the individuals who chose to respond to the message, some of whom expressed irritation at being ‘spammed’ or simply provided an insulting remark or imperative to ‘go away.’ Moreover, the reported “hostility” that chat room participants reacted with is arguably typical of chat room behaviour, which has a reputation for being hostile, in part due to the anonymity of its participants (e.g. Herring 1993). Furthermore, those potential participants’ reactions to being solicited for a research project are not consistent with the reactions from potential participants in this project. This will be addressed in further detail in later sections; however, it should be noted that Hudson & Bruckman’s (2004) solicitation was a brief, anonymous script indicating a “study on language use,” sent without discretion to all individuals in chat rooms (2004: 131).

In contrast, potential participants for this project were strategically identified as individuals likely willing to participate (by the participant liaison). They were not contacted at the outset due to ethical protocol that stipulated participants could not be approached by the researcher. Thus, the girls took the initiative to get involved in the project. Furthermore, when third parties were contacted to participate later into the data collection process, they were sent personalized messages describing in detail the research project, and why their interactions were deemed relevant to the data collection process. They were also provided contact information and an image of the nonymous researcher. While valuable for insights into online participants attitudes, the Hudson and Bruckman

(2004) study cannot extend to the multitude of other online platforms, each with its own atmosphere of interaction and expectation for publicity and privacy.

The issues of perceived and expected privacy demand that researchers and ethics boards work collaboratively to address the specific bounds of each inquiry. Outside of academia, discussions are aimed at developing solutions for protecting privacy in online social networking sites, including social solutions (e.g. encouraging parents to become more involved in children's computer use), technical solutions (e.g. social media sites providing better security for their users), and legal solutions (e.g. legislation to protect minors against the misuse of their personal information). There is a need for academic solutions, which will address important questions about the parameters of public and private data, expectations for informed and ongoing consent, and definitions of harm.

6.1.2 Online Data and the Researcher

The potential data online are innumerable and highly sought after across disciplines. This reality raises questions about accessing these data, which are often at researchers' virtual fingertips but beyond the reach of ethical protocol. Questions about who should have access to the data generated by online interactions abound. Facebook addresses this issue in its Statement of Rights and Responsibilities (<http://www.facebook.com/terms.php>), which is derived from the company's founding principles governing its relationship with users and those associated with Facebook. Facebook states clearly that by using or accessing the site, individuals are agreeing to this statement, which reiterates the networked nature of the site. The company does not prohibit the collection of information by third parties, except by automated means. However, in order to do so, users' consent must be obtained; it must be made clear that it is a third party and not Facebook collecting their information; and users must be told what is being collected and to what aim. The Facebook imperative to share information remains clear; however, users are afforded an incredible degree of control over privacy if they choose to exert it. In conducting research, it is ethically imperative to consider both the medium's structure and its users' willingness to agree to that medium's terms and conditions.

The emergence of social media sites and their wealth of information attracts more than researchers. Lawyers are now using such sites to investigate the background of

parties, witnesses, jurors, and even judges. Case law on discoverability and social media sites is establishing precedents, and most courts have allowed the collection of relevant information posted to sites such as Facebook, particularly when the information is deemed crucial to the case beyond speculative reasoning (Boggs & Edwards 2010). In *Beye vs Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey* the plaintiff alleged that the defendant, a health insurance company, wrongfully refused to pay health benefits for a child's eating disorder. The company claimed the disorder was a 'non biologically based mental illnesses,' and not covered under their policy. They supported this claim through information sought on the child's Facebook and MySpace profiles. The court ordered this information to be turned over, noting the '*low expectation of privacy* attributed to these sites' [emphasis added]. Yet, another court held that a teenage plaintiff's information on MySpace and Facebook was protected because privacy interests prevailed over the defense's demonstration that the information was necessary to their case. This ruling seems to be the exception. Overall, courts are allowing information to be gleaned from social media sites, particularly information readily available through a user's profile. The reality is that courts are increasingly treating social networking sites as a public space.

Within journalism, written formal consent is not required to interview people, yet journalists are expected to be transparent about their intentions to document and make public the interactions with their interviewees. The legal field is increasingly treating social media sites as public spaces, and its practitioners are expected to conduct themselves accordingly within a networked public online. Education departments are also adapting to the emerging public space online, where students interact with each other, with curricula, and teachers in educational and more informal contexts. Ethics boards in education departments are already addressing the possibility, and often, the reality, that students and teachers interact on social media sites, where traditionally private information about students' and teachers' lives is laid bare. It is noteworthy that, despite ethical expectations for transparency, this is hardly the benchmark: one high school principal disclosed to me her 'secret' Facebook profile, with which she tracked students' weekend activities, social trends, and in-group-out-group developments. The profile was named after her dog, lacking images, and enabled her 'Friendships' with students anonymously. I suggest such tactics, though sensational, are not unusual. This anecdote is

evidence that (a) social media sites are important and insightful social resources, (b) practitioners, professionals, and individuals in general have access to these public interactions with relative ease, and (c) the ethical protocol required of researchers within academia far exceeds the expectations of professionals in other fields. However, I am not arguing to condone covert tactics for researchers. Instead, I am suggesting that the medium demands to be understood and accommodated (ethically and methodologically) as the public platform that it is. Haggerty (2004) goes so far as to suggest that “the academy risks becoming the only social institution that cannot routinely quote and analyze information posted on what will likely become the dominant social communication system” (2004: 405). As individuals learn new mediums for communication, they too are educated in its norms for sociability—which include assumptions about self-disclosure. Researchers are pressed to make the same adaptations and be responsible for understanding the methodological and ethical conduct that is contextually specific to their work.

Undoubtedly, some individuals on the Internet conduct themselves under the assumption of privacy and confidentiality. Whether this is realistic is beyond reproach when it comes to deciding how to acquire informed consent. Rather, more attention should be paid to the reasonable degree a group of participants likely considers the nature of their interactions public or private. There are individuals who consider their interactions on the web on par with public speech, and some of them are in fact just that (e.g. comments on online news articles). As conventional media moves increasingly towards online content and means of news dissemination, there is a shift in the acceptability of computer- and digitally-shared information. CMC no longer represents a new frontier, where individuals are unsure of themselves and their surroundings. To meet this evolution, researcher must address issues of perception and expectation of privacy. There is also a need for research that can demonstrate the boundaries of intent to disseminate as more and more interactions are predicated on a user’s intention to share information within the public sphere.

6.2 ETHICAL REDEFINITIONS

The Internet represents a new landscape wherein ethical considerations deserve special consideration, if not modification. In a caution against over-regulatory practice of Canadian research ethics boards, Haggerty (2004) discusses “ethics creep,” a dual process whereby ethics bureaucracy is continually expanding to accommodate new research sites with *intensifying* regulation practices (2004: 394). Haggerty argues that the label ‘researchers’ and the activities that fall under the heading ‘research’ extend beyond practicality—stifling the initiative of ‘our most enthusiastic students’ (2004: 398) and threatening the ability to conduct university-based research. Intensification is not necessarily an indication of appropriate modifications to ethics protocol.

6.2.1 Risk and Harm

Risks to research participants’ reputation or relationships, shaming them, or traumatizing them are all appropriate considerations for social science researchers. The current protocol suggests these risks are especially pressing in online interactions, perhaps due to issues of perceived privacy.

I argue that online interactions are more ‘risky’ only in the case that participants believe those interactions to be private, or when their interactions are especially intimate or revealing of compromising information. Moreover, evaluating participants’ awareness of the risks involved may also prove telling. All of the girls in this study were able to name risks they associated with Facebook interaction, for example, “*letting people see your page*” [Finn/Q/-] (see Appendix 2). They also demonstrated an understanding of the consequences of their behaviour in a networked public. There were community norms for avoiding potentially damaging information, such as the virtual ‘cold shoulder’ or the often used imperative ‘*txt me*’ (instructions for friends to move the interaction off of Facebook to discuss matters more privately). As mediums grow more sophisticated, so too do their users. The community in this study is not representative of Internet interactions as whole, but its members’ ability to conduct themselves with a reasonable degree of decorum illustrates their social media savvy.

Harm issues represent a separate concern for researchers and ethics boards. Hudson and Bruckman (2004) pose the question: “If subjects are not aware that a researcher is recording the conversation in a chat room, is there still harm?” (2004: 135), concluding that participants’ rights are violated even if they are unaware of the violation. However, this question is tied up in another question about which causes greater harm—annoying potential participants or not obtaining consent? The answer to this and many other questions regarding risk and harm in collecting data from online sources are debatable, subject to circumstantial boundaries, and not adequately answered by a single ethics protocol. Obtaining a waiver of consent from an ethics board is another potential way to conduct online data collection, according to Hudson and Bruckman (2004) and under U.S. regulatory law. However, this option is likely to be pursued successfully only in the case that human participants are not involved.

Issues of risk and harm are complicated by the illusion of privacy held by some individuals in online social settings. Hudson and Bruckman (2004) conclude that chat rooms are indeed public spaces, yet this does not excuse researchers from being “sensitive to subjects’ perceptions of privacy when choosing appropriate research methods” (2004: 137). Other considerations are important, including the age of potential participants. For this study, the age of potential participants was changed from early adolescence (12- to 15-years old) to meet ethics protocol that would allow obtaining consent without parental approval (16-years old). A final consideration is the role of the researcher.

The role of the researcher depends on methodology and research frameworks. While some researchers may be entirely absent from the data collection setting, other frameworks (e.g. ethnography of communication) may require that the researcher take part to a certain extent in the community of participants she is studying. In Bell’s (1984) conception of Audience Design, any given audience is made up of third parties outside of the immediate interaction, including *overhearers* and *eavesdroppers*. Neither *overhearers* nor *eavesdroppers* are ratified participants in the interaction; however, *overhearers* are known to be present by the speakers. In mass communication contexts, the *overhearers* are effectively the entire remaining audience outside of the target audience and *auditors*, who are not targeted but known to be receiving communication by the speaker (Bell

1984: 177). It will behoove researchers to develop data collection methodologies that support a researcher as *overhearer* role, in which their participation in interactions is known to participants but allows them to avoid becoming directly involved in the interactions under study. Unlike *eavesdroppers*, the researcher as *overhearer* will be better able to address ethical concerns about participants' privacy, risk, and consent simply due to the fact that participants are aware of their presence and role as a researcher.

6.2.2 Consent

In Canada, the Tri-Council Policy Statement¹⁴ on research ethics expects that participants will sign a release form demonstrating that they have read and understand a summary of the research, including potential risks. In some contexts, oral consent will suffice. If oral consent is adequate for telephone-directed surveys, it is not unrealistic to expect that abbreviated online written consent should suffice for inquiries conducted online. I argue for 'abbreviated' forms of consent because, just as a ten-minute decree of consent dictated over the phone would be unnecessary and an impediment to telephone interviews, so too are lengthy, in-depth consent forms online. For the researcher who can argue demonstrably that the target population of their study is credibly aware of the public and networked nature of their behaviour, complicated lengths toward informed consent should be adapted to reflect the perception and expectation of privacy of the participants.

In lieu of asking researchers to mitigate a host of potential risks that are not likely befitting the research proposal (e.g. informed consent in a public network), I also emphasize the importance of considering the perceived *public nature* of the context. By describing a public nature, I intend to account for the acceptability of contacting third parties within social media sites, not unlike approaching a stranger on the street. When particular interactions were seen as important to this study's analysis (and removing third party contributions would sacrifice the empirical value of the interaction), networked friends were contacted for consent through the private message function on Facebook.

¹⁴ A PDF of the statement is available at <http://www.von.ca/Research%20Ethics/Tri-council%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>.

This possibility was worked into the ethics application—nearly as an afterthought—to safeguard against losing the networked richness of linguistic behaviour, and it proved to be invaluable to data collection and analysis. For those adolescents who had privacy controls that did not allow non-friends to message them, requesting consent was not an option. However, the majority of adolescents could be contacted in a private message, which is a form of consent in itself. Nearly all of those contacted responded favourably and in a timely manner—unlike the respondents in Hudson and Bruckman’s (2004) survey of chat room participants. In fact, most of those consenting third parties were interested to know more about the study, and instigated several topics of discussion subsequent to the original solicit for consent, including requests to read this paper upon completion. This exercise in acquiring third party consent demonstrates two points. First, these adolescents on Facebook are aware of the public, networked nature of their interactions and are open to sharing them. Second, there are alternatives in methodology and ethical standards towards gaining consent online, which researchers and ethical boards alike can work towards developing.

Unfortunately for this project, acquiring informed consent was originally pursued according to traditional ethical provisions by approaching several school boards. After submitting in full two separate applications for permission to conduct research, this study was at a standstill because the school boards in two different cities had denied my application. In fact, I had yet to even speak to a student. Problematically in the case of ethnographies, participant observation, or exploratory inquiry, consent forms may be intrusive and overly sterile in what are often informal, every day contexts—if the researcher can get that far. Furthermore, they can hamper encounters with unnecessarily official and legalistic exchanges (Haggerty 2004). In this case, the school board ethics committees deemed the protocol too in-depth and risky to warrant approval. Arguably, the perceived intricacy and ‘risk’ factors were emphasized in those proposals, as I struggled to work a contemporary context into the trappings of traditional methodological protocol and ethical requirements. Researchers interested in working with computer-mediated behaviour need practical avenues to access participants that reflect the way participants are interacting. In other words, go to the source. Unfortunately, outdated ethical procedures make this virtually impossible—literally.

Guidelines stipulate that participant observation research may be conducted within contexts that individuals can be expected to be “seeking public visibility,” such as political rallies, demonstrations, and public meetings (Haggerty 2004). I argue that participants on Facebook interact with the same expectation of public visibility. This is evident, first and foremost, in the terms of agreement that all participants consent to in joining Facebook. It is also evident in the networked nature of the site, which encourages, indeed *values*, the widening of social networks and thus online visibility. Haggerty (2004) reports instances in which ethics protocol hampered and ultimately prevented research, such as the graduate student who was told “she should look away when her participant observation research brought her into contact with individuals who had not explicitly consented to being studied” (2004: 404). Such constraints on consent prove problematic within social networking sites as well, where it is impossible to ‘look away’ from the interactions of third parties. To remove them threatens to compromise the research integrity of each interaction, particularly for research initiatives concerned with the communicative sociability of interactions in context.

In the case of this project, the plan to address informed consent required much negotiation that, eventually, did not sacrifice the original research question. Considerable time was invested in coming to an appropriate design, which, in the end, better satisfied the networked and informal nature of the context. However, roadblocks persisted, such as attempting to have participants announce their participation on their profiles in order to ‘make third parties aware’ of the possibility that their behaviour was visible to a researcher. Some of the participants posted messages that read only, ‘Im in a research project about teens and Facebook,’ while others neglected to post a message entirely or removed the message from their Wall shortly after posting it. Future attempts at attaining informed consent may include a predetermined message; however, researchers still cannot control what participants post on their Walls, for how long, or that their networked friends will take notice of the message. For these reasons, I suggest researchers make efforts to demonstrate the public nature and perceived privacy of participants’ interactions. For example, creating a group specifically for a research project wherein participants actively post within a closed community will make informed consent more easily acquired. However, these circumstances also sacrifice the networked nature of *in*

situ interactions. To further address issues of informed consent, my identity as a researcher was obvious, as I conducted all interactions with participants and third parties from a specific ‘researcher’ account. My willingness to be nonynomously present likened my role to that of an *overhearer*; however, not all third parties at all times were aware that a researcher was observing their interactions. I urge researchers and ethics boards to consider the feasibility of this situation, particularly in light of the networked public.

Facebook is not a closed community (e.g. a book club), although users are required to *sign up*. It more similarly resembles a community bulletin board or a radio broadcast. Individuals who post on this board are so doing with the intent to disseminate information—albeit to the individuals they expect to be in the vicinity of the bulletin board. Facebook users who post information on their Walls do so with the intent of sharing information pursuant to their privacy settings. This can include ‘Friends Only,’ ‘Friends of Friends,’ or ‘Everyone.’ The networks nested within networks on Facebook make it a platform for information sharing—a constellation of communities. Similarly, when a caller phones a radio talk show, she understands her communication will be broadcast to a wider audience (beyond her immediate audience), which includes *addressees* (perhaps only the radio host), *auditors* (the neighbour whom is known to tune in regularly), and *overhearers* (anyone else who has access to the specific dial on the radio). Trying to establish across-the-board informed and ongoing consent at the same time as protecting the anonymity of all participants is counterintuitive in a networked public such as Facebook, especially in light of participants with varying expectations and concerns for confidentiality. To further complicate matters, when information is posted on another user’s profile or a comment is made on another user’s post, that information then becomes subject to the other user’s privacy settings. I liken it to requesting a street performer to consent to being observed in her performance, then attempting to obtain consent from every passerby—in case their applause, laughter or idle chatter should be useful in later analysis—and finally, never revealing that it is the performer who is the focus of observation.

The difficulties encountered while trying to maintain informed consent, participant anonymity, as well as downplay the presence of the researcher will persist as rough waters in navigating online research. They are equally as important as they are

contradictory. Johns et al. (2004) describe how the observer's paradox for the online researcher is transfigured by challenges to be seen as a researcher in the absence of a physical body. This notion of absence versus presence is particularly germane to ethical issues online, and goes to the heart of the researcher as *overhearer* role. The researcher has to make considerable efforts to emphasize her research role in order to uphold an ethical standard all the while without being intrusive. To this aim, the specific research group and research profile created on Facebook established some kind of stable 'researcher' presence in this case. All of my interactions with participants were reminders of my role as the researcher. I also tagged every message to them with the link to the online group, as well as encouragement to approach me with any questions. This transparency is necessary if a researcher wants to respect their target community and uphold ethical standards. Fortunately, my role as researcher was that of observer, which allowed me to mitigate my intrusion into participants' lives. Without participating in interactions on participants' Walls, I was able to maintain a naturalistic buffer to some degree. I intentionally aimed to be innocuous in appearance and attitude (without sacrificing professionalism). I used first names. I shortened syntax. And I used interjections and discourse markers (e.g. *cool, awesome, ya, like*) to affect informality. After debating the drawbacks of not posting a profile picture, an image of me with camera in hand was chosen for its lack of personal information and intimation of accessibility, as well for the camera being iconic of my role as an observer. Again, there was the need to strike a balance between absence and presence. Ideally, consent and community cooperation are best achieved through face work on the ground—in other words, under the terms that the community operates. Researchers and ethics boards should work towards establishing this approach in context-specific ways that meet ethical assurances with as much ease as possible. A detailed outline of the ethical protocol and participant recruitment process used for this research is provided in Appendix 4.

6.3 METHODOLOGY: FUTURE WORK

Developing a framework to analyze adolescent gender and language practices in virtual communities requires patience to match the kaleidoscope of issues at play. Gender and language alone constitute a formidable undertaking simply for the canon of literature that

goes before them. Adolescence as a life stage is complicated by an ease for chameleon transformations and the willingness to make them. For sociolinguists, the linguistic behaviour of youth is rife with social complexity. The implications of conducting research in computer-mediated contexts have been previously enumerated, but the significance of context and locally specific parameters cannot be emphasized enough.

The sheer quantity and depth of data that can be gleaned from interactions online far surpasses the scope of any single research study. Over a data collection period of two months, in which a couple of hours were spent five to six days a week on participants' profiles, over 12,000 words were collected. This amount of data requires organization before, during, and after it is collected. The potential for future work with that data is great, and the appropriate permission should be established in ethics protocol beforehand to allow for analyses beyond the original project. Various mediums provide different kinds of information (e.g. time and date stamps, names, interlocutors' comments, text histories, images, and so on). Anticipating what will be available to collect is important to determining what ethics protocol to pursue and what appropriate analysis should follow. Determining the level of analysis beforehand will make the expanse of data more manageable, though it may delimit what qualifies as data. For example, by focusing this analysis on participants' Walls, SUs, comments and responses, the expanse of linguistic behaviour that occurs through the site's synchronous chat function is set aside.

Stylistic and structural analysis will likely make fewer demands on the researcher's ability to interpret each speaker's psychological or locutionary intention behind each utterance. However, the distance between researcher and participant requires a degree of improvisation on the researcher's part at all times. This is not to say that the researcher reads data at her whim, rather she reads by stricter standards. Paralinguistic and situational cues are lacking in CMC, making the chosen text representations all the more sensitive to interpretation. Voice diacritic patterning, for example, deserves extra attention for its role as the communicative workhorse. *Speakers*, online, are intentional with their keystrokes. At a most basic level, the choice between capital letters, standard spellings, various codes, specific words, punctuation—or lack of any of the above—may be meaningful to the online speaker. Elucidating such meanings is the responsibility of the researcher, who must rely on in-depth analysis and detailed description to justify her

interpretation. These considerations might also compel the researcher to pursue the appropriate ethics protocol to conduct member checks, peer review of the data, in-depth exchanges with participants, or other instruments to perform triangulation.

Interactional and content analysis ultimately demand a collaboration of aspects of past methodology. The sociolinguistic tradition did not develop out of linguistic interactions online. This new medium will demand aspects of the multitude of approaches that have been established, for it is dynamic in both communicative and social function. Research initiatives akin to this one will succeed by considering the gamut of concerns listed here. Where one theoretical approach or analytical method falls short, another must be reworked into the methodology. For example, footing, positioning, and voice considerations within frame analysis quickly become impotent in the face of a spattering of two- and three-word exchanges between two friends unless they are united with the detail extracted at the structural level. The need for multiple approaches also places demands on researchers to acquire the complexity of ethical permissions that will accommodate various methods.

Admitting the complexity of social and interactional variables online is key to interpreting them in contextually meaningful ways. The Internet achieves neither erasure of gender, nor race, nor class. Nor does it mitigate the nuances at a local level. In fact, it only complicates these concerns as a hybrid medium that affords users the ability to *do* social work amidst a plethora of new communicative settings and functions. Taken altogether, the demands of investigating gendered identity practices online fall on a plane of intersectionality. To neglect the historical and cultural discourses specific to a certain individual within a particular community sacrifices depth of perspective. Yet, neglecting the agentive power of individual speakers simply denies the possibilities for subversive or unique linguistic behaviour, inter-and intra-group variation, and organic language as a production of individual speakers in real-life contexts. Of course, neglecting the setting of the exchange and how technological mediums impinge on the messages they host is equally as negligent. And finally, context-specific considerations—thick in description—are necessary in order to arrive at an interpretation that can be applicable beyond the immediacy of that particular research setting.

Chapter 7 FACE(BOOK): THE FUTURE

7.1 ASSESSING METHODOLOGY

Addressing limitations is an important step in the qualitative research process. In so doing, the discussion naturally entails consideration of future work. This section will consider the challenges in conducting gender and linguistic research online using qualitative and interpretive methods, the limitations of this research as an exploratory case study, and future directions for similar investigations.

The qualitative and interpretive methodologies of this case illustrate how linguistic variables may be locally specific and meaningful to this particular community (e.g. deviations in spelling). At the same time, patterns in the same group may reflect a historical and ideological assumption of heterosexuality (e.g. *soapboxing* about romantic love). These observations are couched in the limitations of the discourse analytic and sociolinguistic traditions. The social meaning of language is not readily transparent. Particularly when it comes to qualitative linguistic research into computer-mediated discourse, text is left *in situ* and to the devices of audience and analyst interpretation. Moreover, this case represents the challenge of empirical investigations into social behaviour more generally. Stubbe and Holmes (1995: 9) describe the infeasibility of establishing a “universe of discourse,” in which the actual use of a specific linguistic variable is more informative as an insight into the interaction, as opposed to determining potential opportunities for occurrences. More directly, “the envelope of variation for these types of features has been considered to be subjective, residing strictly in the motivations of the speaker and therefore not available for reconstruction by the analyst” (D’Arcy 2005: 36). Recreating intent must instead be a matter of cobbling together locally and contextually specific details of the interaction and interpreting them, by way of various tools, against a backdrop of wider considerations (e.g. ideology). True to this effort, the multiple sources of evidence relied upon in this case, as well as the background

of hegemonic femininity and language ideology, provide a thorough and well-measured illustration of unearthing the social meaning behind participants' linguistic behaviour.

As exploratory research, this paper is unable to make generalizations at a global level; therefore, evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research methods is prudent, especially in light of the tradition of quantitative methods and their ostensibly 'concrete' results. The credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of its methodology are important criteria in establishing quality of research soundness (Lincoln & Guba 2003). These criteria were met to the extent that the scope and aim of this project allowed, and are detailed below.

The "thick description" of this discussion is provided to establish credibility. Multiple sources of evidence (e.g. questionnaire, a participant liaison, participant observation, Facebook profile observation) were utilized to obtain depth of data in order to construct an authentic portrait of this community of girls. Permission for prolonged interaction was not pursued during the ethics application process. In a more extensive project, extended participant interviews, participants' observations of the conclusions drawn, and peer review would be invaluable in establishing triangulation from various sources of information.

The conclusions from this discussion are not transferable to other contexts, as the case is bound by only five core participants across four months. However, the analytic methods are transferable to the informing frameworks that make up the methodology, namely ethnography of communication and interactional sociolinguistics. Aspects of the conclusions are in line with other cases that have employed similar methods from the sociolinguistic tradition, such as a range of 'femininities' (e.g. Bettie 2003), the use of positive facework on Facebook (West 2010), a small community of girls with group specific norms, a hierarchy of relations, and linguistic behaviour that is indicative and susceptible to performativity, style, and identity (e.g. Bucholtz 1996), and the presence of gender-marked linguistic features in computer-mediated interactions (e.g. Herring 1993). Most importantly, the local level is where identities are made: "it is in more intensive communities that individuals are living their sense of themselves" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999: 190). So while the conclusions of this paper cannot be transferred to a wider global context, they are not without value to the sociolinguistic field. The novel and

collaborative methodology and ethical considerations are transferable to other research projects.

The detailed methodology and provision of “thick description” make replicating this project possible, permitting future comparisons with other communities of practice on Facebook. As it stands, this work does not extend and remain stable over a long period of time and across researchers due to its exploratory nature; therefore, it is beyond the scope of this paper to judge methodological issues of dependability or reliability. In future research, an extended data collection period, more time for analysis, coding checks, and more freedom to interact with participants are needed. As the conclusions of this paper are pursued, replicated, and added upon by additional research, more adequate evaluations of this work’s dependability can be addressed.

External audits are considered beneficial to establishing the qualitative version of objectivity or neutrality: confirmability (Lincoln & Denzin 2003). This project did not employ audits, member checks, or peer review as a measure of establishing objectivity. These were not included due to scope considerations, such as time, space, and resources, and in light of the sociolinguistic tradition, which admits to the precarious nature of reconstructing intent and interpretation of social behaviour as a reality of the field. The analysis and interpretations are namely my own, with the exception of informal discussions with peers and cohorts that may have influenced my analysis. The conclusions drawn in this research reflect personal assumptions, values, and biases of the researcher as a white, middle class woman trained in the sociolinguistic discourse analytic tradition. However, multiple methodologies, described in detail, and explicit description of the theoretical orientation influencing analysis, bolster the confirmability of this project.

The greatest challenge to this work, aside from the methodological and ethical obstacles that are inherent in developing frameworks, is the intersectionality of gender. In other words, gender is complicated by other social attributes like class, ethnicity, and age. Moreover, it is connected to social ideologies (e.g. femininity). Attempting to incorporate these various other categories in a way that accounts for overarching discourses and speaker autonomy is the challenge implicated in interactional sociolinguistics and ethnographic methods of analyses. This paper sets out to address the methodological

challenge Wolfram (1993) puts forth: how to explain the concept of gender as a complex social, cultural, and psychological construct related to sex, and how gender affects linguistic variables. In so doing, gendered identities are considered as constructed performances, informed by a cultural and historical identity, as well as the locally specific demands of an interaction and individual agency. Gender, by this measure and in this community, affects linguistic variables as a matter of style and socialization.

7.2 CLOSING REMARKS

This research project constitutes an innovative inquiry into linguistic behaviour on Facebook set against a sociolinguistic backdrop. The methodology was originally directed by a single source (e.g. Herring 2004b), but ultimately represented a gestalt of approaches. This emergent framework was a consequence of working with online behaviour without a pre-established toolkit or a set of theoretical influences developed specifically for such data and line of inquiry. The ideal for data was unknown at the outset, as community patterns were undocumented and there was no precedent for the frequency of occurrence or significance of any given phenomenon. A wide possibility for contextual factors could not be accounted for beforehand, which left the level of analysis likewise undetermined. For example, while it seemed practical to expect the use of emoticons and acronyms to typify data, these particular online linguistic tools did not warrant any special analytical treatment in the end—at least not for the narrative that developed. In the same way, a community could be expected to demonstrate sociability, support and identity. Yet these factors have not been designed to account for the behaviour of a community as diffuse as those on Facebook. Future work will have to take into consideration how certain criteria for ‘community’ must flex to meet the context-specific communities in virtual reality. Moreover, future sociolinguistic work on Facebook must delimit its analysis carefully in light of the complexity and interpretive demands of this medium.

This project presupposed a connection between online interactions and face-to-face activities. However, due to time constraints and methodological learning curves, this paper did not attempt to make any observations on the girls’ offline interactions, nor can it reflect on deeper interpretations of what participants were thinking or feeling about

social networking, gender roles, and the implications of their linguistic behaviour on Facebook. Ideally, the discussion of participants' online behaviour would mirror the same individuals' interactions offline. There is nothing to suggest that the girls and their networked friends were operating within a vacuum. There is potential to demonstrate how an offline social hierarchy is governed and affected by interactions online and *vice versa*. Until there is time and the methodological and ethical provisions to do so, the discussion presented here stands as the groundwork for further inquiry.

This paper has demonstrated how a group of teens are using Facebook to construct gendered identities. It has also discussed the role of gender-marked features in Facebook interactions, as well as the linguistic style and structure of Facebook-*ese*. The content analysis has suggested a potential method for accounting quantitatively for certain linguistic phenomena, namely how SUs, *Likes*, and comments may constitute the social 'pull' of an individual on Facebook. It also demonstrated how traditional expectations for gendered language use were both upheld (e.g. the use of emotive language) and discounted (e.g. women defer to men). On the other hand, the qualitative analysis in this paper establishes a standard for tools for interactional analysis in a nonymous and asynchronous setting. The methodological and ethical obstacles resulted in suggestions for adapting the concerns research ethics boards and researchers have for social research online. Finally, this paper demonstrates how to consider locally specific phenomena within a framework of macro-level categories (e.g. gender).

This attempt to account for both fine detail and broad perspective provides a complex account of an online community. In so doing, it has described both stereotypical behaviour and exceptions to it, establishing a starting point from which to develop similar analysis. Sociolinguistic analysis should address in what circumstances linguistic behaviour in nonymous settings follows or diverges from traditional gender norms and be able to offer an explanation as to why. In mind of future work, sociolinguists are susceptible to over-extending the generalizability of their findings. At the same time, they risk '*othering*' individuals who do not match the qualities of their specific participants. In my eye, the most useful sociolinguistic discussions are those that are neither strictly exclusive nor naïvely inclusive of a wider population. Measured analysis and contextualized discussion are insightful over the long term. This paper is written to be

context specific, while, in parallel, offering insight into gendered language and identity online more broadly. The girls in this study are all white, lower-middle class, heterosexual teenagers. However, the familiarity of their racial and class status as subjects within sociolinguistic crosshairs should not detract from this work, as these “girls are members of a tribe, just like any other subculture, with certain clothing, language patterns, and belief systems [...] I write about this tribe because it is the one I know best.” (Wolf 1997: xxvii).

The linguistic behaviour within a community is specific to the norms and functional purposes of that group. Facebook is no exception. The historical role of women as interlopers in the public sphere is remnant in the hetero-normative behaviour that persists between individuals online. Yet the intra-group variation and subversive use of language substantiates the fact that gendered language identities are neither static nor predetermined. Adolescent girls are not exceptional in this case. Dismissing their agentive linguistic ability fulfills institutionalized prophecies about the ‘incompleteness’ of this life stage, and arbitrarily discounts their linguistic behaviour. Accounts of youth and girl culture must account for both ideological realities and the flexibility of identities. Theories of practice and performance are efficient means to do so.

The discussion in Chapter 3 introduces Facebook as a site for sociolinguistic inquiry, and reveals the complexity of sociolinguistic investigation with a third modality: contemporary computer- and digitally-based communication. It establishes the importance of discussing online interactions using re-worked notions of the community of practice (see Table 1). In Chapter 4, a template for future work on gendered language practices within anonymous networked publics is developed. It provides suggestions for working at the structural and stylistic level, addressing content, as well as investigating interactions with discourse analysis. Moreover, it addresses the concerns of ethnographic and participant observation in web-based research. Chapter 5 suggests that linguistic behaviour is neither youthful nor superficial. Instead, it describes the likelihood that Facebook-*ese* is typical of informal, unplanned speech, and a product of the medium’s constraints on language. Regardless, individuals in computer-mediated contexts are afforded new linguistic resources amidst a novel setting—and this warrants attention. Interactional analysis in this chapter also suggests an approach for determining how

specific resources on Facebook (e.g. the *Like* function) can be used to determine social standings between participants. Further discussion in this chapter elucidates the ways in which linguistic phenomena that are indexical of gender roles contribute to the reinforcement of traditional femininity as a standard for aspiring women. Deviations from expected linguistic practice are also addressed in order to demonstrate the variability of gendered identities as *style* work. More importantly to sociolinguistic inquiry, this discussion illustrates the usefulness of an online community framework (Table 1) to address issues of sociability. In Chapter 6, methodological and ethical standards for participant observation are addressed in light of the evolving demands of web-based research. Suggestions are provided to streamline ethical procedures, namely in addressing risk and informed consent. In the final chapter, the future directions for work concerned with sociability on social networking sites are presented, the most ambitious of which will focus on demonstrating how linguistic behaviour reflects the on- and offline connection individuals make between their digitally governed and *real* social lives.

Technology has the day and reform is its siren call. Yet, some language tenets still stand, albeit amidst new linguistic resources. The ease of mapping linguistic phenomenon onto broad-level variables may be tempting at a rudimentary level but outside of academic rigor. Ultimately, it is naïve of the complexity of how identity is constructed in performance and achieves variation in linguistic style. Members of a community cannot be pigeonholed to a static identity. The community itself is fluid and susceptible to the social work that occurs within it. Taken separately, individuals will both reinforce the norms for behaviour familiar to us and flex towards the desires of their autonomy and shape-shifting contextual factors. Wholly considered, the most dangerous risk is in ignoring the pressing importance of local interactions as they are placed within a framework of broad historical and cultural discourse. It is one that ultimately betrays the potential in sociolinguistic narrative.

No, no, nothing is proved, nothing is known. And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really—what shall we say?—the head of a gigantic old nail, driven in two hundred years ago, which has now, owing to the patient attrition of many generations of housemaids, revealed its head above the coat of paint, and is taking its first view of modern life in the sight of a white-walled fire-lit room, what should I gain?

- Virginia Woolf, 'The Mark on the Wall'

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Appendix 1 - Questionnaire Template

Participant Questionnaire¹⁵

for Taylor Marie Young, MA Candidate, Department of Linguistics, University of Victoria (<http://web.uvic.ca/ling/>)

Thank you for participating in this research project. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about you and how you feel about Facebook. There are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' answers. Please complete this questionnaire alone. Please freely express your personal opinion. All personal information and answers will be kept completely confidential. Any identifying information in the data of this project will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms.

Yes, I understand the above conditions and volunteer to participate

Part A – Personal Information

(1) Name	(2) Sex	(3) Age
	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
(4) School	(5) Grade	
(6) Sexual preference	(7) Ethnicity	

Part B – Hobbies and Interests

(8) List any school groups, clubs or teams you belong to:
(9) List any groups, clubs or teams you belong to outside of school:
(10) What do you like to do in your spare time? <i>(if different from what you listed above)</i>

¹⁵ This is a copy of the original questionnaire, which was created and posted online using fluidsurveys.ca.

Part C – Facebook

Choose the answer that most closely reflects your use of Facebook.

- (11) Approximately how many friends do you have?
- less than 25
 - about 100
 - a few hundred
 - more than 500
 - 1000 or more
 - I don't know
- (12) How often do you log onto your Facebook account?
- almost never
 - a few times a month
 - a few times a week
 - every day
 - a couple times a day
 - too often to count
- (13) How often do you update your status on Facebook?
- I don't
 - a few times a month
 - a few times a week
 - once a day
 - a few times a day
 - too often to count
- (14) How often do you comment on Friends' statuses, wall posts, and pictures?
- I don't
 - not very often
 - sometimes
 - usually
 - almost always
 - other, please specify: _____

- (15) How often do you use the online chat function on Facebook?
- I don't
 - not very often
 - sometimes
 - once a week
 - almost everyday
 - other, please specify: _____
- (16) How often do you use the private message function on Facebook?
- I don't
 - not very often
 - sometimes
 - once a week
 - almost everyday
 - other, please specify: _____
- (17) What do you think is the most useful function on Facebook?
- status updates
 - the Wall
 - instant chat
 - photo tagging/comments
 - private messaging
 - Other, please specify: _____
- (18) What do you think is the most interesting part of Facebook?
- status updates
 - the Wall
 - instant chat
 - photo tagging/comments
 - private messaging
 - Other, please specify: _____

Part D – Facebook

Do you agree with the following statements? Select the option that most closely matches your opinion.

- (19) Facebook is an important part of my social life.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (20) Having a Facebook page is a good way to keep in touch with my friends.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (21) Facebook is a good place to make plans with friends or hear about parties.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (22) Facebook is a good place to announce news.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (23) Facebook is a good place to get opinions, feedback, recommendations and/or explanations from Friends in my network.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree

- (24) I have gotten into an argument on or because of Facebook.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (25) You have to be careful about what you say and do on Facebook.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (26) My Facebook page is a good reflection of who I am.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (27) I use Facebook to show people what I want them to see.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (28) When I want to know more about someone, I check their Facebook page.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (29) Nobody's Facebook page is a perfect match to who they really are.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree

- (30) It's important to act the same way on Facebook as I do offline.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (31) On Facebook, I feel more free to say/do what I want than when I'm offline.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (32) On Facebook, sometimes I say/do things I probably never would offline.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (33) Some people act different on Facebook than they do offline.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (34) What happens on Facebook is often talked about offline.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (35) I'm friends with lots of different groups of people on Facebook.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree

- (36) Facebook lets different groups of people connect online when they normally wouldn't offline.
- strongly agree
 - kind of
 - not really
 - strongly disagree
- (37) What are the different reasons you use Facebook? Check as many as apply.
- to meet people
 - to share my life
 - to gossip
 - to get feedback/share opinions
 - to stay connected with friends
 - to flirt
 - everyone uses Facebook
 - other, please specify: _____

Part E – Free Answer

- (38) What does your Facebook profile say about who you are?
e.g. about your personality, interests, values, etc.

- (39) What are the risks, if any, involved with using Facebook?


- (40) Is there anything else about Facebook you would like to share?

You're finished!

Your participation in this study continues to be voluntary. If you decide you no longer want to participate, or if you have any questions concerning this study, please contact the researcher on Facebook or by e-mail (tmyoung@uvic.ca) or phone (250-896-2905). Access to your Facebook page will be terminated at the end of the data collection period (by June 1, 2011).

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire Results

Consent

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes, I understand the above conditions and volunteer to participate.		100%	21
Total Responses			21

Part A – Personal Information¹⁶

(1) *Names omitted.*

(2) Sex

All respondents chose ‘female.’

(3) Age

Five respondents answered, ‘16.’ One respondent answered, ‘17.’

(4) *School names omitted.*

(5) Grade

All respondents answered, ‘11.’

(6) Sexual preference

All respondents answered, ‘heterosexual’ or ‘men.’

(7) Ethnicity

All respondents answered. ‘white.’

¹⁶ Names and school information have been omitted to protect participants’ anonymity.

Part B – Hobbies and Interests

(8) *List any school groups, clubs or teams you belong to:*

leadership
MacIsle volleyball team, MacIsle basketball
manager of football team, rugby team.
manager of school football team, rugby team
senior girls field hockey, senior girls volleyball, Macisle fit
yearbook

(9) *List any groups, clubs or teams you belong to outside of school:*

Miss Riversdae Pageant, voice acting
city volleyball, Miss Riversdale pageant, community soccer
Miss Riversdale Pageant
dance
run club, dance
community soccer

(10) *What do you like to do in your spare time? (if different from what you listed above)*

sing, act, dance, read
go to the beach, hang out with my friends, go running
run, exercise, read, draw, sew my own clothes, swim
exercise, read, sew, draw, swim, socialize, ride horses
hang with friends
hang out with friends, relax at home, watch movies, occasional parties

Part C – Facebook

Choose the answer that most closely reflects your use of Facebook.

(11)

Approximately how many friends do you have?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
less than 25		0%	0
about a hundred		20%	1
a few hundred		0%	0
more than 500		80%	4
1000 or more		0%	0
I don't know		0%	0
Total Responses			5

(12)

How often do you log onto your Facebook account?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
almost never		0%	0
a few times a month		0%	0
a few times a week		33%	2
every day		17%	1
a couple times a day		33%	2
too often to count		17%	1
Total Responses			6

(13)

How often do you update your status on Facebook?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I don't		0%	0
a few times a month		0%	0
a few times a week		67%	4
once a day		0%	0
a few times a day		33%	2
too often to count		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(14)

How often do you comment on Friends' statuses, wall posts, and pictures?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I don't		0%	0
not very often		0%	0
sometimes		17%	1
usually		50%	3
almost always		33%	2
other, please specify:		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(15)

How often do you use the online chat function on Facebook?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I don't		0%	0
not very often		50%	3
sometimes		17%	1
once a week		0%	0
almost everyday		33%	2
other, please specify:		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(16)

How often do you use the private message function on Facebook?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
I don't		0%	0
not very often		17%	1
sometimes		17%	1
once a week		17%	1
almost everyday		33%	2
Other, please specify:		17%	1
Total Responses			6

(17)

What do you think is the most useful function on Facebook? Choose only one.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
status updates		0%	0
the Wall		33%	2
instant chat		0%	0
photo tagging/comments		50%	3
private messaging		17%	1
Other, please specify:		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(18)

What do you think is the most interesting part of Facebook? Choose only one.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
status updates		50%	3
the Wall		0%	0
instant chat		0%	0
photo tagging/comments		50%	3
private messaging		0%	0
Other, please specify:		0%	0
Total Responses			6

Part D – Facebook

Do you agree with the following statements? Select the option that most closely matches your opinion.





(19)

Facebook is an important part of my social life.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		33%	2
Kind of		67%	4
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(20)

Having a Facebook page is a good way to keep in touch with my friends.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		100%	6
Kind of		0%	0
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(21)

Facebook is a good place to make plans with friends or hear about parties.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		50%	3
Kind of		50%	3
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(22)

Facebook is a good place to announce news

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		67%	4
Kind of		17%	1
Not really		17%	1
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(23)

Facebook is a good place to get opinions, feedback, recommendations and/or explanations from Friends in my network

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		67%	4
Kind of		33%	2
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(24)

I have gotten into an argument on or because of Facebook.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		0%	0
Kind of		60%	3
Not really		20%	1
Strongly disagree		20%	1
Total Responses			5





(25)

You have to be careful about what you say and do on Facebook.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		50%	3
Kind of		33%	2
Not really		17%	1
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(26)

My Facebook page is a good reflection of who I am.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		33%	2
Kind of		67%	4
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(27)

I use Facebook to show people what I want them to see.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		67%	4
Kind of		17%	1
Not really		17%	1
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(28)

When I want to know more about someone, I check their Facebook page.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		100%	6
Kind of		0%	0
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(29)

Nobody's Facebook page is a perfect match to who they really are.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		0%	0
Kind of		83%	5
Not really		17%	1
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(30)

It's important to act the same way on Facebook as I do offline.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		83%	5
Kind of		17%	1
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(31)

On Facebook, I feel more free to say/do what I want than when I'm offline.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		0%	0
Kind of		17%	1
Not really		83%	5
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(32)

On Facebook, sometimes I say/do things I probably never would offline.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		0%	0
Kind of		17%	1
Not really		83%	5
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(33)

Some people act different on Facebook than they do offline.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		50%	3
Kind of		50%	3
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(34)

What happens on Facebook is often talked about offline

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		67%	4
Kind of		33%	2
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6





(35)

I'm friends with lots of different groups of people on Facebook.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		100%	5
Kind of		0%	0
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			5









(36)

Facebook lets different groups of people connect online when they normally wouldn't offline.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Strongly agree		100%	6
Kind of		0%	0
Not really		0%	0
Strongly disagree		0%	0
Total Responses			6

(37)

What are the different reasons you use Facebook? Check as many as apply.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
to meet people		0%	0
to share my life		0%	0
to gossip		20%	1
to get feedback/share opinions		0%	0
to stay connected with friends		20%	1
to flirt		0%	0
everyone uses Facebook		40%	2
Other, please specify:		20%	1
Total Responses			5

* Other, please specify response: "All of the above."

Part E – Free Answer

(38)

What does your Facebook profile say about who you are?

what I look like, how I'm feeling, who I talk to most

what I like to do. How I'm feeling sometimes. The pictures shows where I have been and what I have been doing. Interests. Personality sometimes but depending what type of person you are.
--

I like sports and outdoor activities. Very close to family and friends.

I'm into sports, I care about my friends. I have a well rounded social life

it shows everything that I do, I post things that I want to. It shows the places that I go and the people that I'm with.
--

(39)

What are the risks, if any, involved with using Facebook?

gossip, rumours, fights

letting people see your page. Having your phone number just randomly out there for anyone to take. Where you live. Your own family. A lot of gossip. And any pictures can be used for anything. Your identity

the work person getting a bad impression, i.e. Future employer. Words can be taken the wrong way
--

if your profile is not limited to certain people it may be unsafe

sometimes people post inappropriate things, or people get into fights for no reason and they say things that they normally wouldn't

(40)

Is there anything else about Facebook you would like to share?

It is a very good way to keep in touch with friends and family
--

Appendix 3 – Tag Codes

<i>x</i> /	<i>/x</i> /		<i>/x</i>	
speaker	SU	status update	f	fishing
	C	comment	s	soapboxing
	R	response	g	gossiping
			t	tacking
			M	male interlocutor
			F	female interlocutor

e.g. [Speedracer / C / F] = Speedracer comments to a female friend

Appendix 4 - A Framework for Ethical Conduct in Facebook Research

This section outlines the steps I took towards setting up a research group online. This process was important to securing ethical permission to collect data on Facebook:

1. Set up a Facebook group, named clearly for its research purpose (e.g. “affiliation name + department/field + Research”).
 - a. Set group status to ‘Open,’ ‘Closed’ or ‘Secret’ (depending on ethics protocol). For this project, the group’s status was Open until all participants had joined, when it was then reset to Secret.
 - b. Include an appropriate profile picture of the researcher to emphasize the researcher’s role, as well as the researcher’s contact information. I included a picture of myself, holding a camera, on my personal profile page. An image of the University of Victoria crest was included as the profile picture of the research group, which was named ‘UVic Sociolinguistics Research.’
 - c. Post an introduction to the research project on the group Wall, which addresses the research interest, encourages participants to use the group page to post questions or comments about the project, and emphasizes the researcher’s availability and willingness to address questions/concerns.
 - d. Use the ‘Create Doc’ function to post participant recruitment letters of introduction, consent forms, or other relevant information.

2. Participant recruitment: For this research, participants had to become involved in the project by their own initiative. Ethics protocol prevented me from approaching individuals to solicit their participation, so I had to make the group name and URL available to potential participants without directly approaching them. I did this through the participant liaison, who was responsible for identifying and approaching friends she thought would be interested in participating.

- a. Participants find the group on Facebook and join. Depending on the group settings, participants can join freely or require permission from the group administrator to officially join.
 - b. Upon joining the group, participants are provided a link to an online questionnaire, in which the first page includes only a mandatory question requesting consent. Participants must provide their consent before continuing on to complete the questionnaire.
 - i. There is a 'Question' function built into Facebook group pages that may well serve consent purposes if a lengthy questionnaire is not part of the project.
3. After recruiting participants, who have become group members and provided their consent, the data collection process can begin.
- a. In this work, group membership afforded participants a mutual platform to discuss the project with each other in private; however, these participants already had the ability to do this due to their on- and offline friendships, and so did not make use of the official group space.
 - b. Data was collected from their individual Facebook profiles, some of which were set to block 'non-Friends' from viewing Walls. In these instances, participants were requested (in a private message) to change their security settings to allow 'Friends of Friends' to view their Walls during the data collection process, as I was a Facebook friend with the participant liaison.
 - i. The ethical protocol for this project did not allow me to become Friends with participants; however, in future work, I suggest researchers secure permission to do so, as being a participant's Friend improves the researcher as *overhearer* role, making them a ratified member in the network. Furthermore, participants who had agreed to be involved in the research project on Facebook often sent me Friend Requests, under the assumption that participating would require Facebook 'Friendship.'

- c. When third party consent is required, use the private message function to solicit consent. Use a uniform message for all parties, which introduces the researcher, the project and research interest, an explanation of why their consent/involvement is relevant to the project, and a request for their consent. Describe what qualifies as consent, for example, “if you agree to share your posts on Facebook for this project, please reply to this message.” All of my messages to third parties and participating members ended with a reminder to share questions, comments, or concerns with me.
4. After the data collection period ends, close the group by deleting each member (Facebook automatically deletes groups without any members).
 - a. I sent an individual message to each participant as well, reminding them of the end of the data collection period, informing them that the group would be deleted, thanking them for participating, and encouraging them to follow up with questions, comments or concerns regarding the research.