Presentation of Self in MySpace.com
an Online Social Networking Site

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Abstract

This ethnographic study explores the presentation of self on MySpace.com, an online social networking website. One hundred MySpace.com profile pages were analyzed to discover how users complete and manipulate the MySpace template to create a virtual presentation of self. The one hundred profile pages represented fifty stated female users and fifty stated male users. Each page was archived and coded based on the elements present that were viewable by the public. All users were selected at random using the website search tool and a random number generator.

The work of Erving Goffman in his 1959 book, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, is the theoretical foundation for the this study. Analysis of the profile pages sampled indicates that most users studied modify the default template and add various elements from textual information to pictures, music, and video clips to the profile pages and create a virtual presentation of self on MySpace.com.
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I sit alone in my room, pouring over page after page of MySpace (a social networking website) profiles looking for that perfect match. Finding people with common interests in my small town is not easy. My high school graduating class will be made up of approximately 40 students and I feel disconnected from most of them and disconnected from my parents. Life might have been easier if I had siblings to share in the loneliness of small town life but that never happened. The only hope I have for social connection lies within a cyberplace that reaches beyond the limits of my small town, beyond the limits of my state and my nation. With over 160 million users there must be someone who shares my interests, fears, hopes, and dreams. So I keep searching.

Creating and populating my MySpace profile page was easy. I created my account and filled in the template with information that shows what a witty, charming, and interesting person I am. Next, I snapped a couple of flattering photos of myself with my digital camera and uploaded them to my site. But, there was something missing. The blue and white background was less than appealing and it certainly didn’t seem like anyone would see it and want to add me as a friend. After a couple quick Google searches for ‘MySpace layouts’ and ‘MySpace backgrounds’ I found a background that fit and endless icons, emoticons, avatars, graphics, and animations. I had no idea there were so many options available. All that worrying about having to learn html code was for nothing, anyone can have a ‘cool’ looking MySpace profile page.

Continuing the search, I find a few offline friends who have MySpace pages. I send them ‘friend requests’ and look over their pages. One has a song that plays when
the profile page is loaded, another has a video of a car racing down a track. One has only a couple of friends the other has over 100. It was a good feeling to finally be in on what everyone at school was talking about. People are always telling me “check out my MySpace page,” or asking me if they can “add me” as a friend and now I can see their pages and be their MySpace friends.

As I continue to search, I am as interested in meeting new people as I am in connecting with people I actually know. Some profiles are interesting and the people seem like they have some of the same interests as me. Other profiles seem odd, creepy, or just plain disgusting. I know I have to be careful who I associate with so I read all of the information on a profile and check out their pictures. If the person seems normal and they ask to be my friend then I accept. But, if the pictures are too provocative then I don’t reply.

There is more to MySpace profile pages than just pictures and basic information so I find my favorite song and add it to my profile page. I also find a cool video clip and add it. A ‘friend’ sent me a survey that has been circulating around MySpace. It asks me to fill in information about my favorite things and post it on my profile page so others can get to know me. It was long but I filled it in adding some basic information about me, my favorite color, favorite food, my first kiss, whether I drink or smoke, and what my dreams are. Thankfully my parents will never see my profile; they have no idea what I do when I go out with my friends and occasionally drink and smoke, nor do they have any idea I have a boyfriend.

Some of my MySpace friends are people I know offline but others I met through MySpace groups and forums. I am interested in photography and have met a few people
who are interested in that as well. My MySpace ‘friends’ send me invitations to parties and other events but my parents won’t let me go. I have a friend from another state who wants to come and visit so we can meet. I met in a MySpace group about dogs and then we started instant messaging each other. He loves dogs as much as I do. He is really nice and his grandparents live near here. I hope he can come to visit on his next school vacation. I’ll have to tell my parents I am with one of my school friends because they will never let me meet him at the mall or at the movies.

MySpace.com is a vast social networking site with over 160 million users, each one having a different reason for creating a MySpace profile. This study addresses how people use the MySpace template to create a presentation of self on MySpace.com, how users judge the authenticity of other users presentations of self on MySpace, user expectations of privacy on MySpace and societal concerns surrounding the safety of MySpace for adolescents.

The user highlighted in the vignette illustrates a MySpace user who goes through the process of creating a profile and taking part in this online social network. Each aspect of the MySpace profile from the basic information, survey results, and ‘self’-portraits to the background, layout, graphics, songs, and video clips are placed on a page and combined to create a presentation of self on MySpace. It also illustrates that each profile is constructed by the user and may or may not be accurate. Users create profile pages and personal guidelines for evaluating other users’ presentations of self. In the case of the young woman highlighted in the vignette, she looks to images, information and communication to help her make decisions like “he is really nice” or he “loves dogs.”
News of a Homeland Security officer being arrested on “seven counts of use of a computer to seduce a child and 16 counts of transmission of harmful material to a minor” in a CNN report on Tuesday, April 4th, 2006 illustrates why parents and educators worry about how children are evaluating user profiles on MySpace.com and other social networking sites. In the same sting operation, 99 other men were arrested for various inappropriate sexual acts with minors. MySpace is not the only place where sexual predators may linger nor is it the only place that has parents worried, but it is one example of a growing number of sites where users create online profiles that do not have to reflect who they are offline.

Introduction

Literature Review

Pre-Internet: Presentation of Self Offline

The machinery of self is cumbersome, of course, and sometimes breaks down… but, well-oiled, impressions flow from it fast enough to put us in the grips of one of our types of reality – the performance.

--Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, 1959, p. 253

The issue of identity has long been the topic of social science research. Erving Goffman along with other anthropologists and social scientists have spent their careers studying how we present ourselves to others in a variety of situations. Goffman in particular has contributed greatly to the field with his work The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life published in 1959, the contents of which transcend its original settings and
are applicable to our modern virtual environments. The principles Goffman describes are the foundation for this ethnographic study of MySpace.

Goffman defines performance as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presences before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (Goffman 22). Performance is complex and consists of the “front” or “expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman 22) and the person behind it. When performing we each expect or at least “request observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered” (Goffman 17) whether we are sincere to who we are or not. Each front we put forth can be further broken down into the setting in which the performance takes place, and the personal front or the personal “expressive equipment” that “we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes” (Goffman 24). Examples of both setting and personal front may be described for each performance where setting refers to the objects in the environment and personal front refers to “appearance” and “manner.” Appearance is made of physical characteristics and expressive instruments that give others clues about the performer's social status (Goffman 24) while manner refers to the performer’s “role” in the situation.

We have the ability to wake up each day create a new performance, to place ourselves in different settings with different roles and to manipulate our appearance. Goffman suggests that instead of creating a front that we simply select one from those that have been established depending on the situation (Goffman 28). Each performance is “molded” to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented. The observers do not wholly know the sincerity of the performance yet there
are clues that can be taken to support or refute the sincerity of the performance as well as how well it fits into the ideals of society. “If an individual is to give expression to ideal standards during his performance, then he will have to forego or conceal action which is inconsistent with these standards” (Goffman 41). There are many different aspects a performer may conceal during a performance but generally they are actions, processes, behaviors, values, or motives that would not be regarded as “clean” or up to the standard set by society (Goffman 43). One way of concealing oneself or one’s performances that should not be seen by everyone is to segregate audiences in addition to molding one’s performance to fit the particular audience (Goffman 49).

Despite the performers’ attempts to fit the performance to societal standards and the audience and situation at hand, sometimes the performance gets to the audience through each individual’s information filter, or brain, and thus can often be misunderstood or misconstrued by the audience. The meaning of a performance may be filled with cues that the audience misunderstands but are “accidental, inadvertent, or incidental and not meant by the performer to carry any meaning whatsoever” (Goffman 51). The audience may have a very different impression of the performer or performance than what was projected. Goffman explains that there are three general ways in which a performer may “convey impression that are in general so incompatible with the ones being fostered” (Goffman 52). The performer may convey “incapacity, impropriety, or disrespect” (Goffman 52); she may act like she is too interested or not interested enough in the interaction; or she may “suffer from inadequate dramaturgical direction” (Goffman 52). In general these three aspects are thought to be unintentional acts that mislead the audience, however, deliberate misrepresentation may be present because the audience is
only aware of what is presented to them and cues may be used to cause them to get a
certain impression. The only things that hold a performer back from misrepresenting
herself are “shame, guilt, or fear” (Goffman 58). The audience often pays close attention
to cues that cannot be manipulated to gain a more accurate perspective on the reliability
of the performance. If the performer is caught in the act of deception she risks
“immediate humiliation and sometimes permanent loss of reputation.” Discovering the
performer is a fraud indicates she did not have the “right to play the part [she] played”
(Goffman 59).

Often the audience is more disturbed by performances that are very close to the
real thing when in fact they are false. Villains are those whose performance makes them
appear to have a higher status than they have while heroes are those whose performance
indicates they have a lower status than they present. Most audience members would
agree that some types of deception are more acceptable than others. If the performer is
cought in a slight exaggeration or “white lie” she will likely be forgiven but if they are
cought in a bold lie they are likely to damage their reputation. “We find that there is
hardly a legitimate everyday vocation or relationship whose performers do not engage in
concealed practices which are incompatible with fostered impression” (Goffman 64).
The issue is that once the performer’s lies has been discovered the audience is likely to
take the rest of the performance into question. “We tend to see real performances as
something not purposely put together at all being an unintentional product of an
individuals unselfconscious response to the facts in his situation. And contrived
performances we tend to see as something painstakingly pasted together, one false item
on another…” (Goffman 70). To conceal indiscretions, the performer must be able to
make the audience believe she is sincere, but the audience should keep in mind that “while the persons usually are what they appear to be, such appearances could still have been managed” (Goffman 71).

“It often happens that the performance serves mainly to express the characteristics of the taste that is performed and not the characteristics of the performer” (Goffman 77). In such performances “team” refers to “any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine” (Goffman 79), or a one-man team when other members are absent, where the “team itself may stage a performance for an audience that is not present in the flesh to witness the show” (Goffman 82). Team members have a special relationship with one another because they can let the audience in on any indiscretions and give away the performance at any time. The team must co-operate to keep up the performance so the audience does not discover and inconsistencies in the performance. “A teammate is someone whose dramaturgical cooperation is dependent upon fostering a given definition of the situation: if such a person comes to be beyond the pale of informal sanctions and insists on giving the show away or forcing it to take a particular turn, he is nonetheless part of the team. In fact, it is just because he is part of the team that he can cause this kind of trouble” (Goffman 83).

Another aspect of the performance is the region or place where the performance takes place. It is “bounded to some degree by barriers of perception” and “boundaries with respect to time are often added” (Goffman 106). The region may be broken down into two segments, the “front region” where the audience can freely view the performance and the “back region” that is the private staging area of the performer. Performances on MySpace.com, just as offline performances, can be broken into the front and back
regions. The audience is not welcome in the back region as what may be seen there may damage the impressions the performer is creating. On MySpace the back region is the secure area protected by a username and password that only the performer has access to. In the front region, the performer makes an “effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards” (Goffman 107). Politeness, decorum, moral, and instrumental standards must be upheld in the front region. The front region of a MySpace performance is the focus of this study as it is the area that the audience can see. The back region is not focused around the maintenance of standards and vital secrets of the performance may be seen there so the audience does not intrude. Secrets visible in the back region and performers may also behave out of character or badly conveying their true feelings about the audience. The “outside” is the final region that must be taken into consideration. It is a region other than the front or back regions and may contain people who are not part of the performance. The outside in the case of a MySpace performance is any place outside of a particular users profile page that is not associated with that particular user. This includes all other performances taking place that have no connection to the performance given on the particular profile being observed.

“One overall objective of any team is to sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters” (Goffman 141). Performers must control the information that is given to the audience and when working in teams the control becomes more difficult. “A team must be able to keep its secrets and have its secrets kept” (Goffman 141). There are three general types of secrets: strategic secrets are those that are kept to further the intentions of the team, inside secrets that define who is “in the know,” and dark secrets
that must be kept to maintain the performance. In a team situation, dark secrets must be kept forever among the team for if they are leaked the audience will discover that the performance is not what it seems.

Goffman breaks each performance into three roles played by people: the performer, those who are performed to, and outsiders who do not perform and who are not performed to. In the case of MySpace the role of the audience is variable as performers may elect to have their performance be viewable by the public or by a selected audience and they can change this distinction at any time. Outsiders are those who do not view a MySpace profile performance. Different information is available to individuals in each role. Performers know the secrets and believe they understand the impression they are giving in the performance. The audience knows what information is presented to them from the intentional performance and the additional information available through observing the performers carefully. “The outsiders know neither the secrets of the performance or the reality fostered by it” (Goffman 144). Individuals also have access to different areas of the setting based on their role. The performer can be in the front and back regions, whereas the audience only has access to the front region, and outsiders have access to neither region. Using the information an individual has access to or the region an individual can access, the researcher or observer may be able to discover the role that the individual plays. Within these general roles some individuals specialize. Some examples of the specialized roles are: informers or “spies” who pretend to be on the team; shills who are members of the team acting as the audience; mediators who try to earn the trust of both the performer and the audience to gain information; spotters who set the performer up to reveal secrets; and the shopper who is part of the audience to get
ideas. There are also those who are part of the performance due to the role they play but who are not present when it is given. Some individuals are not present for the performance but play roles that contribute to it. Examples of these roles are: service specialists who create some aspect needed for the performance to take place; confidants who the performers trust and confide in revealing their secrets; and colleagues who present the same performance but are not part of the team. “Colleagues share a community of fate. In having to put on the same kind of performance, they come to know each other’s difficulties and point of view, whatever their tongues, they come to speak the same social language” (Goffman 160). Often colleagues extend “good will” offerings to one another that indicate an understanding: “You don’t tell on us and we won’t tell on you” (Goffman 163). While the team must work to maintain the performance “every role has its defrocked priests to tell us what goes on in the monastery, and the press has always shown a lively interest is these confessions and exposes” (Goffman 164). When colleagues are involved they may do damage to another’s reputation of the other by disclosing information that discredits the performance.

Performers must manage the impression they put forth and take “expressive responsibility” for all portions of the performance including, unmeant gestures as they can cause a performance and those performing it to be discredited. “Faux pas” are accidental comments in the same category as unmeant gestures. Both unmeant gestures and “faux pas” may cause the audience to question the performance as the gestures or comments do not support the performance. Inopportune intrusions, such as the back region being exposed to the audience, may also cause the performer to be discredited if the audience discovers information that is not meant for them. Disruptions of the types
mentioned previously can cause new scenes to come up. For instance, a shift in the performance happens when teammates openly criticize one another and refuse to continue to cooperate to create the performance; when the audience ceases to politely interact with the performers; when the interaction between two people draws the attention of others that were not originally involved; or when a one-man show “throws himself to the mercy of the audience” by making a request that he cannot get out of if it is denied. Believable performances are those that have been carefully managed and are free from such inconsistent verbal and nonverbal cues.

When studying performances, the researcher is really studying a social establishment, as performers are more likely to select a performance that fits the scene and minimizes inconsistency. “A social establishment is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place” (Goffman 238). Each social establishment may be viewed from several perspectives, such as technically, politically, structurally, culturally, and dramaturgically. Technical aspects of the social establishment relate to its “efficiency and inefficiency as an intentionally organized system of activity for the achievement of predefined objectives” (Goffman 240). The political perspective is one that focuses on “the actions, which each participant (or class of participants) can demand of other participants… and the kinds of social controls which guide this exercise of command and use of sanctions” (Goffman 240). The structure of the social establishments looks at how the people involved are distributed along social lines and class structures, while the cultural perspective looks at moral values. Dramaturgical views of the social establishment focus on the “art of
impression management,” discussed earlier. It also focuses on the “identity and interrelationships of the several performance teams which operate in [it]” (Goffman 240).

The main focus of Goffman’s work and of this study on MySpace is the presentation of self. Thus some time is dedicated to defining ‘self’ with the framework being the performance, teams, impression management, and social establishments that all contribute to the presentation of self. Self is “a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern is whether it will be credited or discredited” (Goffman 252). MySpace performers create a virtual self that is understood by the audience and is a culmination of the scene and performance presented on the profile page, blog, ‘pics’ page, and video page. Offline, the physical body of the performer is merely a “peg on which something of a collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments” (Goffman 253). Online, the MySpace template provides a peg that the performer hangs virtual artifacts on to create a self. Problems arise when the component parts that make up this intricate collaboration are exposed by the breakdown of the façade of self created by them. The performance is seen as a version of reality fixed within a certain social establishment, in this case, MySpace.com. The performance is also fixed at the specific time and is referred to as “self”, at that moment.
Pre-Web: Usenet and the Presentation of Self Online

Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community

Identity plays a key role in virtual communities. In communication, which is the primary activity, knowing the identity of those with whom you communicate is essential for understanding and evaluating an interaction.


Offline, we witness that the body is a “convenient definition of identity.” Yet in online environments “one can have, some claim, as many electronic personas as one has time and energy to create” (Donath). As online communities grow users must look at questions surrounding online identity to frame online interactions. Donath points out, “For assessing the reliability of information and the trustworthiness of a confidant, identity is essential. And care of one’s own identity, one’s reputation, is fundamental to the formation of community” (Donath). As people use online technology they become attuned to cues that are present in online communication in the absence of physical bodies.

Donath studied Usenet newsgroups to examine what constitutes online identity and cases of deception. She found that “Although technically simple – they are essentially structured bulletin boards – a complex social structure has evolved within them.” Usenet is an example of an online social network focused on non-fiction issues where users assume that others are who they appear to be. “For most participants, identity – both the establishment of their own reputation and the recognition of others-plays a vital role” (Donath). Offline we have established ways of qualifying information by the reputation of the source. The same holds true online. However, it is harder to
understand the reputation of source as any individual can publish information and there is rarely and editor checking facts. Donath also points out that it may take a long time for false postings or false presentation to catch up with a user, as first others must see the claims as false and then post information about the bad information. At this point, the user may move to another community to establish themselves again. In each community “reputation is enhanced by contributing remarks of the type admired by the group” (Donath).

In the Usenet world, “the letter is not only the basic form of communication, but one’s primary means for self-presentation” (Donath). The letter is broken down into four component parts: the header or account name that appears at the top; the body of the letter, which “reveals voice”; the history of the exchange; and the signature. Each piece offers clues to the identity of the writer.

Donath discovered that the account name may be directly linked to the individual’s real name or it may be purposely unrelated. The account name in the case of the Usenet groups studied was an email address and while some users had the ability to select their user names the domain that came after the @ may have been determined by whom the user is affiliated with. If the domain is familiar to the reader it may give credibility to the author if it represents a well-respected organization. Today domain information may be less useful because of the large number of generic domains that people use and the ability of some to create accounts without being affiliated with a reputable organization.

“The opening up of the online world to anyone with a computer and modem has met with quite a bit of resistance from the original residents. Most maligned are
newcomers who have accounts with the consumer-oriented commercial services such as Prodigy and America Online (AOL). Postings with aol.com addresses are sometimes greeted with derision; newsgroups such as alt.aol-sucks exist solely to spurn America Online subscribers. This resistance is partly a reaction to the loss of exclusivity – access to online communication no longer means one is the forefront of technology – but there are also differences between the old guard and the newcomers” (Donath).

One other aspect to be considered is how closely the user name matches the real world name of the user. While we assume that each user name goes with one user, that is not always the case, thus the user name may contain some small clues either in that it corresponds very closely to the real world name or the fictitious name has some significance or meaning.

Donath ties her work with Usenet and the “Identity in voice and language” to the work of Goffman and his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, citing the difference between “expressions given” and “expressions given off.” Looking at the pieces of a Usenet letter and reading into the expression given off, the reader can get a sense, using verbal cues, of the author. Users on MySpace use the same type of cue to gain insight into a profile author. Based on the items found on the profile page and the voice used one can assess the impression that is given off. In a small Usenet community “writing style can identify the author of a posting” (Donath). The use of verbal cues will prove much more difficult in an online community like MySpace that has over a million users. It may be used to identify groups, group members, and would-be group members.

The basic framework for identity on Usenet can be applied to modern social networking sites. The impression given off by the tone of the writing may give the
performer a recognizable “voice” in the online world. The specific application of this concept will be discussed in later sections. While signatures on blog entries and other profile items are rare, there are times when a user may refer to them self as a name or when others may refer to the profile creator by name. Signatures as “business cards,” as Donath describes them, are still used in email and message boards but, social networking sites are permanent places reserved for a specific user and therefore no signature is required.

“Yet these identity cues are not always reliable. The account name in the header can be fake, identity claims can be false, social cues can be deliberately misleading.” (Donath) Just as the cues on a Usenet letter are a manufactured presentation of self that may not be representative of other version of self performed elsewhere the same holds true for MySpace profile pages, comments, messages, and group postings. Goffman and Donath both agree that “some types of misrepresentations are “more acceptable than others” (Goffman 61) and it seems that the more subtle the identity manipulations are, the more acceptable they are. Examples of acceptable deception may be posting pictures that are flattering or a performer stating his height as 5’6” rather than the true height of 5’4”.

Category deception is when a user presents as being a certain type of person. Donath uses the example of a Usenet troll who pretends to be interested in planning weddings and etiquette yet often is rude to other users causing outrage within the group. She also sites gender deception as category deception. Goffman agrees that people do not manufacture presentations of self out of nothing but rather select a presentation based on an accepted social category.
The face of Usenet has changed over the past 10 years as the World Wide Web has grown in popularity and the Internet has become an inclusive club rather than an exclusive one. Now, the performer has more control over the creation of the presentation of self, because the performer has the ability to fill the profile page with exactly what he wants instead of being forced to include information due to what the software pulled form a database. Donath discusses the impacts of software development on online identity in the following excerpt:

The online world is a wholly built environment. The architects of a virtual space – from the software designers to the site administrators – shape the community in a more profound way than do their real-world counterparts. People eat, sleep, and work in buildings; the buildings affect how happily they do these things. But the buildings do not completely control their perception of the world. In the electronic domain, the design of the environment is everything. Whether or not you know that other people are present or privy to a conversation, whether you can connect an on-line identity to a real-world person, whether you have only a faint notion of the personalities of those around you or a vibrant and detailed impression – this is all determined by the design of the environment.

As technology evolves and new technologies are invented the art of creating and maintaining identity online evolves as well. With Web 2.0 users have much greater control to create a presentation of self and manage the impression given off.

**Post-Web: Presentation of Self on the World Wide Web**

**Overview**

The World Wide Web has grown exponentially since its inception in 1990. As individual participation in this new environment has increased so has interest in it from several research points of view. Riva and Galimberti (1998) point out “the social sciences are increasingly interested in understanding the characteristics of CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) and its effects on people, groups and
organizations.” (Riva and Galimberti) While there are several different types of communications technology available on the Web, personal web pages and social networking sites will be focused on because they represent technologies that are similar to what is present on MySpace.com. “Personal home pages exhibit differing combinations of text, images, graphics, hypertext, sounds, and video” (Stern 218).

Regardless of the type of site or technology being used to create a presentation of self, emoticons, or electronic smiley faces, and pseudonyms are usually present as expression of self. “Many CMC participants use what are called “smileys”, officially known as “emoticons” (Wolf 828). Wolf studied newsgroups to discover if there are gender differences in emoticon use and concluded that while, more females use emoticons in newsgroups that are predominately female, males increased their use of emoticons in newsgroups that are mixed gender.

Friedman (2001) discusses the use of pseudonyms and the impact that anonymity has on social interaction online. He states that the wide use of pseudonyms online “introduces opportunities to misbehave without paying reputational consequences.” In an environment where self can easily be re-created, the consequences of a bad reputation may not prove to be a deterrent of bad behavior. (Friedman 3) We are naturally not trusting of people we meet online because we do not know if they are who they appear to be. “Thus, the distrust of newcomers is an inherent social cost of easy identity changes (Friedman 4). Friedman indicates that this is due to the fact that we know anyone can get rid of his or her negative reputation by creating a new pseudonym and new identity. This does not hold true for all social networks, such as eBay where “people go out of their way to accumulate positive comments and, once they have accumulated them, to avoid
negative comments” (Friedman 3). The same may hold true for MySpace as people go out of their way to accumulate friends and most likely want to keep them. Anonymity and misbehavior will be discussed in more detail later in this report, but it is important to note that anonymity can be looked at in a more positive light as “it is also less embarrassing to have personal conversations in disembodied spaces, because no one can see you if you blush” (Valentine and Holloway 308). Pupils in their study indicate that it is a freeing experience to interact with others through the use of information technology because of the anonymity. It may help them in their quest of self-discovery as the “online identities they construct are still usually situated and contingent upon their offline identities and everyday peer group social relations” (Valentine and Holloway 316).

**Personal Websites**

“Our sense of self is not a fixed or given “reality.” It is created during social interactions, shaped by situational needs as well as the verbal and nonverbal symbols exchanged between social actors” (Chan 272). As we look at presentation of self online, it is important to look at the Web as a place that contains many social establishments in which people give their performances and that “as the technology develops, more expressive resources become available [and], as the culture of electronic communication develops, people will construct expressive resources out of whatever facilities are available” (Miller 171). Both Chan and Miller understand personal homepages as expressions of self and relate their findings to Goffman’s theories regarding the presentation of self. The Web gives people the option to use it as a “presentation space” where they express themselves, give impressions, and where their expressions give users
an impression of them. The “style, structure and vocabulary” or “how [he or she] deals with a Web page compared with customary ways of doing it” inform the audience (Miller 173).

Like Goffman, Chan (2000) discusses the use of “regions” in creating and executing the effective performance. The back region is used to create the presentation that is seen by the public and the type of presentation seen in the front region by the viewer may categorize each page. Miller (2005) has created several presentation categories that are based on what he saw when observing home pages: “Hi, this is me”; “This is me (as a member of an organization); “Hi, this is us”(family homepages); “This is what I think is cool”; and “An advertisement for myself.” A similar set of categories can be developed for MySpace profile pages, as the observer tends to get the impression that the page has been created for some purpose. From the user standpoint we must remember that things are not always as they appear as each of us can have a very different intention for putting information on a page and the impression that the performance is giving off may not be the impression the performer is giving.

In her research conducted about 4 female students and their homepages, Chan (2000) found that three of the women were very concerned about privacy and had constructed their presentations to minimize their risk. One informant did not reveal any information about a romantic relationship that she had out of respect for her parents who would not approve. Goffman explains that often we have discrepant roles that are used so we can tailor our performance to the audience so that it is meets the social requirements of the scene and the expectations of those viewing it. “It can be argued that [the informant] was performing only the selves that she considered most important to her
at that moment in time” (Chan 277). This is in contrast to what Stern states regarding the perspective of many authors who have indicated that Internet users are free to “be who they want to be online”. In the case of Chan’s informant, apparently family values outweigh whatever social freedom she may feel.

Stern (2004) explores adolescent’s self-disclosure on their personal home pages. All communication regarding self on the home pages is considered in this study. The major difference Stern sees between online and offline self-disclosure is that online the communicator of the information must be present to create the presentation of self yet there is no guarantee that the impression created will be received by the audience it may have been meant for or by anyone at all.

The artifacts present on a home page like a MySpace page create the presentation of self where the physical body and offline interaction are absent. “Multimedia tools, in particular enable adolescents to present themselves in distinctive ways and to appropriate cultural artifacts (such as photographs, advertisements, CD covers) that signify with what and whom they align themselves” (Stern 221). Once the presentation is created on MySpace, in the form of a profile page, most users establish connections with others by adding people whom they may or may not know to their list of friends. This may be an attempt to “determine the appropriateness of their attitudes, behaviors, and values” (Stern) that are present in the impression they have created with their page. Stern found that many feedback mechanisms existed on the personal homepages in her study and that those mechanisms “signaled the authors’ interest in communicating with others.” MySpace profile pages come with built in feedback mechanisms such as the ability to comment on the main profile page, on blog posts, and on images and videos that the
author if the site includes. MySpace users also add in whiteboard space, where the audience can draw messages using the computer mouse and audio recording widgets where audience members can leave recordings of their voice. MySpace pages as with the home pages on Stern’s study also include many references to retail sites in the form of images, links, songs, videos, and even backgrounds for the entire page.

At the time when Stern conducted her research of personal home pages, social networking sites were just beginning to take form on the Web. She observed that most adolescents who created home pages came from economically-advantaged families and used the internet on a daily basis. As Internet access has become more widespread and as social networking sites have given novices the opportunity to create presentations of self with little technical know-how, the economic status of Web performers may be less relevant. The following quote from Danah Boyd in “The Wired Campus” (2007) supports the idea that the Web is no longer for the elite.

The goodie two shoes, jocks, athletes, or other “good” kids are now going to Facebook. These kids tend to come from families who emphasize education and going to college…. They are in honors classes, looking forward to the prom, and live in a world dictated by after-school activities. MySpace is still home for Latino/Hispanic teens, immigrant teens, “burnouts,” “alternative kids,” “art fags,” punks, emos, goths, gangstas, queer kids, and other kids who didn’t play into the dominant high school popularity paradigm. These are kids whose parents didn’t go to college, who are expected to get a job when they finish high school. These are the teens who plan to go into the military immediately after schools (Read).

This study does not focus on the socioeconomic status of MySpace performers but the work of Stern and Boyd illustrates how access to the ability to create a presentation of self online has shifted from a narrow segment of the population to a much broader user group that includes a variety of performers.
Social Networking Sites

As social networking sites have grown in popularity, as noted in the preceding quote, society has become increasingly interested in what happens in online community. The increased interest is evident in the vast amount of media coverage related to social networking sites and is the reason MySpace was selected as the basis for this study.

Social networking sites allow people to create a presentation of self and then link that presentation to others. The presentation of self is created by the information the user elects to add to the template provided by the social networking site. This information is in the form of text, audio, video, still images, links, and connections made to other users. O’Murchu et. al. looked at 5 different social networking sites and found that most templates collected the same type of information about the user asking about their families, work life, interests, and likes as well as offering the ability to post a photo or other media. When observers view the profile pages or presentations of others they are not only look at the items on the page but also with whom the page producer lists as contact or friends. “Social Status, political beliefs, music taste, etc, may be inferred from the company one keeps” (Donath and Boyd 72). On MySpace this is accomplished not only through the use of friend links but also through the use of groups, band links, and video links. While the use of multimedia links helps to give a more complete presentation the friend links often prove to be very informative. “The main relationships are listed as friends, friends or friends, and friends of friends of friends (in essence strangers)” (O’Murchu, Breslin and Decker 9). As Donath points out in her article “Public Displays of Connection” in 2004, the addition of friend links makes the profile seem more reliable to the observer because those who are linked to it sanctioned it, at
least in theory. She continues her discussion of reliability by stating “If the connections listed on the profile were always a) real people who b) knew the subject and c) would impose sanctions on false self-portrayals, then yes, these sites would be quite reliable.” Unfortunately for the observer there are ways around each of the conditions posed. Thus the connections may seem to validate the person but the entire network could be constructed to give an impression. In some cases the user may simply add people to increase his/her number of friends. In many of the social networking sites expanding one’s network seems to be a goal for most and an obsession for others. While offline it would take a person a lot of time and energy to create and maintain a large number of relationships this can be done very efficiently on social networking sites.

Gross and Acquisti also studied a social networking site to gain insight into how college students use an online social networks and the privacy issues surrounding making information available to the public on the Web. Their article “Information Revelation and Privacy in Online Social Networks (The Facebook Cases) was published in 2005. While “The Facebook” is a closed network only available to a community involved with an educational institution the authors discuss ways in which hackers can very easily gain access to personal information based on user profiles. They state “across different sites, anecdotal evidence suggests that participants are happy to disclose as much information as possible to as many people as possible.” They conclude that the majority of The Facebook users are “quite oblivious, unconcerned, or just pragmatic about their personal privacy” and that these issues are not unique to The Facebook. Gross and Acquisti et. al. (2005) categorized information found on the profile pages of students by looking at what information was mandatory and the additional information present. Regardless of
privacy implications 90.8% of those studied had images of people, 87.8% had a full birth date, 39.9% listed a phone number, and 50.8% list a current residence. None of the information was a mandatory part of “The Facebook” profile page.

According to the findings in this same study by Gross and Acquisti et. al. (2005), the connections present on a user profiles cannot be distinguished based on the type of relationship that the person has to the producer. On MySpace, however, users now have the freedom to select how many people should be listed as “top friends” and they can select who occupies those spots. This gives observers the impression that some friends are more important than others. This study also cites the tendency for some users to include anyone as their friend while others are more selective. Friends of friends cannot be counted on in this instance as being people with whom the producer would associate offline or whom they trust. “This implies online social networks are both vaster and have more, weaker ties, on average than offline social networks” (Gross, Acquisti and Heinz 3).

**Problem Statement & Research Questions**

How do MySpace.com users create a virtual presentation of self?

1. What information is included in the MySpace template?

2. What information is included in user profile pages?

3. What does a typical MySpace profile page look like?

4. Do users modify the template? If so, in what ways do they modify it?

5. Are there noticeable differences between the profiles of stated male MySpace performers and stated female MySpace performers?
Study Methodology and Theory

In 1959, Erving Goffman wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, as a way of describing human actions and behavior as they relate to interactions that people have when in the presence of others. This study of MySpace is an ethnographic look at how users complete and manipulate the MySpace template to create a virtual presentation of self. “Ethnography is written representation of culture (or selected aspects of culture)” (Van Maanen 1). As ethnography, this study does not try to prove MySpace fits Goffman’s theories about the presentation of self in everyday life but rather uses terminology and ideas as a framework for looking at the components of a MySpace presentation. Connections between the theory and the culture of MySpace will be created in the themes section of this report.

Data Collection Techniques

In this section, the basic components of a MySpace performance will be outlined. The themes found are based on the examination of 100 MySpace user pages, 50 stated male pages and 50 stated female pages. Each user page was archived using “Scrapbook,” a Mozilla Firefox extension and the archive was stored locally on the researcher’s hard drive. Separately, a survey was posted on the researchers MySpace profile as a blog post and as a post to a MySpace group. The information gleaned from in-person interviews and the online survey has been included in the introduction and conclusion and the MySpace profile pages inform the discussion on the presentation of self.
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<td>Social Scientists</td>
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Table 1: Data Collection Matrix

**Summary of Analysis**

A MySpace performance consists of a performer; the expression given and given off by the text or ‘About Me’ information present on the profile page or the blog; the expression given off by the Glitter on the profile page, the ‘pics’ page, and/or the video page; and the expression given and given off by the public displays of connection in the friends and comments sections.

Individuals who create MySpace accounts sign up to create a presentation of self, online, that can range from simple to elaborate. While some would like to pigeon hole MySpace performers as people from certain groups or classes, this investigation finds that while the majority of performers who appeared in a random search are in their twenties, stereotypes regarding age, gender, ethnicity, or social class are not easily constructed when viewing user pages. Wired Campus quoted Danah Boyd in an article
“Social Networking and a New Digital Divide?” written on June 25th, 2007 as stating that MySpace performers fit certain stereotypes based on ethnicity, sexual preference, and social groups. The sample selected in this study was based on random numbers applied to users listed in a search of MySpace pages. While the audience may draw conclusions from the presentation create by a profile page there are no clear signs that the categories described by Boyd describe the culture of MySpace or the typical MySpace users. Demographics from the profile pages observed in this study can be found under the ‘About Me’ theme in this section.

The majority of performers modify the MySpace template by adding code to the fields in the template instead of text. The code is provided by outside sources, usually web sites, which have collections of code. The code provided allows performers to modify the background of the profile page by changing colors and the layout or applying themes. Glitter graphics, interactive widgets, slide shows other than MySpace slide shows, and videos other than MySpace videos are all modifications to the template that require code to make the changes. Because the MySpace template does not allow users to change the look and feel directly with editing tools and because performers are creating a performance that requires the modification of the template to create individuality, the number of external code sources continues to increase, as do the number of modifications available.
Themes

Glitter

Glitter is any decorative item on a profile page that creates an expression that is given off by that item. These items may be changes to the default background in terms of layout, color scheme and/or decorative theme; graphics either stationary or animated; slideshows; profile songs; video clips; interactive widgets; or other items. Images that are present on the ‘Pics’ page, that are present where the profile picture appears are not included in the ‘Glitter’ theme. Text is not considered Glitter unless it is present in a graphic. Glitter offline are the decorations performers place in school lockers, dorm rooms, houses, offices, or any location that people decorate. Both online and offline ‘Glitter’ is the impression that is given off and may be intentional or not.

About Me

‘About Me’ is defined as any text on a profile page that is not part of a graphic. Performers enter the text into the template and it is displayed on the profile page. Some fields are filled because they are required yet others are optional. The fields that are part of the template are outlined in this section. Each field is described as mandatory or optional and with specific characteristics that apply. The ‘About Me’ aspect of the performance is the impression given by the performer as it is equated to what a person would verbalize during a performance.
And the Survey Says…

Surveys are a part of the MySpace culture. They are often created by external sources and then circulated throughout the community by performers who email them to others, post them as comments on others’ profiles, or who fill them out and post them to their profile. When a survey is filled out and posted to a profile page any audience member can view the results and get the survey to take by following a link. Only 19% (10 female, 9 male) of the performers observed in this study included surveys in their performance but the majority of those have more than one survey on their profile page.

The ‘Angles’

David Lehre directed a short film called “myspace: the movie”. The introduction and one of the chapters of the film are dedicated to “The Angles” or photographs that are taken of specific body parts usually as self-portraits. In this study ‘The Angles’ refers to pictures that a performer includes on the ‘Pics’ page of a MySpace profile. ‘The Angles’ are not limited to the definition described in the film.

“Public Displays of Connection”

Donath and Boyd describe social networking sites as “sites in which participants create a self-descriptive profile and make links to other members” (Donath and Boyd 71). In this theme the focus is on the impression given off when performers link to other performances. Being added to the friend list of another performer is often a topic of discussion in the ‘Comment’ section of the profile page. When reading posts, the
audience should note that a comment that says, “thanks for the add” is telling the owner of the profile page that the other performer appreciates being added as a friend.

**Dynamic Identity**

The ‘body provides a stabilizing anchor” offline (Donath) while online the performer creates a presentation of self that is both textual and multimedia in some cases that is the virtual body. Despite the attempts to create a virtual body online, identity is ambiguous (Donath) because of the volatility of the information presented (Friedman). The dynamic nature of online identity was witnessed in this investigation of MySpace performances in three ways: profile background changes; profiles becoming private; and profiles being deleted.

**Case and Context**

“In recent years online social networking has moved from niche phenomenon to mass adoption” (Gross, Acquisti and Heinz 1). MySpace.com is one of several social networking websites. It was established in July 2003 as “an online community that lets you meet your friends' friends” (MySpace.com). In 2005 in “ Information Revelation and Privacy in Online Social Networks”, Gross and Acquisti stated that MySpace.com had two million users. When this study of MySpace.com began in the spring of 2006, there were approximately 80 million users and now, one year later that number has grown to approximately 187 million users. “It is not unusual for successful social networking sites to experience periods of viral growth with participants expanding at rates topping 20% a
month” (Gross, Acquisti and Heinz 1). One reason for the rapid growth may be that MySpace, like other online communication tools, gives people the opportunity to create global networks and take risks with identity that offline may be unrealistic (Valentine and Holloway).

As the number of MySpace users has increased, so has the media coverage of MySpace related stories, many of which focus on privacy issues, safety issues for children using MySpace, cyber-bullying, and self-disclosure. ‘Google News’ searches done over the past year indicate that thousands of articles are written on a daily basis related to MySpace. “Electronic communication (EC) has established a new range of frames interaction with a developing etiquette. Although apparently more limited and less rich in interactions in which participants are physically present, it also provides new problems and new opportunities in the presentation of self” (Miller 170). While MySpace and social networking topics permeate the media, little research has been done to discover how individuals create a presentation of self in a template-based virtual environment such as MySpace or to what degree they disclose information about themselves online. Some research has been done regarding gender and online identity and “the occurrence of online gender swapping reinforces the idea that both men and women may be experimenting with nontraditional emotional expression in the privacy and comfort of cyberspace (Wolf 827).”

“More than half (55%) of all of online American youths ages 12-17 use an online social networking sites” (Lenhart 1). Because of this trend, educators and parents have a keen interest in MySpace and other social networking sites as they try to iron out the affects participation has on children’s’ social lives, development, and safety both online
and offline. Some key findings of the PEW telephone survey that was conducted in October and November of 2006 are as follows:

- 55% of online teens have created a personal profile online, and 55% have used social networking sites like MySpace or Facebook.
- 66% of teens who have created a profile say that their profile is not visible by all Internet users. They limit access to their profiles.
- 48% of teens visit social networking websites daily or more often; 26% visit once a day, 22% visit several times a day.
- Older girls ages 15-17 are more likely to have used social networking sites and online profiles.
- 70% of older girls have used an online social network compared with 54% of older boys, and 70% of older girls have created an online profile, while only 57% boys have done so.
- 91% of all social networking teens say they use the sites to stay in touch with friends they see frequently, while 82% use the sites to stay in touch with friends they rarely see in person.
- 72% of all social networking teens say they use the sites to make plans with friends; 49% use the sites to make new friends.
- Older boys who use social networking sites (ages 15-17) are more likely than girls of the same age to say that they use social networking sites to make new friends (60% vs. 46%).
- 17% of all social networking teens say they use the sites to flirt.
- Older boys who use social networking sites are more than twice as likely as older girls to say they use the sites to flirt; 29% report this compared with just 13% of older girls.

MySpace was deemed the front runner of the social networking sites from the same survey as 85% of teens use a MySpace profile while 7% use “The Facebook” (Lenhart 4).
“My” Space on the Web

Creating a presentation of self on MySpace is an evolutionary process that begins with the completion of fields in a template and quickly moves to finding and adding code to improve the aesthetics of the profile page. This section will describe the steps taken to create a presentation and summarize the pieces of information that are mandatory and what is optional.

![Why Join MySpace?]

Create a Custom Profile
Upload Pictures
Send Mail and IM’s
Write Blogs & Comments
It's FREE!

Figure 1: MySpace.com 2003 ‘Why Join MySpace?’

The Back Region

When creating a MySpace account, the user must enter a valid email address, first and last name, country and zip code, date of birth, and gender. The user can elect to have their birthday hidden from other users. Once the information is accepted by MySpace, users are prompted to upload a picture, although that step can be skipped. The final step to setting up the profile is to invite friends and announce that the MySpace page has been created. Once this basic set up is complete, users have a MySpace account and a profile page. Initially users do not have a “MySpace Name” which must be set. Once the name is selected it cannot be changed. Friedman states, “distrust of newcomers is an inherent
social cost of easy identity changes” in his 1999 article “The Social Cost of Cheap Pseudonyms”. In the MySpace community there are so many users people must be creative in their choice of user name because it is likely that a name close to the users real name is not available.

With the limited information that has been put into the user account at this point, it may seem that the profile will be blank. However, upon viewing it the user will find that there is a profile name, age, and location; an icon to indicate if the user is logged in; the last login date; links to send them message and add the user as a friend; the users MySpace URL; marital status; zodiac sign; space for blurbs and blog entries; a place to leave a comment; and a friend named ‘Tom.’ So, who is ‘Tom’ and why is he your friend when you do not know him? Tom is one of the co-creators of MySpace and he is added as the first friend for every user. Once the initial profile is set up then a user can edit it and add much more information into the MySpace template. What follows is a list of profile items that appear on each page of the profile editor and the items that are contained on each page: (each title has a blank that can be filled in after it; * denotes a required field)

- Interest & Personality
  - Headline: byline that appears near the users name and photo
  - About Me
  - I’d Like to Meet
  - Interests
    - Music
    - Movies
• Television
• Books
• Heroes

• Name
  • User Name (set and cannot be changed)*
  • Display Name*
  • First Name
  • Last Name

• Basic Info
  • Gender*
  • Date of Birth*
  • Occupation
  • City
  • Country*
  • Region*
  • Zip Code
  • Ethnicity
  • Body Type
  • Height
  • I am here for (Dating; Serious Relationship; Friends; Networking)

• Background & Lifestyle
  • Marital Status*
  • Sexual Orientation
- Hometown
- Religion
- Smoker
- Drinker
- Children
- Education
- Income

- Schools
  - School Name
  - Country
  - State/Province

- Companies
  - Company Name
  - City
  - State/Region
  - Country
  - Title
  - Division
  - Dates Employed

- Networking
  - Field
  - Sub-Field
  - Role
The user can also change their account settings to add privacy so that only friends can see their profile or contact them via instant message. The user can set up the account to alert them via mobile phone when they have messages. The user can select what groups he or she would like to join to communicate with others about that common interest. Groups may be displayed on the profile page or hidden from public view. The user can manage other items such as the calendar, music and “away” message.

In addition to basic information, music, and videos, photographs can be added to the profile and are contained on a separate page. Each photograph can be uploaded, labeled with a caption, and marked whether it will be viewable by others. When uploading photos, the user can arrange them into albums and then elect to add a slideshow to their profile that displays all the photos in a given album. Visitors of the profile can leave comments on individual pictures.

“Video” and “Music” are two other multimedia items that can be added to the profile page as part of the MySpace template. In both cases, the user browses songs and videos that are already uploaded to MySpace by others or may upload videos to his or her profile and add them to the MySpace collection. Music is only available from artist pages so the user must browse what is available and make a selection unless they are
artists and create a page for their music and therefore could upload songs the network. All other multimedia items on a profile page come from external websites and authors.

There are several community functions that MySpace users can take part in. These functions will be discussed generally as the main focus of this study is to look at the presentation of self on the profile pages. Below is the header for a user’s homepage on MySpace.com

Figure 2: MySpace.com 2003 Features

Starting at the left and moving right:

- “Home” is the link to the user’s profile where he or she can edit his or her presentation, make changes to the account, view comments, and gain access to all aspects of the MySpace account.

- “Browse” is used to browse the MySpace network for others who fit specific criteria.

- “Search” is used to search for specific people by name, school, or an affiliation.

- “Invite” allows user to invite friend to join MySpace.

- “Film” is a link that takes the user to a space where he or she can view film trailers, read about films, read others comments, and link to pages where more information can be found.

- “Mail” is a simple web mail client that is built into the user’s MySpace profile.

- “Blog” is a blogging application that is also an aggregator for the blogs the user subscribes to. The user can both write and read blogs from this page.
• “Favorites” are other profile pages that the user has marked as a favorite. This is much like bookmarks or favorites on web browser.

• “Forum” is a page where the user can gain access to discussions on a plethora of topics by reading and posting to various discussion groups.

• “Groups” are like forums except the user can subscribe to them and be kept up to date on the latest posts.

• “Events” is a page where the user can browse for events in a specific area, add events to the calendar, create events, make created events public or private and invite other to attend events.

• “Videos” are short clips that users upload to the video site. They can be movie trailers done professionally or they may be homemade clips that are uploaded. Users can search for videos here and add them to the profile or he or she can upload videos.

• “Music” is a search page that allows a user to look for music and add it to the profile. From this page the user may also find forums related to music, classified ads, and specific artist pages.

• “Comedy” is set up much like music as a search page to give users access to the comedian pages on MySpace.

• “Classifieds” is a page like a newspaper classified that the user can search based on location and item they are looking for.

Table 2 shows the uses of social networking site reported by teens.
The Front Region

The main focus of this study is how users add to and modify the MySpace template to create a presentation of self. Based on language Goffman defined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, we will refer to the presentation as a performance and the profile page as the stage. In the last section, the parts of the stage that are accessible by the performer or the user who creates the profile page were reviewed. That region is referred to as the back region. This section will focus on the front region and its components. The front region is the performance that is visible by the audience. On MySpace as in other online environments “lots of images can be included, but the receiver can always choose not to receive them” (Miller 173). Thus the audience has some control over the “performances” they view.
Below is an example of a user profile page, although each field found in the Back Region can be seen in the Front Region the data set used does not include a user with all of the components. We will look at the example page in several segments.

![Figure 3: MySpace.com 2003 ‘Profile Page’ (with personal information concealed)](image)

In the upper right the user’s display name appears. This name can be anything the user sets it to be. Just below that is a profile picture; that the user uploads and selects as the profile picture, this is optional. Immediately to the right is an optional headline with the mandatory gender below it. Continuing down the users age appears along with their city, state, and country. The age, state, and country are mandatory, but the city is not.

The last login date, the links to ‘Pics’ and ‘Videos’, and the contact information are all part of the page created by MySpace and a specific piece of code has to be written and
applied to make those sections not visible. If the user has included a song it will appear below the basic information in the upper right. Moving down the left side of the page the performer’s interests are next. If information is included this section can contain ‘General,’ ‘Music,’ ‘Movies,’ ‘Television,’ ‘Books,’ and ‘Heroes.’ Each of these fields may be filled with text, images, videos, slideshows, or other multimedia elements. To the left both the ‘About Me’ sections and ‘Who I’d Like to Meet’ are optional and may be filled with text and/or multimedia components.

Figure 4: MySpace.com 2003 ‘Interests’, ‘Details’, ‘Blurbs’ (with personal information concealed)

Below the ‘Interests’ the ‘Details’ are listed. If all fields in this section are filled the following items will be present: ‘Marital Status’ (mandatory), ‘Sexual Orientation,’ ‘Hometown,’ ‘Religion,’ ‘Smoker,’ ‘Drinker,’ ‘Children,’ ‘Education,’ and ‘Income.’ To
the right in this example of the ‘Who I’d Like to Meet’ section was loaded with a video clip from the MySpace videos. Below that the “Friend” section starts.

Figure 5: MySpace.com 2003 ‘Friends’ (with personal information concealed)

In this section this performer has elected to display a top 12, friend list and has added a total of 22 friends. Each friend’s image appears along with a profile name and both are links to that users profile page.
Above is an example of a comment section. The user that posts the comment is found on the left while the comments is on the right with the date and time of the post.
Figure 7: MySpace.com 2003 'Pics' (with personal information concealed)

Above is an example of a picture page. The performer can upload the photos and post captions for each. Other users can post comments for each picture.
Performers can extend their performance by writing blog entries. The image above is an example of a MySpace blog. Below is an example of a MySpace video page:

In addition to the elements that fill in the MySpace template performers often modify the template with code that changes the background and layout of the page as
well as add video from sites like YouTube.com or other code that create small widgets such as white board spaces that visitors can draw on.

Below is an example of a performance that includes a change of background and layout from an external source, www.codemylayout.com.

![MySpace.com 2003 Layout Change](image)

**Figure 10: MySpace.com 2003 Layout Change**

“Teens have told [PEW researchers] that a social network profile is more engaging if it changes frequently” (Lenhart 4). Lenhart notes that teens visit their sites often to make changes and view others’ sites to see what they are doing and that more than half of those with profiles have them visible only to their friends. This investigation looks at how 100 users completed and modified the MySpace template to create a presentation of self, online.
Theory

In 1959, Erving Goffman wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, as a way of describing human actions and behavior as they relate to interactions that people have when in the presence of others. This study of MySpace is an ethnographic look at how users complete and manipulate the MySpace template to create a virtual presentation of self. “Ethnography is written presentation of culture (or selected aspects of culture)” (Van Maanen 1). As ethnography, this study does not try to prove MySpace fits Goffman’s theories about the presentation of self in everyday life but rather uses terminology and ideas as a framework for looking at the components of a MySpace presentation. Connections between the theory and the culture of MySpace will be discussed in the “Themes” section of this report.

All the World’s A Stage

The Performance

Goffman defines performance as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presences before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (Goffman 22) On MySpace.com each user is a performer who uses the template provided by MySpace and often use external sources to create a presentation of self on the profile page which is the online performance that was studied. Other aspects of the performance such as email, instant
message, forum discussions, group discussions, or comments on other pages were not investigated.

**Performer**

Each user's performance is complex and consists of the “front” or “expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman 22) and the person behind it. MySpace performers just as those who create homepages have the ability to create a performance that expresses to others who they are and how they want to be perceived (Stern). “User profiles determine the way in which users are able to present themselves to others” (O’Murchu, Breslin and Decker 7)

In this investigation, the front has been observed but the person behind it is not known. The question of who is creating the presentation is not investigated. Offline the body is the “stabilizing anchor” (Donath) whereas on MySpace the template is the stabilizing anchor. Each user that was observed is a performer on MySpace that “request[s] observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered” (Goffman 17) although this is not explicitly stated. Because performer’s “expressive equipment,” (Goffman 24) such as, the body, body language, gestures, etc. is created from no predetermined equipment, the performer has the freedom to create an online performance that does not relate to the offline body. The performer’s “personal front” refers to “appearance” and “manner” they use to conduct their performance. Appearance is made of physical characteristics and expressive instruments that give others clues about the performers social status (Goffman 24) while manner refers to the performers “role” in
the situation. Even offline we have the ability to manipulate our performance each day based on the setting we will be in and the audience we will perform to. Online it is easier to totally recreate one’s self because each day the user can reset the template and start with a blank page again. On MySpace this is a bit more tricky because the user links to friends that may notice that a user was a man one day and a woman the next but small changes in persona seem to be acceptable as are small changes in attire depending on mood and setting as we try to meet the expectations of our audience. An example that most people are familiar with is the difference in attire depending on whether the person is at work, at home, at a party or social gathering, a wedding, or at the gym. Each setting has an expected presentation associated with it and people would not dare show up to a formal wedding reception in their sweaty gym shorts and tank top. MySpace too has its set of social expectations depending on the type of performance a user is giving. Examples of specific types of performance and associated profile appearances will be discussed in the “Themes” section. As in real life, on MySpace making observations on profile pages that give clues to the “holes” in a person’s performance, help the observer to remember that online as well as offline there can be large and small difference between the performance being observed and the performer creating it. The only things that hold a performer back from misrepresenting herself are “shame, guilt, or fear”, (Goffman 58) all of which may be less online if there are few ties to the offline world where the consequences may be more severe than online.

Performers must manage the impression they put forth and take “expressive responsibility” for all portions of the performance including the unmeant gestures as they can cause a performance and those performing it to be discredited. As both Goffman and
Donath note the performer must not only manage “expressions given” but also “expressions given off” as both things are taken into account by the audience.

**Audience**

The audience is made up of the individuals who are performed to. The audience knows what information is presented to them from the intentional performance and the additional information available through observing the performers carefully. In face-to-face contact, the performer knows who the audience is while if the performance is given with media as an intermediary whether it be television, radio, cinema, or the internet, the performer may not know the specific people they are performing to. Often the demographics of a target audience helps those producing television, radio, or cinema features to shape a performance but online the performer may have no idea who the audience is. “Identity plays a key role in virtual communities. In communication, which is the primary activity, knowing the identity of those with whom you communicate is essential for understanding and evaluating an interaction. Yet in the disembodied world of the virtual community, identity is also ambiguous” (Donath).

**Outsiders**

“The outsiders know neither the secrets of the performance or the reality fostered by it” (Goffman 144). These are individuals that are not being performed to and if they enter mid-performance, they may cause the performance to fall apart. On MySpace.com, the line between audience and outsider is fuzzy because even those who are not users may view profile page that are open to the public. Although, outsiders will not have the
ability to interact with a MySpacer, using the MySpace tools they can view the general performance. When the performer creates a public performance that can be viewed by anyone at any time, the roles of people as audience or outsider has the potential to change at any time without the performer knowing or being affected by the change.

**Teams**

In many cases, groups of individuals work together as a team to create a performance. Each member of the team collaborates in its creation and vows to uphold the secrets of the team. Any member of the team has the power to destroy the performance if they reveal the secrets of the team. Those who participate in the performance may be required to hold dark secrets that can never get or they may simply be privy to information that others do not have.

**Colleagues**

Colleagues are individuals that give the same performance as a performer or a team but who give it in a different setting or at a different time in the same setting. These individuals have knowledge of the secrets of the performance but rarely give them away as there is an unwritten “I won’t tell on you if you don’t tell on me” agreement.

**Setting/Region**

Goffman divides the front created by the performer into two elements. The first is the personal front or “expressive equipment” discussed earlier. The second element is the setting, which includes the décor and physical layout where the performance takes place.
The overall setting of a MySpace profile page is MySpace.com as the layout of the site is not malleable by each user. Profile pages on MySpace, however are where users create a setting for their performance by either modifying the generic look to the page or leaving it as it is. The performer can use tools and resources created by external sources to manipulate the layout, colors, graphics, and multimedia items present in their space, or setting.

Each performance has multiple regions that make up the setting. In the Front Region where the performance takes place, the performer makes an “effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards” (Goffman 107). By comparison, in the Back Region the performer is free to let the performance slip, allow secrets that may have been hidden in the front region to be visible, and rest as the audience will not enter this region. If the Back Region is exposed the entire performance may be in jeopardy if the performer is able to drop the façade created by the performance. That is not to say that the Front Region performance is always dramatically different than the back region performance. All other regions beyond the front and back are considered the outside. The performer has access to all of the regions while the audience only has access to the front or the outside if they leave the performance. Outsiders only have access to the outside.
MySpace Themes

Presentation of Self on MySpace

A Starring Role

Individuals who create MySpace.com profile pages add information and modify the MySpace template to create a virtual presentation of self. The online performances found on MySpace range from simple, with minimal template modification and information to elaborate performances containing detailed personal information, pictures, graphics, video clips, music, and thematic backgrounds.

Lights, Camera, Action

In this section, the basic components of a MySpace performance will be outlined. The themes found are based on the examination of 100 MySpace user pages, 50 stated male pages and 50 stated female pages. The pages were selected using a broad search of MySpace user using the ‘browse’ feature. The search engine listing methodology is as follows:

- Women or Men (each gender was done independently)
- Ages 18 – 68 (largest age range possible)
- Living within the United States
- The results appear by last login
No other modifiers were added to the search. Once the browse page returned the 3000 results one set of random numbers was used to generate the page (1 – 300) that would be used and a second set of random numbers determined the user (1 – 10) that would be selected. Each user page was archived using “Scrapbook” a Mozilla Firefox extension and the archive was stored locally on the researchers hard drive. Separately a survey was posted on the researchers MySpace profile as a blog post and as a post to a MySpace group. The information gleaned from in person interviews and the online survey has been included in the introduction and conclusion and the MySpace profile pages inform the discussion on the presentation of self.

**Glitter**

Glitter is any decorative item on a profile page that creates an expression that is “given off” by that item. These items may be changes to the default background in terms of layout, color scheme and/or decorative theme; graphics either stationary or animated; slideshows; profile songs; video clips; interactive widgets; or other items. Images that are present on the ‘Pics’ page, that are present where the profile picture appears are not included in the ‘Glitter’ theme. Text is not considered Glitter unless it is present in a graphic. Examples of ‘Glitter’ offline are the decorations performers place in school lockers, dorm rooms, houses, offices, or any location that people decorate. Both online and offline ‘Glitter’ is the impression that is given off and may be intentional or not.

**Background Theme, Color Scheme, and Layout**
The majority of users modify the MySpace template by adding CSS, HTML, or JavaScript to the fields in the template instead of text. If a user elects to change the background and layout in any way, they must do so by adding CSS code. There is no layout page included in the MySpace controls, instead there are numerous sites that allow the user to select from themes or create their own color scheme. These code sources give the user the piece of code required to change the look and feel of the profile page. The next series of figures show how the MySpace template looks without modification, where the CSS code is placed to change the background and what the resulting profile page looks like. Figure 11 shows the original template, Figure 12 is an example of CSS code in the ‘About Me’ field and Figure 13 is the resulting changes to the MySpace profile page.

![Figure 11: MySpace.com 2003 Unchanged Template (with personal information concealed)](image-url)
Color Schemes

The color schemes found in the sample of pages were divided into the following categories with example screen shots:
• Black & White/Gray Scale

Figure 14: MySpace.com 2003 Black, White, Gray, Color Scheme (with personal information concealed)

• Black + Color

Figure 15: MySpace.com 2003 Black and a Color, Color Scheme (with personal information concealed)
- Earth Tones

Figure 16: MySpace.com 2003 Earth Tones Color Scheme (with personal information concealed)

- Fluorescent/Bright

Figure 17: MySpace.com 2003 Bright Color Scheme (with personal information concealed)
• Pastel

Figure 18: MySpace.com 2003 Pastel Color Scheme (with personal information concealed)

• Red White and Blue

Figure 19: MySpace.com 2003 Red, White, Blue, Color Scheme (with personal information concealed)
Within the sample, ‘Red, White, and Blue’ was observed the least with only one stated male performer adding it and ‘Fluorescent/Bright’ was the next lowest with three stated female performers adding it. The four color schemes were seen in nearly equal numbers of performers with nearly equal distribution of stated males and females with the exception of the pastel category that was used by eighteen performers total with only one of them being a stated male. The remainder of the sample had no change to the background color.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black/White Gray</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black + Color</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth Tones</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red White Blue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Color Changed</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Applied Color Schemes**

**Background Themes**

In addition to changing the color scheme of the profile page, many performers also modify the background by applying a theme. Of the 75 performers who modified the background, 66 of them also applied a background theme and of the 66, 27 were stated males and 39 were stated females.

Examples of background themes are:

- Alcohol related
• Automotive
• Cartoon
• Celebrity
• Fashion
• Repeating Pattern
• Film
• Food
• Graffiti
• Hearts
• Holiday
• Industrial
• Military/Patriotic
• Music
• Mythical Creatures
• Nature
• Sex
• Sports
• Twinkling Stars

No Modifications

Of the 100 performances that were observed, 75 of the performers modified the profile page background in some way while 25 of them left it as the default blue and white background with no color change and no theme.
Graphics

Sixty-one percent of performers observed in this study use graphics as part of the performance. Of that 61%, 40 are female while 21 are male. In this study, ‘graphics’ are defined as any image other than slide shows, or interactive spaces. Graphics may be static or animated. Graphics may be drawings, photographs, sayings etc. Performers gather code from external sources and paste it into the MySpace template. To apply a graphic to a profile page a performer does not need to know any html code. The performer follows the steps below to add a graphic:

1. Locate an external website that has “Glitter” available (These sites usually give the code away for free but they may also collect demographic information or require the performer to create an account. In this example, the site is giving the “Glitter” away for free.)

![Glitter Graphic](image)

**Figure 20: GlitterYourWay.com Glitter Graphic**
2. Select an image (like the one in Figure 20)

3. Copy the code from the page with the graphic (The first box below the image in Figure 20 contains the html code needed. This is simply a link to an image held on a server of the “GlitterYourWay.com” producers.)

4. Paste the code into the profile once it is open in edit mode

5. Save the changes

6. View the profile to make sure it is working

Figure 21: MySpace.com 2003 Graphic Code in Template Field

Figure 22: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Graphic on Profile Page
Each “Glitter” item on a profile page is a link to the source website. The source websites are full of advertisements. “Glitter” seems to spread through MySpace. A performer will discover a new item or source, add it to their page or post it as a comment on others and then those who see it go out and get similar items. The same images are seen again and again as the profile pages are observed. Sparkling “Glitter” graphics are the most common and may be images of well-known cartoon characters, anime characters, clothing items, words, basic shapes such as hearts, stars, balloons, etc., and many other forms. In general female performers are more likely to have sparkling graphics on their pages than stated male performers but adding graphics is not limited to stated females. Males add graphics but most are static images that do not sparkle. For example, one of the male users out of the sample of 50 had a sparkling flag but all others that added glitter added images that were more like posters with images and sayings.

Photographs

Photographs that are professional images of celebrities, scenes, automobiles, and other items are often added to profile pages. These photographs resemble posters offline and are part of the impression that the performer is “giving off”. Performers do not generally comment on the images. Below are some examples of images taken from one performers page, collections of images that give an impression are frequently found on MySpace:
Figure 23: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Photographs

Figure 24: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Photographs 2
Interactive Widgets

Interactive widgets are small mini-applications that run on a MySpace profile page that allow the audience to draw on them with the computer’s cursor and therefore add to the performance or modify it in some way. These modifications can be temporary or permanent. There are few types of interactive widgets that were found on profile pages in this study, the interactive whiteboard space, the voice recorder and various fill-in questionnaires. In the first two cases, the widgets are designed to record message left by audience members. In the third case the widgets are there as entertainment for a particular audience member during their viewing session. These widgets ask the audience for input and then produce an answer based on the input much like crystal balls at fair that predict the future. All types of widgets are added to the profile pages using the same
method as was described in adding glitter graphics. Interactive widgets are much less common than non-interactive graphics and other types of glitter. Only 18% of performers include interactive graphics in their performances. Males and females add widgets almost equally.

- Interactive whiteboard widgets

Figure 26: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Whiteboard Widget

- Voice recorder widgets

Figure 27: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Voice Widget
Slide Shows

Twenty-four percent of the MySpace performances viewed contained slide shows as part of the profile page performance. The percentage of MySpace users that have or have requested the ability to create slide shows from their MySpace “pics” may be larger than the percentage seen in this study as MySpace recently began offering this service as part of the template given to all users. Due to the recent change in the template, the number of performers using this feature may also increase. Outside sources that offer MySpace graphics, layouts, and widgets also offer slide show applets as do other outside sources that specialize in photograph storage and sharing such as [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com). Many of the slide shows seen in the sample are from either MySpace itself or Flickr. Most slide shows contain images that appear to be taken by non-professional photographers while some include graphics as well as photographic images. Slide shows are often adorned
with graphic frames, twinkling stars, animated decorations such as hearts or words, picture borders, and captions. Of the 24% of performers that included slide shows 80% of those users were stated females. Here are three examples of Slide Shows from one users profile performance:

Figure 29: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Slide Show

Figure 30: MySpace.com 2003 Glitter Slide Show 2
Song

The option to add a profile song is part of the MySpace template and 67% of performers observed in this study have added a profile song.

Performers add a song to the profile by browsing the music available on MySpace and selecting a band.
Next the song is selected and the performer clicks ‘Add’ to add that song to the performance. The song appears on the profile page with the standard audio widget. Only one song can be displayed as the profile song at one time.

Videos

Videos have also become part of the MySpace template but they are not as common as songs. Only 28% of the MySpace performers observed added videos to their profile on the video page. Performers may also add videos from outside source such as
YouTube by copying the code given by the outside source and adding it to the template and 31% of performers added video content from one of the external sources.

Figure 35: MySpace.com 2003 Profile Video

MySpace videos are added in the same way a user would add a profile song. The one difference is that the profile videos have a separate page associated with the profile just as there is a separate page for ‘pics’ and blog posts.
The MySpace video community is growing as more performers add videos and view others productions. A rating system is available and performers can share videos with others whether they are MySpacers or not.

**About Me**

‘About Me’ is defined as any text on a profile page that is not part of a graphic. Performers enter the text into the template and it is displayed on the profile page. Some fields are filled because they are required yet others are optional. The fields that are part
of the template are outlined in this section. Each field is described as mandatory or optional and with specific characteristics that apply. The ‘About Me’ aspect of the performance is the impression given by the performer as it is equated to what a person would verbalize during a performance.

**User Name**

The user name appears in the upper left corner of most profile pages, some page have a different layout and the username may be shifted to the center. Performers create usernames that fall into four categories: first and last name; first name; last name; and screen name. For the first name, last name, and first and last name categories it is not known if the names correlate to offline names but the names are possibly the performers actual name. Screen names are obviously names that are created and are not the actual names of the performers. Below are examples of each of the four types of user names and their relative frequency in the total sample observed (100 performers):

- First Name – 45%

![Figure 37: MySpace.com 2003 User Name is First Name (with personal information concealed)](image-url)
• Last Name – 1%

Figure 38: MySpace.com 2003 User Name is Last Name (with personal information concealed)

• First and Last Name – 3%

Figure 39: MySpace.com 2003 User Name is First and Last Name (with personal information concealed)
• Screen Name – 50%

Figure 40: MySpace.com 2003 User Name is Screen Name (with personal information concealed)

**Headline**

The headline is a short statement next to the profile picture in the top left corner of the profile page. Seventy-eight percent of the 100 performances observed included a headline.
Age

This study used the ‘Browse’ function on the MySpace site to select a sample of performances to observe. The ‘Browse’ function limits the searchable age range to 18 – 68. When looking the numbers of performances in each age range it is important to note that not all age ranges were searchable. Those performances that stated the performer is under 18 or over 68 are not included. MySpace has regulations that state if a user is between the age of 18 and 14 (14 is the minimum age for a MySpace user according to the terms and conditions) the profile will be set to private. Profiles that are set to private will not be visible with the ‘Browse’ nor are profiles for users under 18. When analyzing the ages of performances observed in this study we are really looking at the distribution of age between 18 and 68. Performers may elect to have their birth date hidden from others but the age is populated onto the page automatically. There is one exception found
in the sample. One female performance is missing the age and it must be something that was manipulated within the layout. The table below outlines the number of performers that indicated a particular age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: MySpace Performer Age Ranges**

Three obvious cases of age discrepancy were discovered in the process of performance observations. In all of these cases the secrets of the performer are given away by the performance as all three stated females did not keep up the appearance on their stated ages. This is an example of why the audience must “beware of taking [their] impressions to seriously (Miller).” In a short article titled “Confessions of a MySpacer” Vaht’s MySpace informant states, “I think most people understand the nature of MySpace: it’s for fun, so it doesn’t matter if it’s “real” or not (Vaht 36).”

**Case 1: Stated Female F42**

Female F42’s performance states that her age is 22 years old. This is determined by looking at the age field that is displayed next to the profile picture. See Figure 42.
When the audience observes the rest of the performance, there are two instances where the stated age is contradicted. The first instance occurs in an interactive quiz to find “Your best Abercrombie outfit”. As seen in Figure 43 below the performance indicated that the performer's age is 16.

The second instance also occurs on the profile page but this time in the ‘About Me’ section. In this case the performer appears to be stating some facts about her. In this portion of the performance she states that she is 13. See Figure 44.
This performance has three different ages stated and the audience has no information to indicate which one is correct. This profile is now set to private and pictures are not available to give clues to the actual age of the performer.

Case 2: State Female F47

At the top of the profile page the stated age is 18 as seen in Figure 45.
In another portion of the performance the performer states that her birth date is 3/13/95 making her 12 and not eighteen. This profile as well has been set to private so additional information is not available to try to determine what age is accurate.

Figure 46: MySpace.com 2003 Age Discrepancy Case 2 – B

Case 3: Stated Female F09

The age listed in this performance is 20 at the top of the page. Where the other two performers have pictures that are not recognizable the image on this profile is clear giving the impression that the other two are more mysterious or have more to hide.

Figure 47: MySpace.com 2003 Age Discrepancy Case 3 – A (with personal information concealed)
In another portion of the performance the performer states that she has never been in love because she is “only 13”.

Figure 48: MySpace.com 2003 Age Discrepancy Case 3 – B

This profile is still public and the audience has 14 photos to view if they wanted to gain information from the impression given off in order to guess the performer’s actual age. Four months after the initial observation of this performance another indication of age discrepancy has surfaced. The stated age is now 16 as it appears in Figure 49, below and the user name is now “| MORGAN (what’s my age again?)

Figure 49: MySpace.com 2003 Age Discrepancy Case 3 – C (with personal information concealed)
As seen in the last example, the audience of a MySpace performance is able to gain understanding by observing the impression given off at one specific time. They may also gain insight over time by observing changes in the profile page. Given that some may be long-term audience members, discrepancies that allow them to discredit the performance altogether, may be uncovered.

**Geographic Location**

The geographic location indicated in a MySpace performance may be fictitious, realistic, or absent. In the case of the fictitious location these are those that are obviously not places and could not be confirmed as realistic places by Google map search. Realistic locations are those that are actual places where a performer could live. Realistic does not mean that the performer actually lives there.

The majority of the performance observed in this study, 89% of them, listed a realistic location as part of the performance. Of the 89%, 46 were stated males and 43 were stated females. Four percent (2 male, 2 female) did not list a geographic location and seven percent (2 male, 7 female) listed a fictitious location. Figure 50 is an example of a fictitious geographic location.
Interests

This section of the profile page was intended by the MySpace producers to be an area where performers can shade information with the audience as a tool for building connections. As MySpace has evolved and performers have taken more control over the performance these fields have become places where performers can mix text with graphics, videos, slide shows, interactive widgets or place code that changes the background and layout of the profile page itself. The performer chooses to include each of the categories of interests and no category is mandatory. One hundred MySpace performances were observed, 50 stated male and 50 stated female. The table below outlines the percentage of male and female performers who placed text in the field; who placed media, including videos, images, graphics, slide shows etc. in the field; who
placed text and media in the field; or who left the field blank. The percentages indicate
the number of that gender out of 50 performances observed. Note that ‘Groups’ are links
that a performer elects to add and that field cannot contain other media or typed text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Category</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Text &amp; Media</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Female 40% Male 48 %</td>
<td>Female 12 % Male 6 %</td>
<td>Female 18 % Male 6 %</td>
<td>Female 30% Male 40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Female 30 % Male 46 %</td>
<td>Female 20% Male 6 %</td>
<td>Female 38 % Male 22 %</td>
<td>Female 12 % Male 26 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>Female 10 % Male 22 %</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Female 90 % Male 78 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>Female 47 % Male 40 %</td>
<td>Female 6 % Male 4 %</td>
<td>Female 20 % Male 12 %</td>
<td>Female 27 % Male 44 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>Female 32 % Male 48 %</td>
<td>Female 12 % Male 2 %</td>
<td>Female 32 % Male 12 %</td>
<td>Female 24 % Male 38 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Female 44 % Male 42 %</td>
<td>Female 12 % Male 2 %</td>
<td>Female 30 % Male 28 %</td>
<td>Female 14% Male 28 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Female 36 % Male 38 %</td>
<td>Female 8 % Male 2 %</td>
<td>Female 28 % Male 12 %</td>
<td>Female 28 % Male 48 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: MySpace Performer Interests

Figure 51 is an example of a profile that has text in the interest fields.

Figure 51: MySpace.com 2003 'Interests' Text Example
Figure 52 is an example of a profile that has media in an interest field.

Figure 52: MySpace.com 2003 'Interests' Media Example

Figure 53 is an example of a profile that has text and media in an interest field.

Figure 53: MySpace.com 2003 'Interests' Text and Media Example
Figure 54 is an example of a profile that has no information in the interest fields.

![Figure 54: MySpace.com 2003 No 'Interests' Example](image)

Details

The MySpace template drives the details that performers list in this section of the performance. Both marital status and zodiac sign are mandatory while all other fields are optional. The details were analyzed in the same manner as the interests and Table 6 outlines the percentage of female and male performers that included a particular detail in their performance. Only 2% of the performers observed left all of the details blank. The zodiac sign category has been left out as it is a function of the performers birth date that they must include in their account when they sign up. Marital status, and ‘Here for’ are
analyzed separately because each section was a multiple choice question for performers to select so each choice is broken down to show how many performers selected it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Percent of Female Performers that Listed this Detail</th>
<th>Percent of Male Performers that Listed this Detail</th>
<th>Percent of Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>78 %</td>
<td>84 %</td>
<td>81 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>74 %</td>
<td>70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>58 %</td>
<td>72 %</td>
<td>65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>54 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>59 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>66 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>48 %</td>
<td>42 %</td>
<td>45 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke/Drink</td>
<td>64 %</td>
<td>58 %</td>
<td>61 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>82 %</td>
<td>88 %</td>
<td>84 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: MySpace Performer Details

It is worth noting that of the 84% of performers that listed their sexual orientation 82% indicated that they are straight. The additional 2% is made up of one stated male and one stated female each of whom indicated that they are bi-sexual.

Marital status is mandatory field. Table 7 indicates the percentage of stated males and stated females for each category they could choose when filing in this section. The percentages indicated are based on the 50 male and 50 female performances observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent of Female Performers</th>
<th>Percent of Male Performers</th>
<th>Percent of Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a Relationship</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>32 %</td>
<td>24 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>34 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>48 %</td>
<td>60 %</td>
<td>54 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swinger</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: MySpace Performer ‘Marital Status’ Results
‘Here for’ is an optional category that performers can answer with a combination of selections. This field four possible answers but users can select none, one or any combination of answers. Table 8 outlines the performers who selected none, one, or all four, as these combinations were the most interesting. Note that each category was taken separately and each item a performer included was counted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Here for…</th>
<th>Percent of Female Performers</th>
<th>Percent of Male Performers</th>
<th>Percent of Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>16 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>62 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Relationship</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 4</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>34 %</td>
<td>31 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: MySpace Performer 'Here For...' Results

**Schools**

Performers on MySpace have the option to search for a link to educational institutions that have been added to the MySpace community. Fifty percent of MySpace performers add at least one school to their presentation of self. There is no gender difference seen in the number of performers who add a school. The performer in the back region fills in the fields that contain information about the schools attended. Figures 55 and 56 depict the Back Region when a performer adds a school:
Figure 55: MySpace.com 2003 Schools- Back Region

Figure 56: MySpace.com 2003 Schools - Back Region 2
Figure 57 shows what the audience sees as part of the performance once the performer adds the school.

![Figure 57: MySpace.com 2003 Schools - Front Region](image)

Companies

Performers can add companies to their performance in the back region by filling in a specific part of the template. Only 19 % of the performers observed added companies to the profile page. Of that 19 % 11 are stated females and 8 are stated males. Figure 58 shows the Back Region and Figure 59 shows the resulting Front Region when a company is added.

![Figure 58: MySpace.com 2003 Companies - Back Region](image)
Blurbs

There are two ‘blurb’ section on the MySpace template. Each is present to give the performer the opportunity to share information about them. As was observed in the ‘Interests’ section performers often place text, media, or a combination of both in the ‘blurb’ section. Table 9 outlines the percentage of male and female performers who placed text in the field; who placed media, including videos, images, graphics, slide shows etc. in the field; who placed text and media in the field; or who left the field blank. The percentages indicate the percentage of the gender out of 50 performances observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blurb</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Text &amp; Media</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About me</td>
<td>Female 28%</td>
<td>Female 10%</td>
<td>Female 44%</td>
<td>Female 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male 48%</td>
<td>Male 4%</td>
<td>Male 20%</td>
<td>Male 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who I’d Like to Meet</td>
<td>Female 38%</td>
<td>Female 18%</td>
<td>Female 30%</td>
<td>Female 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male 31%</td>
<td>Male 10%</td>
<td>Male 22%</td>
<td>Male 37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: MySpace Performers 'Blurb' Results
Figure 60 illustrates a performance that includes only text in the blurbs.

Figure 60: MySpace.com 2003 Text Blurbs
Figure 61 illustrates a blank ‘About Me’ section and a mix of media and text in the ‘Who I’d Like to Meet’ section.

Figure 61: MySpace.com 2003 Media and Text Blurbs
Figure 62 illustrates a media only ‘Who I’d Like to Meet’ section of the performance.

![Who I'd like to meet:](image)

Figure 62: MySpace.com 2003 Media Blurb

**And the Survey Says…**

Surveys are a part of the MySpace culture. They are often created by external sources and then circulated throughout the community by performers who email them to others, post them as comments on others’ profiles, or who fill them out and post them to their profile. When a survey is filled out and posted to a profile page any audience member can view the results and get the survey to take by following a link. Only 19% (10 female, 9 male) of the performers observed in this study included surveys in their performance but the majority of those have more than one survey on their profile page. There are two types of surveys found on profile pages categorized here by length, the detailed survey and the quiz. The detailed survey asks many questions regarding
preferences, likes, dislikes, etc. while the quiz often asks one or two questions about a specific topic and then give the performer's response to post. Figures 63-66 are three sections of a long survey.

Figure 63: MySpace.com 2003 Survey 1
Figure 64: MySpace.com 2003 Survey 2
Figure 65: MySpace.com 2003 Survey 3

Figure 66 is a quiz result.

Figure 66: MySpace.com 2003 Quiz

The ‘Angles’

David Lehre directed a short film called “myspace: the movie”. The introduction and one of the chapters of the film are dedicated to “The Angles” or photographs that are
taken of specific body parts usually as self-portraits. Figure 67 is an image captured from
the film depicting “The Angles”.

![Figure 67: MySpace The Movie](image)

In this study ‘The Angles’ refers to pictures that a performer includes on the
‘Pics’ page of a MySpace profile. ‘The Angles’ are not limited to the definition
described in the film.

**Profile Image**

Ninety-eight percent of the MySpace performances observed in this study
contained a profile image. The profile image is located under the user name in the upper
left corner of the page.
Eighty-two percent of the performances observed in this study had an image of a person as the profile image as seen in the image above. Half of the 82 performers were stated females and half stated males. Seven percent of the performance included a graphic instead of a person image, 6% included a photograph of something other than a person, and 3% included an image of a person that was distorted beyond recognition with an image overlay.

Figure 69 is an example of a profile image that is a graphic.
Figure 70 is an example of a profile image that is a photograph of something other than a person.

Figure 70: MySpace.com 2003 Profile Picture – Photograph

Figure 71 is an example of a profile image that has a graphic overlay.

Figure 71: MySpace.com 2003 Profile Picture - Graphic Overlay
Pics

The MySpace template contains a separate page for images the performer would like to include. Thee images are uploaded and can be organized into albums. Of the performances observed 98% had at least one picture loaded. This is expected, as each profile image must be loaded before it will appear on the profile page. The majority of performances that contain pictures have 20 or fewer images in the ‘Pics’ section and most performers include captions with the images.

“Public Displays of Connection”

Donath and Boyd describe social networking sites as “sites, in which participants create a self-descriptive profile and make links to other members” (Donath and Boyd 71). “Online relationships are based more on shared interests and less on social characteristics” and the connections made between friends, friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends may be so lose that in essence they are strangers (O’Murchu, Breslin and Decker 4). The analysis up until now has focused on the presentation of self create by the performer using and manipulating the MySpace template. In this section we will focus on the impression given off when performers link to other performances and comment on their pages. What others say about the performer impacts the impression given off by the profile page (O’Murchu, Breslin and Decker ). Being added to the friend list of another performer is often a topic of discussion in the ‘Comment’ section of the profile page. When reading posts the audience should know that a comment stating, “thanks for the add” is telling the owner of the profile page that the other performer appreciates being added as a friend.
Top Friends

Each performer is encouraged to add friends to their MySpace profile page. Using the search tool a performer can look for other performers he or she knows. The performer can add a person as a friend and/or request that another performer add them.

On some social networking sites there is no feature to distinguish one friend from another (Gross, Acquisti and Heinz) but on MySpace the performer has the option to designate some friends more important than others by selecting how many “Top Friends” they would like to include on the profile page and then selecting which friends occupy the top spots. Performers can select a template that display the top 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, or 40 friends. Once the number of top friends is selected the performer can select the friends that are already added to the profile to occupy the slots. The top friends can change at any time. Just as the addition of a new friend is sometimes a topic for comment on the profile page as is discussion about being moved up into the top friends or being a performer’s # 1 friend. Figures 72-74 represent one side of a conversation related to where a person is in the friend list.

Dec 29, 2006 7:56 PM
there are a few things you could do to be #1 but im sure your not thinking of the same things i am!!!

Figure 72: MySpace.com 2003 Friend Conversation – 1
Table 10 shows the number of performances that include a specific number of top friends. Note that some performers manipulate the number of top friends by only adding a certain number of friends to the template and thus the number of top friends reflects that number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Top Friends</th>
<th>% Female Performers</th>
<th>% Male Performers</th>
<th>% Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: MySpace Performers 'Top Friend' Results
Total Friends

All of the performers observed in this study have at least one friend. When a new profile is created ‘Tom’ one of the founder’s of MySpace is added as the performers friend automatically. This may take them by surprise as they may not know who ‘Tom’ is and wonder how a man from California found them so soon after creating the profile. The performer may keep ‘Tom’ as a friend or delete him. When a performance includes ‘Tom’ as the only friend that is an indication that it is most likely an inactive profile. Of the performances studied 5% (2 females and 3 males) have ‘Tom’ as their only friend. The majority of the performers observed, 71%, have 150 or fewer friends with the majority of those having less than 100 friends. “While some people are willing to indicate anyone as Friends, and others stick to a conservative definition, most users tend to list anyone who they know and do not actively dislike” (Gross, Acquisti and Heinz 3).

The term “MySpace Whore” as defined by www.urbandictionary.com is “a person who consumes most of their time on the Internet website myspace.com. These people are often loved by their screen friends.” Although the same source indicates that MySpace whores have thousands of friends for the purposes of this study we will consider a MySpace whore to be any performer with greater than 300 friends. Nine percent of the performers observed have over 300 friends listed. Of those performers 5 are male with friends numbering 322, 324, 416, 927, and 947. The other 4 performers are female with friends numbering 783, 597, 744, and 465.
Teams or Colleagues?

When observing MySpace performances the audience must make the distinction between a team performance and performers who are simply colleagues giving the same kind of performance in different spaces at different times. Goffman defines a team as a group that knows the secrets of the performance and upholds the impressions given and given off to deliver one cohesive performance. Goffman also discusses colleagues and defines them as people who may know some of the secrets but who actively work to deliver separate performances. When looking at a MySpace performance with a network of friends the network represents colleagues who have created separate performances when there is no comment posting between the colleagues. That is to say that performer A and B are colleagues as long as A does not post a comment on B’s profile and visa versa. Once commenting begins then the performers enter a gray area between colleagues and team members. The comments add to the performance but people who comment on others pages at times only know the performance given and are not privy to any of the secrets. Regardless of the depth of the relationship the comments add to the performance as the performer choose to allow them to be posted or to delete them. In some cases there is an ongoing relationship between performers that indicates a stronger team bond than some that simply “stop by to say hi”. In one case the start of a relationship and its evolution was observed by reading comments posted between two performers. The following is a depiction of the evolution of this relationship using screen-captured comments from the two performers pages. We will refer to the female as Sally and the male as Sam.
Act I: Flirtation

Sam:

Dec 27, 2006 8:55 PM
wut am i ganna hafta do to become #1 on ur friends list?......got a few ideas

Figure 75: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation – 1A

Sally:

Dec 29, 2006 7:56 PM
there are a few things you could do to be #1 but im sure your not thinking of the same things i am!!!

Figure 76: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation – 1B

Sam:

Dec 29, 2006 9:16 PM
and wut is it tht ur thinkin of?

Figure 77: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation – 1C
Sally:

Dec 29, 2006 9:22 PM
why would i tell you.... its more fun if you try to figure it out!!

Figure 78: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1D

Sam:

Dec 30, 2006 10:17 AM
thts as close to 1 as ur gettin...gotta work 4 #1

Figure 79: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1E

Sally:

Dec 30, 2006 4:59 PM
i moved you up one....thats all you get for now!!!

Figure 80: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1F
Sally:

Jan 15, 2007 4:30 PM
this week is gonna be boring..... i have to go to school, and i wont have anyone to piss me off!

Figure 81: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1G

Sam:

Jan 15, 2007 6:59 PM
y cant u just say ur gonna miss me, cuz im sure ill still be able to piss u off...haha

Figure 82: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1H

Sally:

Jan 15, 2007 7:19 PM
ok...i might miss u a little bit...maybe!

Figure 83: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1I
Sally:

Jan 17, 2007 6:58 PM
you should feel special…. you get to see me tomorrow!!! :)

Figure 84: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1J

Sam:

Jan 18, 2007 12:02 PM
I GET TO "SEE" YOU TONIGHT!!!!!

Figure 85: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1K

Sally:

Jan 18, 2007 11:18 PM
yes you get to see me!!!!!!

Figure 86: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1L
Sam:

Jan 22, 2007 6:26 AM
thanx 4 takin care of(or maybe puttin up w/ me last ngt...have fun at school this week...see ya thursday

Figure 87: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation – 1M

Sally:

Jan 22, 2007 9:45 AM
you weren't that bad.... you just kept repeating yourself!!! and your welcome!

Figure 88: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 1N

Act II: The Relationship

Sam:

Jan 26, 2007 7:56 PM
hello girlfriend!!!!

Figure 89: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2A
Sally:

Jan 26, 2007 10:15 AM
im ur GF now!!!!!!

Figure 90: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2B

Sam:

Jan 28, 2007 4:51 PM
i hung out w/ u all day and i still dont have enough...im gonna miss u

Figure 91: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2C

Sally:

Jan 29, 2007 3:07 PM
im gonna miss you all week :( 

Figure 92: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2D
Sam:

Jan 29, 2007 8:48 PM
your beautiful.....im suppost to b doin HW but im not.....im thinkin of u...i think its the cute elf pic...haha...u hate me...i know

Figure 93: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2E

Sally:

Jan 29, 2007 8:52 PM
stop procrastinating.....get your work done!!! xoxo i miss you!

Figure 94: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2F

Sam:

Jan 30, 2007 12:58 PM
i feel special bc i have a beautiful girlfriend...

Figure 95: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2G
Sally:

Jan 30, 2007 12:41 PM

you should feel special..... when you figure out why let me know!!! xoxo

Figure 96: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2H

Sam:

Jan 30, 2007 1:04 PM

IM NUMBER 1, YEA BITCHES!!!!!!

Figure 97: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2I

Sally:

Jan 30, 2007 7:51 PM

come see me.......:( i miss you!

Figure 98: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2J
Sam:

Jan 30, 2007 7:57 PM
i wish u were here....X's and O's

Figure 99: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2K

Sally:

Jan 31, 2007 6:38 PM
you came to see me!!!! i had fun today! i will see you tomorrow! xoxo

Figure 100: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 2L

Act III: The Team

Sam:

Feb 12, 2007 10:13 AM
i hate weekdays....and our toy still ddnt come....wut ya get me 4 vday?...
missin you
xoxo

Figure 101: MySpace.com 2003 Conversation - 3A
In Act I the relationship is just beginning and the comments are flirtatious as we progress into act two Sally and Sam solidify their relationship and become a couple.

Through acts one and two some hints of a team presentation are found but is in act three
that the audience observes conversations that do not make a lot of sense as they are taking place between the two performers and are based on secrets the audience does not know. After the observation period conducted in this study the researcher went back to observe any additional comments that add to the performance. In additional comments post the conversations between the two performers are more cryptic and in June the words “I Love You” begin showing up in comments.

**Dynamic Identity**

The ‘body provides a stabilizing anchor’ offline (Donath) while online the performer creates a presentation of self that is both textual and multimedia in some cases that is the virtual body. Despite the attempts to create a virtual body online, identity is ambiguous (Donath) because of the volatility of the information presented (Friedman). The dynamic nature of online identity was witnessed in this investigation of MySpace performances in three ways, profile background changes, profiles becoming private, and profiles being deleted.

**Background Changes**

In 27% of the performances observed in this investigation the performer altered in the background theme and/or color scheme within a month of the initial profile observation.
Privatization of the Profile

Six percent of the profiles that were originally observed as public profiles were changed to private profiles within a month of the initial observations.

Invalid User ID

Three percent of the profiles originally observed were deleted, either by the user, or by MySpace, within a month of the original observations. One had sexually explicit content on it that was blocked from view before it was deleted. Another was a female who stated she had recently moved away from an abusive relationship, and the third was a grandmother with no indication as to why the profile would be deleted.

The Audience and Outsiders

Depending on whether a profile is set to private or public the lines distinguishing the audience from outsider shifts.

Public Profiles

When a profile is set to public the audience is made up of anyone who either happens upon the profile or who knows of the performance and goes to the profile page to observe or interact. All others who do not view the performance are considered outsiders. These may be people who do not visit MySpace or they could be members of the audience for other performances. In both cases they have access to outside region and neither have access to the back region. The audience has access to the front region, and
the outsiders do not have access to either region. If an outsider views a public profile they can become part of the audience.

Private

When a profile is set to private the line between audience and outsider is clearer. Those that are added as friends are the only individuals that can be in the audience. While all of the friends are colleagues some may be team members depending on the depth of the relationship. Any person who is not added as a friend is an outsider and in order to become an audience member they must request to be added as a friend and have the request accepted. In the case of the private profile the performer controls what individuals are included in the audience.

Assertions and Conclusions

How do MySpacers create a virtual presentation of self?

What information is included in the MySpace.com template?

The Back Region

The performer must add a valid email address, first and last name, country and zip code, date of birth, and gender to the Back Region. Once the initial profile is set up then a user can edit it and add much more information into the MySpace template. The list of profile items is added here a reminder of the items that appear in the Back Region of each
performance. (Each title has a blank that can be filled in after it; * denotes a required field)

- **Interest & Personality**
  - Headline: byline that appears near the users name and photo
  - About Me
  - I’d Like to Meet
  - Interests
    - Music
    - Movies
    - Television
    - Books
    - Heroes

- **Name**
  - User Name (set and cannot be changed)*
  - Display Name*
  - First Name
  - Last Name

- **Basic Info**
  - Gender*
  - Date of Birth*
  - Occupation
  - City
  - Country*
• Region*
• Zip Code
• Ethnicity
• Body Type
• Height
• I am here for (Dating; Serious Relationship; Friends; Networking)
• Background & Lifestyle
  • Marital Status*
  • Sexual Orientation
  • Hometown
  • Religion
  • Smoker
  • Drinker
  • Children
  • Education
  • Income
• Schools
  • School Name
  • Country
  • State/Province
• Companies
  • Company Name
  • City
o State/Region
o Country
o Title
o Division
o Dates Employed

• Networking
  o Field
  o Sub-Field
  o Role
  o Description

• Song & Video on Profile
  o Profile Song
  o Video Player
  o Video Slider

The performer can add privacy so that only friends can see their profile or contact them via instant message. The performer can contribute to groups, manage a calendar, music and away message, or add music, videos, and photographs. All other multimedia items on profile page come from external website and authors. Community features are also available they are browse, searching, invite, film, mail, blog, favorites, forums, groups, events, videos, music, comedy, and classifieds.
What information is included in user profile pages?

The Front Region

Based on language Goffman defined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the presentation on a MySpace page is a performance and the profile page as the stage. The Front Region is the performance that is visible by the audience. The mandatory items that make up the Front Region are the performer’s display name, gender, performer’s age, geographic location, the last login date, links to pics, links to videos, and links to the contact information, marital status, friends, and top friend list. The optional items in the Front Region are the profile picture; the headline; song; About Me and Who I’d Like to Meet blurbs; interests including general, music, movies, television, books, and heroes, groups, and details such as, sexual orientation, hometown, religion, smoker, drinker, children, education, and income. Performers can extend their performance by writing blog entries.

In addition to the elements that fill in the MySpace template performers often modify the template with HTML, CSS code, or JavaScript. The addition of code changes the background and layout of the page they also add video from sites like YouTube.com or other code that create small widgets such as white board spaces that visitors can draw on.

What does a typical MySpace profile page look like?

Chan draws comparisons between homepages and bedrooms, as they are both personal spaces where performances occur. MySpace profile pages are homepages that
happen to be part of a larger community giving people with less technical ability the tools needed to create intricate performances. It is important to remember “what happens on screen should be taken for what it is (Chan 283)” and not to draw conclusions about offline performances of self based on what is seen online.

**Glitter**

Glitter is any decorative item on a profile page that creates an expression that is given off by that item. These items may be changes to the default background in terms of layout, color scheme and/or decorative theme; graphics either stationary or animated; slideshows; profile songs; video clips; interactive widgets; or other items.

**Background Theme, Color Scheme, and Layout**

Seventy-five percent of the performers observed modify the MySpace template by adding code to the fields in the template instead of text.
Color Schemes

Table 11 shows the color schemes found in the sample of pages were divided into the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black/White Gray</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black + Color</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastel</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth Tones</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red/White Blue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Color Changed</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: MySpace Performer Color Scheme

Background Themes

In addition to changing the color scheme of the profile page many performers also modify the background by applying a theme. Sixty-six percent of the performances observed applied a background theme.

Examples of background themes are, alcohol related, automotive, cartoon, celebrity, fashion, repeating patterns, film, food, graffiti, hearts, holiday, industrial, military/patriotic, music, mythical creatures, nature, sex, sports, or twinkling stars

No Modifications

Of the performances observed 25 % of them left it as the default blue and white background with no color change and no theme.
Graphics

Sixty-one percent of performers observed in this study use graphics as part of the performance. Graphics may be static or animated. Graphics may be drawings, photographs, sayings etc. Performers gather code from external sources and paste it into the MySpace template.

Photographs

Photographs that are professional images of celebrities, scenes, automobiles, and other items are often added to profile pages. These photographs resemble posters offline and are part of the impression that the performer is “giving off”.

Interactive Widgets

Interactive widgets are small mini-applications that run on a MySpace profile page that allow the audience to make input into the performance and modify it in some way. These modifications can be temporary or permanent. There are few types of interactive widgets that were found on profile pages in this study, the interactive whiteboard space, the voice recorder and various fill-in questionnaires. Only 18% of performers include interactive graphics in their performances. Both males and females add widgets almost equally.

Slide Shows

Twenty-four percent of the MySpace performances viewed contained slide shows as part of the profile page performance. Most slide shows contain images that appear to
be taken by non-professional photographers while some include graphics as well as photographic images. Slide shows are often adorned with graphic frames, twinkling stars, animated decorations such as hearts or words, picture borders, and captions.

**Song**

The option to add a profile song is part of the MySpace template and 67% of performers observed in this study have added a profile song.

**Videos**

Videos have also become part of the MySpace template but they are not as common as songs. Only 28% of the MySpace performers observed added videos to their profile on the video page. Performers may also add videos from outside source such as ‘YouTube’ by copying the code given by the outside source and adding it to the template and 31% of performers added video content from one of the external sources.

**About Me**

‘About Me’ is defined as any text on a profile page that is not part of a graphic. Performers enter the text into the template and it is displayed on the profile page. Some fields are filled because they are required yet others are optional. The fields that are part of the template are outlined in this section. Each field is described as mandatory or optional and with specific characteristics that apply. The ‘About Me’ aspect of the performance is the impression given by the performer as it is equated to what a person would verbalize during a performance.
User Name

The user name appears in the upper left corner of most profile pages, some page have a different layout and the username may be shifted to the center. Performers create users names that fall into four categories: first and last name; first name; last name; and screen name. For the first name, last name, and first and last name categories it is not known if the names correlate to offline names but the names are possibly the performers actual name. Screen names are obviously names that are created and are not the actual names of the performers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Display Name</th>
<th>% of Performers Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First and Last Name</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen Name</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: MySpace Performer User Names

Headline

The headline is a short statement next to the profile picture in the top left corner of the profile page. Seventy-eight percent of the 100 performances observed included a headline.

Age

Performers may elect to have their birth date hidden from others but the age is populated onto the page automatically. There is one exception found in the sample. One female performance is missing the age and it must be something that was manipulated.
within the layout. Table 13 outlines the number of performers that indicated a particular age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 29</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 39</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 49</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 – 68</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: MySpace Performer Age Groups

Three obvious cases of age discrepancy were discovered in the process of performance observations. In all of these cases the secrets of the performer are given away by the performance as all three stated females did not keep up the appearance on their stated ages.

Geographic Location

The geographic location indicated in a MySpace performance may be fictitious, realistic, or absent. In the case of the fictitious location these are those that are obviously not places and could not be confirmed as realistic places by Google map search. Realistic locations are those that are actual places where a performer could live. Realistic does not mean that the performer actually lives there.

The majority of the performance observed in this study, 89% of them, listed a realistic location as part of the performance. Four percent (2 male, 2 female) did not list a geographic location and seven percent (2 male, 7 female) listed a fictitious location.
Interests

The performer chooses to include each of the categories of interests and no category is mandatory. One hundred MySpace performances were observed, 50 stated male and 50 stated female. Table 14 outlines the percentage of male and female performers who placed text in the field; who placed media, including videos, images, graphics, slide shows etc. in the field; who placed text and media in the field; or who left the field blank. The percentages indicate the percentage of the gender out of 50 performances observed. Note that ‘Groups’ are links that a performer elects to add and that field cannot contain other media or typed text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Category</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Text &amp; Media</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: MySpace Performer Interests

Details

The MySpace template drives the details that performers list in this section of the performance. Both marital status and zodiac sign are mandatory while all other fields are optional. The details were analyzed in the same manner as the interests and table 15 outlines the percentage of female and male performers that included a particular detail in their performance. Only 2 % of the performers observed left all of the details blank. The
zodiac sign category has been left out, as it is a function of the performers birth date that they must include in their account when they sign up. Marital status, and ‘Here for’ are analyzed separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Percent of Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body Type</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hometown</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke/Drink</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: MySpace Performer Details

It is worth noting that of the 84% of performers that listed their sexual orientation 82% indicated that they are straight. The additional 2% is made up of one stated male and one stated female each of whom indicated that they are bi-sexual.

Marital status is mandatory field. Table 16 indicating the percentage of stated males and stated females for each category they could choose when filing in this section. The percentages indicated are based on the 50 male and 50 female performances observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent of Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a Relationship</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swinger</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: MySpace Performer Marital Status
‘Here for’ is an optional category that performers can answer with a combination of selections. This field four possible answers but users can select none, one or any combination of answers. Table 17 outlines the performers who selected none, one, or all four. Note that each category was taken separately and each item a performer included was counted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Here for…</th>
<th>Percent of Female Performers</th>
<th>Percent of Male Performers</th>
<th>Percent of Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td>16 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>62 %</td>
<td>64 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>36 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious Relationship</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 4</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>34 %</td>
<td>31 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: MySpace Performer 'Here For'

Schools

Performers on MySpace have the option to search for a link to educational institutions that have been added to the MySpace community. Fifty percent of MySpace performers add at least one school to their presentation of self. There is no gender difference seen in the number of performers who add a school. The performer in the back region fills in the fields that contain information about the schools attended.
Companies

Performers can add companies to their performance in the back region by filling in a specific part of the template. Only 19% of the performers observed added companies to the profile page. Of that 19% 11 are stated females and 8 are stated males.

Blurbs

There are two ‘blurb’ sections on the MySpace template. Each is present to give the performer the opportunity to share information about them. As was observed in the ‘Interests’ section performers often place text, media, or a combination of both in the ‘blurb’ section. The table below outlines the percentage of male and female performers who placed text in the field; who placed media, including videos, images, graphics, slide shows etc. in the field; who placed text and media in the field; or who left the field blank. The percentages indicate the number present out of 50 performances observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blurb</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Text &amp; Media</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About me</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who I’d Like to Meet</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: MySpace Performer Blurbs

And the Survey Says…

Surveys are a part of the MySpace culture. They are often created by external sources and then circulated throughout the community by performers who email them to others, post them as comments on others’ profiles, or who fill them out and post them to their profile. Nineteen percent (10 female, 9 male) of the performers observed in this
study included surveys in their performance but the majority of those have more than one survey on their profile page.

The ‘Angles’

David Lehre directed a short film called “myspace: the movie”. The introduction and one of the chapters of the film are dedicated to “The Angles” or photographs that are taken of specific body parts usually as self-portraits.

Profile Image

Ninety-eight percent of the MySpace performances observed in this study contained a profile image. The profile image is located under the user name in the upper left corner of the page. Eighty-two percent of the performances observed in this study had an image of a person as the profile image as seen in the image above. Seven percent of the performance included a graphic instead of a person image, 6% included a photograph of something other than a person, and 3% included an image of a person that was distorted beyond recognition with an image overlay.

Pics

The MySpace template contains a separate page for images the performer would like to include. These images are uploaded and can be organized into albums. Of the performances observed 98% had at least one picture loaded. This is expected, as each profile image must be loaded before it will appear on the profile page. The majority of
performances that contain pictures have 20 or fewer images in the ‘Pics’ section and most performers include captions with the images.

“Public Displays of Connection”

Top Friends

Each performer is encouraged to add friends to their MySpace profile page. Using the search tool a performer can look for other performers he or she knows. The performer can add a person as a friend and/or request that another performer add them. On some social networking sites there is no feature to distinguish one friend from another (Gross, Acquisti and Heinz) but on MySpace the performer has the option to designate some friends more important than others by selecting how many “Top Friends” they would like to include on the profile page.

Table 19 shows the number of performances that include a specific number of top friends. Note that some performers manipulate the number of top friends by only adding a certain number of friends to the template and thus the number of top friends reflects that number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Top Friends</th>
<th>% Total Performers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: MySpace Performer 'Top Friends'
Total Friends

All of the performers observed in this study have at least one friend. When a new profile is created ‘Tom’ one of the founder’s of MySpace is added as the performers friend automatically. Of the performances studied 5% (2 females and 3 males) have ‘Tom’ as their only friend.

The majority of the performers observed, 71%, have 150 or fewer friends with the majority of those having less than 100 friends. Nine percent of the performers observed have over 300 friends listed.

Do users modify the template? If so, in what ways do they modify it?

The majority of performers modify the MySpace template by adding code to the fields in the template instead of text. The code is provided by outside sources, usually web sites, which have collections of code. The code provided allows performers to modify the background of the profile page by changing colors and the layout or applying themes. Glitter graphics, interactive widgets, slide shows other than MySpace slide shows, and videos other than MySpace videos are all modifications to the template that require code to make the changes. Because the MySpace template does not allow users to change the look and feel directly with editing tools and because performers are creating a performance that requires the modification of the template to create individuality, the number of external code sources continues to increase as does the number of modifications available.
Are there differences between the profiles of stated male MySpace performers and stated female MySpace performers?

The following list of gender assertion, illustrating gender differences, is based on the observations of 50 female performance and 50 male performances during this study and cannot be extrapolated to make general statements about the larger MySpace community, as the sample size is quite small.

- Females are more likely to have modification to the background with color and/or themes.
- The majority of females selected pastel color schemes while the majority of males selected black, white and gray color schemes.
- Females are more likely to have graphics added to the performance.
- Females are more likely to have slide shows added to the performance.
- Both males and females added videos to the video section of the profile equally but males are more likely to have video content on the profile page.
- Females are more likely to have content in the Television and Hero sections of the Interests area.
- Females are more likely to have a headline on the profile.
- Males are more likely to have the ‘body type’ field filled in.
- The majority of males and females have ‘single’ in the ‘marital status field’ but ‘married’ showed the second highest percentage of females while ‘in a relationship’ showed the second highest percentage for males.
- The majority of males and females have ‘friends’ in the ‘here for’ field but males are more likely than females to have ‘serious relationships’ listed.
• Males are more likely to have just text in the ‘about me’ field while females are more likely to have text and media.

• Females are more likely to have the ‘who I’d like to meet’ section filled in.

Assertions

…at this point we should no longer see people simply as ‘users’ or given systems, but as social ‘actors’ (Riva and Galimberti 454).

The Performance

• A MySpace performance consists of a performer; the expression given and given off by the text or ‘About Me’ information present on the profile page or the blog; the expression given off by the Glitter on the profile page, the ‘pics’ page, and/or the video page; and the expression given and given off by the public displays of connections in the friends and comments sections.

• Other aspects of the performance such as email, instant message, forum discussions, or group discussions contributions are not visible to the every audience member.

Performer

• Each individual with a MySpace account and profile page is a performer who uses the template provided by MySpace to create the performance and who often use external sources to create a presentation of self on the profile page.
• Each users performance is complex and consists of the “front” or “expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman 22) and the person behind it.

• Because performer’s “expressive equipment” (Goffman 24) such as their body, body language, gestures, etc. the MySpace performance is created from no predetermined equipment, the performer has the freedom to create an online performance that does not relate to the offline “expressive equipment”.

• Performers must manage the impression they put forth and take “expressive responsibility” for all portions of the performance including the unmeant gestures as they can cause a performance and those performing it to be discredited.

**Audience & Outsiders**

• The audience is the individuals who are performed to and depending on whether a profile is set to private or public the lines distinguishing the audience from outsiders shift.

• When a profile is set to public the audience is made up of anyone who either happens upon the profile or who knows of the performance and goes to the profile page to observe or interact, while all others who do not view the performance are considered outsiders.

• When a profile is set to private those who are added as friends are the only individuals that can be in the audience and all others are outsiders.

• The audience contains friends that may be teammates or colleagues.
Teams and/or Colleagues

- Within a MySpace network of friends some individuals are teammates and others are colleagues depending on the depth of the relationship and the extent to which each participates in the performance on a given profile page.
- Individuals may move from being a colleague of a performer to a teammate if they begin to post frequently on the performers profile page and if the comments indicate the sharing of secrets through conversation that is not understandable to the audience but is understandable to the teammates.

Setting/Region

- The front region is the profile performance that is visible to the audience.
- The back region is the template and functions available when the performer is logged into MySpace.
- On MySpace there is a ‘Middle Region’ that consists of mini-performances via email, instant messenger, forum discussions, and group contributions that are visible to some audience members but not all.
- All other regions beyond the front, back, and middle are considered the outside.
Research Limitations, Strengths, & Weaknesses

Limitations

Browsing

Using the ‘browse’ feature of the MySpace site to initially select the sample, which was then narrowed using random numbers, added limitations to the sample that was studied. These limitations were:

1. Private profiles were not included in the search and thus no data could be collected regarding the number of profiles that are set to private in a given sample.

2. The age range of 18 – 68, which is the maximum age range allowed by the ‘browse’ function hinders the researchers ability to ascertain more accurate age trends.

3. The ‘browse’ function sorts the results returned by: recently updated; last login; new to MySpace; or distance from the user searching. Any one of these options has the potential to skew the results of this study. The last update option was selected but this may affect the number of pages that have content added, the types of content added, or the amount of content added. This limits the ability to make generalizations regarding culture to the results of this study alone and not to the larger MySpace community.
Vastness of MySpace

1. MySpace contains over 180 million users and limiting the field to a manageable sample size based on the scope of this project and the resources available limits the sample size.

2. With the limited sample size it is not possible to correlate what was observed during this study with the larger MySpace community with a reasonable amount of certainty.

Dynamic Quality of MySpace

1. MySpace like the entire web is a dynamic virtual environment with dynamic user performances that can limit the researchers ability to make observations if the performances are not archived in their entirety at a specific time.

2. When using the ‘browse’ feature MySpace randomly regenerates the list of 3000 users each time a new page is visited.

Strengths

Research Archive

Each user performance in this study was archived using an extension of Mozilla Firefox called ‘Scrapbook’. ‘Scrapbook’ allowed the research to collect the user pages on one particular day, freezing the performance in time, and then analyze the performances over time. Without the use of an archival tool it would have been difficult to make observations as users pages are dynamic and frequently change.
The archive also allowed the researcher to compare the archived performance with a more current performance where it was necessary.

**Comprehensive View**

In this study the sample of 100 MySpace performers was used to make observations about the front region of the performance while the back region was observed through first hand experience. The researcher created a profile page and investigated through the eyes of a user, in order to fully understand the back region. The ability to observe both the Front and Back Regions was a critical step in understanding what performers do to create the presentation of self the audience sees.

**Randomizing the Sample**

While the ‘browse’ feature limits the sample according to how the results are ordered the use of a random number generator works to even out the possible skewing. Each time a user completes a ‘browse’ 3000 MySpace users are returned. In this study a random number generator was used to select the page, 1 – 300 on which the user would appear. The use of the random number to select the page made it as likely that a high page number would be selected as a low page number. The selection of both low page numbers, individuals who were last logged in very recently, and high page numbers, individuals who were logged in less recently, makes sure that the sample contains both types of user and therefore makes the sample more representative of the whole community.
The ‘browse’ feature is also dynamic and each time a user visits a results page the rest of the sample is regenerated. The regeneration of the sample increases the number of individuals that have the possibility of being selected by the two sets of random numbers.

Weaknesses

Correlations Between Sample and Larger MySpace Culture

More Randomized Sampling Method

While the random number generator works to even out possible discrepancies in the sample the fact remains that MySpace is ordering the results of the ‘browse’ based on a defined criteria. This limitation makes it more difficult to make reliable correlations between the sample observed in this study and the larger MySpace community.

Larger Sample Size

The vastness of the MySpace community itself is the largest limiting factor on the ability to make reliable correlations. With over 180 million user the sample size would need to be extraordinarily large in order to reliably make predictions about the presentation of self in this vast community. More time, resources and personnel would need to be dedicated to a project of that magnitude.
Further Research

In the future, more research should be conducted to gain more insight into the presentation of self on MySpace and other social networking sites. The following questions should be investigated to get a more complete picture of social networking culture.

• How do the online presentations compare with offline presentations of self?
• Does what was found in this small sample represent the larger community?
• Can users be categorized by their expression given and given off?
• How does the audience make judgments about the validity of a performance?
• How do MySpace performers decide whether to accept or reject friend requests?
• How do MySpace performers classify their presentations and do the expressions they are intending to give off match what the expression the audience is receiving?
• How does the presentation of self on MySpace compare to the presentation of self in other online social networks?

Closing Vignette

A Confessional Tale: Evolution of a MySpacer

I initially chose this topic because of a conversation I had with a friend about her teenage son and his online activities. She was very concerned about the amount of time he spent on MySpace and had gone as far as to create an account so she could view his activities. I set out to be the investigator who would unlock the MySpace mystery for my
generation and hopefully gain some insight that would help my friend. Little did I know that some where along the way I would become a MySpacer.

As I began my investigation I set up my first MySpace page and populated it with information about his study. The next day I awoke to have some strange guy named Tom as my friend. My husband, the always skeptical, announced, “See, They found you already! Some stranger wants to be your friend.” “Could this be true?” “Could some weird guy be lurking, out there, waiting for females users to be added?” The answer was a resounding “No!” as I learned that Tom is one of the founders of MySpace and that he is automatically added to every new person’s profile, as a sort of welcoming committee. The MySpace learning curve was moderate and I quickly had added information to my profile and changed the background color to something I was “sure” was not typical of a female user, black with a hint of raspberry. I posted to forums and joined a group on MySpace about MySpace. I did not expect that within a few days I would have several responses to my posts and my profile blog containing the answers I was seeking by people I had never met. Surprisingly the answers were realistic and I was on my way to breaking down the barrier between me and MySpace.

I had read in several news articles and had seen on Dateline NBC that MySpace was a scary place filled with sexual predators, prostitutes, and bullies. It was hard to separate this picture that I had in my head based on the media and my frantic friend’s account of her son’s MySpace interactions from my investigation. At first I was looking for any sign to affirm my prejudice but as I continued much of what I was feeling faded away. As I observed the performances in my sample I realized that most of those users were what I consider “Joe User” they are people, like me, who create a MySpace
performance to connect with their friends and family who have MySpace accounts and to reconnect with people with whom they may not have been in contact with for years. They are open to meeting new people but few are actively advertising themselves as someone you just have to meet. At the same time I also discovered that some of my family and friends are also on MySpace and my network began to grow. While I am sure that MySpace can be a scary place it has not been for me.

As my evolution as a MySpacer has evolved I have learned how to create my performance, how to limit my audience, and how to evaluate other performances. Much like when I interact with people offline, on MySpace I get a feeling about a performance that helps me to evaluate whether I believe it to be sincere. I use my intuition to determine whom I add as my friends on MySpace. Every time I login to work on this study I receive messages from other users who invite me to be part of a group, or add them as friends. I rarely know the sender and have learned to ignore these messages as they are randomly generated. I have been a MySpacer for over a year now am yet to be stalked, bullied, or harassed, and yes, I am a MySpacer. I have a profile performance, I interact with others in the MySpace community, I add glitter and information to my performance, and I browse other performances looking for interesting tidbits or people I know offline.

My advice for my friend and all parents, guardians, educators, or others who are concerned about online interactions on MySpace is that children must be monitored online as well as offline and while I did not encounter the scary side of MySpace my intuition tells me it is out there. Children must be armed with the knowledge that not every performance is sincere and that it is safer to stick to interacting with individuals
they know offline as well as online. Adults should also be conscious that negative behaviors such as bullying could take place on MySpace and help children to deal with these issues.

Despite the potential threats on MySpace I can see the attraction to online interaction and to creating a virtual self, using a MySpace performance. It is fun to create the profile and modify the template and it is always nice to connect with others who are sharing your experiences.
Glossary

About Me

‘About Me’ is defined as any text on a profile page that is not part of a graphic. Performers enter the text into the template and it is displayed on the profile page. Some fields are filled because they are required yet others are optional. The fields that are part of the template are outlined in this section. Each field is described as mandatory or optional and with specific characteristics that apply. The ‘About Me’ aspect of the performance is the impression given by the performer as it is equated to what a person would verbalize during a performance.

And the Survey Says…

Surveys are a part of the MySpace culture. They are often created by external sources and then circulated throughout the community by performers who email them to others, post them as comments on others’ profiles, or who fill them out and post them to their profile. When a survey is filled out and posted to a profile page any audience member can view the results and get the survey to take themselves by following a link. Only 19 % (10 female, 9 male) of the performers observed in this study included surveys in their performance but the majority of those have more than one survey on their profile page.

Back Region

The back region is the area of the MySpace template that is visible only to the MySpacer who created that particular profile page.
**Dynamic Identity**

The ‘body provides a stabilizing anchor” offline (Donath) while online the performer creates a presentation of self that is both textual and multimedia in some cases that is the virtual body. Despite the attempts to create a virtual body online, identity is ambiguous (Donath) because of the volatility of the information presented (Friedman). The dynamic nature of online identity was witnessed in this investigation of MySpace performances in three ways: profile background changes; profiles becoming private; profiles being deleted.

**Front Region**

The front region is the MySpace profile page that is visible to a select audience or to the general public.

**Glitter**

Glitter is any decorative item on a profile page that creates an expression that is given off by that item. These items may be changes to the default background in terms of layout, color scheme and/or decorative theme; graphics either stationary or animated; slideshows; profile songs; video clips; interactive widgets; or other items. Images that are present on the ‘Pics’ page, that are present where the profile picture appears are not included in the ‘Glitter’ theme. Text is not considered Glitter unless it is present in a graphic. Glitter offline are the decorations performers place in school lockers, dorm rooms, houses, offices, or any location that people decorate. Both online and offline ‘Glitter’ is the impression that is given off and may be intentional or not.
MySpace Performance
A MySpace performance is the sum of all of the elements on one MySpacers MySpace presence. It may include a profile page, blog, videos, ‘pics’, postings on other profile pages, postings in groups or forums, or MySpace email communications.

MySpacer
A MySpacer is a MySpace performer or anyone who creates a MySpace profile page.

“Public Displays of Connection”
Donath and Boyd describe social networking sites as “sites, in which participants create a self-descriptive profile and make links to other members” (Donath and Boyd 1). In this theme we focus on the impression given off when performers link to other performances. Being added to the friend list of another performer is often a topic of discussion in the ‘Comment’ section of the profile page. When reading posts the audience should note that a comment that says, “thanks for the add” is telling the owner of the profile page that the other performer appreciates being added as a friend.

The ‘Angles’
David Lehre directed a short film called “myspace: the movie”. The introduction and one of the chapters of the film are dedicated to “The Angles” or photographs that are taken of specific body parts usually as self-portraits. In this study ‘The Angles’ refers to pictures that a performer includes on the ‘Pics’ page of a MySpace profile. ‘The Angles’ are not limited to the definition described in the film.
Ethics Protocol

Ethics Protocol for Ethnographic Research

[Heather Perretta]

This authorization is being requested in part to fulfill requirements of the State University of NY Institute of Technology’s Human Subjects Research Review Board as well as state and federal regulations regarding the use of human subjects in research. The project involves an ethnographic study that may be used in my master’s research at the SUNYIT Information Design and Technology Master’s program. Excerpts or rewritten versions may also be submitted to professional journals for publication. The ethnography involves the social behavior of individuals in online environments and its affect on family dynamics. The work involves participant and non-participant observations, one-on-one and group interviews, and scheduled visits.

I can be reached at [315.826.5656 or you can reach Russell Kahn, Information Design and Technology Department chairperson at 315.792.7438., which is at the State University of New York, Institute of Technology at Utica/Rome]. I would be happy to answer any questions about the project.

I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several, rights.

- Your participation in these studies is entirely voluntary.
- You are free to decline to answer any question at any time,
- You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

My notes from meetings, interviews, and observations will be kept strictly confidential. Excerpts from these notes may be made part of the final thesis.
Copies of the final publications will be supplied whenever possible and as requested.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that you have read its contents.

______________________________ signed

______________________________ printed

______________________________ dated
The focus of this ethnography is to discover the culture of the online My Space community and compare it to societies perceptions of this community.

1. Do you have a My Space account? What are your reasons for joining or not joining?
   a. If so, when did you become a member and how often do you use your account?

2. What have you discovered can be done on My Space?

3. What types of things have you found are on a typical My Space page?

4. How would you describe the My Space community?
5. Why do you think most people join My Space?

6. How have you seen My Space users communicate or interact with other My Space users?

7. What do you think are the roles of individuals on My Space?

8. How do you communicate with friends or meet new people?

9. Is My Space a safe place?

10. What do you think the major concerns of parents, educators, and the media are in regards to My Space? Are they valid?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Here is a copy of the Informed Consent form that you signed. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Your responses and participation in this interview as well as in future interviews will be kept confidential.
References


Curriculum Vita
Heather Perretta
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DOB: 07/07/1977 - Utica, NY

Objective:
• Create authentic learning environments that are engaging and inspiring for all learners.

Education:
• Spring 2004 - Present  State University of New York Institute of Technology
  • Pursuing M.S. in Information and Design Technology – Current GPA 4.0
• December 2001  Utica College of Syracuse University
  • NYS Teacher Certification – GPA 4.0
• May 1999  SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
  • B.S. Environmental and Forest Biology with a specialization in Environmental Interpretation. – GPA 3.435

Experience:
• 1/2006 – 6/2007  SUNYIT Graduate Assistant
  • I worked as a graduate assistant for the Information Design Technology Department as a teaching and computer lab assistant during the spring 2006 semester.
  • I worked as a research assistant for Kathryn Stam during the summer 2006 semester to assist in research for her upcoming book.
  • I worked with Steve Schneider as the graduate assistant for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).
  • I worked with Steve Schneider as the graduate assistant on a website analysis project through the Research Foundation at SUNYIT.
  • I was employed by the Mohawk Regional Information Center in Verona, NY. The Mohawk Regional Information Center works with 52 school districts in Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, and Herkimer Counties. I worked primarily with teachers in Herkimer County to enhance education through the use of instructional technology.
  • I coordinated two curriculum committees that included teachers from many of the 52 districts. I was also a member of the curriculum council in Herkimer County.
  • I organized a technology symposium that was held on December 6th 2005 to highlight exemplary teachers throughout the five counties who effectively integrate technology to enhance student learning and achievement.
• 9/2002-6/2005  High School Biology Teacher
  • I taught high school biology, marine biology, and earth science at Rome Free Academy. While working in Rome I was heavily involved in Living Environment curriculum development within the science department. I also was a member of a regional curriculum committee and worked to increase understanding of how to integrate technology into the science curriculum.
• 9/2001-7/2002  Young Scholars LPP Site Assistant
  • I worked for Utica College and the Young Scholars Liberty Partnerships Program at Senator James H. Donovan Middle School in Utica, NY. This
position allowed me to help ‘at risk’ junior high students in grades seven through nine to reach their academic potential. My responsibilities included supervising day and after school tutoring programs, tutoring students, coordinating half-day review sessions, coordinating community service projects for the students, and working closely with the faculty at Donovan to ensure that each student’s needs were met so that they could excel.

- **7/2001-8/2001 Environmental Curriculum Writing**
  - I worked with a biology teacher from Poland Central School to construct an environmental science module. We were awarded the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation Grant to write an interactive curriculum module that can be used by elementary, junior, and senior high teachers.

- **9/2000-7/2001 Young Scholars LPP Site Assistant/Teacher Liaison**
  - I worked for the Young Scholars LPP as a site assistant at T. R. Proctor High School in Utica, NY. This position allowed me to work with ‘at risk’ students in 10th through 12th grade. My responsibilities included tutoring students in all academic subjects, communicating with the faculty at T. R. Proctor High School to gather materials for regents review sessions that I organized and taught, attending academic conferences with the faculty to discuss the students’ progress and assess their needs, and to work closely with the faculty to ensure the their needs were met.

- **7-9/2000 Interpretive Naturalist**
  - I worked to create interpretive brochures for two nature trails in the Town of Russia. I worked directly with 14 high school students to designate the trail stops, research topics, and produce two self-guided trail brochures.

- **1999-2000 High School Science Tutor**
- **1999-2000 Customer Service Associate at UnitedHEALTHCARE**

**Honors:**
- SUNYIT 2007 IDT Faculty Award
- Graduated Magna Cum Laude, SUNY ESF
- Who’s Who Among American College Students
- New York State Outdoor Writers Association Scholarship

**Memberships:**
- Northeastern Anthropological Association
- Association of Internet Researchers
- International Society for Technology in Education
- Science Teachers Association of New York State
- New York State Association of Teachers
- New York State Outdoor Educators Association