Self-Conscious Selves:

Facebook and the New Structure for Identity and Community

An Honors Project for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

By Karina Jenny-Louise van Schaardenburg

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Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support of my two readers, Professors Van Vleet and Ballinger. I am grateful to their support for my unorthodox proposal, and their helpful comments along the way.

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CHAPTER 1
Introducing Facebook

On March 30, 2007, the Bowdoin Orient published an article about a dialogue on race that had taken place recently on Facebook, an online social networking website. The incident discussed in the article went as follows: someone at a party made racist comments to a group of students of color. Shocked that this had happened to them, they wrote a note on Facebook titled "Did you know that you have to be white to feel welcome?", and invited a large number of Bowdoin students to read it. This sparked offline and online discussions about race at Bowdoin, and led to a cover story in the Bowdoin Orient (Miller 2007). The number of people who were made aware of this issue, and the dialogue it fostered, would not have been possible before Facebook. "Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and Director of Multicultural Student Programs Wil Smith said communicating through a Facebook note is almost the same as a student of the past standing on the Quad with a bull horn or handing out flyers. However, he said, 'Facebook reaches larger communities than the flyers or the bull horn could have ever imagined.'" (Miller 2007) Although this is an apt metaphor, there are important differences between Facebook and preexisting communications mediums. Not only does Facebook reach many more people than bullhorns or flyers could have done, according to Dean Smith, but Facebook is also much easier to use than either.

The article went on to discuss how face-to-face interaction was missing in this example, and how that changes what people are willing to say and how people interpret what others say. Facebook is new, thus the possibilities it opens are also new. These students were able to make their voices heard. Because it is still new, people are also still trying to understand what it means to use Facebook at Bowdoin College, or elsewhere.

The article spent as much time analyzing Facebook's role in publicizing the incident as it did discussing the racial tensions that surfaced. "Nick Tomaino '08, who commented on Lam's Facebook note, described Facebook as 'very impersonal' and said that using it in this way can 'perpetuate the problem.' 'Rather than having a discussion about it, people make assumptions and nothing is resolved,' Tomaino said. 'Ideally, talking to somebody on a personal level would be the most productive'" (Miller 2007). Here, Nick is struggling with what it means to adopt a new technology. Just because Facebook is easier to use does not automatically make it better. At the same time that some students are embracing Facebook's possibilities, others are wary of it because of what it cannot do. Appropriateness is negotiated as people test out what is possible through Facebook, and what is not.

Tied up in this conversation is the fact that Facebook explicitly links online profiles to offline identities, and is integrally tied to place. This orientation is unique among social networking websites. Although the student posting the note protected the identity of the other people involved in the incident, she took a risk by attaching her name to such a controversial post. Issues of identity are raised here when people bring their offline knowledge of each other to an online context. Offline social contexts inform the relationships people engage in on Facebook. There is tremendous crossover between the two. This is illustrated by the fact that this online dialogue was sparked by an offline incident, involving people who belong to the larger Bowdoin community. Furthermore, after the dialogue began online, it quickly bounced back offline to conversations between friends, the Bowdoin Orient, and to an offline discussion group on discussing race proposed by the Deans.

Facebook, although typically seen as frivolous and as a "waste of time,"[1] cannot be dismissed. This incident shows how the far-reaching publicity Facebook makes possible can have a powerful impact. That the administration became involved shows the results that Facebook can have.

On a smaller scale, Facebook is impacting day-to-day activities for a large number of students. Students can quickly find out personal or contact information. Photos are posted and labeled; jokes are shared. One student found out that another student had found his wallet because he received a Facebook message notifying him. Another met his girlfriend on the Facebook before he matriculated to Bowdoin. Another had her boyfriend guess her password and then change her profile to reflect negatively on her character after a dispute. Another found out about a friend's engagement from a profile update on Facebook. These examples are just a few of the ways Facebook is changing how students communicate and understand their relationships with their peers.

What is Facebook?

Facebook is a social networking website, founded in February 2004. Since then, it has acquired nearly 19 million "active users," according to Facebook's most recent press release.[2] Since the website launched at Harvard and expanded first to other universities, the majority of these members are young college students. Facebook is nearly ubiquitous on American college campuses, and has popularized social networking

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[1] This phrase came up repeatedly in my interviews, referring to Facebook.
[2] April 11, 2007. Facebook has undergone massive growth, as they only claimed to have 9.5 million users in their September 26, 2006 press release. Facebook has doubled in size over the course of this research project. These statistics always vary by source, as some sources are concerned with the number of active members, others are concerned with the number of unique visitors per month, and still others refer to the number of registered users.

vocabulary, including terms like "friending" (to add someone as a friend), "tagging" (to label a photo with the names of the people in it), "poking" (to send someone a notification that he/she has been poked), and of course, "Facebooking" (to look someone up on Facebook).

Like most social-networking websites, the site is a collection of individual profiles created by members. Contact, personal, educational, and employment information constitute a few of the categories of information that members can fill in about themselves. Members can also choose a profile picture, which serves to identify them to others viewing their profiles. Members can choose to fill out as many or as few of the available fields as they wish.

The figure included to the right shows how Facebook compares to other social networking websites in terms of traffic. Facebook is not the largest social networking website, but just one of a number of smaller social networking websites.

With Friends Like These . . .

While many other networking sites have grown over the past year, some vastly, Friendster has been shrinking.

UNIQUE VISITORS
U.S. TRAFFIC, IN MILLIONS

	SEPT. '05	SEPT. '06
MySpace	21.6	55.9
Facebook	8.5	13.3
Xanga	8.0	7.0
Flickr	3.0	6.9
Yahoo 360	n/a	5.7
Friendster	**1.2**	**1.0**
Orkut	.06	.3

Source: comScore Media Metrix   The New York Times

Figure 1

However, although the number of Facebook users is small compared to the larger population, it is very large compared to the number of students in college. Although
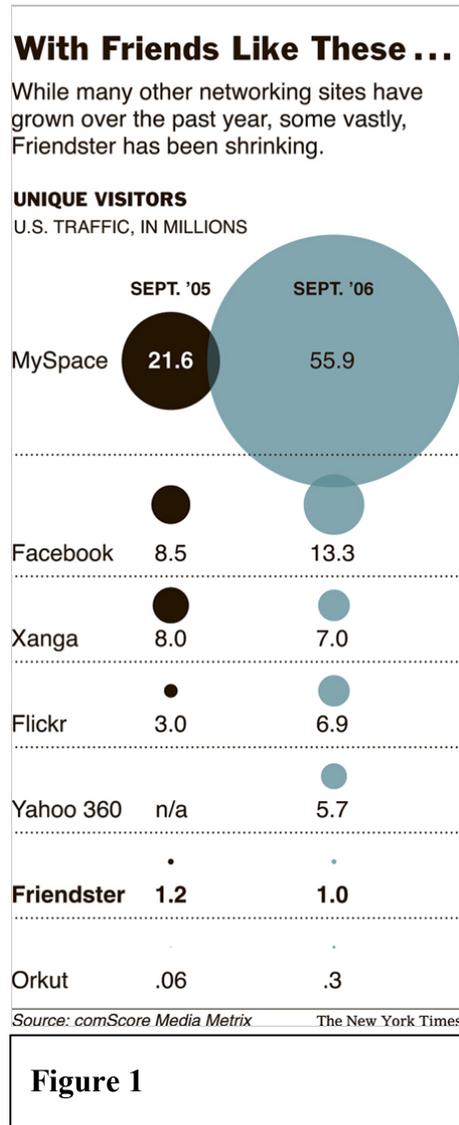
Facebook is pervasive on college campuses, its impact beyond college is still limited, and is small compared to Myspace.[3]

On page 10, I have included a sample screenshot of a Facebook profile page from the profile of Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and CEO of the Facebook.[4] Unfortunately but necessarily, as the vertical format of websites does not translate easily to a page with a defined bottom edge, this screenshot does not include the bottom of the profile, which typically includes the additional fields, "Favorite Books," "Favorite Movies," "Favorite Music," "Favorite Quotes," and "About Me." Members also have the option to join groups, which either reflect offline affiliations, such as student organizations, or strictly online affiliations. A few famous Facebook groups that have received wide recognition in their own right, but have no offline meanings, are "I Will Go Slightly Out of My Way To Step On That Crunchy-looking Leaf," with over 161,000 members, "When I was your age, Pluto was a planet," with over 757,000 members, and "For Every 1,000 that join this group I will donate $1 for Darfur," with over 500,000 members.[5]

The main feature that sets Facebook apart from other, similar social networking sites is the network feature. Members belong to networks of work colleagues, classmates, or residents of the same area. Joining a work or school network requires a valid email address from that institution, making membership exclusive and reflective of

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[3] Mark Zuckerberg explains to the New Yorker that Facebook's smaller membership base is an asset. "Under Metcalfe's law, Facebook is vastly less useful than MySpace. But Zuckerberg argues that on social-networking sites it isn't the size of the over-all network that matters but the way people organize themselves into subnetworks and exchange information within those subnetworks. 'If your site is open, and you let everyone read everything, then the stuff they put up is going to be less personal,' he said. 'The stuff that people want to share with just their friends is the most important stuff: photo albums that you only want your friends to see, contact information, that kind of thing.'" (Cassidy 2006)
[4] This screenshot is available for public use as part of a press packet downloadable from: http://www.facebook.com/press.php.
The direct link is:
http://www.facebook.com/press/FacebookLogoScreenshotDownload.zip
[5] As of December, 2006.

offline affiliations. As Zuckerberg defined Facebook's function, "We don't view the site as an online community- we bill it as a directory that is reinforcing a physical community. What exists on the site is a mirror image of what exists in real life" (Nagowski 2006). Due to this network feature, the only profiles visible to a member are those within of that member's networks, and the profiles of "friends" from other networks. Someone can add another member from a different network as a "friend," and if that member accepts the "friend request," each person will be added to the other's list of "friends." Because Facebook allows for cross-network friendships, a typical Facebook member will have friends from both within his/her network (Bowdoin, in this case), and from other networks.

Because members can list their friends and make their social connections known to a larger group, definitions of "community" are now being negotiated and redefined by these members. The newness of Facebook means that members are still trying to decide what constitutes appropriate norms of use. Both parties need to accept the online "friend" relationship for it to show up publicly, but reasons for accepting or initiating friend requests vary from individual to individual. In short, Facebook cannot capture or reflect the nuances of offline relationships, yet members necessarily use Facebook creatively in order to construct uniqueness out of a standard model.

Facebook also includes a popular photo-sharing feature. Facebook is currently the number one photo sharing website. According to the Facebook website, "With unlimited photo uploading capabilities, we have over 2.3 million photos uploaded daily." Members can not only post photos, but tag them as well. Tagging links someone's face in the photo to that person's profile. Members have the option to remove their tag from a

photo but no one can remove a photo posted by someone else. The Facebook staff only has the authority to remove photos if they are pornographic or copyrighted.

The option to post photos was not an original feature. Facebook has undergone several other important changes that have drastically affected perceptions of Facebook. In early September, 2006, Facebook launched a "news feed" that sparked outrage and controversy across the Facebook community. Any changes that "friends" made on their profiles, including any photos added, or any wall posts made, were posted in the form of a list that members saw upon logging on. This kept each member informed about activity within his/her created network of "friends," but it also fueled a dialogue about privacy issues and where the line should be drawn between public and private information. The news feed aggregated the social information from each member's network. While it was merely publicizing information that members themselves were making available, the new format felt intrusive to many members. An example of the webpage a member would see upon logging on is included on page 11. Like the profile screenshot, this one is also taken from the account of Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook. [6]

Around the same time that Facebook introduced the controversial "news feed" feature, it introduced new privacy settings that members could choose from. Before the new settings, all information posted was visible to everyone within a member's friend list, and also to everyone within that member's networks. On September 26, 2006, Facebook opened their registration to anyone with a valid email address. Before that date, registration required a valid email address from one of Facebook's supported institutions. Since networks have expanded to include geographic regions (for example,

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[6] This screenshot is available for public use as part of a press packet downloadable from: http://www.facebook.com/press.php.
The direct link is: http://www.facebook.com/press/FacebookLogoScreenshotDownload.zip

the "Boston" network could include hundreds of thousands, while a college network would probably include only a few thousand) and since members are increasingly concerned about privacy now that anyone can register for an account, Facebook has tightened its privacy settings. The new settings control who would be able to view a member's profile, photos, and even whether that member would show up in search results.[7] For a screenshot of what these options look like, see below.
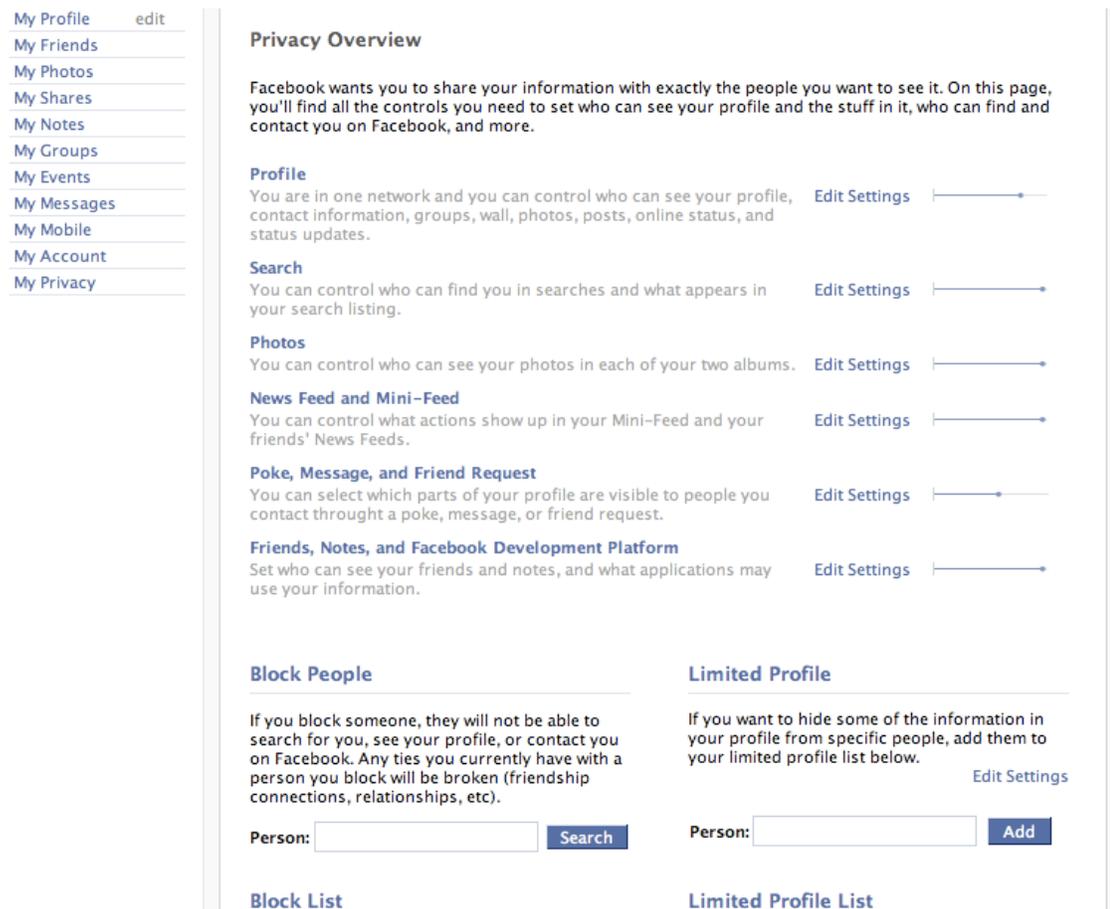
Figure 2

Facebook does have two strictly private functions. "Messages" and "pokes" are the two ways to communicate via Facebook that are only visible to the sender and the

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[7] Interested readers can explore the system of privacy protection at http://www.facebook.com/policy.php, which includes an overview of Facebook's privacy policies, and members with accounts can click on each part of their profile to change the settings for that section.

receiver. All other information posted on Facebook, including "wall posts" (public comments on someone's profile page), profile updates, photo albums, and status updates are visible to all the people included under a member's set privacy settings. The message feature is an important complement to wall postings, which are visible to any of the recipient's friends or network members, as it gives members a way to communicate with the same privacy and ease as email. This private space within the larger public realm of Facebook allows members to choose who should be able to see what.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Research Questions

Although Facebook is an online social resource, its network structure functions to integrate online networks with physical space. While the Internet has a reputation for being anonymous and global, Facebook is neither. Its popularity and its nature led me to

hypothesize that its appeal came from trying to integrate, rather than separate, community online with community offline. Because identity on Facebook is directly linked to users' real names, and because profiles are embedded in online networks that map to offline networks, it is clear that Facebook is trying to mimic the patterns of social behavior that characterize offline social relationships. In talking to my interviewees, I explored the ways they talked about relationships and interactions, as they played out online. I found that people easily incorporated Facebook into their lives. People engaged in political debates, shared photos, told stories, found contact information, and sent party invitations, all through Facebook.

In some ways Facebook is facilitating activities that people would otherwise be engaging in through other mediums. Without Facebook, people would still be able to email stories, share physical photo albums, or tell jokes in person. At the same time, however, Facebook is actually changing the possibilities for communication in important ways. "Wall posting" is enabling people to construct and present relationships in a more visible way than was previously possible. Having Facebook is giving members the option to communicate in a more informal manner than ever before. I argue that making the choice to use Facebook is not a superficial choice, but is fundamentally changing the possibilities and practice of social behavior. Some of the possibilities Facebook enables existed previously, but are facilitated by Facebook; others never existed. When people choose to use Facebook, they are making that decision because of the unique implications Facebook has for social interaction. Understanding that choice is crucial, and is impossible without first understanding what Facebook offers.

Through structures of friending and communicating, community emerges. Belonging to the Bowdoin network (a binary quality: people either belong or they do not) might seem like it would define the bounds of the community. However, people understand community in much more complex ways. Each person's unique network of friends includes people within and beyond Bowdoin. Facebook represents a small fraction of the ways people understand relationships and social networks. Although Facebook friendships are not meaningless, the depth and quality of the relationships people have with each other is defined through practice, not static identification, just as it is offline.

Just as Facebook forces members to view the construction of community as a process, so too does it force members to view identity construction as a process. Facebook gives people an arena in which to conceive of their identities as conscious products. Because people must decide how to present themselves without the distraction (or aid) of social context, Facebook creates a new way of thinking about self. Conversations about "favorite interests" virtually never come up in casual offline conversations, yet Facebook assumes that a collection of interests, books, music, movies, and quotes will combine to create a cohesive identity. I argue that people do not passively accept Facebook's framework of a supposedly holistic identity that remains constant despite the viewing audience. Rather, Facebook members actively try to construct a successful Facebook identity while recognizing the implications Facebook's structure has for identity. Facebook forces members to be consciously aware of the process of presenting identity, and makes that process explicit.

Community and identity seem like they should be much simpler to understand on Facebook since the structure removes much of the ambiguity that is present in offline relationships and interactions. On Facebook, people either are friends with each other or they are not. However, the simple structure actually highlights the complexities of relationships, and people actively imbue Facebook with meaning to bridge the gap between the simplicity of Facebook and the complexity of offline interactions. By 1) discussing Facebook in person, 2) using Facebook to elaborate on offline activities and interactions, and 3) thinking about the human meanings behind the computer façade, Facebook members are deconstructing the online/offline divide.

Facebook is an arena in which people can negotiate how they understand themselves as individuals and as social beings (or as members of larger collectivities). People appropriate the structure Facebook provides in unique ways, and they achieve social goals that are not that different from offline social goals. By examining the structures of Facebook as a social networking website, the practices of using Facebook, and the ways individuals are engaged in and talk about Facebook, we can come to a better understanding of how people's online and offline lives blend into each other. In particular, Facebook members are at once self-conscious about identity construction and still negotiating the meanings of relationships online in conscious ways. This contributes to anthropological discussions of production of identity by challenging us to view identity as an active process. Facebook also challenges anthropology to rethink the category of "community," as people engage in community-building practices online and offline.

Literature on the Internet

As the Internet has changed from being an exotic new technology to being a fact of everyday life for a considerable fraction of the global population, academic writing about the Internet has also changed. The social impacts and implications of the Internet are based in what sorts of social practices the Internet makes available. Therefore, the anthropological literature has changed over time to accommodate changes in the infrastructure (and consequently, use practices) of the Internet. First, I will explore the utopia versus dystopia dichotomy that characterized the initial literature on the Internet. Then I will show how and why this dichotomy broke down over time. Finally, I will discuss the smaller issues that have emerged in the wake of the loss of the two initial theories.

When scholars first realized the potential social impact of the Internet, they quickly divided into two main camps: the utopians and the dystopians (Wellman 1997). Academics generally saw the Internet as a potential source for global democracy, or as an agent of alienation from society. The difference lay in whether they saw computer-mediated communication as social or antisocial. The utopians viewed the Internet as enabling pooling of ideas across national boundaries. Dystopians viewed time spent behind a computer as antisocial and as taking away from time spent socializing offline.

The utopians embraced the new technologies. Before the Internet, people could share information and talk over a few linked networks of computers. The first online communities were ARPANet, USENET, MUDs, the WELL, and others.[8] The first

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[8] For a fairly technical summary of the history of the Internet, view Weldes et. al. 1999. This article explains how the Internet gained its monopoly over the other online networks, and explains how the government funded early research into online networks. It also has an extensive discussion on how privacy and encryption were developed for the Internet.

networks were used less for viewing static websites, and more for posting to discussion boards and contributing to this new, seemingly global community. Howard Rheingold wrote <u>The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Virtual Frontier</u>, an ethnography of community on the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), one of the first online communities (1993).

> I'm not alone in this emotional attachment to an apparently bloodless technological ritual. Millions of people on every continent also participate in the computer-mediated social groups known as virtual communities, and this population is growing fast. Finding the WELL was like discovering a cozy little world that had been flourishing without me, hidden within the walls of my house; an entire cast of characters welcomed me to the troupe with great merriment as soon as I found the secret door. Like others who fell into the WELL, I soon discovered that I was audience, performer, and scriptwriter, along with my companions, in an ongoing improvisation. A full-scale subculture was growing on the other side of my telephone jack, and they invited me to help create something new (Rheingold 1993: 1-2).

Rheingold was clearly enamored with the magical world he had discovered. It is important to note the date of publication. This ethnography was originally published in 1993.

Rheingold was not the only one who saw the WELL as a utopia for sharing knowledge, helping each other, and empathizing. In citing Marc Smith, another important researcher on Internet community, he states, "The three kinds of collective goods that Smith proposes as the social glue that binds the WELL into something resembling a community are social network capital, knowledge capital, and communion" (Rheingold 1993: 13). The WELL was established in 1985, in the void left by the dissolution of 1960s and 1970s counterculture. The Internet seemed to provide a new forum where the ideals of the 1960s and 1970s could reach real fruition. The seven goals that the design team decided would shape the WELL were "1. That it would be free. […]

2. It should be profit making […] 3. It would be an open-ended universe…. 4. It would be self-governing…. 5. It would be a self-designing experiment […] 6. It would be a community […] 7. Business users would be its meat and potatoes. Wrong…" (Rheingold 1993: 43). Although this list is slightly confusing to read, the idealism that initially shaped the pre-Internet online communities is readily apparent. That the WELL strove to be both free and profit making is testimony to its idealism. As Turner discusses, the WELL emerged as the electronic version of the Whole Earth Catalogue, an empowering and enormously successful periodical about sustainability. "Throughout the WELL's early years, these systemic embodiments of countercultural communal ideals, coupled with the lived countercultural experience of many members, provided users with a rhetoric of disembodied collectivity that echoed the back-to-the-land movement of the late 1960s even as it embraced the computer networking technologies of the 1980s" (Turner 2005: 500). Although the WELL has taken a backseat to newer technologies of online community, the Internet grew out of the idealism that shaped these early online networks.

In stark contrast stands Mark Slouka's work War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality, published only a few years later, in 1995. Slouka shared Rheingold's belief that the Internet would change life dramatically. His descriptions of the novelty of his first experiences in cyberspace are virtually indistinguishable from Rheingold's. His interpretation of that experience differs, however.

> As a dream, it was undeniably worthy. The reality—utterly unanticipated by the idealists who set up the Net – was monstrous: a hybrid world in which every potential virtue became its own dark double; in which freedom became freedom to abuse and torment; anonymity, the anonymity of the obscene phone call; and

liberation from the physical body, just an invitation to torture someone else's virtual one. With the checks and balances of the real world barred at the door, all the worst in human nature quickly set up shop (Souka 1995: 53-54).

This indictment is strong. It is one of Slouka's many arguments against the Internet. His main point is that the substitution of virtual reality for reality is easy but detrimental. Internet users have more control over virtual spaces, but that control comes at the expense of a shared human experience of reality. Without that common ground, people would lose a common morality. The subheadings for some of the chapters in Slouka's book are "The Assault on Identity," "The Assault on Place," "The Assault on Community," and "The Assault on Reality." If I were to accept his argument, I would have to omit the bulk of this work, as he argues that cyberspace erodes these social practices (Slouka 1995).

Slouka was correct that early Internet communities were largely unmediated. Although he saw this as negative, since the anarchy on the Internet allowed for 'flaming' (intentionally provoking controversy) among other things, many early critics saw this is paving the way for a new democracy, where marginalized groups would achieve an uncensored voice. However, as the infrastructure of the Internet grew, greater levels of mediation were required. As censorship in prominent online communities increased, the types of fears Slouka expressed dissipated, as did the hope that the Internet would foster a new forum for global democracy.

An irony of the contemporary burst of interest in community networking is that in many ways community networks are *less* interactive and *less* community oriented than they were 15 years ago. In the early 1990s, community networks were implemented as bulletin boards and newsgroups, supplemented by listservs and email. They were all about communication, albeit asynchronous communication. They were locally hosted and managed, and their content reflected local topics. Today, they are part of the global World Wide Web, sometimes managed by a

web development company, and containing, via hyperlinks, a spectrum of local and external content and topics (Carroll and Rosson 2003).

The structures of online communication that Carroll and Rosson discuss here are not as important as the fact that members of online communities had much more power when the communities were smaller and less likely to be mediated. Current, large online communities are less likely to give users control over the format and structure of the community. Because they are larger, they often require webmasters, system administrators, or other people who control or monitor the content or appearance of these sites.

The reality of global Internet use has proven to be somewhere in between Rheingold and Slouka's two projections, although the impact has been at least as great as early predictions. Sweeping fears and hopes dissipated quickly as reality replaced hypotheses. Kendall's ethnography on an online community she calls Blue Sky, Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online (2002), serves as a more recent counterpoint to earlier works. Kendall's work can be usefully contrasted with the Rheingold's utopic and Slouka's dystopic portrayals of the Internet. Kendall's book was published in 2002, nearly a decade after online communities first gained publicity among scholars. There are many similarities between Kendall's work and prior work. Rheingold, Slouka, and Kendall all researched online communities that they were previously unaware of. The members of all three communities were technologically adept: the WELL appealed to pioneers of online community, and Blue Sky housed a community of "dinosaurs," people who have been using the Internet since its beginnings. Although Slouka did not study a specific community, it is safe to assume that anyone

participating in online communities prior to 1995 would have been technologically competent (Kendall 2002; Rheingold 1993; Slouka 1995).

However, the differences between current work on the Internet and work from the early 1990s are startling. The Internet changed enough during the 1990s that Kendall is more matter-of-fact than earlier scholars were. Although she writes about the Internet as a separate space, she writes about how people must exist in an offline space in order to exist in on online space. By acknowledging her physical presence in her house as she conducts her ethnography, and by acknowledging the disruptions of her online presence when she gets up to get a cup of coffee, she is showing how participation online is dependent on offline presence as well. Also, rather than treating online community as a revolution, Kendall shows how traditional discourses of masculinity and identity are simply reproduced through a new medium.

Throughout their books, Rheingold and Slouka each talk about Cyberspace as a space separated from offline space. They write about online and offline as mutually exclusive categories. Rheingold states that the possibilities available online cannot be found offline, thereby separating the two spheres. Slouka states that digital copies cannot capture the essence of their offline originals, thereby implying a need to choose one above the other. Both make reference to losing a sense of existence offline while participating in online community, by referring to losing track of time.

Current literature tends to shy away from this simple binary categorization of online and offline. There is clearly a difference between being online and offline. A computer and an Internet connection are necessary for the former. However, when the motivation to seek information, support, or company is present in both, that division is

not as important. Bakardjieva cites Wellman and Guila, "In a recent paper, Wellman and Gulia (1999) have pointed out a common weakness of all these approaches to online community, including the empirically grounded anthropological studies. All these analyses are premised on a false dichotomy between virtual communities and real life communities. This split is unjustifiable" (Bakardjieva 2005: 167).

These more contemporary theories of virtual community explain Facebook use better than theories like Rheingold's or Slouka's. People discuss Facebook as just another facet of their social lives. Utopians and dytopians both assumed that virtual communities would replace offline communities, disagreeing only on whether that shift was positive or negative. Facebook is positioned outside the assumptions of early research on Internet communities, and is closely aligned with the perspectives outlined by Bakardjieva, Wellman, and Guila (Bakarjieva 2005; Wellman et al. 1996).

Some recent scholars have even begun to question whether the Internet needs to facilitate communication in order to be relevant. Bakardjieva shows that the assumption that communication is the primary goal of online activity is faulty. She discusses two models for Internet usage: the consumption model, which rejects social interaction as pivotal for Internet use, and the community model. The consumption model involves users passively consuming information and products that are available online. The community model involves communication between people via the Internet. She proposes that women or disenfranchised groups would be more likely to adopt the community model for Internet use, whereas the hegemonic group would be more likely to adopt the consumption model. Just because the Internet can function as a social mediator does not mean that people necessarily use it as one (Bakardjieva 2005). However,

Facebook still operates on the community model, using the Internet as a vehicle for communication.

Despite their different conclusions and emphases, all these researchers share the experience of conducting ethnographic research online. As I stated earlier, online communities have traditionally been largely anonymous and global, and tend to exist independently of offline relationships and communities. Therefore, online ethnography faces particular complications, as researchers cannot efficiently verify the identities of their informants, or meet them face-to-face. In order to conduct effective research, ethnographers studying these communities were forced to choose between arranging offline meetings with online subjects, or focusing their research on the ways people talk about and understand identity online, and assuming that 'real' identity is unimportant. These considerations have shaped what has been possible in online ethnography, and the shape it has taken (Hine 2000).

The Current Status of Literature on Facebook

Because Facebook is new, no juried academic literature has been published yet on how it is affecting social interactions. One of Facebook's original engineers, Karel M. Baloun, recently wrote a book, which he published online, about the experience of working at Facebook (Baloun 2006). This book, though interesting, is more relevant to readers interested in the work environments of so-called "web 2.0"[9] companies than social science researchers interested in how people use these applications. The two years

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[9] "Web 2.0" refers to the new generation of internet companies, which try to make their websites more dynamic than "web 1.0" websites, which were characterized by static, non-interactive collections of data and information. Facebook is one of a growing number of companies that let members themselves determine what the websites they browse contain.

since Facebook's founding have not been long enough for scholars to complete the peer review process in academic publications.

Although little work has yet been published in academic, peer-reviewed journals, some sociologists are currently conducting research on how undergraduates use Facebook and publishing their findings online. Two MIT graduate students, Harvey Jones and José Hiram Soltren, electronically published a comparative article on privacy issues surrounding Facebook (2005). Jones and Soltren took a technical approach by studying the structures Facebook provides for maintaining privacy. It is unclear whether this study is the precursor to a more comprehensive work, or whether it is meant to stand alone.

Fred Stutzman, a current doctoral student in Information Science at the School for Library and Information Science has extensively researched Facebook use among undergraduates, and his works, although still in press or unpublished, are available in PDF form online. Stutzman's work also takes a thorough quantitative approach, focusing on how much personal information members are willing to share and how identity is constructed, among others.[10] (Stutzman in Press)

Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman (2007) also take a quantitative approach. They approached their research on a large scale: analyzing 362 million anonymized messages shared by 4.2 million members. They found patterns in the times at which members are most likely to message each other, and analyzed how often members message other members from the same school versus members from different schools. Their most important finding relevant to my study was that students use Facebook more during the week than during weekends. The conclusion the authors draw "is that Facebook use, and

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[10] See http://chimprawk.blogspot.com/2006/04/summarizing-facebook-research.html. This is Stutzman's blog, and includes links to numerous studies he has done specifically on Facebook.

therefore computer use, does not represent leisure time, but rather, social interaction engaged in as an activity paralleling the schoolwork and other computer-related activities during the week" (Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman 2007: 9). Thus, Facebook does not act primarily as a substitute for offline social activity, but rather, acts as a way to socialize during a part of the week when offline socializing is less practical, and typically does not occur.

While these three studies provide invaluable repositories of data, they also draw attention to the need for qualitative work on this subject. The research I have encountered thus far has contained minimal support from interview data. This could be due to the fact that much of this research is done by researchers who are trained primarily in quantitative methods. This could also be partially due to the ease of conducting quantitative studies on Facebook and similar websites. Comparisons are facilitated since many of the possible fields contain drop-down menus of choices. The number of "friends," number of wall posts, and number of photos in a member's network are all already tallied for the researcher. Sometimes these numbers are valuable, but since Facebook has grown so rapidly, many statistics from studies done as recently as six months ago are already obsolete. Without an understanding of how and why people use Facebook, the numbers function only as a snapshot of Facebook use in time, not as a cultural study extending through time. My intention is that this qualitative project will complement the valuable research currently being conducted by Stutzman, Jones, and Soltren, as well as other researchers who currently have works in press (Stutzman in Press; Jones and Soltren 2005; Golder, Wilkinson and Huberman 2007).

Researchers have studied and published on Myspace, Friendster, and a few other social networking websites more comprehensively, since they predate Facebook. Many of the issues that pertain to Myspace or Friendster also apply to Facebook since they are all premised on creating an Internet profile page and linking to friends' pages. Some of the similarities between social networking websites are laid out in an article by Judith Donath and Danah Boyd (2004). In their work, Donath and Boyd give a concise and clear overview of what motivates people to join social networking websites, and how much information it is appropriate to display on them.[11] Some social networks, such as LinkedIn, function to help professionals maintain contact with colleagues, and can cause tension when members use these websites as personal profiles. Combining personal information with professional information can lead to uncomfortable renegotiations of propriety standards. The authors draw the conclusion that these websites encourage members to increase the number of people in their networks. Because there is no way of differentiating between close friends and acquaintances on most social networking websites, and because there are more positive than negative effects for increasing the size of one's network, members often create large webs of weak ties.

Although the research on social networking websites is valuable for providing a context within which to situate Facebook as a research topic, the features I described above set Facebook apart, creating unique opportunities and dilemmas for members. It is impossible to directly extrapolate from research done on Myspace, for example, to current issues on Facebook because Myspace and Friendster do not position their

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[11] This article, along with the Stutzman article cited earlier, also compares features and usage patterns of prominent social networking websites. Both articles were written before Facebook was founded, or at least before Facebook became a competitor to websites like Myspace. Still, these articles are invaluable because Facebook faces many of the same hurdles.

members within networks in the same way. Many issues that have characterized research on online social networks are not pertinent to Facebook, while new ones have emerged.

Methods

The depth of analysis I wanted to do and the kind of data I needed required interviews. I conducted unstructured interviews because I wanted to allow room for different focuses in the interviews depending on the different experiences people had. Because I was interested in studying how relationships played out online versus offline, I began with a snowball sample, which allowed me to study the same online and offline relationships from more than one perspective. Although a random sample might have generated more generalizable data, I was more concerned with how relationships bridge the online-offline divide than preserving statistical randomness. I chose the starting points for these snowballs randomly, using the random profile generator on the Facebook browse page. Three of my interviewees were randomly selected; the other eight were not.

My interviews covered a few basic topics. I asked members about how they used Facebook, how they perceived others' use of Facebook, and what they thought about Facebook. I had originally intended to spend the second half of the interview looking at the interviewee's profile with him/her, in order to get him/her to bridge the online/offline divide in communicative practices. I soon discovered that that approach was not necessary, as most of the issues brought up by a member's profile came up naturally in conversation, and it became redundant to ask interviewees to go over the same issues again.

I am a Facebook member and have been since Facebook included Bowdoin as one of its supported networks. My group of friends began consistently contextualizing gossip with information posted on Facebook. This piqued my curiosity, and I became interested in learning how other social groups at Bowdoin conceive of Facebook. The fact that I have evolved use patterns on Facebook before undertaking a formal study might have initially skewed my expectations. The interview guide that I used during my first few interviews was largely based on perceptions I held from my own experiences. However, as I learned more about how others used Facebook, my interview guide quickly shifted to include issues I had not previously been aware of: the use of messaging versus wall posting, for example.

I chose to focus my research on interview data rather than on my own experiences as a Facebook member for several reasons. First, I wanted to protect the identities of my friends since I did not have them sign informed consent forms. I wanted to make sure that they felt comfortable talking about Facebook to me or around me, without having to worry that I would capitalize on their experiences. These conversations informed my research, although I do not explicitly refer to them in this project. Second, I wanted to learn how others saw and used Facebook, without placing a large weight on my own perspective, which is only one of many. I was also cautious about talking to my interviewees about my own experience on Facebook, not wanting to lead their responses.

I chose Bowdoin as my research site primarily due to its convenience, but also because it is a good example of a prototypical Facebook community network. The fact that Facebook creates an online representation of an already-vibrant offline community is more apparent at Bowdoin than at larger schools where students know fewer of their

schoolmates. Choosing Bowdoin allowed me to make in-person interviews my primary research method, which was important to my focus. In-person interviews allowed me to explore how online behaviors are understood in offline conversations, and how the online-offline dichotomy is losing relevance.

Facebook is also currently such a popular topic of conversation that it was very easy to get interviewees to share opinions and experiences. Many of the opinions that interviewees expressed were clearly well-rehearsed stances solidified by multiple conversations. I was wary of accepting answers that might reflect a popular opinion rather than my interviewees' personal opinions. In this fear, I underestimated Bowdoin students. Their thoughtfulness and care in formulating opinions extended to our interviews, and I talked to few people who were not willing and able to rethink or rearticulate their ideas.

My sample included people from each class year and one graduate. I specifically targeted people from each class year so I could gain an understanding of how the experience of being at Bowdoin when Facebook was introduced (as was the case for graduates, and current juniors and seniors) differed from the experience of joining before freshman year (as was the case for current freshmen and sophomores).

One of the problems with my research was predictable in advance. About half of the people I contacted did not respond to a request for an interview. What I did not expect beforehand was that women ended up responding much more frequently than men. None of the male random starting points responded to my request for an interview, and only one man agreed to participate after I got his name from a friend. Therefore, all four of the random starting points were women, although I was able to interview men by

getting their names from the starting points. Perhaps women felt more comfortable talking to me because I am, myself, a woman. Perhaps women responded in greater numbers because women are socialized to be more responsive. Because I found myself interviewing more women, I found that I needed to target some men in order to balance my sample. This gender bias certainly affected the results I was able to obtain. I could assume that the men who were willing to talk to me are more involved with Facebook, or are more extroverted. However, since I will never know the reasons why some responded and others did not, this is just speculation.

I found that my interviewees provided a broad range of unique perspectives on Facebook. The variety in the responses I received convinced me that my sample was not weighted down with a disproportionate number of informants who shared a certain perspective. Rather, the heterogeneity that emerged in my sample allowed for widely differing voices to each be heard. Taken together, my interviews create a portrait of several ways that people at Bowdoin understand themselves and Facebook, without privileging any of these perspectives.

I use pseudonyms wherever names are mentioned, both to refer to my interviewees, and to anyone they might have mentioned in the quotes I include. Additionally, I have changed any tangential characteristics that I feel might directly identify someone. I did not change any information relevant to Facebook use. In the transcribed quotes included throughout, I chose to eliminate backchannel responses and repeated words. I made this decision for two reasons. Backchannel responses are not relevant to the type of analysis I am doing and they are distracting. My interviewees were all remarkably articulate and intelligent, and I found that their ideas came across

better when they were not mired in noises that our ears are trained to ignore but our eyes are not. In the quoted excerpts, the initial "K" stands for me, the interviewer. Other initials stand for my interviewees.

I will quote extensively from my interviews throughout my analysis. In order to familiarize the reader with my interviewees, I will provide some basic background information on them and the ways they use Facebook. I sort them by class year. I intend for this to provide a general context for the interviews. The information I chose to include offers a summary of basic profile statistics, and a very brief summary of what was covered in the interview itself. As this is not a quantitative study, I will spend my analysis on the interview data, not these statistics. The statistics I provide are included as a part of an overall interviewee profile, not as generalizable statistics that represent the behavior of an average Bowdoin student. Quotes from my interviews will make more sense with some understanding of where these people come from. This is the only background information I will include, since I do not see including full transcripts as productive here and since I cannot include screenshots of profiles for obvious privacy reasons.

Liza is a freshman. At the time of writing, she had 135 photos tagged (all by others), 275 friends (138, or 50% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 695 wall posts. She joined before her freshman year, and used Facebook to discuss Bowdoin with other rising freshman. She uses the wall post feature often, especially while doing work in the library. She is Sally's cousin.

Alice is a sophomore. At the time of writing, she had 93 photos tagged (1 tagged by her, and 92 by others), 474 friends (133, or 28% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 604

wall posts. She was the least concerned about privacy out of my interviewees. There was not much she felt uncomfortable sharing, although she has overcome some difficult experiences with people accessing her Facebook account and changing it without her permission, once to humiliate her, and once as a joke.

Steve is a sophomore. At the time of writing, he had 249 photos tagged (122 tagged by him, and 119 by others), 636 friends (178, or 28% of whom went to the college he attended his freshman year, and 104, or 16% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 1,180 wall posts. He was a transfer student who could discuss how he used Facebook differently in his transition to college as a freshman, and then as a transfer student. He met the girl he would later date through Facebook before he arrived at Bowdoin. He also used Facebook photo albums as online galleries for his artwork. He is in choir with Sally and Sofia.

Ashley is a junior. At the time of writing, she had 13 photos tagged (all by others), 283 friends (130, or 46% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 38 wall posts. She uses Facebook very little, and joined recently. Her family lives abroad, so she uses Facebook primarily to keep in contact with people who she does not see often and might otherwise lose touch with.

Sofia is a senior. At the time of writing, she had 70 photos tagged (33 tagged by her, and 37 by others), 522 friends (308, or 59% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 511 wall posts. She was the person I talked to who was most concerned about privacy. She used many of the privacy options, such as removing her name from public searches and limiting her younger brother from viewing her wall. She is in choir with Sally and Steve.

Andrea is a senior. She has never been a Facebook member. She finds the Internet very frightening, and some of her reluctance to create an online profile comes from her reluctance to share information with people she does not know—online or offline. She is friends with Scott. Postscript: Between the time I interviewed Andrea and the time of writing, Andrea joined Facebook. I am not including her statistics since she was not a member during my interview with her or during the period in which I gathered profile statistics on the other interviewees.

Sally is a senior. At the time of writing, she had 90 photos tagged (7 tagged by her, and 83 by others, 485 friends (229, or 47% of whom went to Bowdoin) and 111 wall posts. She uses Facebook infrequently now, and only really checks Facebook when she gets a wall post or a friend request. She is ambivalent about Facebook now, and sees it as a passing fad that has lost its novelty. She is Liza's cousin, and is in choir with Steve and Sofia.

Andrew is a senior. At the time of writing, he had 124 photos tagged (3 tagged by him, and 121 by others), 140 friends (41, or 29% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 250 wall posts. He likes being able to look at photos from his study abroad program on Facebook. He is roommates with Paul and Dan.

Paul is a senior. He had just joined two weeks previously. These statistics might therefore not be meaningful in the same way that the others' statistics are, since his profile is probably still in flux. However, they do still indicate an orientation so I chose to include them. At the time of writing, he had 10 photos tagged (all by others), 290 friends (101, or 35% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 39 wall posts. Paul is concerned about people finding out information from Facebook that might hurt or compromise

somebody. He is especially concerned about untagged photos circulating on Facebook, as Facebook members only have the option to remove the tag, not the original photo. He is glad he finally joined Facebook. He is roommates with Andrew and Dan.

Dan is a senior. At the time of writing, he had 103 photos tagged (50 tagged by him, and 53 by others), 596 friends (298, or 50% of whom went to Bowdoin), and 519 wall posts. He uses Facebook often, and is happy that there is a convenient way to keep in touch with so many people. He liked that Facebook was making it possible to stay in touch with people who he would otherwise lose touch with, but admitted that he rarely uses Facebook to communicate with his closest friends. He is roommates with Andrew and Paul.

Scott is a graduate. At the time of writing, he had 2 photos tagged (both by others), 123 friends (82, or 67% of whom went to Bowdoin) and 88 wall posts. He was very involved in identity construction online. He cultivated a "vague" persona online by changing his name as it appears on Facebook and including very minimal personal information. He currently teaches high school. Unfortunately, his students created a hate group on Facebook about him, which he then found out about. This incident had interesting impacts on how his students understood privacy. He is friends with Andrea.

Overview of Sections

In this chapter, I have both introduced Facebook as a social networking website and have discussed some of the specifics of my findings and my research methods. In Chapter 2, I discuss the networks that constitute the foundations for community. These include both the networks that Facebook provides and the networks that people construct

for themselves. The act of communicating via Facebook cements Facebook friendships, while also reproducing concerns about which method of communication is most appropriate. Explicit references to "public" and "private" emerge as people struggle to identify new audiences and understand their place in a still-unfamiliar social environment.

In Chapter 3, I analyze how individual identity is constructed within the framework of community. In order to do this, I first examine the structures the Facebook provides for profile information. Then, I will discuss what those structures mean to the people I talked to, and how they understood their own identity, both offline and online. That Facebook forces a self-conscious construction of identity means that people are necessarily highly aware of how they present themselves on Facebook, complicating anthropological theories on identity.

In Chapter 4, I conclude by discussing how Facebook played a large role in helping students cope with a recent tragedy. Students creatively used Facebook in order to publicly affirm their solidarity with Virginia Tech after the shootings. In extreme situations, social structures often become more transparent. This situation shows how integral Facebook has become to its members' conceptions of identity and community. The structure of Facebook might be constant, but it is being appropriated in flexible ways as members use it for their changing purposes.

CHAPTER 2
Rethinking Community

Facebook members conceive of themselves as part of an online network to which a large part of their offline peer group belongs as well. The practices of messaging, posting on walls, and creating photo albums are active ways members participate in community building. Merely logging on to Facebook, although it seems like passive participation, functions to maintain a sense of how Facebook as a whole operates, and how individuals fit into the network. Facebook is not, however, a community isolated from other communities. It is one of a number of loosely bounded, sparsely knit, and specialized communities, such as members of study groups, intramural sports teams, or people living in the same dorm, that all overlap (Wellman and Hampton 1999).

At a small school, where students find it easy to meet in person, communication online happens within a dense context of offline interactions. Therefore, the way community on Facebook is understood depends on the communication choices members make. Online communities are typically seen as valuable for their ability to bring people together across large distances.[12] Facebook depends less on the potential for global interaction than other online communities because it contextualizes members within an offline, spatial context. What does an online community have to offer when students already have such a vibrant offline community to participate in? What role does Facebook play in the Bowdoin community? Why is a seemingly less personal communications medium so popular among students who could easily see each other face-to-face? In order to answer these questions, I will start by broadly examining how Facebook relates to larger discourses of community, both on- and off-line. Then I will

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[12] See, for example, Kendall 2002. The community that Kendall researches, Blue Sky, is comprised of members who live across America and rarely meet offline.

relate the specifics of how community on Facebook is composed of specific practices, including "friending," messaging, and wall posting. Engaging in these practices reinforces pre-existing offline relationships, and determines where the bounds of the community can be drawn.

Facebook combines spatially defined community with the global possibilities of online community. The Bowdoin network assumes that spatial proximity plays a role in defining the bounds of community. However, the fact that members can add friends from other networks shows how Facebook allows for a more flexible interpretation of what constitutes community. Facebook members appropriate the network structure Facebook provides and construct their own communities.

Anthropology of Community

An anthropologist studying a community must first determine the bounds of that community. Traditionally, the bounds of community were delineated based on physical boundaries. A village might have been assumed to be a discretely bounded community. Anthropologists soon learned that although spatial delineation of community makes research easier, it does not necessarily accurately reflect how people understand their own community. People are generally much more mobile than the spatially bounded community assumed, and often identify more closely with distant relatives than with proximate neighbors. "The traditional approach of looking at community as existing in localities—urban neighborhoods and rural towns—made the mistake of looking for *community*, a preeminently *social* phenomenon, in *places*, an inherently *spatial* phenomenon." (Wellman 1999: xiv; emphases in original) An increasing number of

anthropologists are conducting multi-site ethnography to correct this.[13] When the subjects

of ethnography are also caught up in an increasingly global world, defining community

by locality is limiting. Nevertheless, deciding where to draw the boundaries, although

difficult, is crucial for determining what to include in a study.

Linguistic anthropologists also have sought to define the bounds of community.

Their definitions of speech communities have changed over time to map as closely as

possible onto the ways people understand community. Rather than relying strictly on

location to define the edges of the community, they also looked at where the boundaries

for language use were, assuming that having a common language would be a necessary

(although not sufficient) condition for participation in a common community. As

Gumperz defines speech communities, they are "… any human aggregate characterized

by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off

from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage." (Gumperz 1968)[14]

Therefore, actively using shared norms for communication would define a community.

Although this could refer to mutually unintelligible languages, this definition of speech

communities could also be applied to more minor linguistic differences, such as dialects

and registers within a language.

This definition of community was not without its flaws, however. As Jackson

(1974) showed in her case study of the Vaupés Indians, communities that are primarily

bi- or multi-lingual require scholars to reevaluate the relevance of sharing a primary

language, or delimiting a shared set of norms for defining community. The Vaupés

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[13] See for example: Little 2004, who studied urban street vendors both in their urban workplaces and in their rural homes, or Bestor 2001, who studied the tuna trade in several global locations.
[14] Labov provides a similar definition. "The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms…" (Labov 1972, 120-121).

Indians collectively speak over twenty languages, and most people can speak four or five languages. Because these language-aggregates practice exogamous marriage, are not spatially distant, and can usually find a common language, there is as much communication between language-aggregates as within them. The distinctions between language-aggregates are therefore irrelevant, as the Vaupés spoke enough languages that they could usually communicate regardless of their primary language. As Jackson notes, applying Gumperz's definition of speech communities would result in viewing a large part of Columbia and Brazil as a single speech community. "Another way [in addition to speech communities] to describe the Vaupés is to consider the territory characterized by language exogamy as a speech area…. All Indians share rules for speech, even though some Indians' verbal repertoires do not overlap…" (Jackson 1974: 55) The rules of speech Jackson refers to are shared norms for language use. Jackson proposes that scholars rethink community to accommodate exceptions such as the Vaupés, and frame speech communities in terms of how speakers share patterns of language use, not by the specific languages spoken.

Rusty Barrett (1997) frames his research in a way that is particularly relevant for Facebook. Jackson's work provided the foundation for exploring the heterogeneity of a speech community. Rusty Barrett more recently extended this to a different social group. The languages spoken by the Vaupés are mutually unintelligible, but even people speaking the same language may still use linguistic markers creatively. Barrett discusses how gay men use different styles of speaking in different contexts. Traditional characterizations of community and identity cannot support the types of language practices male homosexuals engage in because Barrett shows that community is

constructed through practice, and does not exist independently of social interaction. This theory rejects essential identity, instead proposing that identities will gain salience through interaction, and determine how speakers wish to verbally interact. In this framework, community is situationally defined, emerging from the linguistic choices made in each interaction between people with multiple identities.

Although the structure of Facebook can make community seem self-evident, community is difficult to pin down, and delineating the bounds for community on Facebook is equally challenging. Facebook members belong to "networks," externally imposed frameworks of community. Bowdoin students belong to the Bowdoin network. Bowdoin, an offline, spatially defined, institutionalized collection of people, is presumed to be the most relevant primary categorization for Bowdoin students. However, Bowdoin students can add people who do not belong to the Bowdoin network as "friends," thereby complicating the view of Bowdoin as a bounded community. Facebook members have friends outside their own network, creating webs of people both within and beyond the Bowdoin network. Since Facebook members can view the profiles of people within their networks (as the default privacy setting), and also the profiles of their "friends" from other schools, there is no practical difference between the two. As I noted earlier, within my pool of interviewees, the percentage of Bowdoin students out of the total number of friends ranged from 28% to 67%, an enormous difference in usage. This means that Facebook members are using Facebook in very different ways. Some use it primarily with other Bowdoin students, whereas others use it primarily with "friends" they meet elsewhere.

Although Facebook members communicate primarily in one language (English), there is enough communication between members from different networks that refusing to acknowledge the existence of relationships outside of the Bowdoin Facebook network would exclude crucial aspects of community. However, unlike the Vaupés example where multiple languages do not present a barrier to community, there is very little overlap in different individuals in extra-Bowdoin friendships. Each Bowdoin student has his or her own collection of Bowdoin "friends," which likely overlap to some degree with the personal networks of other Bowdoin students. My interviewees understand Facebook community as including both Bowdoin and non-Bowdoin students; however, mapping individuals' personal networks would only yield considerable overlap within the Bowdoin student population.

Community is integrally tied to communication, both on Facebook and offline: community is constructed through patterns of interaction between people. Community does not passively emerge, but is actively and dynamically developed. Because social behaviors online and offline are more similar than different, these theories of offline community apply to Facebook as well. As Barrett (1997) shows, community emerges through interactions. How people use language or other social cues during that point of interaction determines how that relationship will be constructed. Since communities are just collections of relationships, community depends on the contact that Barrett describes.

"Friending": The Building Block of the Facebook Community

Facebook members initially structure the bounds of their personal communities by determining who they will include as their Facebook "friends." That initial mutual

acknowledgment of Facebook "friendship" allows members to tag each other in photos, write on each other's walls, and view each other's profile updates in the news feed. As I will discuss in more detail, being Facebook "friends" is a necessary but not sufficient determinant of community boundaries. The initial "friendship" provides the foundation for community, but the Facebook community depends on active communication over time in addition to the structural "friend" relationship.

Facebook "friendships," although constructed differently from offline relationships, are generally extensions of offline friendships. Very rarely do people who have not met offline become Facebook "friends." (Students who have not yet matriculated to Bowdoin are interesting exceptions. However, those relationships carry the expectation that they will soon meet in person.) After becoming Facebook "friends," they will typically continue their offline friendships. It is important to remember that people bring offline contexts of interaction to their "friendships," and that those offline contexts evolve as people continue to interact offline.

Adding someone as a "friend" carries certain meanings. Those meanings are not understood in consistent ways because Facebook is still new. Structurally, Facebook "friendships" are set up so one member extends the invitation to become "friends" to another member. That member is given the choice to accept or reject the invitation. This structure means that one member must reach out, simultaneously offering the other member his or her "friendship," and the opportunity to reject him or her. Therefore, adding someone as a "friend" on Facebook can be intimidating, particularly in the vacuum of social cues that exists in the absence of face-to-face interaction.

How close members consider themselves to be with their Facebook "friends" varies dramatically. Because it is so easy to add someone as a "friend," most people I talked to viewed Facebook friendships as a looser and larger category than offline friendships.

> D: They should change the name 'friends' to something else. Like, 'contacts' or 'Facebook buddies' because….
> P: They're not friends.
> D: They're not! I have probably three hundred people from the Bowdoin network, and I probably only talk to—in any given month I probably only talk to a hundred of those people, in some way. – Dan

That said, being "friends" on Facebook is often seen as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for offline friendship. As Sally explained it

> A girl in my film class, we started talking, and the next day she friended me on Facebook. And I was like, "Oh, OK." So it's sort of an acknowledgment of our friendship, you know? That it's almost solidified that way? – Sally

Another interviewee similarly described becoming Facebook "friends" as a nice gesture, but also as something of a social expectation:

> I feel like by and large, being a Facebook friend is—it doesn't carry a part-- that much weight to it. I'll probably Facebook friend you later, you know. And not that I don't genuinely want to get to know you, I might, but, in some ways I feel like it's almost a formality. That if you meet someone and don't have a negative experience with them, it's almost common courtesy to say, "Hey! It was nice meeting you. We're Facebook friends." You know? – Steve

This view frames Facebook "friending" as a passive obligation, not an active choice. Members' "friend" lists would then include a combination of offline friends and acquaintances who are merely included because it would be rude not to.

Other people were much more ambivalent about including acquaintances with closer friends in the same category of Facebook "friends." Many people were bothered by how little effort went into being "friends" on Facebook, and felt concerned that these

people weren't real friends since neither person was likely to expend any more effort in subsequent offline interactions.

> K: Why doesn't it mean anything to friend somebody?
> L: I guess because it's so easy to do, and it's not actually like being their friend, cause it's just like the click of a button type thing. And especially the people who just kind of mindlessly friend, and then have a lot of friends, type thing. Because there's no commitment. Once you say "I'm your friend," that's it, you're done. You don't have to talk to them ever again. But they're on your friend list. So I guess that's the reason why, and because it's just like, electronic, you know? It doesn't-- it shows that you've thought about them, that you thought, "I wanna be their friend," but it also shows that you could've just been thinking, "Oh, let me add him because he's not on my list already." – Liza

There is minimal communication between Facebook users during "friend" requests. It has only recently become possible to include a message with a "friend" request, and few people use that option in my experience. Members also have the option to message another member before extending a "friend" request, but again, my experience and interview data show that this is uncommon, and communication about reasons for friending is minimal. Because "friend" requests typically contain no information other than the name of the person extending the request, Liza is right to say that how much personal thought goes into a "friend" request is impossible to gauge, and can make "friend" requests seem impersonal.

Impersonal "friend" requests can also seem too forward, depending on how the recipient views Facebook "friending." Since everyone has different expectations for how close they would need to be to someone to add them as a "friend" on Facebook, when the person extending the friend request is more inclusive with "friending" than the recipient, the recipient can feel like an uncomfortable boundary has been crossed. In telling a story about an unexpected friend request, Alice tries to make sense of an online interaction which surprised her, and made her rethink what it meant to be "friends" on Facebook.

> I did a program this summer and one of the girls that was in it Facebooked me. She's like, "I don't know if this is the right person," she sent me a message, "But I had a program this summer [and] I looked. I see that you're in the program." I think she got my email from-- the program director sent out a wide email, and she saw my email. And so she looked me up on facebook, which I thought was kind of weird at first, but then I was like, "Oh, it's perfectly understandable," I mean, I don't know if I would've done the same thing cause I didn't, but I was just— she was like, "Oh, we can be friends, Facebook friends," and I was like, there's something about friends in real life, it's like, are Facebook friends really friends? Because it takes a lot for a person to consider you their friend and with Facebook it's just like click of a button and it's just like, "Ah! I'm your friend," but I don't know. –Alice

Although she revised her initial reaction that the friend request was "weird," she did not go as far as to consider this summer camp acquaintance an offline friend.

This expression "click of a button," or similar phrases, came up often in my interviews. Whenever my interviewees wanted to express an impersonal or distant experience on Facebook, they almost universally used this expression. This metaphor for alienation encapsulates both the lack of effort and the digitization, which are two of the main issues members have with Facebook as a medium for communication.

The lack of effort implies a casualness or flippancy about friendship to many users. When real relationships require effort over a long period of time, Facebook "friendships" can be seen as trivial. When I misunderstood Sofia's perspective on how easy relationships are to maintain on Facebook, she corrected me.

> K: So you see it as a positive thing that, if you meet someone that you want to get to know better, it's easier to do that now?
> S: Actually, I think it was better when you actually had to make an effort to do that. Because Facebook can be anything from casual acquaintances to good friends. I don't really know what that meant, [laughs] but I think it was better before when you had to make an effort. – Sofia

Here, effort is assumed to be an integral part of meaningful relationships. A lack of effort could imply a lack of meaningfulness, in this framework.

The digital aspect of online communities adds to this sense of alienation as it removes facial expressions, vocal cues, and other aspects of face-to-face interaction from communication. When Ashley was talking about how she misinterpreted something on Facebook, I asked her,

> K: Do you think it's harder to tell when people are joking or serious because it's on the Internet?
> A: Yes, I think, I think that's true for—I think that's also why I don't talk very much on AIM or MSN because I'm not very good at judging emotions online and that's something that really matters to me, so I don't feel as comfortable talking to people online because I'm not able to-- I mean, it's hard enough on the phone. But, it's something I'm really not good at reading, so… yeah. – Ashley

This is not new, of course. Concerns about alienation have occupied sociology since Durkheim (1897) and Marx (1848), and concerns about alienation due to modern technologies have occupied technophobes since the telephone first made it easy to communicate in real-time without face-to-face interaction. (It is perhaps not coincidental that Durkheim was writing around the same time that the telephone was invented.)

Facebook "friendships" require minimal effort to initialize. Additionally, they also require no effort to maintain, highlighting the alienation many people found inherent in Facebook "friendships." While relationships require effort, both online and offline, the structure of Facebook "friending" means that once people mutually construct a "friend" relationship, they will continue being "friends" whether or not they continue to communicate.

> A: Yeah, there's a lot of relationships that fall apart. For example, I friended my good friend Pete's girlfriend at the time. And then they broke up, and I'm still 'friends' with her. But I'm never going to talk to her again. I'm just not going to cancel that 'friendship.' – Andrew

This highlights why being "friends" on Facebook is a necessary but not sufficient condition for friendship. When Andrew and his friend's girlfriend stopped

communicating, the fact that they remained Facebook "friends" seemed to underscore the superficiality of Facebook "friendships." However, for members who are "friends" on Facebook and who do communicate, being Facebook "friends" sets up the initial structure for community.

Although many people focused on the lack of closeness in Facebook "friendships," Scott viewed Facebook "friendships" as mapping fairly accurately onto his offline friendships. When I asked about his friendships, he said, "Mostly people I'm Facebook friends with are people that I legitimately see often or communicate with." This is important because it emphasizes the fact that Facebook members actively construct their online networks in unique ways, and do not passively accept others' patterns of usage. Some Facebook members are more selective in which "friend" requests they accept; others are less so. The variability in closeness between Facebook "friends" exhibited in these quotes shows that users appropriate the possibilities that Facebook offers differently. Many Facebook members also discussed how "friending" has become less personal over time. The first "friends" Facebook members added were their closest friends, and the "friends" they have added since then are more distant acquaintances.

In the quote above, Scott is also explicitly linking his online and offline social practices. The fact that people appropriate Facebook's structure for "friends" in unique ways corresponds to the broad range of ways people interact socially offline. When Liza and Alice discuss the impersonal nature of some Facebook friendships, they are not suggesting that Facebook relationships are inherently less personal, but rather, that casual

acquaintances are grouped together with close friends. Both categories exist offline as well, but offline there is no unifying structure labeling each relationship.

Communicating: Maintaining Facebook Community

Once Facebook members have added "friends," they have set up the initial structure for their personal community. However, community is not static, but is constantly maintained through mutual engagement. Facebook provides structures for communication between "friends," allowing Facebook members to accomplish this. Whether Facebook members engage in the Facebook community strictly online, or whether they integrate Facebook into their offline community, they are embedding themselves into networks of active participation.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) show that community is created through engaging in shared practices. Communities of practice are groups of people that share common practices, thereby constructing a repertoire of shared experiences and norms. By collectively sharing the experiences that those practices yield, people form bonds of community.

> During the course of their lives, people move into, out of, and through communities of practice, continually transforming identities, understandings, and worldviews. Progressing through the life span brings ever-changing kinds of participation and nonparticipation, contexts for "belonging" and "not belonging" in communities. A single individual participates in a variety of communities of practice at any given time, and over time. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995: 469)

The theory of communities of practice shows that community is not self-evident. Communication and interaction are necessary for people to make that leap towards community. Also, communities of practice are not exclusive. People choose to

participate in many different community-building practices with different groups, depending on the situational contexts.

Facebook Online

Once a Facebook user has a network of "friends," there are three major ways to communicate strictly via Facebook. Students can 1) Message (one sender and one recipient), 2) Wall post (one sender and one recipient, yet visible to anyone the recipient allows to view his/her wall), or 3) Profile update (one sender and many indirect recipients). People also use Facebook as a sort of directory, or online address book, in order to find the addresses or phone numbers of their "friends." In short, Facebook is not only an integral part of collegiate communication, but it also facilitates other forms of communication.

Choosing which communications channel to use carries connotations because of the different qualities of messaging versus wall posting. This is not unique to Facebook: choosing to write a letter, talk at a party, or talk in private are similar offline choices that social actors have. Some users, like Ashley, preferred to message rather than wall post.

> I never write on people's walls. And I think that this, the concept about it not being private, the fact that other people could know what I wrote onto other people… that's something that I don't like very much. So I prefer to write them a message on Facebook or email them instead, as opposed to doing something that like…
> K: Is there a reason you don't like that other people can see it, in terms of what you're writing?
> A: [laughs] No, I don't think I'm writing particularly personal things. It's just something that-- I mean, I'm talking to *them*, you know? It's not something that everybody needs to know about, I guess. – Ashley

She was in the minority, however. Few people felt uncomfortable having their communications visible to other people.

Liza represented the other end of the spectrum. When I asked her to expand on how she was using Facebook to interact with people, she described how she viewed wall posting as a default communications channel.

> K: So would you do that on someone's Facebook wall, or would you send them a message?
> L: I do it on a wall. I tend do walls, instead—I don't really get what the point of messages is, unless it's private. –Liza

Further on in our conversation, she elaborated on how she actually felt uncomfortable with messages. This complicates the discomfort Ashley felt about wall posts.

> L: I guess the thing with messages, I—if I get messages from some people I usually think, "I wonder why they're messaging me instead of writing it on the wall?" Like, there's this kid in my Latin class who always messages me for the homework assignment, or if he has a question about Latin, and the first time he did it I was like-- now I've gotten used to it. Now I never get wall posts from him, I usually just get a message. And I was surprised by that in the beginning, like who-- it's not like something personal.
> K: So do you think messages are more used for more personal things?
> L: Yeah, cause it's more private I'm assuming. And I've gotten more private messages, maybe about a joke that they don't want other people to see, or something that happened that they don't want other people to know about and we didn't get to see each other in person to talk about it, I don't know. –Liza

Here, both Ashley and Liza discuss messages that aren't particularly "personal," to use their terminology. However, Ashley would feel uncomfortable having that information on a wall, and Liza felt uncomfortable receiving that information in a message.[15] Messaging therefore seemed to create closeness between sender and receiver that might seem presumptuous if that closeness was not present offline. She therefore used wall posts as her default medium since messages were reserved for sensitive subjects, not for any subject outside general interest, as Ashley used them.

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[15] Ashley saw this information as "not something everybody needs to know about," thereby giving it a default private label. However, Liza felt that by sending something in a message, the sender was placing more weight on the communication by making it strictly private. The elimination of potential virtual eavesdroppers made the communication seem uncomfortably "personal," since messages were reserved for this purpose in Liza's mind.

An important difference between wall posts and messages is that when a member receives a wall post, s/he will also receive an email notification. However, members receive no email notification about any other activity on Facebook. What this means is that when someone receives a message, s/he would not be aware of that message until s/he logs onto Facebook, whereas s/he would become aware of a wall post as soon as s/he checks his/her email. Unless the sender knows the recipient checks Facebook multiple times a day, it would be unwise to send time-sensitive information in a message. Wall posts, although they are more public, are also more direct. The content of messages is therefore limited to time-insensitive communication that is personal in some way. It is useful to think of messages as short emails, and wall posts as public message board posts.

Facebook offline

However, Facebook interactions are not restricted to the online arena. The ways people appropriate Facebook communication and the ways people bring Facebook back into their offline conversations, all constitute community-building practices. Alice describes a situation where she integrated Facebook into a social situation.

> My best friend, I wrote on his wall, and then I called him! Actually, this is funny, but I read on the mini feed that he wrote on my other best friend's wall. We were all—the three of us were best friends. And then I was like, "Oh how's he gonna write on her wall and he's not gonna write on mine!" So I called him and I was like—or he had written on her wall inviting her to an event, and I was like "How're you gonna invite her and not invite me!" But I didn't say that when I called him, and then he had invited me when he called—when I called him, but it was just, kinda weird to use the mini feed for that. It's like "That's [inaudible] a little sketchy there." I don't know. Cause if it wasn't there I would've never, well, if I had gone to her page I would've seen he had written on it, but… -Alice

Here, Alice expresses some ambivalence about using Facebook to facilitate close relationships. Still, she uses it seamlessly, and the interaction resulted in a phone

conversation and an invitation to an offline event. Facebook is often not the end result,
but rather, a catalyst for future offline interactions.

Ashley described an uncomfortable interaction she had after a misunderstanding.
Similar to Alice's situation, Ashley also noticed something on Facebook and brought it
up in an offline conversation. When I asked about how people use the relationship status
feature of Facebook jokingly, Ashley said,

> A: I have been tricked by that before! And it was very uncomfortable. I thought
> my friend was engaged and she played on that joke, and I didn't know cause it
> was all on the Internet, you know? I couldn't see her face and so I ended up
> totally falling for it. I guess I'm just really gullible. [both laugh] […]
> K: So your friend who was jokingly engaged, how did you find out in the end
> that she wasn't? Did she tell you?
> A: No, my other friend told me. I was like, "Hey! I heard Ellen's engaged!"
> She's like, "No, Ashley, it was all a big joke." [K laughs] I'm just too gullible I
> guess. – Ashley

Although Ashley missed the joke initially, Facebook provided a joke that they can now
share together. Ashley was relieved to learn that someone she considered one of her
closest friends would not become engaged without letting her know personally. Ashley's
discomfort is similar to the discomfort Alice felt in the earlier quote. Both Ashley and
Alice were apprehensive about integrating a new technology into friendships that had
successfully predated Facebook.

Steve also had an experience that began on Facebook and resulted in an offline
interaction. While Ashley and Alice used Facebook to facilitate pre-existing
relationships, Steve used it with a stranger.

> I lost my wallet yesterday, and I was like "oh! I lost my wallet, it's going to be a
> huge hassle." Driver's license, credit card, not to mention ATM card. I have no
> way to get money until I get all this stuff figured out. Huge pain. And, I get a
> Facebook message from a girl this morning who says, "Hey, I found your wallet
> in the theater and I found you through Facebook and I live in this dorm and I'll
> give it to your girlfriend, or something like that. So it's fantastic for just finding

people, particularly if you need to contact someone. I don't have my lab partner's phone number. It's on Facebook though, so I get it through there. Um, so it's very convenient. – Steve

Facebook not only facilitated that communication, but it also allowed this girl to see who Steve's girlfriend was, and what the easiest way to get his wallet to him was. Here, Facebook is being used as a very comprehensive directory. Steve's contact information, his girlfriend's contact information, and both their dorm residences were available to the girl who found his wallet. It is also notable that the girl chose to use Facebook to look up his information, rather than using the student directory.

Facebook has largely replaced the student directory for looking up contact information. I have heard several people say "Remember when we used to use stalkernet [the term students use for the student directory]?" The term implies that looking up information about someone is the equivalent of stalking. Facebook use connotes stalking as well to Facebook members, to an even greater extent than using the student directory did. The reason for this comparison is that people are able to view others' directory information or Facebook profile without their explicit consent or knowledge. People are now able to view a large volume of information about other people, including photos, interests, and activities, even if they have never spoken to each other. Because of this voyeuristic aspect of Facebook use, people are often embarrassed about looking other people up on Facebook unless there is a specific impetus, like needing to return someone's wallet.

Steve's interaction about his wallet was with a stranger, but it was also strictly utilitarian. Facebook is typically used in the ways Alice and Ashley described using it with their friends from home, to share social information, or the way Steve described

using it when he lost his wallet, as a directory. People do not often use Facebook as a

way to meet new people. Most students assume that becoming acquaintances is

something that should occur offline, before becoming Facebook friends. The important

exception, as I mentioned earlier, is Bowdoin students who have yet to matriculate.

Students now have the ability to share information with roommates, dorm mates, or

people who share their interests, before meeting them during orientation. Steve describes

meeting his future girlfriend before matriculating. When I asked him whether he used

Facebook to meet other Bowdoin students before transferring, he told this story:

> S: I did friend some—and actually the girl that I've been seeing for a couple
> months now, we met on Facebook before school started [K: Oh! Interesting.]
> Yeah.
> K: How did that happen?
> S: We're both huge fans of the TV show "24" and she made a 24 group and I
> joined it. She friended me through that and I was browsing her profile and
> realized, "this girl likes all of the same books and movies and music and TV
> shows that I do," and so, and then, she's a great musician, and playing in rock
> bands is super fun, and then I'd see pictures too, so you know, she was kinda cute,
> and we liked a lot of the same stuff, so my curiosity had been piqued. I didn't
> come to school expecting—or trying to hunt her down, per se, but when we did
> meet—I guess it was fortunate that not only did we have the interest connection
> but personality and relationship dynamic clicked as well.
> K: So, uh, when you met, did you talk about how you'd been friends on the
> Facebook?
> S: A little bit, and we still joke about it, how it's kind of awkward, and how very
> silly and awkward and modern it is that we technically met on Facebook. In some
> ways, I'm not gonna lie, I don't—it's not something I'm particularly proud of
> because I certainly don't want to be the person using Facebook as my online
> personal ad, and neither does she. But that's the way it happened I guess. –Steve

Steve thoroughly describes the process by which he became romantically interested in

this girl. Discovering similar interests, finding her attractive, and talking about playing

live music could all easily have occurred offline after matriculating. However, Facebook

makes it easy to see all this information in one place, despite the fact that Steve and his

future girlfriend were not proximate. This is possible because students can join the

Bowdoin network as soon as they receive their Bowdoin email address. Their status as Bowdoin students is cemented on Facebook before they actually become Bowdoin students. This allows the practices of community building to begin online before they can begin offline.

While Steve's online connection translated to an offline connection also, Liza had a different experience after meeting her Facebook friends in person at the beginning of freshman year.

> I don't think that kids having it [Facebook] over the summer made anything less awkward about meeting new people. I don't think that helped it or made it— although it could have helped some kids. But I know that it didn't really help me. Even though I was friends with people—they were on my friend list, one or two of them, we did laugh about how we recognized each other or, we had made some connection over similar whatever on Facebook over the summer, and then we talked about that in person when we met. And for the most part it didn't really change anything about orientation, or whatever. –Liza

Liza went on to talk about how the people she is close with at Bowdoin are not the people she initially met over Facebook before her freshman year. While Steve found that he connected easily offline with the girl he met on Facebook, Liza did not have that experience. However, the fact that her early Facebook friendships were short-lived does not negate the value of the community-building practices she engaged in before matriculating. Although she says that meeting during orientation was still awkward, she and her classmates still shared the experience of looking at each other's profiles before coming to Bowdoin, and thereby gained a greater understanding of Bowdoin's student body.

Created Networks: Conclusions

Liza did not feel that Facebook had mediated any of the discomfort she felt during freshman orientation. Scott had a different take on how Facebook affected his relationships with casual acquaintances. He did feel that Facebook could facilitate making the leap from being offline casual acquaintances (or in Liza's case, not having any offline context at all) to becoming closer friends.

> I have found that people that I've been marginal friends with who I then became friends with on Facebook and could comment on their wall, or do random—just be part of their network, then I felt like when I saw them it was almost—it was just much easier to be aware of them. It wasn't like when I met up with a group, and they'd be there that, they were, they just—it didn't give us anything to necessarily talk about. We wouldn't talk about the Facebook. I kind of felt like, "Oh, OK, like, by becoming Facebook friends we've like established that I'm aware of your existence, you're aware of my existence, and so I've looked at your profile, you've looked at mine, so now we can forgo the "Hi, I'm whoever.
> – Scott

Scott shows how Facebook helps to construct a sense of community. Being "aware" of other people by looking at their Facebook profiles reinforces a sense of identification with other people who share the experiences of being a Bowdoin student and being a Facebook member. This quote also captures the fluidity of the online-offline divide. People who meet in person engage in online practices, which then facilitate future offline interactions. The ways people use Facebook online, and then the ways they bring Facebook back into future offline interactions, show how people actively appropriate Facebook into pre-existing patterns of community construction.

CHAPTER 3
Restructuring Identity

The analytic category of identity is central to the study of anthropology. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 4-5) show that identity is both a "category of practice" as a folk category outside anthropology, and a "category of analysis" within anthropology. They write, "As a category of practice, it is used by 'lay' actors in some (not all!) everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 4-5). Often, identity in the folk sense is essentialized. Within anthropology, it has a more nuanced meaning; anthropologists often talk about "situational identity," meaning that identities can shift depending on who is present, or what each interlocutor seeks to gain from the interaction. Anthropologists also talk about various categories of identity, such as race, class, or gender, which intersect and influence each other.

Questions of identity have been raised with the advent of online communities, largely due to the anonymity that the Internet enables. When a lack of physical presence means that participants of online communities can present deceptive identities, the public conception of identity as essential is challenged (Donath 1999). Researchers have studied why certain people are more willing to participate in online community than other people, and what that means for the study of identity. Although the Internet is a relatively new medium, people often use it to reproduce older identity stereotypes. In "Writing in the Body: Gender (re)production in online interaction" O'Brien argues that online, gender is still viewed as essential to identity despite the absence of face-to-face interaction (O'Brien 1999). Although the Internet is complicating some of anthropology's findings on identity, it is reproducing others.

Because Facebook is uniquely positioned between traditional offline and traditional online community, it provides a unique forum for addressing issues around identity, particularly self-presentation and the lack of anonymity. The Facebook community depends upon members creating profiles that they feel reflect who they are. Facebook is structured such that a member must first construct his/her identity in the form of a profile. Only then can a member engage in the community-building aspects of Facebook. This differs from the ways people construct offline identity. Offline, people create and perform identity simultaneously in particular contexts. As linguistic anthropologists have pointed out, "context" refers to a variety of social and historical arenas. Sometimes context refers to a specific situation. At other times context may refer to a much broader social or historical movement (Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

Members construct identity within the dual social contexts of Bowdoin and Facebook. Bowdoin provides the amorphous offline context of social relationships and patterns of interaction. Facebook provides the clearly defined online context in the form of a structure that dictates what is and is not possible. Both contexts inform how Facebook members choose to present identity. Together, these two contexts determine what is structurally possible and what is socially acceptable.

Members must choose how to present themselves independently of any situational context before they can engage in the social context of Facebook. Moreover, because people bring the offline social context of Bowdoin to Facebook, and because Facebook has become a part of the offline social context, people are attempting to apply offline social norms to Facebook in much the same way. People expect that presentations of identity will only differ between online and offline in the format they are presented in.

Because of this expectation, people try to use the format of Facebook to present the same identity they present offline, despite the initially unfamiliar format. Although the structure of Facebook makes this goal impossible, Facebook members present the same identity online as offline to the extent to which that is possible. Consistent presentations are valued because people are interacting with the same people online and offline.

People have the agency to determine how to present themselves, both online and offline. People choose to highlight certain facets of identity and downplay others. People choose how to dress, what to say, and what situations to engage in. These choices collectively determine how people are viewed by others. It is impossible to engage socially, both online and offline, without presenting identity in some way. Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of self provides a solid basis for understanding how identity is presented offline. Presenting identity is much more explicit on Facebook than it is offline, however. Choices for presentation are also more visible as well as less nuanced within the structure Facebook provides.

Although the fact that members can construct their own profiles might suggest that members have complete control over the identities they present, once they become embedded within the Facebook community, their identities become negotiated. Others can post on the profile owner's wall, or tag photos, affecting the profile owner's presentation of identity. Identity takes on new dimensions as people situate themselves within networks of their own choosing. While members must make profile decisions without the benefit of a social context, tagging photos, posting on walls, and negotiating "friending" are a few ways that larger social networks directly affect personal identity construction. Sally describes how her social network relates back to her identity.

S: This is like showing other people that we're friends. Like, "These are my friends at Bowdoin," you know?
K: So it's a self-identification thing?
S: Yeah, yes. It puts you in a location. These are—this is where I am. These are my friends. These are my networks. These are all the people that I am friends with from different schools, you know? – Sally

Sally shows how identity is a broad category, and includes every facet of participation on Facebook. In this ways, constructing identity on Facebook is similar to constructing identity offline. In both situations, identity is created through the presentation choices people make and through the social situations and relationships people choose to become involved in.

On Facebook, members lose control over the situational context in which their profiles are viewed. Once members construct their profiles, others can view those profiles at any time, and anywhere with a computer. Roommates discussing a party might look at photos from that party on Facebook. Friends discussing a new crush might look up his/her profile to gauge whether he/she is single. The radio station might view the profiles of new DJs to find out what their favorite music is. These are all situations in which someone's profile might be viewed, yet the profile owner loses control of which situations they wish to participate in.

Thus, Facebook creates a unique forum for identity presentation. Although members often discuss how a Facebook profile can never be comprehensive, the uncomfortable implicit assumption is that they should be. Each Facebook member is assumed to have exactly one profile. Some members will create a new Facebook profile when they transfer schools or move, but most do not. Steve, who transferred, explained that he kept the same Facebook profile when he moved to the Bowdoin network because he wanted to stay in contact with his old friends as he was making new ones. The fact

that the vast majority of Facebook members have only one profile suggests a folk assumption of essential identity.

Consequently, members must quickly learn how to construct online presentations that are consistent with their offline presentations, and learn how to unify their various presentations into one essential identity. At the same time, the process by which identity is constructed is more explicit on Facebook, requiring a more self-conscious awareness of selfhood. Ultimately, although the format seems radically different from offline methods of identity construction, the motivations are the same. People still try to create identities that are simultaneously familiar and flattering, just as they do offline.

In this chapter I explore the sometimes-contradictory aspects of identity presentation. I will start by analyzing how Facebook creates a framework for identity by showing how the available fields embody certain assumptions. Then, I will go into how Facebook members themselves understand identity. This will lead into a discussion of whether identities are essential or context-dependent according to the framework provided by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), which will entail an analysis of how identity on Facebook relates to the larger literature on identity construction and presentation.

Structure

Facebook allows users to fill in certain fields to express identity. The fields are broken up into several categories and have varying degrees of flexibility. Drop-down menus are the least flexible, requiring members to choose no more than one from a list of given choices. Check boxes are intermediate, providing the options without limiting how many a member can choose. Open fields are the most flexible, allowing members to

create their own text rather than picking from a list of choices. Interestingly, none of them are required fields. Members must include their name, but any other information in the profile is optional. The fields that members choose to fill in tell as much about choices about identity presentation as the information in those fields. These fields reflect the assumptions that the Facebook creators make about identity and how college students would prefer to construct identity online. Examining the structure of the Facebook profile will reveal the assumptions embedded in the structure of Facebook.

Basic

The "Basic" category includes information about gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, "looking for," hometown, and political and religious views. The fact that these fields are in the "basic" section implies that these are the first and most fundamental facts to learn about another person. Most of these categories are seen within U.S. society as relatively unchanging, essential qualities that remain constant over the course of a person's life. The choices for these categories are fairly narrow, as most of these fields contain drop-down menus. The interesting exception is "relationship status," which Facebook members do change, and consider to be a fairly loaded category.

For "gender," users can select either "female" or "male," perpetuating the common thinking that gender is essential, and fits neatly into one of two possible categories.[16] The "interested in" category is understood to refer to sexual orientation, although the wording is ambiguous. Although the "gender" category forces members to choose between two options in a drop-down menu, the "interested in" category provides check boxes instead, so that members can choose to check "men," "women," or both. Facebook assumes that while each person should identify with a single binary gender,

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[16] See, for example: Mary Hawkesworth. "Confounding Gender." Signs 22:3 (Spring 1997) pp 649- 685.

sexual orientation does not have to fit as neatly into one of two categories. However, the fact that people still must choose to check "men," "women," or both eliminates the possibility to choose more nuanced options, like "gay men" or "trangendered," for example.

The drop-down options for the "relationship status" field are: "single," "in a relationship," "in an open relationship," "engaged," "married," or "it's complicated." These options reflect assumptions about how college students would want to characterize their relationships, and also what the most common types of relationships among college students are. After choosing a relationship status, members have the option to display the name of the person with whom they are in that relationship. That person must then accept the relationship for it to appear in both of their profiles. Once either party removes the relationship from their profile, the relationship is cancelled. This is a place where Facebook members often play with the structure provided. Although many people do use this feature for its intended purpose, many other people use this feature to show that they are married to their best friend, for example.

"Looking for" refers to the types of relationships the profile owner would be interested in having. The options are check boxes, not drop down menus. Again, this implies that people could be looking for more than one type of relationship, possibly with different people. The options are: "friendship," "a relationship," "dating," "random play," and "whatever I can get." Again, these options reflect assumptions about the goals college students have for their sexual and non-sexual relationships.

"Hometown" and "religious views" are both open fields, although the "state" and "country" aspects of the "hometown" category provide drop-down menus. This structure

allows users to determine how to express their religious views. Facebook members are not restricted to provided choices, but can decide how specific or general they would like to be in describing their religion. However, "Political Views" does provide a drop-down menu. The choices are also ordered on a scale from liberal to conservative, implying that political orientations exist on a sliding scale. Facebook members can choose from: "very liberal," "liberal," "moderate," "conservative," "very conservative," "apathetic," "libertarian," and "other." "Apathetic" and "other" are provided as catch-alls, for people who would like to fill out this field but who do not feel that the categories provided express their political views.

Contact

The "Contact" category includes ways to reach a Facebook member beyond Facebook. The possible fields include email, screen names, mobile phone, land phone, mailbox, residence, room, address, and website. This category gives members the option to limit access to friends or certain networks with every field they fill in. The extensive privacy options for this section show the assumption that offline contact information requires the most protection. This shows that while people are using Facebook to break down the online-offline dichotomy, they simultaneously require control over the possible intersects between online and offline life. The default privacy setting for these fields is "all networks and all friends." Members differ greatly on whether they change the default privacy settings, and on how much information they are willing to include in this section. Some people choose not to include any contact information. People cite convenience as a reason to include contact information. It is a way for Facebook members to let their friends know how they would like to be reached.

Personal

Third, the "personal" section requires the most creativity to fill in. The possible fields are activities, interests, favorite music, favorite TV shows, favorite movies, favorite books, favorite quotes, and "about me." These fields afford the Facebook member more freedom. None of the fields contain drop-down menus, and members can include as many or as few examples for each category as they wish. Some people thoroughly attempt to display their favorites in each category. Other people choose one category to fill out fully. Some people never edit these fields after creating their profiles, while others might add a movie they enjoyed or remove a band they find themselves no longer listening to.

Work, Education, and Courses

The next three sections are fairly self-explanatory and do not require much elaboration. Members can fill out education information, work information and what courses they are taking. These fields leave little room for creativity, and restrict members to drop-down menus for most of the information. The "education information" field allows members to list every school they have attended, including their fields of study and graduation years. This field has an advanced "auto-fill" ability: it guesses which school the member means as he or she types the name in. The "work information" section allows users to fill out their employment history, including employers, positions, descriptions, locations, and dates employed. The "courses" section allows members to fill out what courses they are currently enrolled in. Members select from a drop-down menu of departments. Then they fill out the course number, and from that information Facebook can determine what the course title for that course is, and display it.

Photo

Last, Facebook members can choose a profile photo to appear with their profile information. This photo functions as both a way to identify the member, and as a personal signature. Whenever a member writes on a wall, a thumbnail of their profile photo appears next to the text. A good profile photo is one that is generally considered attractive, funny, exotic, or interesting in some way.

> Recently I've gotten a lot of comments on-- wall postings on my profile picture. Cause it's this really fun picture of me and a friend of mine from the Frisbee team laying down and high-five-ing each other, so it looks like we're suspended three feet off the ground hovering in midair, and you can see our shadows as well, so it's very cool. So I think [that] grabs a lot of people's attention. They say "Wow! That's a really cool picture. How did you take that? – Steve

This is a good example of a photo that stood out. When people take photos of each other at an exotic location, or doing something interesting or particularly characteristic, they will often tease each other about putting it on Facebook. People commonly talk about "a good Facebook photo" as a photo that embodies these qualities.

Theory on Identity and Its Implications

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) discuss the ways "identity" as a term has come to mean very different things for anthropology, causing analytic confusion. They argue that since "identity" has come to have contradictory meanings, scholars must be aware of how they use the term "identity." They distinguish between "weak" and "strong" definitions of identity.

> We suggested at the outset that "identity" tended to mean too much or too little. This point can now be elaborated. Our inventory of the uses of "identity" has revealed not only great heterogeneity but a strong antithesis between positions that highlight fundamental or abiding sameness and stances that expressly reject

notions of basic sameness. The former can be called strong or hard conceptions of identity, the latter weak or soft conceptions (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 10).

Bubaker and Cooper equate strong conceptions of identity with essential, or folk categories. In the United States, many people assume a singular, "true" identity. Weak identity is equated with the fluid, situational identities often used in anthropology. Facebook lends itself well to analyzing these conflicting definitions of identity. The performance of constructing a profile highlights the flexibility and changeability of identity. This plays into Brubaker and Cooper's definition of weak identity. At the same time, because each Facebook member is assumed to have only one profile, thereby presenting only one identity on Facebook, members still view identity in the strong sense of the term.

Scholars doing research on the Internet have noted the ways the strong definition of identity collides with notions of identity as performed. For example, Kendall, in discussing how identity is constructed online, makes the point that "To some extent, our performances of identity acquire their meaning precisely from the belief that they are not performances" (Kendall 2002: 8). The betrayal that people feel when they discover that a member's presentation of identity only exists online is a projection of this belief on others. People expect that others will value continuity between online and offline presentations of identity as much as they themselves do. This conflict between the expectation and reality of online presentation map onto a conflict between projecting self and role-playing (117-118). The newness of the Internet as a medium for communication means that users have conflicting understandings of how identity should be performed. Some view their various Internet usernames as characters, distinct from themselves, but still embodying a facet of their offline identities. Other people try to reproduce their

offline identities as thoroughly as possible in the new medium. Because belonging to networks on Facebook eliminates anonymity, people cannot treat their Facebook identity as entirely removed from their offline identity. Therefore, they attempt to maintain consistency between online and offline presentations to the extent to which that is possible, rather than treating their Facebook identities as an unrelated performance.

In some ways, Facebook forces members to view their identities as performances. Facebook members are all given the same blank template with which to construct an identity. It is impossible not to view that construction of identity as a performance, since each aspect of the profile is consciously constructed, not passively evident. As Ashley said, "You project something about yourself on Facebook, you know? You get to choose what your profile says, what it doesn't say." The work of identity construction is so visible to the profile creator and the profile viewers. People are aware that they have choices in what aspects of themselves they emphasize when they are structurally forced to prioritize their interests and qualities in a finite space.

The notion of the performance of identity was well elaborated by Goffman (1959). Goffman uses the metaphor of a stage to symbolize the experience of performing identity. He calls this the *presentation of self*. This theory acknowledges the malleability of identity by theorizing that how people present themselves is always dependent on the context, consisting of the other actors on the stage and who is in the audience. The clothes people choose to wear become their costume. The things people bring with them become their props. Goffman exhaustively analyzes how social context affects the ways people choose to present themselves, using his dramaturgical metaphor.

Although Facebook provides a new forum for identity presentation as Goffman describes, there are key differences between online and offline presentation of self. As I discuss above, the specific membership of the audience is relatively unknown on Facebook. Facebook is fairly unnatural in this way. It is as if Facebook itself is a stage somewhere, and members are asked to make cardboard versions of themselves that are as realistic as possible, to stand on the stage for them. These cutouts remain on the stage performing identity for that person, even after the person leaves. Audience members come and go from the Facebook stage, and the cardboard stand-in cannot change depending on who is viewing it.

This issue is clearly evident in the choice about which photo to use as a profile photo. When Facebook members must choose one photo to represent them to others, that choice of a photo clearly functions as performance, and plays directly into Kendall's quote above. In choosing a photo, people become aware that they are choosing a presentation. Since strong identities carry more weight than weak identities, and since the performance of choosing a photo highlights the multiplicity of identity, choosing a photo weakens identity presentation.

The identifying potential of Facebook photos is off-putting for some. There is an inherent contradiction in Facebook where members want to know the most information possible about other people while they are simultaneously concerned about revealing personal information themselves. Not all members feel this way, but many are cautious about choosing a profile photo. Some of these concerns are related to privacy, but there was also a recurring fear of being "judged" based on a profile picture or general information in their profiles.

Andrea had not joined Facebook yet when I interviewed her. When I asked her about the reasons why she was apprehensive about Facebook, she talked about judging as a major reason she was nervous about joining. This quote is taken from a joint interview with Scott, Andrea's friend and a Facebook member.

> K: So you talked about judging you? That's one of the reasons why you don't want to be on it? [directed at A] And, [A: Yeah] So what do you—do you think that people judge other people a lot by their Facebook profiles?
> A: Well, you find out information about them, and you know music [laughs]… you get a glimpse of what they're like and you decide who they are. A little bit.
> K: So do you worry about that offline too, being judged by other people? Or is that…
> A: Yeah, sure. Same thing, I don't really know that—I don't let that many people know me. Offline too. So, Internet…
> S: [inaudible] that's really cause they could look at the Andrea Hoffman at any point. But whereas, they would have to at least find you, in your body and be like, "Andrea who are you?" [A laughs] [K: That's true] Even if you didn't share that much information, all of a sudden, you existed in a searchable way. –Andrea

Many users talked about fear of judgment as a key factor in driving how they constructed identity or perceived identity in others.

In order to avoid judgment by others, Facebook members practice what Goffman calls *secret consumption*. "If an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forgo or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards. When this inappropriate conduct is itself satisfying in some way, as is often the case, then one commonly finds it indulged in secretly; in this way the performer is able to forgo his cake and eat it too" (Goffman 1959: 41). Since Facebook members try to present themselves as attractively as possible, they select the most appealing aspects of their personalities to highlight. Facebook members might not include a movie they have seen many times, or a band they listen to often if they view that movie or band

as a guilty pleasure. Scott describes how he censored his profile to include the most

attractive parts of his personality.

> I found that when I was on Friendster and I really did care about my profile, I just became very obsessive. [K laughs] Kind of problematic. Like, "Well do I really want to say that's my interest? I don't—that doesn't sound that great. – Scott

Scott chose which interests to include in his profile based on how they would sound to

other people. Interests that do not fulfill this purpose would be secretly consumed and

enjoyed privately, not publicly.

Since the audience of Facebook is fluid, Facebook members must secretly

consume tastes that might be viewed negatively by anyone in the potential viewing

audience. This is difficult to do. One approach is to secretly consume everything by

creating a blank profile. Here, Andrea discusses the impossibility of creating an accurate

profile that would capture the complexities of offline personality by addressing this issue.

> A: Just uh, it freaks me out, basically. Like, um, I've seen enough of the Facebook from other people's accounts, and log onto a computer and we'll-- I'll look over their shoulder and look at it. And you can see what information is available to you, when I don't want people to know anything about me. Well, I don't… cause you can look up random people who don't even know you. And you can find out any informa—not any information but some information about them. And I don't want people I don't know knowing anything about me.
> S: But couldn't you just--you don't want to find out information about other people though?
> A: If it means people are going to find out information about me, then no. Cause I have no problem with looking at it on other people's accounts. [S: OK] And… but if that also means me having to put, to make a profile, I don't want…
> K: Cause you know that there's new privacy settings that mean that the only people who can see you profile are your friends? [A: Mm] Doesn't change it?
> A: No. It's also just really complicated. I don't-- I've never done Friendster, or Myspace, or any blog, or anything. The Internet kind of freaks me out, too.
> S: Do you think that's a phobia now? I feel like, cause you could change privacy settings. You could share very little information if you wanted to.
> A: Yeah, but then if I were to make my ideal profile, it would just be blank. It would just be my name. So there's no point in that. –Andrea

Andrea is expressing her opinion that any information in a profile could lead to certain assumptions by people viewing her profile. The only real way to avoid judgment is to create a blank profile, but even a blank profile connotes something about that member to other people.

Scott took a similar approach to constructing his profile. Although he had no problems being on Facebook, as his side of the conversation excerpted above shows, he still presented a very minimal profile. He changed his name online to an obscure musical reference, and his profile photo was non-representational. He also included minimal and obscure information in his profile. He said that he would often put puns in his profile, or references with double or triple meanings. Each of these choices about representation of self functions to complicate his performance of online identity. Scott constructed this ambiguous identity in order to circumvent the typical one profile/one identity paradigm.

> There's different sides of me that come out specifically with different people. And I guess I consider all of it to be "me." Incongruities are natural, between acting one way or the other. And so I see the Facebook as being just another side of me that brings out that part of me. But I don't think in any way it reflects—I don't think anything really reflects the totality of me. Which I think is funny when judging people based on something like the Facebook, is like, I know it doesn't—I feel like no matter what, you really can't know people from all their sides. […] And I don't ever try to make it somehow more encompassing of me. – Scott.

By being vague, Scott prevents other Facebook members from determining what his "essential" identity is by eliminating the possibility of a simple interpretation. Ironically, Scott does interpret the profile information others put on Facebook, an irony he appreciates and recognizes. When I questioned him further on the reasons he created such a vague Internet identity, he elaborated on the nature of Facebook.

> K: Do you think that by being vague, you are trying to allow for multiple interpretations of who you are?

S: Definitely. And also, I think that's the only way you can really exist online, and actually hope to in any way communicate with other people. Cause once you pin yourself down, then you are always gonna alienate some part of you, or also some group of people you know. So I like to keep it as simple and vague as possible. So it's just like "I exist. That's kind of it. There's not much you can do with what I put up there." Which allows other people to add meaning to what I do do. Like when they post on my wall. To just kind of like, [inaudible]. Rather than me giving them something to talk about. See, Andrea, you're missing out.
A: Not on much! [laughs] So you don't tell anyone anything, and they kind of maybe tell you a little bit something. [A laughs]

In this quote Scott elaborates on how the different aspects of his personality correspond to the people he expresses them with. Choosing a singular identity to portray would therefore alienate both the incongruous aspects of himself, and the various people in his life. He therefore tries to create identity as a blank slate upon which his friends can project their impression of his identity. He views his wall as one way his friends can communally construct a heterogeneous identity for him, without Scott himself needing to subscribe to any particular aspect of that identity.

Goffman refers to the process by which performers ensure that they present the identity that their audience expects as *audience segregation*. When performers take on different roles, they must prevent their audiences from witnessing their different presentations. If audience members witness contradictory or inconsistent roles presented by the same individual, they will begin to doubt the authenticity of the presentation that is intended for them. "By proper scheduling of one's performances, it is possible not only to keep one's audiences separated from each other (by appearing before them in different front regions or sequentially in the same region) but also to allow a few moments in between performances so as to extricate oneself psychologically and physically from one personal front, while taking on another." (Goffman 1959: 138) Goffman argues that

audience segregation is an integral part of identity presentation, and typically merely implies a complex identity, not intentional deceit.

Audience segregation is not possible on Facebook in the way that it is possible offline. Profiles remain static regardless of who constitutes the viewing audience at any particular moment. It is possible to a small extent: the privacy settings discussed in the Communication section provide ways that members can choose how different people experience their profiles differently. Also, members generally intend their profiles to be viewed by their peers, not parents or administrators, meaning that they can present certain identities to their peer groups without disrupting how these other groups view them. Still, the audience is generally much larger for Facebook than for offline interactions. It becomes impossible to present different identities to different people within the large audience of one's Facebook friends. Audience segregation is therefore limited as people are forced to choose one identity to present to all their possibly disparate offline audiences.

This raises another issue. People create offline identity through any social interaction. Although Andrea states that she is just as cautious about letting others get to know her offline as online, there is still a crucial difference. Identity presentation offline is a constant process, where people depend on the situational context to provide cues for appropriate behavior. Although other people may add to the profile owner's presentation of identity while he or she is not online, the profile owner cannot alter his or her presentation of self while away from a computer.

In constructing identity, Facebook members also look outward to how their identities relate to those of others. Manuel Castells (1997) put forward a theory of

identity that analyzes how people mobilize identity in relation to a perceived hegemonic identity. The three types of identity he defines are legitimizing identity, resistance identity, and project identity. The first reinforces mainstream culture, the second stands in opposition to it, and the third constructs identity based around a specific issue. These types of identity depend on actors constructing perceptions of what constitutes mainstream identity, and then taking a stance in relation to that identity.

Most people on Facebook employ a legitimizing identity by filling in the provided fields, and relating to each other in a standard, commonly understood way. Scott, however, constructs his identity as a resistance identity. By leaving almost all the fields Facebook provides empty, Scott is rejecting the hegemonic framework of identity construction. Steve, in contrast, constructs his identity as a project identity.

> I would say my Facebook profile is kind of a balance between, between, "Oh! These are cool bands/movies/books, I've heard of these, and I kind of like the indier-than-thou snobbery where it's like "Oh, there's definitely a few bands and artists, and a few books and movies that you probably haven't heard of." And so maybe I like to think that, that it sort of gives me a "Ooo, what hip subculture is that kid into," you know?
> K: Mm hm. That's interesting. So you want people to-- or you think people look at your profile and say "Oh, he's a little bit hipper than everyone else"
> S: I would like to think so. In sort of a pique-your-curiosity, or that's-kind-of-cool sort of way. –Steve

Here, Steve is constructing a project identity on a small scale. His entire profile is not entirely based around this hip image he describes. Still, by embedding these obscure references in with more mainstream tastes, he is trying to get the people viewing his profile to see him as a member of a "hip subculture." By ascribing to that subculture, and by creating a profile that reflects that, Steve was using the project identity that Castells defined, although he did not base his entire profile on that aspect of identity.

Steve's presentation is effective because other people might not know some of Steve's obscure tastes. Steve is relying on his perception of what the average Bowdoin student might listen to or read, and positioning himself outside of that hegemonic identity. He is presenting this identity not only because he feels it highlights valuable aspects of his personality, but because it sets him apart from others. Although Castells' three models for the relationship between self and society are simplistic categories, his theory that identity construction depends on how people perceive others is valuable because it recognizes the ways identity production is not only done in relation to an audience, but is also situated within the power relationships between self and audience.

Impact of Others on Identity Presentation

Facebook identities are difficult to construct because Facebook continues to present a member's identity to others, even without the physical presence of that member. Moreover, other people can add to an individual's profile without their initial approval. Thus, maintaining a certain identity presentation can be difficult. When Steve chose to present a project identity, or Scott chose to present a resistance identity, that decision impacts how they are viewed even when they are not online. Members lose control of what happens to their identity when they are not online. Photos could be tagged of them, or other members could post on their walls, and they would be unaware until they check their email. Still, these additions would be visible to other people between the time they are posted and the time the profile owner sees them.

Photos and wall posts are both aspects of a profile that the profile owner does not have complete control over, which can be problematic for a discussion of presentation of

self. Most other social networking websites require members to authorize any comments or testimonials, which are just the terms other websites use for this concept of wall posting. The fact that Facebook doesn't require profile owners to view and approve any tags of them or any postings on their wall ahead of time is an interesting structural choice. Instead, a Facebook member would get a version of the following form email, "X has written something on your wall. To see what X wrote, follow the link below: http://bowdoin.facebook.com/profile…. Thanks, The Facebook Team." Tagged photos and wall postings are part of how identity is presented, since they are a part of the overall profile. Therefore, the passive wording in this email is interesting because it assumes that people are not interested in viewing tagged photos or wall posts as identity performance. Facebook assumes people will actively perform identity through the fields they provide, and passively accept the identities that others present for them in these two ways. As I discussed in my introduction, people do have the option of removing tags or wall posts, but this email emphasizes passive observance, rather than active acceptance or rejection, with the wording "To see what X wrote, follow the link below."[17]

Although Facebook implies that members should view these additions to their presentations in passive ways, most people actively use the options to delete these additions, at least some of the time. Andrew describes the ways in which a hypothetical Facebook member might attempt to construct identity, and how they might cope with the influence others have on their profiles. Mocking Facebook members, Andrew says:

> A: 'I'm gonna find the hottest picture of me, and I'm gonna de-tag any pictures of me that don't look good. And I'm going to delete every wall posting that doesn't make me look funny.' –Andrew

This quote captures both the influence others have on identity, and the ways Facebook

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[17] Personal email.

members manage that influence. Although other people can tag photos and post on walls, thereby affecting the profile owner's presentation of identity, the profile owner can delete those additions if they do not contribute to the image he or she is trying to present. Leaving a photo tagged or a wall post on their wall indicates an acceptance of that addition to their identity presentations.

Scott recognized wall posts' ability to publicly display relationship and construct mutual identity. When I asked him about how he viewed wall posting, he described this.

> K: So you don't see walls as a place to post communications?
> S: No. I don't. I feel like you're just like, tagging them with a graffiti sign. It's someone's *wall*. [Emphasis placed on the double meaning of "wall"] And so why would you graffiti, "You want to meet me tonight at 9?" You'd want to put something on there that would have some, indelible, quality to it, that would make it interesting. – Scott

When Scott talks about making someone else's wall interesting, he means making it interesting for third party profile viewers, the audience for identity. Profile viewers read the wall to learn more about both the identities of the profile owner and the wall poster. Posting on someone's wall publicly reaffirms a relationship, particularly if the post contains an inside joke, or plans for meeting offline.

Andrew also saw wall posts as a way to present identity publicly. He framed this negatively, saying that people who use wall posts in this way are trying to get "attention."

> A: For example, they're like "Hey, call me later tonight." They write on someone's wall, when you could do a message and it would be so much simpler. But they want "Oh man, she's cool! They're gonna hang out tonight." I find it really stupid.
> K: So do you ever post on other people's walls?
> A: Yeah, when I have something that I want everyone else to see. –Andrew

These two quotes show that people place value on whether or not certain communications deserve to be publicly visible. There is a higher standard for wall posts

than other forms of communication. Andrew also shows how people can view wall

posting as a way to appear more popular, by publicly displaying an offline relationship

with a popular person.

> Photo tagging is similarly reflective of how social relationships affect
presentation. Like wall posting, photo tagging causes profile owners to negotiate their
identities by accepting or rejecting the ways others modify their presentations.

> K: Has anyone tagged any photos of you that you didn't want tagged?
> L: If I didn't want them tagged it was just because it was really unflattering, or a
> stupid face I was making, so you can un-tag.
> K: Do you do that?
> L: Yeah, I've done it a couple of times, if I just really don't like the way I look in
> the picture. Not cause its offensive, just because I don't want it there. And so
> they still have the picture on their album on their page. It's just not tagged. And I
> guess if it really bothered me, I could be like "delete it, please." But mostly it's
> just unflattering. –Liza

People want to appear attractive online as well as offline. By attractiveness I refer to

physical attractiveness as evidenced by photos, but I also refer to less tangible aspects of

identity. If a member has many interesting friends, or many photos tagged of him- or

her-self at exclusive parties, he or she is presenting an attractive identity. Therefore, un-

tagging unflattering photos functions to remove any disruptions to the attractive

presentation of identity the profile owner is attempting to construct.

> Facebook members largely do have control over their profiles: they have the
power to un-tag photos, delete wall posts, or change their privacy settings. However,
Alice describes a particularly difficult situation where her presentation of self was taken
out of her own hands.

> A: …What wasn't funny was freshman year my boyfriend at the time logged into
> my account and la—I hadn't given him my password or anything, but I use the
> same general password for everything. [K laughs] I know it's a bad thing, but
> I've got a shoddy memory and I can't remember a lot of things, so I usually have

the same password. [K: I do the same thing] He logged in and he read my notes, and I had been writing, well messages. And I had been messaging this guy. Nothing was coming, we were just being friends. And he mistakened them for love notes and I was just like "No, it's not like that," and he got really angry and posted all this stuff on my wall about me being a liar and a cheater and all that stuff.
K: While logged in as you?
A: Mm hm. And then, I had a friend-- I was working, and I had a friend that was like, "You should check your facebook account." I'm like "OK!" And I log in and I see all this ranting and he had posted some of the messages that—and I was like "This is crazy! He's crazy!" And I could understand being mad but that was a little bit extreme. –Alice

Although this example shows a more drastic violation of identity presentation than would normally occur, the point it makes is still valid. People are not presenting identity through their physical presence, they are using Facebook, a website that requires a username and login, to mediate identity presentation. Several people I have talked to mentioned occasions when they left the room only to have their roommates change their profiles, or change their passwords so that they would not be able to log in again. These are generally fairly harmless pranks, unlike the situation Alice describes. Still, this makes Facebook a much murkier realm of identity presentation than more traditional, offline realms.

Facebook members understand that the identity presented on Facebook does not necessarily correspond to the identities the profile owners would like to present. When Alice's friend saw that she had updated her profile, she inferred immediately that Alice was not behind the changes on her profile. The possibility of discrepancy between identity and presentation makes Facebook different from other, more direct communications mediums, like the telephone or email. Disruptions in presentation, like this one that Alice faced, are forceful reminders that presentation of identity on Facebook is a performance.

Changeable Identities

When the identities presented offline could potentially conflict with the identities Facebook members intend to portray, it becomes harder to ignore the differences between online and offline presentation of self. Ashley struggled with how identity was presented online. As an earlier quote from Ashley showed,[18] she felt that facial expressions and emotions were a critical aspect of identity presentation. Being unable to read them in an online context interfered with her ability to read the presentation of her friend who was pretending to be engaged. Misreading presentations of self can complicate relationships and draw attention to the limitations of the communications medium.

Ashley's example of the discrepancy between offline identity and online presentation differs in important ways from the example with Alice's boyfriend. Clearly, Ashley's friend had different motives in mis-presenting identity than Alice's boyfriend had. Also, Ashley's friend was presenting herself, while Alice's boyfriend was presenting Alice. Finally, Alice's friend immediately recognized that Alice's profile was not accurately representing her identity. Because Ashley's friend presented an identity that was somewhat more believable, and could not be verified without a face-to-face interaction, Ashley believed her friend was engaged. Ashley elaborated further on in the interview about how she had felt hurt when she believed that her friend had gotten engaged without telling her. Ashley felt that her friend was presenting herself as engaged to all her friends simultaneously, by posting it on her profile. Because she had not told Ashley personally, Ashley felt like their relationship had become less personal.

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[18] See Page 47.

I do not mean to assume that people always present serious identities offline. Ashley's friend could have played the same joke over the phone, or in person. The reason that these examples disrupt perceptions of identity is that Facebook is a novel channel for communication, and people are still learning how to use Facebook in ways that make sense to the profile owner and profile readers. These disruptions are new since the technology is so new. It became clear during my interviews that my interviewees were still trying to understand how Facebook could be used and still in the process of constructing frameworks of meaning.

One of the contested aspects of Facebook identity is how permanent profile information is. Everyone has their own patterns for how often they update. Some people create their profile and never change it, and other people update virtually daily. Unless the profile viewer has a good sense of how often the profile owner updates, it would be hard to tell how the profile owner views the permanence of identity. Alice viewed her Facebook identity as very changeable. She incorporated transient experiences and emotions into her profile.

> A: And I wouldn't say it's a reflection of me because it's not. I mean, part of it is obviously, but it's—you can't judge me by what I put on my Facebook account. It's a form of expression.
> K: So it's expression but not…
> A: But not a total refle—I'm expressing myself, but my expressions aren't necessarily a reflection of me. Like I could be angry and on my facebook wall you could—I mean, not wall, but the page—you could be angry, but that's not saying that I'm an angry person. Just at that time I was angry, so… to say that that's a reflection of me wouldn't be fair I guess. –Alice

When I followed up, she expanded on this explanation.

> K: What do you think people think of you after they see your profile? Do they think "Oh, that's how she was feeling on the day when she made this, or…?"
> A: If they're looking intellectually at what my favorite books and things like that are, then that's pretty much who I am. That's the kind of stuff that I like, the kind

of music that I listen to. But if they're looking at my status or looking at the "about me" or anything that is liable to change in a whim, then basically I think they're like "Oh, that's how she's feeling today," or "that's how she was feeling. – Alice

Alice saw some aspects of her profile as somewhat permanent and essential, and others as temporary. No one else made this distinction. The fact that Alice sees the movies and books as the permanent aspects of her identity, and the "about me" section as the section that is most likely to change is significant because it contradicted my expectations of the aspects of identity that are least likely to change. A few people mentioned that they would update their profile if they saw a good movie, or read a good book. Liza was most likely to change her favorite quotes. They saw tastes as the more flexible aspect of identity. Alice, contrastingly, viewed tastes as the constant aspect of her profile, and the "about me" section as the one most likely to change.

Presenting Self: Conclusions

The choices discussed here highlight the fact identity presentation requires thought and work. A successful presentation of identity emerges through careful planning, and depends on careful negotiation of social contexts. People are conscious of the choices they make, and understand that by highlighting certain aspects of identity they are socially aligning themselves in specific ways. Members can also easily change their identity presentations, by updating their profiles. In this way, identity construction on Facebook is similar to identity construction offline. The information that people choose to de-emphasize on their Facebook profiles is the same information people de-emphasize in offline interactions, according to Goffman's (1959) social rules of audience segregation and secret consumption. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) would call this the

weak interpretation of identity. Identity is in flux, and changes when members update their profiles.

However, members also understand their presentations of identity in terms of Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) strong interpretation of identity. Presentations can never be comprehensive, although the one member/one profile paradigm suggests that one presentation should be sufficient to present an adequate identity. Because members have only one identity to present to their various peer groups, the structural assumption in Facebook is that there is a unified essential identity that various presentations emerge from.

CHAPTER 4
Conclusions

On April 16, 2007, 33 people died at Virginia Tech in the deadliest school shooting in American history. As people reeled from the aftermath, Facebook was one of the first destinations for students trying to make sense of the shootings. Among Virginia Tech students in the hours shortly after the shooting, Facebook members used their "status" to let their friends know that they were uninjured, or joined the group "I'm OK at VT." People used this group to ask about friends and share information about missing people. These updates were instantly visible to anyone that that person counted among his or her Facebook friends. They used the Virginia Tech network's wall (a new feature that had been introduced only days before the shooting) to post information also.

In the days after the tragedy, Virginia Tech students used Facebook to make sense of what happened and to come together as a community. Many people changed their profile photo to an image of a black ribbon with "VT" across it, replacing an image that represented them with one that represented the tragedy. Many students from other schools also changed their photo to this image, showing that people everywhere wanted to show their support after the shooting. People also used the Facebook walls of the victims as a place to grieve and share memories. News stories about the shooting included quoted wall posts from the victims' walls, the Virginia Tech network wall, and the walls of the many groups that were set up in the wake of the shooting. As Amanda Lenhard, a senior researcher at the Pew Internet and American Life project, said about the impromptu memorials on Facebook and Myspace, "What better place to mourn someone than a place that they themselves build to express who they are, and a place where the deceased and his or her friends may have spent a great deal of time interacting?"

(MSNBC 2007) When students were trying to find information about members of their community and later, when they were trying to process their collective loss, they turned to Facebook. Students also petitioned Facebook to change its colors to the Virginia Tech school colors for some period of time. Although this hasn't happened as of the time of writing, the motivation for this request is important. A supportive community is especially crucial during difficult times. When students look to Facebook for that community, they expect to receive the same level of emotional support on Facebook as they would receive offline.

The shootings at Virginia Tech also highlight the impossibility of researching Facebook without researching the offline contexts within which Facebook is embedded. The shootings were an offline tragedy, yet people utilized an online forum in order to cope with their loss. Of course, Facebook was not the only, or even the primary, venue for expressing grief. People joined these groups and wrote on the walls of the victims as they were also attending candlelight vigils and engaging in offline conversations. Facebook is, thus, a new social tool, but it does not replace more traditional means of interaction. Rather, they exist in tandem (MSNBC 2007; ABC 2007).

In this paper, I have explored Facebook as a social practice among college students. I have argued that individuals use Facebook in addition to other forms of communication. The distinction between offline and online—although helpful to some analyses—misrecognizes the practices of using Facebook. By examining specific activities and structures of Facebook, I have brought attention to both community and identity. Understanding Facebook has important analytical implications for anthropology. As Facebook makes the structures for community and identity explicit, it

becomes possible to analyze how people relate to the external structures Facebook provides. People creatively employ Facebook's standard structure to serve their social needs.

Popular Views of Online Media

The media coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings marks one of the first times a social networking website was framed in a positive light by mass media. Online communities have received a copious amount of negative press due to popular views that online and offline are two separate realms. Myspace is criticized as being a haven for sexual predators. Myspace members are often portrayed as potential victims, unaware of the dangers posed by the anonymity of Myspace. Facebook members are criticized for using Facebook to indiscriminately post incriminating photos and information about others and themselves. In both cases, the members of online communities are portrayed as passively accepting online social structures, not as actively appropriating those standard structures by developing unique interpretations and use practices. Members of online communities do not leave their offline selves behind when they participate in community online. They bring their inhibitions, social ties, and identities with them. Alarmist media portrayals about the dangers of online interaction miss the point: these are not new dangers; the Internet has merely given them new faces.

Viewing online and offline as distinct realms of communication is not only unproductive, it is also inaccurate. The medium of the Internet is certainly responsible for creating new ways to engage socially. However, my research clearly showed how imbedded Facebook is within offline community, and how fluid that divide really is.

Facebook is facilitating the flow of information about offline events as well as creating a space for online interactions.

I have shown that people actively utilize their agency in order to construct community and identity through Facebook. As people construct their own communities by adding people as "friends" and by engaging in Facebook as a community of practice, people are adopting offline social practices to an online medium. The communities that emerge on Facebook are integrated into offline communities. Both online and offline, communities are layered and overlapping. People look to Facebook as a way to reinforce their social relationships, both with other Bowdoin students and with friends from elsewhere. These communities function as heterogeneous audiences for the performance of identity.

This contributes to anthropological notions of community by requiring recognition of the fluidity of community. The definition of community must move still further from the spatially delimited definition to include communities that are at least partially maintained in the absence of face-to-face interaction. Analyzing Facebook as a community of practice requires that anthropologists expand their conceptions of what community-building practices are, to include practices that do not involve physical presence.

Although Facebook is new, the motivations for joining social networking websites are not. People strive to foster relationships and to create attractive identities online, just as they do offline. Rather than framing online social practices as unfamiliar and therefore frightening, anthropology should create a discourse of online community that acknowledges the underlying social motivations for participating in online

community. This discourse is important in order to correct the "otherizing" discourse of fear that the media forwards.

I have also shown that Facebook is significant to discussion of identity. As identities are performed, people adapt offline patterns of self-presentation to the new medium. People try to look as genuine and as attractive as possible, and accomplish these goals using Goffman's theories of audience segregation and secret consumption. Facebook members must monitor their identity presentations, as other Facebook members have the option to add information to them, in the form of tagged photos or wall postings.

Furthermore, my interviews suggest that identity as an analytical concept needs further refinement. The structure of Facebook demands a self-conscious awareness of the process of identity construction, yet it still assumes a single identity. This caused confusion for many of my informants, as their folk categories of identity collided with a recognition of analytical categories of identity. More research needs to be done to understand whether Facebook members understand identity as largely essential, or as multi-faceted with a unified presentation. Both perspectives emerged during my research. My interviews thus suggest that both community and identity need further exploration, but even more so, that anthropologists need to bring attention to this medium.

Geertz defines culture as follows. "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973: 5). Facebook is a growing

web of 19 million users. Members spin these webs as they engage in the Facebook practices I have described. If anthropology is concerned with cultural practices, it must acknowledge that Facebook is a new and significant cultural practice for a large number of young people, and is changing how an entire generation shares social information.

Further Research

While the sudden emergence of Facebook as an important social phenomenon has left a void in the literature, this gap will narrow as current research goes to press. The plethora of statistical and quantitative studies on social networking websites speaks to a need for more qualitative research. This project deconstructed the online/offline divide by asking people to discuss their online practices offline. A greater understanding of the ways people conceive of their online identities and communities will lead to a greater understanding of the role the Internet plays in the social lives of the current college-age generation.

Facebook will have a profound impact on the emerging subfield of virtual ethnography. Because Facebook is not entirely separate from spatial community, I was able to meet my interviewees face-to-face. For the most part, this has not been easy in virtual ethnography since traditional online communities are composed of members across a country or the globe. A combination of online and offline research methods would yield a greater understanding of how use practices are reflected in offline interviews. I did this on a small scale when I looked at my interviewee's profiles before and after our interviews. This should be frame future research, and should combine both quantitative and qualitative methods.

One specific area for further research is how gender, race, and class affect Facebook use. Due to the fact that so many more women answered my request for an interview than men, it emerged that there was a significant gender aspect to Facebook use that I did not have the data to examine. Future research should examine if and why the Facebook is a feminized space. This issue is particularly interesting given the previous research on the Internet as a masculine sphere (Kendall 2002; O'Brien 1999). How do the structures of various online spaces lead to gendered use practices? Bakardjieva's (2005) two models might help explain this phenomenon. As I discussed in my Introduction, Bakardjieva argues that dominant groups were more likely to adopt a consumption model for Internet use, while marginalized groups were more likely to adopt the community model. Applying the research on feminized versus masculinized work could yield productive results. Research needs to be done on how Facebook is challenging the masculinized view of computer use while simultaneously reinforcing gender norms of social behavior.

Much work has been done in economics and sociology on the impact of the global digital divide (See for example, Guillén and Suárez 2005). Participation in online communities requires access to expensive technologies. Although Facebook is facilitating communication, it is doing so primarily among elite college students. This could be partly due to the fact that Facebook originated at Harvard and spread first to the other Ivy League universities. Although registration is now open to anyone, until recently, a valid school email address was required to register for Facebook. This excluded people who could not afford to go to college from registering.

As the current generation of Facebook users graduates college and forms ties with people beyond their college network, it will be interesting to research how Facebook use will shift. Will privacy become a greater concern if a large number of alumni belong to the same college networks as current students? Will people continue to use Facebook to notify their friends of future life changes, like a move or marriage? Will Facebook remain a college phenomenon, as graduates delete their accounts? What will it mean to be a Facebook member in ten years?

These questions are currently unanswerable. Facebook is still evolving, as are the use practices surrounding Facebook. Facebook itself is not static: it adds new features regularly and undergoes website redesigns. As the structures Facebook makes available change, the ways in which they are used must change also. However, the motivation to engage socially will remain constant. Although the structure is new, the practices of constructing community and identity are much older, and will adapt to new external structures.

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