PRESENTATION OF SELF AND THE PERSONAL INTERACTIVE HOMEPAGE:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF MYSPACE

A Thesis

by

JENNIFER LAUREN DAVIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2008

Major Subject: Sociology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,      Sarah Gatson
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ABSTRACT

Presentation of Self and the Personal Interactive Homepage: An Ethnography of

MySpace. (May 2008)

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Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective sees the world as a stage and social actors as the players (1959). Social actors partake in a series of dramatic performances to accomplish a certain stable social self. This idea has been built upon in recent years through the structural symbolic interactionist perspective, particularly with the work of Peter Burke's Identity Control Theory (2004). I hope here to continue to build upon the work of these theorists, as well as engage in a dialogue within the field of computer-mediated-communication (CMC). This work is at the nexus of social psychology and CMC studies. Contemporary technology has had great implications for many aspects of the social world and for interaction in particular. Since contemporary technologies impact interaction, and self construction is embedded in the interaction process, then it is important to look to at the theoretical implications of contemporary society's technological advances. I look ethnographically at MySpace, using participant observation and interview, to study how interaction and self presentation take place within the structure of the personal interactive homepage. My sample (N=97) is non-random and is drawn from my "Friends" list.

I argue that the personal interactive homepage provides a unique forum for interaction. I analyze the structure of the personal interactive homepage, and examine the ways in which users construct an ideal and still authentic self within this structure. Through a synthesis of these analyses, I am able to build upon presentation of self theories, arguing that the dimension of power can (and should) be included in understanding the presentation of self process. The extent, to which an actor can present an ideal self in light of varying degrees of negotiation, represents the actors' "power to present".

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Ziegen, Roscoe, and James.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION


In 1959 Erving Goffman wrote *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In this work Goffman outlines the dramaturgical perspective. This perspective sees the world as a stage and social actors as the players. Social actors partake in a series of dramatic performances to accomplish a certain stable social self. Goffman saw the self not as a possession of the actor but rather as "the product of dramatic interaction between actor and audience" (Ritzer &Goodman, 2004:224).

Contemporary technology has had profound implications for many aspects of the social world and for interaction in particular. Communication and interaction can now take place through mediums not yet thought of just fifty years ago, during the time of Goffman's writing. Through contemporary technologies such as the internet[1], actors can interact privately, in dyads, triads, and small groups, or in simultaneous mass communication. Spatial barriers can be transcended. Information can be more quickly and readily diffused. Actors can remain anonymous, or make themselves known. Since contemporary technologies impact interaction, and Goffman's theory is embedded in the interaction process, then it is important to look to at the theoretical implications of contemporary society's technological advances. My focus is on MySpace, a Personal Interactive Homepage (PIH), and I research how interaction has changed, and how this then implicates the process of self presentation.

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This thesis follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.
[1] I have chosen not to capitalize the "I" in internet. I make this decision because the capital "I" internet was created for a specific purpose (government use). Today the internet has become so commonplace that it no longer warrants a capitalization. For more in-depth discussion on this issue see Howard and Jones eds. 2004.

**MySpace**

   To fully understand the purpose of this study, it is essential first to have an understanding of MySpace.   MySpace is an interactive personal homepage. It is an online profile set up by a user (or users) mostly for purposes of social interaction. The profile can be seen as an all inclusive self-presentation of the user.  Each profile is represented by a *default* picture. This is one picture chosen by the user which will show up each time he or she interacts with another user. This is also the first picture to show up on the MySpace profile.

   A MySpace user has *friends*. These are other members of MySpace who the user allows to have full access to his or her site. A list of *friends* appears (each *friend* symbolized by his or her *default* picture) on the MySpace user profile. A designated number (usually either 8 or 16) are visible immediately on the profile (these are designated as the users' *top friends*), the rest can be accessed through a *view all friends* link. *Friends* can contact a user through either *messages* (private correspondences which are pretty comparable to e-mail), or through *comments*. *Comments* are short messages displayed upon the users' *wall*. The *wall* is a designated space on the profile where *comments* are openly displayed. The *comment* indicates who sent it by showing the persons name and *default picture*.  In addition to the *default picture*, there is also a spot to post unlimited pictures which can easily be accessed through a *pics* link at the top of the page. Users' *friends* can leave comments on pictures.

   The page also consists of a series of questions which the user answers about him or her self. These include a general "about me", as well as more specific questions about

music, movies, books, political views, educational and work information, sexual orientation, relationship status, zodiac sign, and future plans. The site includes a *blog* option. This is where users can post longer narratives. These can be updated and added by the user periodically. *Blogs* are used for a variety of purposes, including (among others) life updates, poetry, and rants. *Friends* are able to then comment on *blog* entries. *Postings* are short messages which the users can post for all *friends* to see. This is a way a user can communicate a message to his or her entire *friends list* at once. The post will show up for all of the users' *friends* the next time the *friends* sign on to MySpace. Each *posting* has an option for *friends* to reply. Finally, the profile can have a background chosen by the user. The profile can also include picture slide shows, movie clips, and a song list which plays as the profile is being viewed.

The reason that I chose to study MySpace as a medium for interaction and self-presentation is because it involves a unique sort of interaction. While many forms of online interaction can be analogous to off-line interactions (e.g. e-mail analogous to letter writing, instant messaging analogous to conversation), the PIH is not a "new version" of anything. Rather than a back and forth dialogue, it has more of a present and respond sort of structure. Multiple overt tools are being used by the profile creator in presenting him or her self. Interaction through MySpace uses these overt rather than covert forms of presentation (tools used in impression management). Further, MySpace allows the user to have a good deal of control over who receives his or he presentation. A user can present him or her self to a vast number of people at the same time, or only to a select group of others. It can be used as a mass media vehicle by opening the page to

everyone. Access to the users' presentation can also be limited by making the page

available only to those in the users' direct network.  I wish then to look at the theoretical

implications of these structural changes in the interaction and presentation processes.

2. THEORY

My research will be guided mainly by structural symbolic interactionism. Specifically, I will use Goffmans' *Dramaturgical Perspective* (1959) as well as Burke's *Identity Control Theory* (2004). While Goffman is often taken as a symbolic interactionist, he actually identified himself as more of a structuralist. Rather than seeing reality as constantly being created and re-created, he saw reality and identities being created through existing structures. Today Goffman would probably fit best in the field of structural symbolic interaction, where reality is seen as being created within the structure or the situation (Stryker 1980).

In his dramaturgical perspective, Goffman sees the self emerging through interaction between social actors and audience members (social others, or ones self, as actors can take themselves as object). His unit of analysis is not individuals, but rather interaction "teams" (1959) consisting of actor and audience. Each interaction can be seen as a performance where the actor and audience negotiate together to establish a stable self for the actor. Because the self is an outcome of negotiated interaction, each performance has potential for disturbance. Although most performances go undisrupted, dramaturgy looks at how disturbances are dealt with and avoided on the part of both actor and audience.

In interaction, the actor attempts to present a stable and consistent sense of self to the audience. The goal of the actor is to put forth a strong enough performance, and gain enough control over the audience that the audience will come to define the actors self as

the actor wishes his or her self to be defined. The tools of "impression management" (1959) are utilized to establish this power and control over the audience.  Impression management deals with methods and techniques utilized by actors to maintain the impression of a certain presented self in the face of instability and disturbance.

Goffman (1959) differentiates between the front stage and the back stage. The front stage is where the performance actually takes place. The back stage is where actors prepare (in private) for the front stage performance. It is important to keep audience members out of the back stage in order to maintain legitimacy in the front stage.

Of course, it is not simply an actor who performs, but an audience who negotiates with the actor producing a self and identity. All actors involved in an interaction have the power and ability to disrupt an interaction and reject a performance. Each actor is then dependent upon each other in defining the situation and producing a self.

A more contemporary theory for understanding the process of self-presentation and impression management can be found in Identity Theory. Identity can be seen as the set of meanings associated with a self. Identity Theory fits into the framework of structural symbolic interactionism, where actors and structures are seen as having a dialectical relationship. The actor is embedded within a structure. The structure then shapes the actor, while also being shaped by the actor (Stets 2006; Stryker 1980; Burke 1980).

Burke (2004) uses *identity control theory* (which developed from identity theory) to discuss the relationship between meaning (Burke and Tully1977) and behavior within

roles (Burke and Reitzes 1981). As noted above, identities involve a set of meanings. It is these meanings which then serve as a reference or identity standard for an actor (Burke 2004). The goal for an actor is to achieve identity verification. That is, for behavior to be perceived as congruent with the actors identity standard. This process is illustrated through a cybernetic model using a feedback loop (Burke 2004). This model has four components: 1.) the identity standard (the meaning of an identity for the actor), 2.) perceptual inputs of self relevant meaning of the situation, such as how the actor sees himself, or how others seem to be perceiving him (reflected appraisals), 3.) a comparison of perceptual inputs with the identity standard (comparator), and 4.) output into the environment (behavior) that is the outcome of the inputs/identity standard comparison (Burke 2004). The ultimate goal is reaching identity verification. That is, when situational inputs are congruent with internal identity standards. The goal then is to bring about meaning in a situation which coincides with meaning in an individual standard.

This is important, according to identity theory, because identity verification involves the potential for positive and negative emotion (Burke 2004). Simply achieving identity verification elicits positive emotion, whereas not achieving verification elicits negative emotion (Burke 2004). Essentially, actors present an identity. If verification is not met (if self-meanings of a situation do not match), then the actor will adjust behavior in order to restore the desired perception (Burke 2004).

These theories pertain to a negotiation between actors and audience in the process of establishing an identity. The actor is dependent upon the audiences' acceptance of his or her presentation. The audience is dependent upon the actor to act

within an established structure. When neither of these conditions are met, work must be done by actor and/or audience to repair the situation. In looking at interaction through PIHs, we can be guided by this framework. I seek to answer the question: *How does Self Presentation take place through the interaction medium of a personal interactive homepage?*

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Social construction of self and identity**

As discussed earlier, we can think of identities not as inherent to the individual, but as ongoing creations produced through social action and interaction. This study looks specifically at the self-construction process within the context of the PIH. Before delving into the works specifically pertaining to CMC, I will first examine the literature on self presentation and construction of identities.

Identities are not something that we have, but rather something that we "do". The idea of "accomplishing" identities was used to re-conceptualize the meaning of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987), and later to re-conceptualize the meanings of race and class, arguing that gender is necessarily not mutually exclusive from these domination statuses (West and Fenstermaker 1995). To accomplish gender, race, and class, we act and interact in a way which disguises the constructed identity as an essential identity. We can look for example, at Garfinkel's (1967) case study of a transsexual woman (Agnes) who was raised as a boy. Because she was not raised as a female, she had to learn to how to be female. This included not only learning how to dress, walk, talk and behave like a woman, but learning how to make her womanhood seem to be part of her essential nature. "Agnes's case makes visible what culture has made invisible-the accomplishment of gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987:131).

While the self is constructed through action and interaction, this construction is seen by structural symbolic interactionists as taking place within more stable patterns of behavior (social structure) (Stets 2006;Stryker 1980; 2000;Burke 1980;2004). Identity theory views the self as being made up of multiple identities. Stryker and Burke approach identities of the self from slightly different angles. The former focuses on the structural impacts on identity, while the latter focuses on the internal processes which elicit behavior.

Stryker (1980) understands these identities to be organized into a hierarchy, the more salient an identity, the more it is called upon to shape interaction. The salience of an identity is a function of commitment to that identity, which is embedded in the strength and depth of network ties which elicit the identity (Stryker 1980). Illustrative of the behavioral influence of identity salience, Yopyk and Prentice conducted an experiment which primed student athletes with either an athlete identity, a student identity, or no identity. The subjects were then asked to perform challenging mathematical tasks. Those primed with the athlete identity performed consistently lower than did those primed with the student identity. Those primed with no identity had varied performance levels (2005). In other words, subjects behaved in accordance with their most salient identity (either "student" or "athlete"). When the student identity was made more salient, the student athletes behaved in accordance with that identity (performing well on math tasks). Conversely, when primed with the athlete identity, student athletes were less likely to elicit the behaviors of a student (performing poorly on math tasks).

Burke (2004) understands the formation of identities as a more internal process. He contends that actors' own perceptions of an identity are called forth in particular situations. Actors seek to have an audience's definition of the actors' identity match the definition the actor applies herself. That is, the actor works to achieve identity verification, eliciting positive emotion. Burke has suggested ways of intertwining the different approaches to identity theory, such as understanding the impact of reaching identity verification upon salience and centrality in the identity hierarchy (2003).

After discussing the more recent developments in social construction of self theories, we now go back to the foundational work of Goffman to see how his work has been applied in contemporary sociology. Goffman's Presentation of self in everyday life (1959) has been utilized in a variety of settings. The theory has often acted as a framework to illuminate the actions and interactions of particular arenas, individuals and groups. The following are a few examples (of the many available) which illustrate the breadth of the application of Goffman's theory of self presentation.

Leblanc (2005) uses Goffman to discuss the interaction between members and non-members of the punk subculture. Nonmembers seek out "access information" (Goffman 1959) in order to construct their interactions with members of the punk subculture. Sigelman (2001) uses Goffman to examine the front stage and back stage personas, as well as impression management techniques of former United States presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. While quite different in the back stage, both presidents present a similar "presidential" persona during their major public appearances. Goffman has even been used to discuss bodily presentations through smell,

focusing on the maintenance of moral and social order by avoidance of foul bodily odor (Low 2006). A Goffmanian framework has also been widely applied to computer mediated communication and online interaction. That specific literature will be discussed in a later section of the literature review, after we look at computer mediated communication in general.

**Why study Computer Mediated Communication?**

New technologies have come to have a significant impact upon the ways in which we live our lives. Particularly of great significance for the social sciences are the ways in which new technologies have affected human interaction and communication. The field of *Computer Mediated Communication* (CMC) has developed around just these issues. CMC can be defined most simply as communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers (Herring 1996). This is often seen in contrast to the more traditional forms of interaction, both Face to Face (FtF) interaction, and other more mediated forms such as letter writing and one-to-many mass communication (e.g. newspapers, radio, film, and television) (Lengel et al. 2004).

It is curious that CMC is primarily contrasted with FtF because it assumes that FtF is the basis of traditional interaction. Michel Foucault discusses the concept of *technologies of the self.* Here he talks about how actors create a discourse for presenting themselves through the current technologies of the time. While the current "new" technology is computers, the previous technologies were letter writing, newspapers, and diaries (Martin et al. 1988). The point here is that although interaction and presentation are taking place through a new medium (CMC), *Face to Face* may not always be the

most appropriate baseline to measure against. That being said, much of the literature does use FtF as the baseline for comparison, and we will see this standard in much of the CMC literature.

It has also been pointed out that although interaction is taking place through a new medium, it is not necessarily all that different from what humans have always been doing. In reference to the internet and the new craze of studies in CMC, Lengel et al. state, "Sure, it's a pretty new, sophisticated technology, but what's really interesting about it is the way it's being used to do the same old totally natural thing: communication" (2004:9).

It is important to recognize that in examining CMC, we are studying only those with enough privilege to partake in the use of computer technologies. Availability of technology, education, and the social right to interact with others through technology are privileges afforded to a select group. The *Digital Divide* separates those cultures and communities with access to technological communication and those without. The *Technological have-nots* are typically living in poor countries or areas, or are members of disadvantaged groups (Nakamura 2003). In referring to advertising messages put forth by Microsoft and other information technology providers, Nakamura reminds us that networking technology is a commodity which defines "the privileged, industrialized first-world subject, and situates him in the position of the one who looks, the one who has access, the one who communicates" (2003:685).

Given that we are only looking at a privileged group, and examining how we are doing the "same old thing" (communication), then why is it important to study

interaction in the face of new technologies? One answer is that we can learn more about the nature of human communication when we look to see how it is affected by technologies. In the same vein, we can also learn more about communication technologies by observing the ways they affect, and are affected by, human social interaction. New technologies then, give a new means for interaction and self presentation. This will inevitably impact the ways in which we do the "same old thing". This process is not unidirectional, but dialectical. Technology will act to shape the ways in which we interact, and our interactions will shape the ways in which we use technologies. In turn, this may impact the relationships between actors and audiences.

**Impacts of technology**

The perceptions about the amount of impact new technologies have had upon our lives can be seen as falling on a continuum. *Technological determinism* is the idea that technology is the primary cause of changes at both the macro and micro levels (Chandler 1995). At the macro level, technology is seen as playing a significant role in structural and historical changes. At the micro level, it is seen as influencing social and psychological processes and the ways in which we use tools (Chandler 1995). On the opposite side of the spectrum, is *social constructivism*. This essentially turns technological determinism on its head. *Social constructivism* is the idea that technology is not deterministic. That is, technology does not shape actors, but actors shape technology and its uses (Winner 1993). Technology is not the cause of social change, but rather a tool used by actors within particular socio-historical contexts. Robert Kling (1996) takes a view that falls somewhere in between the two extremes of *technological*

*determinism* and *social constructivism*. Kling prefers the view of *social realism*, which places technology as neither causal, nor as merely a tool. Rather, technology and humans are seen to have a dialectical relationship, each acting upon, and shaping one another (Kling 1996).

**Technologies and communication**

There remains some debate as to how, and to what extent, online interaction differs from self presentation through face to face interaction. Sproull and Kiesler make the argument that online interaction produces a deficit in social cues. In particular they discuss the Reduced Social Cues model (Sproull and Kiesler1986; Kiesler and Sproull, 1992). This model is concerned with the negative impacts of CMC on group dynamics. The model claims that the lack of social cues (which are present in face to face interaction) lead to less fluidity and more required effort in online interaction. Further, there is lowered inhibition and a looser set of social norms. This can lead to "disinhabition," which is "Any behaviour that is characterized by an apparent reduction in concern for self presentation and the judgment of others" (Joinson, 1998: 44).

Lengel et al. argue that this model is too technologically deterministic. Technology alone cannot be held accountable for more aggressive behavior, or less adherence to social norms (2004). The model of *reduced social cues* was created in the earlier days of CMC study. Since then, many scholars have found evidence contrary to this model .That is, online interaction does not necessarily reduce social cues, it merely adapts to them to the new context.

Walther (1996) actually argues that interpersonal communication can be improved through CMC. He refers to this improvement as *hyperpersonal communication*. Through the internet, groups can form with like interests, allowing individuals to interact purposively with others of like minds. It is further argued that due to the anonymity of CMC, presentation of self can be optimized. An actor can present him or herself more so as he or she wishes. More specifically, physical appearance is taken out of the equation, allowing actors to feel more comfortable and relaxed. Finally, in CMC actors have a much longer time to think about what it is they wish to communicate. In an e-mail for example, an actor can take the time to plan out exactly the message he or she wishes to convey (Walther 1996).

Of course, the elimination of physical appearance from online interaction only includes interaction where pictures are not presented. Whitty (2007) points out that in interaction through online dating websites, physical appearance is quite important. For many of the participants she interviewed, looks were the *most* important thing. Because of this, many members of the dating site put considerable effort into choosing which pictures of themselves to display.

Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006) agree with the thesis of online interaction providing a forum for hyperpersonal communication. They examine presentation of self in online dating profiles by interviewing a national nonrandom sample of internet dating website users. Online dating experiences are compared and contrasted with dating in the context of face to face. It was found that online dating, as compared with face to face dating, involved fewer cues, an increased ability to manage self-presentation, and the

increased need to establish credibility. In addition, the anticipation of meeting face to face had a positive relationship with self disclosure (Ellison Gibbs and Heino 2006).

Tanis et al. (2007) looked at the affect of *cues to identity* in CMC. It was found that although cues found in face to face interaction do make the interaction more personal, this does not necessarily make the interaction more satisfying. Rather, they found that while cues to identity positively impacted perceptions of interpersonal interaction, they negatively affected the perceptions of solidarity. That is, the interaction was perceived positively, but a strong connection was not felt. Online interaction was different from offline, and online communication was less functional in creating a connection or a bond between the actors participating in the interaction

Conversely, Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, and Smallwood (2006) found there to be little differences between online and offline interaction patterns. In a study of adolescents using *socially interactive technologies* (SIT's), it was found that relationships online had little impact upon offline social interaction (Bryant et al. 2006). It was found that adolescent users of SIT's were neither creating more, nor weaker ties. Further, those who were socially isolated in offline social settings were less likely to use SIT's. There was also very little overlap between social networks facilitated through SIT's and offline social networks. In addition, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found that self-disclosure and self expression in adolescent blogs mirrored the self-disclosure and self-expression in reality. The argument of these two studies then, is that there is little difference between online and offline action and interaction. Rather, online interaction is merely an extension of offline personas.

**Identity formation and self presentation through CMC**

As discussed above, Goffman's presentation of self in everyday life (1959) has been widely used in understanding the action, interaction, and self construction processes in many arenas. The internet is no exception. Here we look at the ways in which the Goffmanian view of self presentation has been utilized to understand CMC, and how CMC has been utilized by actors in the presentation of self process.

Through online interaction, actors are given the opportunity to explore the complex multiplicities of the self. Identity play is the creation of an entirely new identity, or purposive highlighting of certain aspects of ones own identity. Individuals often have multiple screen names, web pages, and e-mail addresses representing different aspects of themselves (Lengel et al 2004). *Symbolic markers* are tools people use in presenting themselves. It is analogous to Goffman's (1959) *props* which are used as a covert means of presenting some identity. A symbolic marker in online interaction can be as simple as an e-mail address. The inclusion of "edu" or "org" helps to contextualize the actor (Lengel et al 2004).

As new technologies impact the ways in which people interact and communicate, they may also influence self presentation and identity formation. Today, the internet and CMC can be seen as a salient means for creating and negotiating our identities (Chandler 1998). The internet not only gives us another medium for creating our identities, but offers the potential for creating a different kind of self. Web based communication opens up opportunities to interact with a much wider network and become a part of various groups with various identities linked to them (Chandler 1998).

Miller (1995) questions the utilization of Goffman in understanding CMC. He argues that in face to face interaction we are generally aware of the context of the interaction. We have information which allows us to "frame" (Goffman 1974) the interaction, so that all parties involved know how to interpret the situation. Alternately, looking at someone's web page carries the risk of taking the interaction out of context. The viewer may not have gotten to the page through the expected channels, and may be interpreting the information in a manner contradictory to the producers' intentions. However, empirical studies show users of CMC utilizing the internet to construct, negotiate, and reify identities, position, and presentations. The context of various internet sites act as a structure within which these negotiations, constructions, and re-constructions take place (Gatson and Zweerink 2004).

Herrmann (2007), talks about the discursive practices of company stockholders in a financial cyber space. This study shows how cyberspace can be a forum for identity construction through interaction and discourse. The stockholders use the medium of cyberspace to partake in discourse which constructs masculine identities within this particular setting.

Giordano et al. (2007) look experimentally at the ability to deceive others about having a hidden agenda, and the satisfaction of actors in online and face to face interaction. They found first, that online interaction (taking place through instant messenger) provided more satisfaction in the interaction than did face to face interaction. Perhaps more importantly, it was found that those interacting online were better able to deceive than in face to face negotiations. The importance of this finding is the idea of

power in online interaction. According to theories of presentation of self, there is a tension in creating a self that is both ideal and authentic. Increasing the deception abilities of the actor, may give actors more power to present the reality (or identity) that they wish to present.

Walther, Slovacek, and Tidweel (2001) examine the importance of visual pictures of actors interacting through CMC. They note that actors can be rather strategic in their presentation. This is enabled by CMC, which allows actors to have more control over their presented identities. Because of this, new relationships, and stronger relationships are able to develop that may not have taken place with face-to-face interaction. "Online communicators may exploit the capabilities of text-based, nonvisual interaction to form levels of affinity that would be unexpected in parallel offline interactions" (Walther et al., 2001:110). While pictures did increase affection in short term interactions, the pictures lessened the "ideal" images of interaction partners over the long term.

Turkle (1995) views the online identity construction as working to produce a post-modern way of thinking. Rather than the need for a unified identity, multiplicity of self is embraced. Virtual and offline self are not differentiated, but meshed in a postmodern way, neither more real than the other. Robinson (2007) argues against the postmodernist thesis in dealing with cyber identities. She argues that the postmodern accounts are based on studies of multi-user domains (MUDS) and then generalized to the rest of cyberspace. Robinson's data shows that MUD users are no longer the majority of cyberspace users. Further, she argues that a symbolic interactionist perspective

(specifically utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Mead and Goffman) gives us a better understanding of contemporary "cyberself-ing" (2007). "I find that in creating online selves, users do not seek to transcend the most fundamental aspects of their offline selves. Rather, users bring into being bodies, personas, and personalities framed according to the same categories that exist in the offline world" (Robinson, 2007: 94).

Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002) examine the ability to portray one's "true self" and one's "actual" self through online interaction versus face to face interaction. The former being the internal and natural self, the latter being the present characteristics expressed to others. They found that interaction online allowed for the exposure of more "true self" qualities than did face to face interaction. Online interaction allowed the "true self" to be more easily accessed, while face to face interaction allowed the "actual self" to be more easily accessed. This is not surprising, as Miller (1995) points out; there is less pressure for avoiding embarrassment in online vs. face to face interaction.

Whitty (2007) also applies Goffman as a framework to look at online dating site users. Through interviews, the study sought to understand how individuals presented themselves through their profiles, and how they interact with potential dates based upon the other members' profiles. The majority of participants reported embellishing their self presentation in order to more successfully attract potential dates. This indicates reflexivity in presentation, where the presenters create their presentation with the gaze of the audience in mind. Despite the act of embellishment in participants' presentations, dating site users also reported being upset and surprised when an offline meeting did not

meet the expectations put forth on someone's profile. While members of the dating site used the absence of physical presence as an opportunity to present an ideal self, they apparently expected a more "authentic" presentation from others (Whitty 2007).

Chandler (1998) discusses personal homepages as a unique way of self presentation. Personal web pages are often constructed and reconstructed, which is essentially acting to construct and reconstruct the identity of the page creator. These identities are created through what he refers to as *bricolage*. This is a collage of personal biographical information, including photographs, stories, biographical information, and various other symbolic markers all used in constructing the users self. He also notes, however, that despite the time, effort, thought and energy put into personal web pages, they often go unseen except by the author. Although authors create home pages (and identities) with the presentation of themselves in mind, it is often only the author who views and is affected by the presentation of the homepage.

Miller (1995) argues that the homepage allows for a presenter to present a less inhibited version of herself. The lack of face to face contact cuts down on the fear of the embarrassment, which Goffman (1959) indicates is a strong force of social control.

> Others may find your Web page ridiculous, but you probably won't be aware of it. Those others who might be prompted to find ways to mend your presentation to reduce their own embarrassment in a face-to-face encounter are unlikely to feel pressure to smooth over the interaction between themselves and a Web page. So, in two senses, it is easy to make a fool of yourself on the Web: there is little to stop you doing it, but doing it will cause you little pain (Miller 1995:3).

Robinson (2007) sees the personal homepage as part of the self-ing process. It is an expression of the self that anticipates the audiences' reception of this presentation.

The creation of a personal homepage is a process of reflexivity by the creator. Using the language of Mead and Goffman, Robinson states:

> The cyberself is the emergent product of social interaction in which the self masters the ability to be both the subject and object of interaction. In this way, cyberself-ing creates the virtual 'I/me' couplet. Online, the homepage allows the 'I' to present the self to the cyberother; in fact, the very construction of the homepage presumes the expectation of the virtual 'generalized other'. In Goffmanian terms, the 'I' constructs the homepage with expressions given by choosing text, photos, and digital formatting with the other's reaction in mind. The 'I' solicits the other's gaze through links to email, tabs to post comments, hit counters, and membership in webrings. Each of these indicate the 'I's' expectation of the other's presence and eventual appraisal. Once the 'I' perceives the cyberother's reaction, this reflexive constitution produces the cyberme' (2007:104).

**Race, class and gender online**

As with all social phenomena, internet use and self presentation do not take place within a social vacuum. Impacting the ways people use the internet, the ways people present themselves, and the ways people present themselves using the internet, are issues of race, class, gender, and the intersectionality of the three. In other words, to understand the dependent variable of presentation of self online, we must take into consideration the independent variables of race, class, and gender.

Nakamura (2003) discusses the white, wealthy assumption in technology use. She reminds us that the resources and communication tools provided by new technologies can only be used by those for whom the resources are available. This assumption then leaves out many racial and ethnic minorities, those residing in less developed parts of the world, those of lower socio-economic status, and those with lower educational attainment.

Whitty, (2007) in her discussion about the members of an online dating service, points out differences between men and women in their constructions of self through their personal dating profiles. Because the initial encounter takes place online (rather than in person), the creators of the dating profiles have the option of embellishing themselves in order to appear more attractive. The areas in which men and women embellish are indicative of the characteristics the dating site users understand to be valued by the opposite sex. She finds that men are more likely to be dishonest about their height, while women are more likely to include a photograph than men, misrepresent their physical appearance by using an outdated picture, or posting glamour shots, and are more likely to include information about interests and activities. Interestingly, she finds no significant differences between men and women in the characteristics they report to be looking for and find attractive in a partner. The men and women in this study are reflexively creating profiles with gendered biases, even though these biases are not empirically substantiated. That is, they are presenting themselves under the false assumption that men will look for different things in women (attractiveness) than women look for in men (large size, strength).

Miller and Arnold (2000) use a Goffmanian framework to conduct a content analysis of professional personal homepages, examining gender differences. Not only did they find gendered imagery (flowers and scenic settings for women, computer screens, plain backgrounds for men), but they also noted several differences in men's and women's cues to identity. Men appeared much more confident through their pages, while women were more unassuming and felt the need to legitimate their position of

authority. "So for women expecting to be found via the home page 'front door', they present themselves as open, friendly and smiling (with a suitable picture), but also accompanied by a full CV or list of honours, degrees, titles or membership of esteemed professional bodies" (Miller and Arnold 1998:2).

McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, and Saliani (2007) look at the ways transnational youth use the internet and engage in internet culture. Through communication web pages, the transnational youth in the study are able to construct complex identities which associate the actors with more than one culture. In using online communication sites, geographic barriers are broken down, allowing for relationships to exist across borders, and allowing users to participate in multilingual literacies. Moreover, participants utilized their pages to display political messages pertaining to their own ethnicities. For example, one participant posted pro-immigration messages, while another responded in her blog to a newspaper article about fighting in Israel. The authors suggest that "these technological sites are important and dynamic representational spaces for youth to engage in transformative literacy practices and identity work. We also suggest that they allow youth to engage in transborder and multilingual literacies, and to construct identities beyond bounded national identities" (2007:2).

Leung (2003) looks at the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the personal homepage. Her study looks at the ability of personal web pages to help represent the experiences and identities of ethnic minorities. Homepages created opportunity for the producers to situate themselves within a particular ethnic group and

to adequately display the complexities of embodying an ethnic or gendered identity. The particularity of homepages, however, distract from the presentation of larger ethnic themes.

> For those who participate in their production, the Web enables the portrayal of complex ethnicities and identities, as well as resistance to traditional modes of ethnic representation. Paradoxically, for those consuming home pages, they are problematic tools of representation because of their particularity: They become simply another means of looking at and listening to others, never quite able to nor wanting to articulate the broader themes connecting communities. In short, they embody the tensions between the individual, the communal, the biographical and auto/biographical in the construction of ethnicity and identity (Leung 2003:13).

Nakamura (2002) contends with the suggestion that online interaction is "liberating" for minorities. Rather than taking race out of the equation, online interaction often acts to solidify racial stereotypes and categorizations. Those who do not indicate a race or ethnicity are assumed to be white. Minority races and ethnicities played out in "MUDS" and "MOO's" are often stereotypical. Far from the fluid postmodern identity capabilities talked about by Turkle (1995), these racial stereotypes or "cybertypes" are built into online interaction, narrowly defining, categorizing, and stereotyping racial and ethnic minorities (Nakamura 2002).

**The Personal Interactive Homepage**

The PIH is a relatively new phenomenon. This means there has been little work done specifically on the topic. Much of the literature on the topic is found not in academic journals, but in popular publications. Academic articles written about the PIH have been generally more applied than basic. In addition, many of the academic works that do discuss PIHs only do so within the context of CMC in general. That is, they look

at MySpace or Facebook as one source of interaction among many, rarely looking at the

PIH as a unique interactional forum.

Certainly, popular publications are held to a different standard and have different

aims and audiences than do peer reviewed academic journals. These publications,

however, can still be quite informative, illuminating a public view of the PIH.

Wheaton, (2007) using a voluntary survey of *Advertising Age* subscribers, reports

that 61% of respondents don't believe that MySpace and Facebook profiles accurately

represent the people behind the pages. The misrepresentations on PIH's however, are

seen by some as being no different than the presentation of self mechanisms utilized in

face to face interaction (Popova, 2007).

> When you think about it, it's more similar to the kind of infofudging that goes on
> at a dinner party-saying, for example, "Yeah, 'The Da Vinci Code' was just
> phenomenal" when you never even read it. It's the same concept as building
> yourself a certain image and presenting it to your friends. People do this in "real
> life." It's human nature. It doesn't mean it's not reflective of reality just because it
> takes place on a digital platform" (2007:18).

Taking a different approach, Hall (2007) contends that parents can better

understand their children and adolescents by looking at their MySpace and Facebook

pages. Hall contends that adolescents MySpace and Facebook profiles might act as a

window into which parents can look to see the "inner souls" of their adolescents (2007).

In the academic realm, works on the PIH have been largely exploratory and in an

applied vein. Riley (2007) lays out tips to ensure safety when using communication web

pages such as MySpace and Facebook. Hinduja and Patchin (2007) look quantitatively at

the risk of disclosure for youth on MySpace within the context of internet safety. They

conclude that the majority of adolescents are using the web responsibly, and there is an over emphasis on the dangers of PIHs.

An experimental study of the impact of teacher self-disclosure on Facebook upon classroom climate and student motivation found mixed results (Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds 2007). Students were asked to look at Facebook pages of potential teachers and then anticipate their motivation levels, learning ability, and the classroom climate in that teachers' classroom. Greater self-disclosure led students to anticipate positive classroom environments and high motivation levels. At the same time, concerns arose about the credibility of teachers who self-disclose greater amounts. The final suggestion of the work is that teachers utilize Facebook, but maintain a profile that is consistent with their professional manner.

Some recent CMC literature does take the PIH into account, but only as one type of CMC among many. In looking at the uses of online communication sites by transnational youth, McGinnis et. al. (2007) examine MySpace profiles, blogs, and other sites of communication, as they are utilized in identity construction. Only two MySpace profiles were examined, and each was used quite differently. One research subject saw MySpace as mostly a social outlet, and relied more on his blog to express and construct his identity. Alternately, the MySpace page of the other participant displayed messages about her political activism, allowing her to construct messages about her political beliefs and transnational identity. Both Leung (2003) and Robinson (2007) include MySpace and Facebook as two types of homepages among others informing their studies. While these authors do take PIH's into consideration, they do so under the

assumption that PIH's are analogous to other forms of CMC. This assumption is not one I agree with, but more importantly, the PIH is still new, and uncultivated by researchers. It is then premature to make such assumptions.

Though thin, academic literature examining the rich social and communicative aspects of the PIHs does exist. Gooding, Locke, and Brown (2007) conduct a content analysis of a text based exchange between MySpace users. They tell us that in these virtual communities, shared symbols, a shared sense of space, and in particular a shared past, are important for successful interaction and identity formation.

Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) assess the impact of Facebook upon various forms of social capital. The study showed a positive relationship between Facebook usage and social capital. Not only was Facebook shown to positively impact these factors of social capital, but there was also a positive relationship with mental well being. Of course, these are not causal models, merely relationships, so the authors' claims about the "benefits" of Facebook may be premature. They can, however, claim that Facebook (or more generally the PIH) plays an integral role in the attainment and maintenance of social capital.

Valkenburg, Jochen, and Schouten (2006) look at the impact of social networking sites (PIH) upon self esteem. An indirect effect was found between frequency of PIH use and self-esteem. Amount of feedback adolescents received on the site was also an indicator of self-esteem. The direction of the impact was a function of the nature of the feedback. Not surprisingly, Positive feedback had a positive impact upon self-esteem, while negative feedback decreased self-esteem.

**Where do we go from here?**

As we have now seen, the fields of computer mediated communication and presentation of self have themselves been well explored. Similarly, the theoretical use of presentation of self has been aptly applied to the world of online interaction. The literature thus far has been very useful in illuminating how presentation of self takes place within a variety of arenas, including the online arena. There are two places, however, where the literature does not go.

The first gap in the literature is within the realm of computer mediated communication. While there have been multiple studies on the personal homepage, there have been few academic studies that I have found on the PIH (MySpace, Facebook, Friendster etc.). Most of the work done on the PIH have been business-oriented articles (see Ante 2007; Lehman 2007; Kharif and Lackshman 2007) and/or in popular publications. While the work that has been done is important, the PIH has yet to be entered fully into the conversations of social scientists and CMC scholars. I argue that that the PIH is a unique form of interaction, not analogous to earlier forms of interaction (letter writing, conversation, etc.). The PIH then is important to look at for two reasons. First, it is a form of CMC and so should be explored to understand how it compares and contrasts with other forms of CMC. Secondly, if my argument is correct, and the PIH truly is a unique form of interaction, then it should be examined for the ways it impacts communication and interaction in general.

The second place the literature needs building is in the theoretical area of presentation of self. While numerous studies utilize this theory, and apply it to a vast

array of situations, the theory remains unchanged. Authors use Goffman's presentation of self theory to illuminate various situations, but don't take the next step, which would be to pull from those situations the places where the theory doesn't fit. At this point, a truly beneficial sociological use of presentation of self theory needs not only to use it to explain some social phenomena, but needs to use the social phenomena to build back upon the theory.

In this study of the PIH I hope to address these two areas of the literature that I have argued need improvement. Working from a structural symbolic interactionist framework, I will show the structure of interaction and presentation of self on MySpace, noting how presentation of self takes place, and how it differs from original presentation of self theory. I will next discuss the methods used by MySpace users in creating and maintaining a self that is both ideal and authentic. Finally, in accordance with my own advice, I will attempt to build upon presentation of self theory, adding the dimension of power to the process of self presentation.

4. METHODS

I have used ethnographic methods to better understand the process of self-presentation through the new medium of personal interactive home pages.  I primarily used participant observation, observing others' pages and the ways in which MySpace users interact and work to create an identity.  I also utilized unstructured interviews with participants in my study. Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and done over instant messenger. Because of the informal nature of instant messenger, many participants wrote informally, paying little attention to spelling and grammar. I kept the grammar unchanged.

My sample is non-random and consists of the members in my current MySpace network who are over the age of 18 (N=96) (The overall N of Myspace users, as of September 2007, is 199,901,916). The demographic makeup of the sample is predominately white (89%) and female (71%). I have been unable to get MySpace to provide official demographic statistics, but Hargittai (2007) has collected demographic information for MySpace users ages 18-29. I will use this as my bases for comparison. According to her findings, 60% of MySpace users are women., 44% are White non-hispanic, 25.2% Hispanic, 8.2 % African American, 21.3% Asian American, and 1.3 % Native American. Based on these statistics, we can see that my sample is disproportionately female, and even more disproportionately White, as compared with the larger MySpace population. Although the sample is biased in these ways, it can still be quite useful. The purpose of this ethnography is exploration into a field and a set of

ideas. While we must be careful about generalizing these findings, we can use them as a

starting point and an impetus for further explanatory research.

Ruber points out that the use of purely ethnographic methods for studying

technological social phenomena may be problematic. What is able to be included as data

is limited to what the researcher deems readable, writable, and analyzable (1995). With

this in mind, I have included quantitative descriptive data on the participants. These data

includes sex, number of "friends[2]", number of pictures posted, and number of blog

entries. This data was taken upon the first analysis of each page and again at the

conclusion of the study. The two numbers were averaged together for a more complete

quantitative picture. The limitation of taking this data at only 2 points in time is that

besides sex, all other numbers are constantly in flux. That is, users are often posting new

pictures, adding new friends, and writing new blogs (and in some instances removing

pictures, friends or blogs). Data averaged for each member from the first and last profile

viewing, I hope, will most accurately depict quantitatively the profiles which I will

otherwise be qualitatively describing (see Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive data for MySpace profiles

| | Mean | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Friends | 158.86 | 25 | 847 |
| Number of Pictures | 70.29 | 1 | 842 |
| Number of Blogs | 1.90 | 0 | 5* |

*5 Is the maximum number of blogs that can be displayed on a MySpace page

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[2] I place "friends" in quotations only because "friends" are a function of MySpace. This in no way indicates a value judgment on the extent to which MySpace relationships constitute real friendships.

MySpace is a semi-public domain. This means that information on personal pages can legitimately be viewed (and studied) by the public. MySpace users, however, have the option of making their pages "private". This means that only those inside the users' network have access to information on the page. As my sample will consist only of other users inside my network, I have full access to the information displayed on their MySpace profiles. Users were notified via *posting* (a message posted to all members in my network) that I would be studying MySpace profiles in my network. Included in this posting, I offer the option for members to withdraw themselves from the sample. I received no requests for removal from the sample. This received approval from the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (appendix A).

The use of ethnographic methods is beneficial for this type or research, as the area is somewhat new, and constantly changing. This leaves much to be understood about what is really going on with the social uses of computer technology. Ethnography allows the researcher to understand processes and situations from the viewpoint of the actors involved. This is particularly useful in a field which is still somewhat in its' infancy. Lengel et al. (2004) defend this claim

> When scholars step away from lab-based experiments, and step into the real world to conduct studies of what ordinary people are doing in CMC, then allegations about CMC being necessarily impersonal and cold are easily put to rest. In fact, whatever your intuitions may tell you, and despite what you already know, it's always important to observe what people do and to find out how people feel about what they're doing (2004).

Ethnographic research must always deal with issues of ethics and anonymity (Gandy 1995). In the case of this research, the general site (MySpace) is not anonymous. On the contrary, it is the site itself which is an essential part of the study. Gatson and

Zweerink (2004) discuss the issue of anonymity in ethnographic research. Their studies

of *The Bronze* (an online community based around a television show) leave the website

easily recognizable. This approach is defended because the site is a public domain. Users

are aware that interactions in this forum are public, and so are available to anyone who

wishes to visit the community. Similarly, a lack of disguise for MySpace remains ethical

because MySpace is a semi-public domain, with a great deal of controllable and chosen

access to the public.

Ethics in this study become more complex in dealing with the anonymity of

specific subjects. In establishing trust, I was open with all participants about my

objectives in studying and reporting on profiles. Further, as mentioned above, users have

the option of making their profiles open to the public, or private, only to be seen by

others in the users' immediate network. If one were to have the inclination to search for

a participant in the study, they would only have luck in viewing the users' page if the

user had set his or her page to be open to the public.

5. ANALYSIS

**Structure**

Structural symbolic interactionism, as indicated by the name, understands the creation of self and identity to occur within the structure of a situation. I have argued that self presentation and interaction take place in a unique way through the medium of the PIH. It therefore follows that within a unique structure, the ways we act, interact, and construct our selves and identities may be impacted. This structure combines the deliberate (and often ongoing) construction and presentation of a personal homepage, and incorporates interaction. The page allows for one-to-one communication (Instant Messaging, messaging) and allows for one-to-many communication (The page itself, wall posts, blogs, bulletins). The first task then, is to examine the structure of the PIH to see how this structure facilitates interaction and self presentation. Looking at MySpace, I will analyze how the structure of this interaction medium is similar to and diverges from previously established structures within which presentation of self takes place.

Through my analysis, I have found that MySpace does provide a unique structure within which interaction and self construction can take place. This structural uniqueness, however, is not extreme. Rather, the structure of the PIH incorporates old ways of self presentation with new ones. I will discuss each aspect of the PIH structure that differentiates it from earlier theoretical understandings, also showing how current theories are still applicable. The message of this section then, is that the PIH, with its'

unique structure, can help us illuminate ways in which current presentation of self theories can be utilized and built upon.

There are four structural aspects of interaction and self presentation on. Of course there are many ways in which people interact and self present through this medium, but I argue that these four structural aspects encompass most types of interaction. Further, these categories help us address the similarities and divergences of this particular structure and its sub-structures within which presentation of self is currently understood. First, presentation is overt rather than covert. That is, people are *telling* rather than *showing* who they are. Second, conversational forms of interaction (telephone, face to face, instant messenger etc.) produce a strong two way negotiation, while MySpace facilitates a presentation created prior to negotiation. Third, presentation can be accomplished not only by the actor herself, but also through MySpace profiles of others. Finally, the structure of MySpace allows for the isolation of identity. That is, the ability to take the overt, pre-packaged presentation out of context, or for the presenter to deliberately place the presentation within a particular context.

*Covert to Overt*

Goffman discusses the ways in which actors present themselves by using props and settings (1959). It is with these tools that the actor shows who he or she is. Goffman differentiates between expressions 'given' and expressions 'given off'. Understanding that actors will often present themselves in an ideal light, audience members differentiate between overt assertions ('given') and expressions an actor has less control over ('given off') to better determine the actors authentic self (Goffman 1959). A teacher does not tell

her students that she is legitimate, but dresses in professional clothing, carries a briefcase, and appears prepared for lecture. Similarly, a wealthy person doesn't (typically) tell her pen pal (or e-mail pal) how much she makes, but talks about her beach house, or attending a private school. These are covert ways of *showing* who a person is. Actors rely upon shared symbols in hopes of achieving identity verification (Burke 2004).

Through MySpace, actors are given a template to overtly *tell* the audience who they are. The process is indeed similar to that of putting up a personal homepage, but the difference is that this personal homepage is interactive. This is a structure set up for interaction based in overt presentation.

Who a person is can be seen in the boxed categories which each MySpace user is asked to fill in. Looking at a MySpace page tells us in the actor's own words her gender, religion, income, sexual orientation, favorite movies, favorite music, political views, height, weight, geographic origins, educational attainment, current mood, schools attended, occupation, companies, favorite books, heroes, drinking habits, smoking habits, race, ethnicity and the rank order of her "Friends" In addition, the MySpace actor can fill out any other general information about himself in the "about me" and "general" sections.

The "about me" section itself varies in length. Some users such as *James Babson* simply tell the audience to "just ask". On the other extreme, actors can overtly talk about themselves in detail, telling the audience in one segment what would likely take significant time and effort (and much negotiation, which I will discuss more below) to

show them. Contrasting *James Babson's* simple "just ask", we can look at *Meghan*

*Sullivan Thompson*'s lengthy, detailed, and overt self presentation from her "about me"

section.

> i am spirited. I am intense, and emotional, and passionate. all of these aspects of my personality make it possible for me to love more then anyone else in the world. And therefore, Mark will be loved more then anyone else ...EVER! i am complicated. I am a sweet girl with a vicious bite. i love people and i hate people. i would do anything for my friends, whom i love with all of my heart. i have a lot of pride. im independent. I am very strong, I believe in myself and I don't let anyone tell me what I can and can not do, yet I am very fragile, I take things very personally and my heart breaks on a daily basis about things that may not even have to do with me. i love knowing that i can take care of myself. i am sensitive and get hurt easily, but i bounce back fast and forgive anyone who wants me too. i dont hold grudges against people for their mistakes unless there was malicious intent behind it, in which case they no longer exist to me. i have a bad temper, i get heated very easily. i am passionate and emotional, i fight hard for what i believe in and will fight to the death for things others would see as insignificant. i am unfaltering in my opinions, most of the time. yet i love to debate, or even argue. i will fight for the sake of argument. i will get heated over a 3rd grade sports game which means that i would get ridiculous about anything and everything that crosses my path. i make my thoughts known loudly and wildly as many times as i see fit i dont understand why people pretend to be someone that they are not. i believe that people can not be loved for the person they pretend to be, only for who they really are, so if you dont be yourself no one can ever love you or even like you, because you haven't given them a chance to get to know you. i think that people who pretend have a lot of growing up to do, and if you try and be sensitive to them, they will never learn that they must grow up to be happy. i believe that sometimes you must be cold and harsh in order to help someone...and pushing them away, can be the best thing for them. and yet i believe that no one should judge other people for what they do, because it is impossible to know what other people are going through or what they have been through, and in this world, that could mean things that our imagination cant even imagine. im not afraid of anything or anyone. i wear my heart and my mind on my sleeve. i dont fall in love easily. i never believed in true love or marriage, not until I met the best man in the whole world, i am in love for the first, and what i believe is the last time, my heart belongs to him and only him, always and forever. i am more in love then i ever believed that i could be. i never believed that falling in love was an accomplishment or could ever satisfy me. i never thought that a man could make me happy, or that i should rely on a man too. But I have come to realize that we can go through life seeing the world in one way, and completely convinced that our opinions about the world are the correct one,

and then BOOM, we are hit by a flood of realization, that everything we have thought and believed was wrong, and in one second the most amazing thing happens, we prove ourselves wrong….which is one of the most amazing things about life, you never know what might happen next, and even if it completely shakes your world, it could be the best thing to ever happen to you, especially if you never expected that it would. It is important to me that when people look at me that they see how intelligent and strong i am, that when they look at me they see ME. One of the most important woman to ever walk this earth was marie curie, she is inspirational to people around the world and she shows us that this isn't a mans world, and that anything we want to do, we can, as long as we go after it, the things we want wont just be handed to you, you have to go out and get them. my wish is that more women would grab life by the horns and go after what they want, and not let anyone stand in their way. i didnt believe that happiness was more then a fleeting moment, but now that i have fallen in love, i believe that happiness can be so much more, it can last for days or weeks and years without even a glimpse of sadness, anger or surrender. that it is a constant cloud hovering over my head, that makes me unable to stop smiling. i am imperfect in the most perfect way. i wouldnt choose to be any different.

The point is not that some people talk more about themselves than others, or that *all* MySpace users are overtly presenting themselves,  but that the structure of MySpace facilitates the overt presentation, providing a template for actors to overtly disclose who they are (or who they want to present themselves as).

All of this being said, it should be noted that covert presentation of self (showing) does take place through MySpace, just as overt (telling) presentation of self takes place in face to face interaction. An actor may wear a t-shirt labeled "Republican", overtly stating his political affiliation, or decide to tell someone how much money he makes. A teacher might overtly point out to her students that her position is superior to theirs. The difference, however, is in degrees. Whereas a t-shirt does indeed point out overtly part of an actor's identity, (in this case his political affiliation) the actor is only

overtly telling the audience about that one piece of his identity. The rest of his presentation remains covert.

Just as face-to-face interaction can sometimes be overt, MySpace presentations can sometimes be covert. Drawing on Goffman, Robinson discusses the issue of covert presentation of self online. She points out that "since social actors must establish their identities online without relying on the embodied cues normally available in the offline world, attentiveness to primarily textual cues is necessary to read digital expressions 'given off'" (2007:105). Indeed, actors presenting themselves through MySpace use covert tactics along with overt ones. Covert presentation can be seen on MySpace through the songs playing on actors' page, the background displayed on the page, and the pictures they choose to post. Even the overt categories can have covert undertones. *Dan* for example explains during his interview that he includes movies in his "movies" section which he feels portray him as funny and masculine. *It's good to be a Romero* reports using her "Top Friends" section to covertly show her audience that she is selective about whom she is friends with.

> *It's good to be a Romero:*"it [my "Top Friends" section] says that I am picky with whom my loved ones are because I only have a top 4 friends other people have like top 18 friends or more, it's funny  I only have four, the best four".

This covert presentation occurs, however, within the overt presentational structure. *It's good to be a Romero* is covertly presenting her pickiness through the (small) number of "top friends", but the MySpace structure facilitates an overt presentation of a specific group of "Friends" being ranked above the rest. Even while the actor is *showing* who she

is, she *tells* the audience overtly (through the filling in of structurally set categories) about her self and identity.

Overt presentation takes place in offline interaction, but the actor is generally only overtly presenting one aspect of her identity (e.g. wearing a t-shirt with a particular political message). Covert presentation takes place through the PIH, but only extraneously from the overt presentation facilitated by the pages' structure. The PIH then uniquely embeds interaction and the social construction of the self within a structure that facilitates overt self presentation.

*Two Way Negotiation vs. Pre-negotiated Presentation*

Self presentation is understood as a process of negotiation between actor and audience. Goffman describes how the actor plays off the audience, as he attempts to present an ideal, yet authentic self (1959). Burke's cybernetic model illustrates the continual negotiation between actor and audience as the actor presents, receives feedback, and adjusts his presentation (2004). The self is constructed by both actor and audience during the presentation process. There is a continual negotiation where both actor and audience play an equal role, the presenter adjusting his presentation based audience responses.

Presentation of self in the PIH does not follow this model. Rather than a two way continual negotiation of a presentation, the PIH facilitates a one way "giver and receiver of action" format. The actor, in the absence of negotiation, decides how she will present herself through her page. Rather than negotiating each aspect of the self, the self is

constructed by the actor and presented in a pre-packaged format to audience members (receivers of action).

By the time an audience receives a presentation, the actor has already put in a considerable amount of identity work. He has established numerous parts of his identity and an image of his self. The actor creates the page, deciding in the absence of negotiation how he will fill in each category, which pictures he will post, which "Friends" will be listed at the top. He can paint an intricate picture of himself in a deliberate way prior to any situational audience input. Only after the actor's solitary identity work has been completed, will the audience receive the presentation. This presentation can be thought of as pre-packaged, prepared by the actor and ready for consumption by the audience.

How this impacts an actor's ability to present herself is well illustrated in my own creation of a MySpace page. Prior to any negotiation, I chose how I wanted to present many parts of myself. There is one piece of my presentation in particular that would likely have been different in the presence of negotiation. In my "music" section I say: "I'm a big fan of classic rock....Thanks Dad". I *am* a big fan of classic rock, in the sense that I know a lot of the words to a lot of the songs and I like them. If, however, asked about artists and song names, it would be clear that I wasn't an expert in the area. If I made the claim that I was a classic rock fan in a conversational context, an inquiry into favorite artists, favorite songs, and opinions about specific music would likely ensue. It would become clear that my knowledge was lacking and my credibility would be weakened. I would have to negotiate with the audience to reconcile my enjoyment of

a particular type of music with my lack of knowledge in the area. The pre-packaged presentation, however, allows me to make the claim without having to defend it in my interactions.

This is not to say that no negotiation takes place. MySpace allows for interaction through wall posts and messages and so allows for negotiation. If someone were to inquire about my interest in classic rock therein, I would have to defend that presentation. I would have a few choices as to how to do this. I could clarify that I enjoy the music but don't have a lot of knowledge, or I could solidify my presentation by naming the few artists and song names I am knowledgeable about, or I could take the time to look something up (say, on Wikipedia) in order to make my ideal presentation (classic rock fan) appear more authentic. The presenter thus has a choice (one not given in conversational interaction) about the extent to which she will negotiate her identity.

Further, negotiation takes place only after the presentation has already been constructed. By the time the audience has an opportunity to respond and negotiate, the presentation has been somewhat solidified by being put into writing. That is, in the absence of negotiation, I was able to present myself as a classic rock fan. Any negotiation about this presentation would have to take place after I had established this piece of my identity overtly and in writing.

The negotiation process is stifled further by the ways different types of "Friends" interact with others on MySpace. From my interviews and observations, I have found that those who interact offline on a regular basis use each other's MySpace pages mostly for communication rather than to learn about the person through the page. Those who do

depend on MySpace to gather information about a person typically live far away, don't

know the person well, and generally use MySpace as their primary interaction medium

with that actor.

> *Neal*: with close friends, i depend on nothing on their page, because … I know
> them, so i don't need their page to tell me anything…. With people i don't know,
> i have to put more stock in their myspace info, because that's the only
> information i have on them

> *Megan*: [My close frinds] that I talk to on a pretty constant basis I hardly ever
> look at their pages but people that I'd like to know how they are or what they are
> doing I tend to look at their pages more

That is, those with more resources to negotiate the presentation (those who know the

actor outside of his MySpace page) aren't paying attention to the presentation. Those

who utilize the MySpace page to learn about who the actor is (those who interact with

the actor mostly through the MySpace page), have fewer resources to negotiate the

presentation.

This structural form of interaction can lead to greater agency for the actor in her

presentation. This is an issue that will be discussed in detail below. For now, it will

suffice to say that the structure of MySpace facilitates a pre-packaged presentation,

constructed prior to (rather than in the presence of) negotiation.

*Presentation Through Others*

Thus far we have talked about how the structure of MySpace facilitates certain

ways of interaction and self presentation through the creation of an actor's page. We will

now explore how MySpace users can present themselves through others. Not only can an

actor present herself through her own page, but can also present herself through other

MySpace users. Presentation of self through others can take place on one's own page, as

well as on "Friends'" pages. On an actor's own page, the actor can utilize his "Top Friends" list to present himself. On a "Friend's" page, an actor can present herself through "wall", picture, and blog comments.

As described earlier, each MySpace page designates a location for "Top Friends". The number of "Top Friends" ranges from 4-40 as designated by the MySpace user. The "Top Friends" are displayed in rank order on the MySpace users' profile. Further, MySpace users can categorize their "Top Friends" into categories of their choosing. This allows the actor to present herself through her association with others. The MySpace user can add someone to his "Top Friends", or place a "Friend" into a category without approval (or even notification) of the "Friend" being categorized in this way.

The rank order of a "Friend" on a MySpace user's profile is a shared symbol, designating the significance of the relationship between two MySpace users. The higher a "Friend" is ranked, the closer, or more significant their relationship is understood to be. "Top Friends" in my sample consisted mostly of significant others, family members, and best friends. The selection process in designating "Top Friends" was determined by family relationship, romantic involvement, and who people say they have the most contact with. *Kristen*'s "Top Friends" are almost all her cousins, *KiKi's* number one friend is her fiancé, followed by close girlfriends, *James Babson*'s number one friend is his brother, followed by his girlfriend, followed by his dogs (pages created for the dogs by *James Babson*).

> *S@r@:* The first six [of my "Top Friends"] are close friends and family and 7 and 8 are my boyfriends brother and his girlfriend, after that I rank them in who I see often or talk to.

MySpace users can also categorize their "Friends" into categories of their own designation. Only one person in my sample has done this, but I will still discuss it briefly since it is something that the structure allows. *Angie* has her friends categorized into: "Adopted Family" (consisting of close friends) "Family", "Old Roommates (minus Liz)", "Work Buddies (minus Dustin)", and "Top Friends." *Angie* is then not only presenting herself by designating who she is closest to, she is showing all of the different ways she has become close to these people (through work, living together, having a literal and figurative familial relationship).

*Dan* takes this a step further, presenting himself by choosing attractive people for his "Top Friends." Rather than presenting himself by describing his relationship to his closest friends, he is sending a message about what kinds of people he is friends with.

> *Dan:* I picked basically some people I hang out with alot, and also good looking female friends to be included in my top 8. It can't hurt to associate with good looking people.

Not only can the MySpace user present herself by who is in her "Top Friends" list, but can also present herself through how many "Top Friends" she has. As discussed earlier, *It's good to be a Romero,* only includes four "Top Friends." Her self described reasoning for doing so is more complex than these simply being her "best friends." Rather, she uses the small number of "Top Friends" to present herself as selective in who she gets close to. *Dan* reports leaving one of his "Top Friends" slots open in order to portray himself as selective. Other's, such as *Angie,* utilize all 40 slots, presenting

herself as someone with many close friends. These presentations are reinforced through the other aspects of the page as well. *It's good to be a Romero*'s pictures consist almost entirely of her top four friends. Conversely, *Angie* has 623 pictures posted (the most out of my entire sample) which are full of different groups of people.

> *It's good to be a Romero:*[From looking at my page people would say that] she loves her friends a lot, specially two in particular because they're in her pics, top friends, there is a blog about them and lots of the comments on her page come from them two also I think something like that...

The rank ordering of "Friends" not only shows the MySpace user's own perception of his relationships, but can also influence how others perceive their own relationships with the MySpace user. This is illustrated by the influence one MySpace user's "Top Friends" can have upon their position on others pages.

> *KiKi:* I sometimes put those [into my own "Top Friends"] who have me on their list

I myself have been influenced by my position on others "Top Friends" lists. I moved *L!Z* higher up on my "Friends" list after seeing that she ranked me highly on her list. I also moved "*Johnathan*" into my "Top Friends" after seeing that he ranked me highly. In both cases, it wasn't that I felt obligated to reciprocate my position in their "Top Friends," but rather that seeing where they ranked me led me to re-evaluate and re-define our relationship as a closer one. Once I had redefined the relationship as a closer relationship, I then felt it was important to place them in my "Top Friends."

The ordering of "Top Friends" is adjustable, so actors can adjust their "Friend" rankings in accordance with changes in a relationship. This can be either an expression

of conflict, or a source of conflict. *Megan Sullivan Thompson* encountered a conflict

over the ranking of her "Friends."

> *Megan Sullivan Thompson:* My ex and i got in a fight... he was always complaining about not being high enough on my list and how *michelle* was higher then him and she had been complaining to him about her position on his list....so we ended up getting in a stupid fight, because he calls me everyday, and we have gone thru so much in the past 4 years.....where he talks shit about her behind her back....and always has...and he never talks to her anymore.....supposedly because he doesnt like her....and so i brought up that he had her higher on his stupid list...so he switched it back, and then she threw a fit, posting comments about how she was pissed she got moved down, so he moved it back...so i told him he had no backbone, and that he was a punk bitch

*S@r@* used her "Top Friends" list to outwardly express a conflict she was having with

one of her "Friends" by demoting that "Friend" in the rankings, *S@r@:* " It was

influenced this summer how I rank on *Kristy's* list, when *Kristy* was mad at me she

would "bump" me and then I would bump her."   In these latter cases, the rank ordering

of "Top Friends" was used as a symbol of hostility. This can be seen as a shared symbol

within the MySpace community. Since the "Top Friends" list is such an overt expression

of the order of friendships, positive and negative changes in relationships can be

reflected by placement on the "Friends" list. Further, the rank order of a "Friend" can

influence how that "Friend" understands his relationship with the MySpace user, perhaps

leading to re-evaluation and re-definition of the relationship.

Not only does self-presentation take place on an actor's own page, but on the

pages of others as well. This is done through comments on pictures, blogs, and the

"Wall" of other MySpace "Friends." This not only allows a person to establish

presentation through association, but also shows the audience a presentation of the

presenters' social interaction (humor, inside jokes, words of inspiration or consolation etc.). *It's good to be a Romero* talks about how her relationship with her boyfriend can be chronicled through the comments left on one another's pages.

> *It's good to be a Romero:* My boyfriend and I took a break on May 11 on this past year.... if you go back to both of our pages and do some research on the history of the comments you'll see the level of expression before and after. towards the end of April we started to have some problems the mysepace interaction started to slow down then, from very very very expressive before to very little expressiveness then May comes, and after our break there was NO interaction through myspace for a long time then... we started to work on things but still did not interact through myspace because things were still shaky as the relationship has progress we've started myspacing more and more the closer him and I get, the more we've expressed ourselves publicly through the web still no I love yous or anything though we say it to each other and stuff, but for some reason have not reach that level of comfort to do it in a way where everyone knows… in other words... when the relationship was the best the myspace interaction portrayed that... in the same way when the relationship was broken, and in times of healing  my page, I feel is very reflective of my reality

By following the comments on each others pages, *It's good to be a Romero*'s romantic relationship with her boyfriend can be followed. The comments on each other's pages are not mere communication, but public presentations of the state of their relationship. When *It's good to be a Romero* comments on her boyfriends' page, she is establishing her relationship with him by sharing with the audience the content of their interaction. In this case, she is sharing with the audience the state of their relationship based on the level of emotional expression, and quantity of "wall posts".

A comment on one of *Mongoose*'s pictures establishes that she and *Under Construction* have had a long term friendship. The picture is a head shot of *Mongoose,* with the top of a tank top showing and visible underneath is the top of a sports bra.

*Mongoose* is by herself in the picture, and *Under Construction* comments, "im guessing that sports bra is from high school."

*Under Construction* has now shown her own relationship to the picture and the person in it. She has presented herself as someone who has known *Mongoose* since high school, and was close enough with her to remember a particular article of clothing. Implied in the comment is that perhaps that article of clothing had some significance between them (an inside joke perhaps), showing that *Under Construction* interacts with humor. *Jenny* also displays her humor through picture comments. She comments on a picture of *Sheila is happily engaged to Chris*'s, where *Sheila* is standing with her fiancé in front of a fountain (apparently taken at Niagara falls). The picture is labeled "With the love of my life in front of Nigara Falls, Canada." *Jenny* comments, "I kind of expected the falls to be bigger....and not in a man made fountain. Learn something new every day!!! LOOOOVVEE YOUUUUUUU." Comments then, have more meaning than simply a correspondence with a "Friend." I say this because MySpace gives the option of sending a private message. To post a comment is to not only communicate with the receiver of the comment, but is also to present a relationship and/or way of interacting.

We have now seen that the structure of MySpace allows for the presentation of self through others. Actors can display their relationships and friendships by rank ordering and categorizing their "Friends". They can also show their association with particular others, and manner of interaction through public comments (rather than messages) on "walls", pictures, and blogs. The structure of MySpace thus allows for

complex presentational processes where interaction with, and ranking of, "Friends" are used as presentational tools as the actor works to establish her self and identity.

*Isolation of Identity*

For structural symbolic interactionists, the construction of self process begins with the situation. An actor enters into a situation with a particular understanding of the situation and of her identity within this context. The situation impacts the hierarchy of identities, as identity salience and centrality is dependent upon the particular situation (Stryker 1980). Similarly, an actor's identity standard, or the definition of self and identity varies between situations. That is, the actor has an identity standard for each situation he enters. (Burke 2004). For example, an actor will define himself differently, emphasizing different aspects of his identity if he is in a bar, rather than a classroom, rather than the gym. It is context then, which situates the presentation of self and identity construction processes.

The structure of MySpace, however, is that the context can be heavily determined by the MySpace user. The identity is isolated. That is, the MySpace actor is able to situate the presentation into a context of her choosing, dictating to her audience how the presentation is to be understood.  MySpace users can contextualize their pages and presentations in a variety of ways. By doing so, the presenter is not only controlling her presentation, but controlling the context within which it is to be understood. Some of the ways MySpace users contextualize their presentations are through the labeling of pictures and albums, designating a "mood" along with a blog, and direct comments in "about me" sections. The context of MySpace then, gives the presenter great freedom to

frame her presentation and shape her audiences' understanding of the many aspects of self she presents through the page.

*Holla Holly* for example, has six photo albums. They are labeled: *My Photo's, why the hell not?, Adventures in Babysitting, Out on the town, i got new makeup…,* and *Lonely Halloween (obviously)*. Through these labels she has told her audience how to understand the photographs we are about to see. I want to specifically talk about the album *i got new makeup…*. This album consists of 11 photographs. Each picture is of *Holla Holly* by herself, posing in different ways. In most of the pictures she is looking serious, and showing sexually expressive facial expressions such as biting her lip, having her head down with her eyes up while leaning against a wall with her hair covering part of her face, biting her pinky, and making a kissing face. Un-contextualized, this could be interpreted in many ways. For example, she could be seen as sexually promiscuous for her suggestive poses, or as narcissistic for having an album only of herself. She tells her audience, however, that she is simply showing them her new makeup (*i got new makeup…*). This is re-established in her labeling of the first ten photographs (she leaves the final picture unlabeled).

> **[picture one]** i got new makeup **[picture two]** so i thought i would be a goofball **[picture three]** and here i am… **[picture four]** bored on a friday night **[picture five]** with nothing to do **[picture 6]** but take pictures of myself **[picture 7]** wearing… **[picture 8]**my new makeup **[picture 9]** and you love it **[picture 10]** don't you :-)

She labels the photographs in order so that they tell a story (the story of how to understand the album). Based on *Holla Holly*'s contextualization, the audience is told to

understand the album as a display of *Holla Holly*'s new makeup, not as a display of sexuality or a sign of narcissism.

Similarly, *Christal* contextualizes a picture of herself by labeling it "old skooooooooool". The audience is told to understand the picture as old, and therefore not necessarily representative of how she currently looks. *Sheila is happily engaged 2 Chris* has a picture of herself and another girl, both wearing athletic clothes. The picture is labeled: "We're off on yet another nature adventure!!!". The label places the picture within a particular context, directing the audience as to what this presentation means ("my friend and I often engage in outdoor activities").

Blogs are another form of self presentation used on MySpace. Here, actors can write down personal thoughts, poetry, jokes, grievances, and anything else they choose. When posting a blog, MySpace gives the actor an option to designate a "current mood" that will be shown along with the blog. The "mood" can be selected from a drop down menu of "moods" provided by the MySpace page. This can be used by the presenter in order to place the blog into a particular context, showing the audience how it is to be understood. *Dreamer* wrote a negatively toned blog about her current life situation. The blog states:

Mood: Determined

It's about that time again for another update. Life is still sucking. LOL[3] My world is falling apart around me, and I'm tryin' my damnedest to keep from reaching that breaking point. The house I wanted to live in in Radford got scooped up, I've been a college graduate for six months and can't find a job, *and* next week is gonna be the most not-funweek of the year. But, instead of

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[3] LOL stands for "Laugh Out Loud"

complaining constantly, I shed my few little tears the other night, and figured, "Success doesn't show the true character of a person so much as what she or he does in the face of obstacles." Damn, that's a good quote! Copyrighted via Shannon Scott, Inc., not to be used without my express written permission. :P The only thing I can do is continue to search for apartments (already e-mailed three different people), continue to apply for jobs (found one in Blacksburg that, if open, I'm hoping to land before the year's out), and just take next week a day at a time. I wanted S.A.M. to come down, but I haven't heard from him in a month. It would've been cool to spend a whole week together, since it kind of has been almost six years since we last saw each other. Again, not complaining, just taking it all in stride. 'Cause if it's not one thing, it's another. Anyway, a short update, 'cause the more I think about all the bad shit in my life, the more pissed off and depressed I get. And since I do suffer from clinical depression, I'd rather \*not\* go down that road again, 'cause the final destination is not a place I like to be. I'm gettin' the fuck outta Hampton Roads if it kills me...figuratively, not literally, 'cause that wouldn't be so much fun. LOL![3] 😊

This blog could be interpreted in many ways, but at the top of the blog she indicates that her mood is "determined". She is thus telling the audience not to understand the blog as a person complaining about her situation, but a person who is determined to get through a difficult time. Similarly, *Christal* posted a very emotional blog about her Mother's death, which took place about 5 years ago. She talks about the sadness she felt and still feels, and how much her mother is missed. Her designated mood on this blog is "thankful". The blog is to be understood not as a lamentation, but a memorial. This mood tells the audience that *Christal* is focused not on what she has lost, but on what she is thankful to have and/or has had.

The MySpace page can also be contextualized in the "about me" section. This is the general description of the user. Information included in this section can frame how the categorical information, blogs, pictures, and postings can (should?) be understood. *Frankie Dewplex* includes in his "about me" section information about his musical hobbies.

> *Frankie Dewplex:* I am Frankie Dewplex~ I started spinning around 1998, mostly spinning progressive house/trance, and some house, chunky funky tribal beats. Recently in 2007 i have two sets featured on XTC radio and a live 2.5 hr set spun for XTC radio. I would eventually like to produce music, but right now I do not have the time---------- other stuff Skatin is the shit...i love to skate except its hard to find time these days... , building stuff ---> i can pimp your house out. TeTShno-->Techno--->Electronic music..EDM Don t underestimate it you know you like it, Its all around you HMMM what else meh not much Nation was a sweet club..sad to see it go ..those were good times ..thats about it Mostly..mostly------- http://www.thedjlist.com/djs/FRANKIE_DEWPLEX/

This places into context the pictures on his page of him spinning records, DJing, and dancing with glow sticks. The music on his page is of the techno genre. Because of his "about me" section, the audience understands that he has a deeper connection to that music than simply liking the song. Rather, it is understood that he is actively engaged in the techno music and DJing communities. In the same way, *It's good to be a Romero* tells us in her "about me" section that she reads the bible every day and that she is a graduate student in sociology. Giving this information helps the audience to understand her headline quote; "The Virgin Mary is the earth from which Christ was born-C.G Jung" which syntheses a Christian reference (Virgin Mary) and social theorist (C.G. Jung).

Of course not everyone contextualizes their pages, pictures, or blogs. Some "about me" sections give little or no information, some albums and pictures remain unlabeled, and some blogs do not designate any mood. The point is not that all users do contextualize their presentation, but that the structure of MySpace gives the actor the opportunity to contextualize their presentation in a purposive way. The actor can guide the audience's understanding of her presentation, directing the audience as to what the presentation means.

*Conclusions*

I have argued that the PIH provides a unique form of interaction. This structure combines the deliberate presentation of a personal homepage, and incorporates interaction, a key element of the self construction process as understood by symbolic interactionist theories. The structure of MySpace facilitates overt self presentation, a less negotiated, pre-packaged self presentation, negotiation through others, and the de-contextualization of self presentation.

The structure of MySpace facilitates overt rather than covert forms of interaction. An actor is provided with a number of categories, each representing part of her identity. Each category is filled in by the actor, so that she is *telling* the audience who she is rather than *showing* them. Not all presentations on MySpace are overt, just as not all offline presentations are covert. MySpace actors often have implied meanings which they are trying to communicate through their more direct statements (for example *Dan* who was *showing* that he was funny and masculine by *telling* the audience about his favorite movies). The covert MySpace presentations, however, are embedded within the overt ones, facilitating a structure in which interaction takes place based on predominately overt self presentations.

Current understandings of the presentation of self process assume that the self is created in the presence of negotiation between actor and audience (Burke 2004; Goffman 1959). The structure of the PIH is such that presentations are created prior to any negotiation. By the time an audience receives a presentation from which they are able to interact and negotiate, the presentation has been somewhat solidified by the act of

putting it overtly into writing. Negotiation can take place after the fact. However, those with more resources to negotiate the presentation (the "Friends" who interact offline with the MySpace presenter regularly) pay little attention to the online presentation, as they use the page mostly for communication (rather than information gathering) purposes. This pre-negotiated presentation can also be seen through letter writing, or sending a photograph through the mail, but those forms of presentation are limiting in the aspects of self that the actor can present. Through the structure of the PIH, the actor is able to construct a full and complex picture of many components of the self prior to negotiation.

Not only can MySpace users present themselves directly, but they can also present themselves through other MySpace users. Presentation through others takes place with the ranking and categorization of "Top Friends", as well as through publicly posted "comments". An actor can present her identity through her association with particular others. In addition she can present herself through her interactions, demonstrating not only who she is alone, but how she is during social interactions.

The structure of the PIH isolates and de-contextualizes the self presentation. Because of this, actors have the ability to determine a context within which their presentation is to be understood. This is accomplished through the labeling of pictures and albums, the designation of a "mood" for a blog, and the framing that takes place in an actors' "about me" section. The MySpace user is not only overtly telling the audience who he is, but is telling the audience how to understand what he has told them. Not all MySpace users choose to contextualize their presentations, and not all pieces of the

presentation are always contextualized, (pictures remain unlabeled, "about me" sections remain bare) allowing the audience more freedom to interpret presentations. All MySpace users, however, have the *ability* (whether they use it or not) to contextualize their presentations, as facilitated by the structure of the PIH.

It is the structure that differentiates the PIH from other forms of interaction. The presentation format is similar to that of a personal homepage, but MySpace is interactive, creating a structure within which interaction (and so self presentation and identity construction) will take place. If identity construction and self presentation are embedded within the structure, it is important to understand all of the structures within which interaction and identity construction might take place. It is for this reason that the PIH should be examined. Through the rest of this analysis, we will determine how (if at all) interaction through this structure can help us build upon structural symbolic interactionist theory.

**Methods of constructing an ideal and authentic self**

Goffman (1959) discusses the need to strike a balance between an ideal self and an authentic self. Actors wish to portray themselves in an ideal light. This portrayal, however, has to be accepted by an audience. Because of this, the presentation must come across as authentic. Burke (2004) makes a similar argument using slightly different language. An actor wishes to portray herself based on her identity standard (ideal) but must adjust her performance in order to reach identity verification, where the audience defines the actor in the same way that the actor defines herself (the presentation must be authentic). We have seen that the structure of MySpace facilitates interaction and self

presentation in particular ways. Within the structure of MySpace, we will now look at the mechanisms used by actors to present an ideal and authentic self.

I will discuss six mechanisms utilized by actors on MySpace in order to strike this balance between ideal and authentic self. First, actors work to make the information on their pages consistent. Second, actors present contradictory information to show complexity, and then reconcile this information with the ideal presentation. Third, actors present themselves with specific others in mind. Fourth, MySpace users seek affirmation for their presentations. Fifth, actors adjust their pages to accurately represent a changing self. Sixth, actors attempt to present a "natural" self.

*Presenting a Cohesive Self*

MySpace offers a plethora of categories for the user to fill in. Each of these categories represents one piece of the actors' presentation. My analysis suggests that actors have a larger picture in mind when creating their pages. Each actor has an umbrella identity, under which he situates the categorical pieces of his presentation. Goffman (1959) argues that to maintain the authenticity of a self presentation, audiences expect the actor to keep his presentation consistent both within and across identities. In accomplishing this facet of authenticity on MySpace, actors try to relate the different pieces of their presentation to each other, representing a cohesive picture of who they are. This is done not only for the sake of the audience, but for the sake of the actor. Goffman (1959) points out that the actor is among his own audience members. His identity therefore must be authentic to himself.

Each of my interviewees articulated certain larger messages that they were trying to communicate to their audiences. Each category (music, movies, education, pictures etc.) gives specific information about the actor. Interviewees tried to relate these pieces of information into an integrated presentation of self. Their goal was to allow the audience to abstract from the specific information, to a fuller picture of the MySpace users' self. In order for the ideal self to be perceived as authentic, actors related their categorical, specific information in a cohesive way. I will illustrate this by reporting the messages MySpace users themselves claim to be portraying through their page, and then showing how the information from their page can be intertwined and abstracted from in order to portray these overarching images. I will also discuss how actors leave out information which might be contradictory towards the themes that they are trying to build.

*LukeASS* says that he wants to present himself as sophisticated, funny, and somewhat above the culture of MySpace.

> *LukeAss:* I think there are a lot of little things that I hope people will notice that make me somehow unique.  I think myspace is horribly trendy, which I'm generally against, so I try to keep it plain and somewhat intellectual and witty. So yeah, I guess I hope some one out there gets those little things… I usually put up "artsy" pictures or outdoorsy pictures… I have done subtle things that demonstrate, or at least hint, that I know how to write html code.

Looking at *LukeAss*'s profile, we can see further how he is presenting himself in a sophisticated, highly educated manner. One place h e shows his sophistication is by using his "television" category to express rejection of this form of entertainment. In this section, he writes : "Keep your TV I prefer having an imagination thanks." He also

indicates that he is a graduate student, and provides a link to his blog which discusses

primarily social and political issues.

> *KiKi* wants to send the message that she is a person who likes to have fun, but has grown up a lot and is now a relatively mature person.

> *KiKi:* The college student in me definitely comes out with a few references to alcohol, however, I find it more as a social place for me, and I tend to posted a bulletin a lot of pictures of what is going on in my life. So I guess to sum it up in one sentence: I'm the adult who still can have fun but I've grown up a lot.

By looking at her page we can see how her categorical presentations come together to

communicate to her audience that she is "the adult who can still have fun but has grown

up a lot". On her page she makes frequent references to her fiancé, showing that she is

about to enter into the adult institution of marriage. She includes on her profile a

humorous poem about alcohol, where she tells alcohol that they have had good times but

that she needs to focus on other areas of her life now. She explicitly references her

transition from youth into adulthood in her about me section, saying, "In my previous

life I was a lush.... and DaVinci had a different meaning :)".  Her pictures also contribute

to the overarching message of being a "fun adult who has grown up a lot". She includes

pictures of drinking and being out with friends, but also pictures of herself in her office

and at a professional convention.

> *It's good to be a Romero* articulates not only what messages she is trying to get

across, but how she accomplishes this through the intertwining of different parts of her

MySpace presentation.

> *It's good to be a Romero*: [If someone were to describe me based on my page] I think they would probably say something along these lines:  she's religious and liberal, she clearly loves her boyfriend, and he plays a very important part in her life as she has more pictures of them together, than [her] by herself, [her] with

family and [her] with friends she is a complex person, as her reading list and movie picks also entail complexity, but she also likes kids movies and books so that's cool she loves her friends a lot, specially *Jenny* and *James* because they're in her pics, top friends, there is a blog about them

*It's good to be a Romero* demonstrates her "complexity" through the contradiction of serious academic works and children's movies/literature in her "books" and "movies" sections. She combines her pictures, top friends, and blogs to demonstrate her closeness to her friends. Her relationship to her boyfriend is shown in the number of pictures they have together. She also has him placed as "number 2" on her top friends list (her sister is number 1), and has his band listed first in her "music" section.

Goffman (1959) says that actors purposively exclude aspects of themselves in their presentations in order to avoid contradicting themselves, thereby avoiding a threat to their authenticity. Accordingly, actors in MySpace not only include coinciding information in multiple sections of MySpace to present a cohesive (and so authentic) self, they also exclude information which may contradict this cohesive self. Thus, just as important in the presentation as what the actor does include, is what the actor does not include.

*It's good to be a Romero* presents herself in multiple sections of her profile to be religious. In her "about me" section she says that she is catholic and reads the bible every morning. In her "who I'd like to meet" section she includes Jesus, and her "headline" quote talks about Christ and the Virgin Mary. In order to maintain this presentation, she avoids posting anything that is expresses her sexuality, which she views as contradictory to her religious presentation.

*It's good to be a Romero*: [I leave out] certain characteristics about me that I believe to be very essential to my identity but I chose not to reveal because they're very private to me. Sexuality, that's probably the biggest one. I try to keep my page censured from any pictures, messages, or comments that may reveal that sort of thing. My boyfriend and I are both religious and everyone knows that so we try to keep it clean on the web it's hypocritical YES but also very personal we wouldn't want any of our religious friends, or parents looking at some things that maybe inappropriate

*Sarah* first dictates what messages she is trying to get across in her presentation, and

then discusses what she purposefully does not include in her profile so as to avoid

contradiction.

*Me:* So tell me about how you decided what to include in your profile

*Sarah:* i wanted people to be able to see the real me and where i stand on different issues

*Me:* so who is the "real you" that you were trying to get across?

*Sarah:* well i think the real me is what people don't typically see from just looking at a picture or at first impression, that i am a very driven person who wants to do great things in life, and i am a very caring person but at the same time i am not a push over or wishy washy i can have my own opinions and values and stand by it, that i am a strong woman who knows what i want and how to get it but that i will respect others who differ in opinions,values, etc. and that while i am very down to business in most everything i do i can still be fun, im not the dorky little nerd that stays home all the time and never does anything that her parents wouldnt approve of

*Me:* Is there anything about you that you did not put into your profile because it might negate this image?

*Sarah:* i tried to leave out the fact that i have the character flaw of worrying too much about what other people think, and that i am very insecure about the way others perceive me, that would make me look weak, and not in control

Through MySpace, actors display information which will help them present a

cohesive and authentic self. They also leave out information which is contradictory to

this ideal presentation in order to avoid a threat to their authenticity. This shows that actors are thoughtfully intertwining the various pieces of their presentation. They understand the complex process of fitting these parts of identity together in order to construct a self. The self, however, is of course not completely cohesive but complex and at times contradictory. Dealing with this tension between cohesion and complexity requires some fancy identity work by actors in the self presentation process. We look now at how this is accomplished on MySpace.

*Reconciliation*

The self is complex and multi-faceted. At times, different parts of the self can be contradictory to the ideal self presentation, and contradictory to other parts of the actors' self. Showing the complexity of the self can actually aid in the audience perceiving the presentation as authentic. This might seem like an odd claim, bearing in mind the discussion of the previous section. Actors do indeed attempt to present a cohesive self, but it is often impossible to portray all aspects of the self without presenting some contradictions. In the case of contradiction, actors must work to reconcile the contradictions within their identities, allowing them to present an ideal and authentic, yet multifaceted and complex self. It's as if the actors are saying "I am a complex person with layers and contradictions…but that doesn't change the core of my true self". We will look now at some of the contradictions on MySpace users' profiles, and examine how the actors have worked to reconcile these contradictions back to the "core of their true selves".

*It's good to be a Romero* enjoys commercials, but also presents herself has a thoughtful academic. She reconciles these two parts of herself in the text of her "about me" section.

*It's good to be a Romero* "about me": I don't watch television but I love commercials.

This MySpace actor is qualifying her enjoyment of a consumerist production (commercials) by indicating that she does not enjoy television. It is therefore understood that she enjoys commercials for reasons outside of being a "mindless television drone". Perhaps she wants to show that she has a sophisticated reason for her appreciation for commercials. *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* says that she wants to portray herself as an "intense and passionate" person. Although some of the information in her "about me" section contradicts this, she reconciles the contradiction, situating the presentation within the context of passion and intensity. The first line of her "about me" states:

> i am spirited. I am intense, and emotional, and passionate.
> [A few lines down she states]; i am complicated. I am a sweet girl with a vicious bite".... I am very fragile, I take things very personally and my heart breaks on a daily basis about things that may not even have to do with me.
> [She then reconciles this by saying]; but i bounce back fast and forgive anyone who wants me too. i dont hold grudges against people for their mistakes unless there was malicious intent behind it, in which case they no longer exist to me. i have a bad temper, i get heated very easily. i am passionate and emotional, i fight hard for what i believe in and will fight to the death for things others would see as insignificant.

The rest of her "about me" section talks about strength, independence, and passion. What she has done is to present her complexity (a sweet girl with a vicious bite) in a way that situates her contradictions within the framework of her "true self". We are led to understand her sensitivity ("I am very fragile….my heart breaks on a daily basis") not as

a threat to the authenticity of her identity, but as a symptom of her core identity (she is sensitive because she is so passionate).

*LukeAss* has a particularly difficult reconciliation to make. He presents himself as sophisticated, and anti-trendy. Yet, he is making this presentation through MySpace, which he considers "horribly trendy". He then has to present himself against the very medium through which his presentation is taking place. He reconciles this by including little information in an attempt at presenting apathy. His "about me" section only says "nothing worth mentioning". He could have left his blank, but he decided to tell his audience explicitly that he wasn't going to talk about himself through this medium. He even posted a bulletin, announcing to all of his "Friends" that he would be simplifying his page, minimizing the information the page would share. Again, he could have simply filled out fewer sections, or deleted the current information, but he felt the need to notify his friends, presenting himself as someone who would *not* present himself through the "trendy" MySpace.

Many MySpace users display their humor, lifestyle, and social relationships through pictures. These pictures are not always flattering. Most of my interviewees reported posting pictures that made them look good, or were otherwise funny in some way. The challenge becomes reconciling the funny (and perhaps less attractive) pictures with the ideal presentation of being a good looking person. This is often accomplished in the labeling of pictures. By labeling the pictures, the actor can qualify a less attractive picture by pointing out that this is not what the actor typically looks like. Further, the

actor can outnumber the unattractive pictures with more attractive ones, reconciling back to the ideal presentation (of being a physically attractive person).

*Ms. Rachel* has one picture of herself with her face contorted into what looks like a scowling kiss face. She has labeled this picture "Me making my game face for Megans b-day". She explains her contorted face by indicating the reason that she looks how she does in this picture (because she is making her "game face"). This also separates the way she looks in this picture from how she looks otherwise. *Kristy* labels one of her pictures "Apparently, I'm going for that 'Chipmunk' look LOL". She is making the claim that her cheeks look chubby in this picture, but by pointing it out and laughing (saying LOL), she is telling her audience that this is a funny picture, and that it is funny because it is not the norm. *Becca* has a picture of herself with her tongue out and eyes crossed. It is labeled (sarcastically) as "glamour shot!". Through this label, *Becca* is telling her audience that she can laugh at herself (which is consistent with many other aspects of her page) but also pointing out that this picture is funny, and she normally does not look like this. *James Babson* writes under one picture "I didn't even recognize myself in this picture". Again, he is showing that this picture is not representative of how he actually looks. In all cases, these less than ideal pictures are highly outnumbered by much more flattering ones.

In addition to the tying together of pieces of presentation into a cohesive whole, actors' presentations of a "realistic" and multifaceted self will also often include negative and/or contradictory information on their MySpace pages. When this occurs, however, mechanisms (such as textual qualifications and picture labeling) are often

employed to justify the contradiction in light of the ideal presentation. This allows the

actor to present a cohesive and ideal, yet authentic and multifaceted self. The balance

between ideal and authentic is created for the audience at large. In addition to this, the

MySpace user can put forth a presentation for particular audience members.

*Presenting for Specific Others*

      We have seen that MySpace users are reflexive as they present themselves. That

is, as they create and update their pages, MySpace users have in mind how their

presentation will be viewed by others. We can see this as participants articulate certain

messages and images that they believe the audience will receive by viewing the page,

blogs, and bulletins. As MySpace actors create their pages, they are essentially taking on

the role of the other (Mead, 1934). Not only do actors have in mind how their page will

be viewed by a general other, some presentations are constructed with specific others in

mind. Of those I interviewed, this specific other was almost always either: a current,

desired, or ex-romantic partner.

      *S@r@* says that when she fills out surveys and posts them as bulletins, she has in

mind those who she thinks will read the survey. This mostly consists of her top friends

and her boyfriend.

> *S@r@*: On the bulletins it is usually the friends that read them [who I have in
> mind while filling out the survey] which are about 5 of my top friends and my
> boyfriend. I mostly think about how my boyfriend may see me.
>
> *Me:* do you ever put things in your postings to help him see you in a certain way?
> Or help him notice certain things about you?
>
> *S@r@*: Yes. Just like little hints as what I may like, such as dating ideas, places I
> like to visit, the fact that I like romantic stuff.

*Me:* do you think it has worked? how so?

*S@r@:* It hasn't really worked he's not good at taking hints

*LukeAss* reports that he used to update his page with specific girls in mind. He was trying to present himself in a way that would evoke emotion in a specific other (his ex-girlfriend). *LukeASS*: "I used to be really bad about using things like myspace, facebook, and AIM to get back at people I wasn't happy with. I would put quotes I felt relevant to my current problems (sometimes that were not very nice), with the hope of my X or someone else to see it and feel bad. I don't do that much anymore." *It's good to be a Romero* was a bit more subtle in her presentation. Although she was trying to get a message to her boyfriend, (they were on a break at the time) she did so in an abstract way.

> When my boyfriend and I were broken up during summer I knew that he would be checking my page... I mean we were not talking a lot but you know how that goes, I knew he was probably checking my page I missed him a lot... so much... well... him and I LOVE breakfast! It was the first meal that we shared together, and probably the most of any other meals that we've had together definetely the most of any meals that he's ever cooked for me anyway... during summer I decided to write a short blog....during this time we were not together, and I was also attending daily mass at 8:15 a.m, as Catholics we are not allowed to eat an hour prior communion so I was not having breakfast 3 out of 7 days a week and I decided to write about how this sacrifice of fasting in the morning was really making me miss my favorite breakfast foods...I was really missing him too! So it was a play with words really...I wrote about my favorite breakfast foods... Later, after we got back together, he one day told me that he had read that blog and had missed me so much...

While *S@r@*'s presentation went unnoticed, *It's good to be a Romero* was more successful in her presentation. That is, she was better able to have her presentation received by the audience in the way that she intended. An interesting point is that *LukeAss, S@r@,* and *It's good to be a Romero* are not blatantly making things up in

order to present themselves in a particular way to specific others. Rather, they are emphasizing certain parts of themselves, arranging their presentations in such a way that communicates a deliberate message.

In contrast to these more subtle examples, *Dan* explicitly makes up information on his page in order to present himself in a particular way to a specific other. In an attempt to make an ex-girlfriend jealous, *Dan* used his MySpace page to reinforce a lie he had told about himself offline. *Dan*: "For a short while I was putting up things that I thought would make an ex girlfriend jealous, One of the times I had talked to her, I had made up some lie showing how great I was doing without her, and I knew that she occassionally checked my myspace, so I updated it to match the lie I had told her." This ex-girlfriend lives out of state, and Dan acknowledged in his interview that he would not have been able to pull off this lie as easily had she lived near by, or if they had regular contact

Thus, reflexive presentations are not only for the general audience, but also for specific others. These presentations can be blatant or subtle. I have found that most of the time the presentation is arranged in a way that emphasizes certain aspects of the self, portraying the presenter in a particular way. In the example of *Dan*, however, he made things up to shape his presentation for a specific other. These presentations are sometimes successful (as was the case for *It's good to be a Romero*) and other times fail to get the message across (as was the case with *S@r@*). Presentation for specific others was accomplished within the structure of MySpace through blogs, survey bulletins, and

profile text. Of course other aspects of the page might be utilized for the same purposes (playing a song that is significant to someone, posting certain pictures etc.).

*Seeking Affirmation*

Goffman (1959) and Burke (2004) emphasize the role of the audience in the self construction process. Not only does the actor have to perceive and present himself in a particular way, but he then has to adjust his presentation based on feedback from the audience. It is a joint process between actor and audience, where in order for a self to be constructed, an audience has to accept the presentation. Since the structure of the PIH facilitates the original self presentation to be constructed in the absence of audience interaction, actors will seek out feedback from the audience after the presentation has been constructed. There is often a desire to engage in a dialogue with others in an attempt to affirm the presenters' presentation. This is often accomplished by posting a bulletin when pictures, updates, or blogs have been put up and asking for comments. Those I interviewed often indicated that they looked forward to receiving comments on the pictures they posted.

*It's good to be a Romero*: picture comments are my favorite

*Me*: Why is that?

*It's good to be a Romero*: I absolutely love pictures, looking at them, showing them, taking them, I mean I love pictures... so having an online album that people can look at without having to come over your place it's pretty awesomeand then they get to comment on the pics usually you post the best looking pics, the funniest one, the most memorable one and you get to read about people think you're so cute, and hot, how you look so good with your boyfriend, how that time was so much fun I mean it's great!

*It's good to be a Romero* is looking for affirmation for her presentation of being attractive and having a good relationship with her boyfriend. *Sarah*, S@r@, and *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* all report looking forward to picture comments more than any other form of communication on MySpace. *S@r@* noted, "I like getting photo comments, everything makes me smile but I like to read funny comments about either what people think is going on in the photo or if they made some funny stuff up." *Dreamer* and *LukeAss* post a bulletin each time that they write a new blog, and ask for comments. *Gibsongirl* recently posted a bulletin that she has "well….new everything!" informing her "Friends" that her presentation has been altered, therefore inviting them to be an audience for her most recent presentation.

Some Myspace users do not seek this affirmation. I found that those who do not seek feedback use the page mostly for communication rather than presentation. *Matt* for example uses his MySpace page mostly to gather information about bands and comedians. Only 17 out of his 56 "Friends" are not bands or comedians. His page is very plain, with only three pictures and most of the sections remaining blank. Since his main purpose for using MySpace is gathering information about bands/comedians, he hasn't put much effort into his presentation. Since he is not using the page as a presentation tool, he has little need to seek affirmation on his presentation, "honestly, it [my MySpace page] says very little about me as a person I think Its almost a stopholder for my personal stats I guess the most it says about me is due to my likes and dislikes. bands I like  movies I like etc I don't use the blog though I honestly don't think its a particularly good representation of myself its like trying to get at the personality of a baseball player

through a baseball card." Of the people I interviewed, *Matt*[4] was the only one who wasn't using his page for presentation, but rather for the gathering of information. He is also the only one who doesn't seem to be seeking negotiation or affirmation in some way. I doubt, however, that he is the only person in the sample with these characteristics. I think it is more likely that those who volunteered to be interviewed were those who are more active MySpace users, and those who put significant thought and effort into their pages. Although not all actors use their MySpace pages to present themselves, those who do use the page for presentation, often seek the negotiation (or at least affirmation) that will help them to construct an ideal and authentic self. Their own construction is ideal, but the feedback from an audience helps them affirm that the presentation is authentic.

*MySpace and Identity Change*

The self is not static. Rather, the process of the self is continuous and dynamic. It follows that as the person's identity changes, her presentation will change to better represent the changed definition of herself. If the MySpace page is a structure within which interaction and self presentation take place, we then must examine if and how actors adjust their pages to reflect changing identities. Some members of MySpace don't use their pages frequently, and allow them to become outdated. Some update their pages only when they experience a significant change in their lives (new school, new

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[4] *Matt*, I should point out, is the husband of one of my closest friends. When volunteering for the interview, he joked that he was obligated to help me out in any way based on my relationship with his wife. Of course I told him that he was in no way obligated, but he decided to let me interview him anyway. I share this bias to point out that although his way of using MySpace is unique to my interviewees, it is likely not unique to my sample or to MySpace users as a whole. Unfortunately, I cannot make direct inferences about how much or how little a MySpace user seeks affirmation without first talking to the MySpace user. Since all interviews are voluntary, *Matt* is my only example of what I would guess is a larger population of non-presenting MySpace users.

job, new relationship etc.). Some MySpace users adjust their pages frequently to reflect their recent activities and current mood. Still others utilize the page as a reflection of and catalyst for the open expression of a new identity.

We can see the degree to which MySpace users utilize their pages to reflect identity change on a continuum from "not using the page to reflect" to "using the page as the outward expression of identity change". Some MySpace users, such as *Matt*, update their MySpace pages very infrequently. This is likely because he (and other MySpace users like him) is not primarily using the page as a self presentation tool. Those who are not using the MySpace page as primarily a presentation tool might be less likely to update the page to reflect a dynamic self. That is, someone not using the page for the purposes of self presentation would likely not be overly concerned with the accuracy of their presentation.

Many MySpace users, however, do adjust their pages in order to reflect a dynamic self. Those who do update their pages to reflect life/self changes do so in varying ways. Some MySpace users change their pages in order to accurately represent significant life changes and descriptive information. *Jessie* says that she doesn't update her page often, but will do so when she changes something significant in her life, "I'll usually add big changes, like when I started school last semester and deleting my employer after I quit earlier this summer...other than that, I assume that I'll have contacted my friends to tell them what's going on, outside of Myspace."

*Kristen* updates her MySpace to coincide with her changing interests. She describes how

she has changed as a person over the past few years, and her page reflects the changes

she has made.

> I feel like I change as a person… develop new interest and I add them or if
> something is going on in my life, sometimes makes it to the "about me" section.
> Under my general interests I added Physical Therapy and children w/autism.
> When I first created my page… these things weren't really important to me but
> w/my job and undergrad major I came to really love working w/this population. I
> also update my movies or TV shows as I acquire new favs.

Other MySpace users update their pages more frequently in order to reflect mood

changes and recent activities.

> *Me*: How did you decide which things about yourself to include, and which to
> leave out?

> *LukeASS*: changes with my mood… I guess, in the end, I don't really know. I
> post funny things when I'm in a good mood, detailed things when I'm lonely, and
> angry/abrasive things when I'm feeling political charged or discontent with
> certain social issues.

Similarly, *Neal* updates his page to reflect his mood as well as his recent activities, "i

just update [my MySpace page] to whatever kind of mood i'm in like my current

background i've been hitting Arlington a lot lately, so i threw it up on the myspace

page." *Neal*'s background is a picture of a city skyline at night. *Neal, Kristen,* and

*LukeASS* change their pages regularly to reflect their moods. They are not only keeping

the page current as far as descriptive information (job, school, relationships etc.), but

current as to how they define themselves at the moment (lonely, happy, a person who

spends time in the city etc.).

If one end of the continuum consists of MySpace users like *Matt* who don't

update their profile pages, the other end of the continuum consists of MySpace users

who use their page as an outward expression of their divergence from one identity and movement into another. *LukeASS*, *Sarah,* and *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* have all used their MySpace pages in this way.

*LukeASS* comes from a conservative, religious, military background. Since high school, he has changed his political views drastically. He has used his MySpace page to reflect this change, separating him from his old identity and the people associated with that identity. Many of his old friends had a difficult time with the altered identity that *LukeASS* portrayed on his MySpace page and he lost a lot of friendships over it.

> I try to make a point sometimes to include things that separate me from my old friends in high school and the religious military community I was brought up in…. I used to be not as brave in person, and afraid to express my views. Being outgoing online used to be much easier for me, so in a lot of ways I was much different in person compared to online. The current myspace I use is my second. My first page had a lot more of the friends I had a "falling out" with. My new page is only current, active, friends.

*LukeASS* first expresses his changing identity on MySpace. This elicits negative reactions from many of the individuals associated with his previous identity. He eventually creates a new page, including a presentation of his new identity. The new page includes only those "Friends" who accept the new identity, making the separation from his previous identity more complete.

*Sarah* has always been known as a "book worm". She is serious about school and that has typically been all that people knew of her. Since coming to college she has developed more of a social persona and thinks this is reflected in her MySpace page. This is particularly the case for audience members who have not seen her since her "book worm" days.

oh i am sure people have changed their opinion of me [by looking at my MySpace page]- when i had more constant contact with a lot of these people through school,etc. i was perceived more as the quiet kid in the back of class who never did anything worth mentioning unless it was on the educational track, and now i have pictures that prove i am going out and having fun and showing that i actually have friends outside of 'the geek brigade' (people who don't look or act like your run of the mill pocket protector dorks) rather than just being the little dork in the corner who has no friends other than her fellow geeks. I know even my sister was surprised by this (we don't live together and so I pretty much see her once every few months and will talk to her through myspace) and so i know her opinion of me has changed

*Sarah*'s page includes text about her strong work ethic and busy life, but also pictures of her out with girlfriends drinking, and socializing. She has used her page to construct an image of a well rounded person, not just a serious student, but also a young woman who likes to have fun. This is an image that negates the perceptions of people she used to know. Her identity change is represented in her MySpace page.

*Meghan Sullivan Thompson* reports that she was depressed in high school with really low self confidence. She has used her page to project how much she has changed, how much confidence she has gained and how happy she is now.

i have changed a lot from high school, so i hope that people that i talk to on myspace that i havent seen since high school, have different opinions of me! i guess if i was trying to get any message across, its that I did what i always said i was going to do, and i am not going to let anyone stand in my way...and hopefully help other people realize that their life is in their hands...and they can do anything that they want....they just have to go out and do it! [Someone looking at my page] wouldnt know that i grew up with a very heavy depression...they wouldnt know that my home life growing up was "less thenb satisfactory"...they wouldnt know that, thats the reason i have been planning to move to california since i was 10....they wouldnt know that i use to fe elcompletely out of place, and that i would never find someone i could fit in with, someone to understand me...they wouldnt know how much i have changed and grown over the last 6 years....

*Meghan Sullivan Thompson*'s page reflects confidence, intensity, and happiness in the text and in the pictures.  'about me':" I believe that happiness can be so much more, it can last for days or weeks and years without even a glimpse of sadness, anger or surrender. that it is a constant cloud hovering over my head, that makes me unable to stop smiling. i am imperfect in the most perfect way. i wouldnt choose to be any different".  Her default picture is of her with her fiancé, both with big smiles. She has a total of 241 pictures (at the high end for the sample). All of her pictures show her smiling, out with others, with her fiancé, always seeming to have a good time. The text of her "about me" section also reflects her current projection of happiness and confidence.

We have seen that use of the MySpace profile to reflect identity change falls onto a continuum. While some are unconcerned with how accurately the page reflects their identities, others utilize the page as a tool in the identity change process. *Matt* for example, rarely updates his page and describes it as unrepresentative of who he is, while *LukeASS* was first able to present his new identity through MySpace, and then through the creation of a new page, has been able to complete a full separation from his old self and the people associated with it. Between these two extremes are those who update major life changes, or update the page frequently to reflect more subtle changes in the self, such as mood, or recent leisure activities.

*Presenting a "Natural" Self*

Goffman (1959) tells us that the work that goes into a presentation takes place in the backstage. By the time the presentation moves to the front stage, the work that went

into it is supposed to be invisible. The ideal presentation then, is to appear effortless, as if this is naturally who the person is. If a person is seen as intentionally presenting him or her self in a particular way, it can take away from the authenticity of the presentation.

MySpace users have to deal with this same predicament. They have to present themselves without seeming like they are presenting themselves. This task is much more complicated than that which occurs offline, because the structure of the page literally asks the MySpace user to overtly present to the audience who he or she is. We can see the "back stage" of a MySpace presentation as the thought that goes into deciding what should and should not be included on the profile page as the actor works to create an ideal image of himself. The problem for MySpace users then, is not allowing the audience to see the significant amount of effort that has gone into these decisions, and making the final presentation seem to be something the actor had to think little about. That is, the problem is making a well thought out presentation seem natural and spontaneous.

I have found that MySpace users handle this predicament by qualifying their presentation within an air of apathy about how they are viewed. We have already seen this in *LukeAss*'s presentation, as he feels the need to point out that he will not be presenting himself through this medium. Further, despite his claims to apathy, he works at choosing "artsy" pictures, and writes an in depth blog that is available to all of his "Friends". Not surprisingly, he labels his blog "My Horrible blog".

The subject line of bulletins are probably the best illustration of presenting without seeming to be concerned with how the presentation is perceived. A "bulletin" is

a message that is sent to all of a MySpace user's "Friends". This can be any message, but often MySpace users fill out surveys about themselves and then send them out as bulletins. People also put up a bulletin when they add new pictures, change their profile, or write a blog. Sometimes the subject line of a bulletin simply says what the bulletin is about e.g. "Survey", "new pics", "page update". Other times, however, the person who posts the bulletin gives a qualifier for posting this information about himself.

*Christal* put up a bulletin when she added new pictures to her page. She labeled the bulletin: "I was having a weak moment". That is, she acknowledged that this was not something she would normally do. She also was acknowledging (and so excusing herself) from going outside her own normative standard by telling her audience that she wanted them to look at her presentation. *Kristen* filled out a survey about herself, and posted it. The subject line of this bulletin was "bored". Similarly, *KiKi* posted a survey about herself, with the subject line "waiting for work to be over". These MySpace users qualified their self presentations with statements of apathy. They are trying to portray themselves as uncaring about what others think, despite the fact that they have deliberately decided to share a plethora of information about themselves to a large group of people.

This can also be seen in the interviews. Of the MySpace users I interviewed, two explicitly and on multiple occasions pointed out that they did not care what other people thought of them based on their pages, and said that they don't think much about how other's will perceive them based on their pages. These two users (*Holla Holly* and *S@r@*) are also, ironically, two of the people who post bulletins frequently when they

have new pictures, and who frequently post surveys about themselves. They also utilize

almost every category, put up decorative backgrounds, have song lists, and post more

pictures than almost anyone else in the sample. I make sense of this by viewing these

two participants as particularly "heavy" presenters. That is, these two individuals are so

steeped in their presentations that they may have a difficult time stepping outside of their

presentations even when explicitly asked about it (such as in my interview with them).

*S@r@* claimed that it is unlikely that people would learn new things about her

from looking at her page. She also says that when she is working on her page, what she

mostly is thinking about are "color schemes and quotes that jump out". She also says

that she assumes people don't look at her page, or her pictures very often and that it

doesn't bother her. Although she makes these claims, the way that she uses MySpace

contradicts them. In the past 10 days (November 29th -December 8th 2007) she has posted

11 surveys about herself. In addition, she sends a bulletin informing her "Friends" each

time she posts new pictures.

*Holla Holly* also claims to be apathetic about her self presentation. When asked

about how she portrays herself on her page, she responded, "i don't know if i am actively

trying to portray a particular message." She also claims that she her purpose in filling

out the survey she fills out (which are about equal in number to the amount of surveys

S@r@ fills out) are done out of boredom.

> *Holla Holly*: all of the surveys i fill out...which has been quite a few...are done
> out of boredom.  I have nothing to hide from anyone and have nothing to gain by
> revealing secrets, truths, or lying about who i am.

Her claim is that she fills in the surveys out of boredom. Certainly this might be a way to pass the time. *Holla Holly*, however, not only fills out the surveys, but then posts them for all of her "Friends" to see. Further, she denies caring whether or not people comment on her pictures and blogs.

> *Me*: Do you hope to receive comments on the pictures you post?

> *Holla Holly:* oh!  none!  haha!  i am not much of a "comment whore."  I don't really care if people comment or not

Despite this claim, *Holla Holly* posts a bulletin each time she adds new pictures, and has explicitly asked in her post for people to comment on the pictures.

Although *Holla Holly* and *S@r@* are extreme cases of presenters trying to seem natural and non-presenting, many of the MySpace users in my sample made attempts at a portrayal of apathy towards other's perceptions of their pages. Seeming natural and non-presenting in the PIH is particularly challenging, in that the structure of the page is such that the actor is explicitly asked to directly present himself.

*Conclusions*

I have discussed six mechanisms utilized by MySpace users in constructing a self that is both ideal and authentic. First, actors keep the pieces of information on their page consistent with and across identities. Second, actors work to reconcile any contradictory information displayed on their pages. Third, actors present themselves for specific others. Fourth, actors seek out negotiate and affirmation for their presented identities. Fifth, actors utilize the page to reflect a dynamic self. Finally, actors try to hide the back stage work that goes into these presentations.

MySpace offers individual categories within which the actor is supposed to fill in information about herself. In order to present a consistent self, actors often overlap the information in individual sections. This creates a larger picture that portrays some message about the actor's "true self" and core values. This is accomplished not only by what actors include in their profiles, but by what they do not include. For example, *It's good to be a Romero* intertwines different pieces of her profile to present herself as a religious person. She leaves out expressions of her sexuality because they contradict this presentation.

Although actors try to portray a consistent self, they also want to show their complexity. This means that some pieces of the presentation will be contradictory. The actor then has to reconcile the contradictory information, situating it in a way that it fits into the core values and "true self" of the actor. *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* for example, contradicts her presentation of strength and confidence with the statement "I am fragile….my heart breaks easily". She then reconciles her presentation by situating the comment within the context of one of her core values (passion). By reconciling contradictions, actors are able to present a complex self without threatening consistency, therefore maintaining authenticity.

We have seen that the presentation process is a reflexive one, where the actor takes into consideration how his presentation will be viewed by others. Not only do actors view their own presentation from the eyes of the other (Mead 1934), but take into consideration specific others as well. The specific others that are considered by participants in this study are mostly romantic partners.

Since the construction of a MySpace page is completed prior to any negotiation, actors sometimes actively seek out affirmation for their presentations. The construction of self process consists of two way negotiation between actor and audience. MySpace users then seek out this process in order to affirm that their ideal presentation is indeed authentic. This is seen as participants post bulletins when pages are updated, or new pictures have been added. Similarly, many participants reported expecting and looking forward to picture comments.

The self is changing and dynamic, MySpace users can adjust their pages to reflect a changing self and identity. This is seen on a continuum, with some rarely updating their pages, and others changing their pages with new moods, new jobs, and new relationship statuses. Still others use their pages as a tool in making a significant identity change.

Finally, to present an ideal and authentic self through MySpace can take extensive thought and deliberation. We can see this, as participants have articulated that they go through a process of deciding what about themselves they want to include or exclude from their presentation. Indeed, this process is what allows for a consistent and complex self to be portrayed. In maintaining authenticity, however, actors must work to hide the backstage work that goes into self construction process. This is accomplished by 'giving off' an air of apathy. Even as participants fill out extensive surveys about themselves and post bulletins for all of their friends to see, they present themselves as uncaring of how others view their presentation. Survey bulletins are often qualified by

the actor, with subject lines telling the audience that the survey was not given much thought (e.g. "I was bored", "waiting to get out of work", or "procrastinating").

I first discussed the structure of the PIH. Here, I discussed the mechanisms used by actors in the presentation of self processes as they work to construct an ideal and authentic self within that structure. The processes discussed in this section coincide with the processes seen in offline and other forms of interaction. What makes them unique, however, is that they take place through the structure of the PIH. The theoretical implications of this will be discussed in the next (and final) section.

**Theoretical importance**

I have explored that idea that the PIH provides a unique form of interaction. The personal homepage is a *bricolage* of personal information used to construct the actor's identity, but is rarely viewed by anyone other than the creator, and so has little impact on other's constructions of the actor's identity (Chandler 1995). Other forms of online interaction, such as e-mail and instant messaging are analogous to offline interactions (letter writing and telephone conversation respectively). The PIH provides the direct self presentation of the homepage, with these other forms of interaction such as e-mailing and instant messaging. It provides a space for social relationships to be formed, maintained, and evaluated. The PIH essentially combines the structure of the homepage with interaction and communication capabilities. Others not only see the self presentation on the PIH, but interact through it. So what does this mean? In the final section of the analysis, we embark on the theoretical importance of this study. While the structure and inner-workings of MySpace are interesting, and can contribute to the field

of CMC, my larger purpose is to use the PIH to illuminate a new theoretical dimension in presentation of self theories. The theoretical findings illuminated in this work are based upon the analysis of the structure and interaction processes of the PIH. Thus, before delving into the theoretical (and most meaningful) contributions of this work, let us very briefly review what my theoretical assertions will be based upon.

The structure of the PIH is unique. It combines the overt, prepackaged manner of a personal homepage, and then brings in the component of interaction. Interaction, is then taking place through a structure that is unlike other online or offline interaction mediums.

The PIH facilitates a presentation that is primarily overt rather than covert. Although actors can engage in covert presentations through the PIH, the structure is such that much of the actors' identity is *told* rather than *shown* to the audience. Further, this presentation is constructed in the absence of negotiation. The audience is therefore presented with a pre-packaged presentation, that has become somewhat solidified in writing prior to any audience input. This presentation is de-contextualized, giving the presenter the power to contextualize the presentation himself. That is, not only can the actor give the audience her pre-packaged, un-negotiated presentation, but can then dictate how this presentation is to be understood. Presentation can take place through the actor himself, or the actor can present himself through others.

Within this structure, actors work to construct a presentation that strikes the balance between an ideal and authentic self. The actor works to make himself appear consistent, yet complex. He presents not only for the general audience, but for specific

others as well. He seeks affirmation for his presentation. He uses the MySpace page to reflect his changing and dynamic self. Finally, all of the work that the actor does in constructing a self must be kept in the backstage, away from the eyes of the audience.

To appear consistent (authentic) and also complex (ideal), different parts of participants profile pages are intertwined and overlapped, illustrating the consistency of the self to the audience. This consistency helps the actor to combine pieces of her identity into a larger picture of her "true self". While consistency is important for authenticity, many participants "ideal self" is also complex. To portray a complex self may involve showing contradictions. Actors then have to reconcile these contradictions so as to avoid threatening the consistency of their presentation. This is often done by situating conflicting information within the context of the larger "true self" image of the presenter.

Not only does the actor present for the general audience, but for specific others, trying to present himself in a particular way to particular people. The presenter often seeks feedback on his presentation, hoping to affirm his construction of self. Since the self is changing and dynamic, MySpace pages are adjusted to reflect the changing self. In some instances, MySpace pages are a tool in helping the actor transition into a new identity. Since the production of a presentation is done in the absence of negotiation, actors often seek out some sort of affirmation for their presentation.

The presentation of a complex and multifaceted yet consistent and authentic self clearly takes work. This work, however, must go on in the "backstage". Since the presentation is supposed to be that of a natural and authentic self, the actor must hide the

"backstage" efforts that have gone into deciding how the presentation will be displayed, such as decisions about which parts of the self are to be included, emphasized, or excluded.

*Power to Present*

Theories of self presentation discuss mainly *how* the self is presented, negotiated, and constructed. These theories discuss how the interaction between actor and audience result in a jointly constructed definition of the self within the situation. Understanding this process as it is impacted by new structures and situations is extremely important for the future development of structural symbolic interactionism.

I argue that the self construction theories should include the dimension of power. I argue that we should explore the issue of an actors' power to present. I define Power within the context of presentation of self theories somewhat differently from how it has otherwise been used theoretically and in everyday language. I define power to present as the extent to which an actor can present his ideal self in light of audience negotiation. We can think of power to present as being situated on a continuum. Maximum power to present would be the ability to present an ideal self in the complete absence of negotiation. The other side of the continuum would be having no power to present. That is, attempting to present an ideal self in the presence of constant negotiation. Power to present and negotiation thus have a negative relationship. As negotiation increases, power decreases: Negotiation↑ Power↓ or Negotiation↓ Power↑.

Audience members come into an interaction with varying backgrounds, histories, and knowledge that will shape how the presentation is received and interpreted. Within

each interaction, the audience can be said to have a certain amount of "negotiation resources". Negotiation resources include any information about the actor external to the presentation possessed by the audience. That is, the more information an audience has about an actor outside of his direct presentation, the more resources the audience has to negotiate the actor's presentation. The amount of power an actor has in an interaction is a function of the audience's negotiation resources.

This concept of power to present might be expanded to other forms of presentation such as television, advertising, or cinema. The intended message will have more or less power depending on the audiences' negotiation resources. That is, audiences will be more or less equipped to negotiate the messages of a cultural product based on the extent of their knowledge external to the direct presentation. This, however, is another topic, and from here on out the discussion will focus on interpersonal interaction and presentation.

I will use MySpace to illustrate and elaborate upon this theoretical assertion (that the dimension of power helps us more fully understand the presentation of self process). I will first show how the continuum of power is represented on MySpace. I will then revisit the issue of MySpace as a reflection of identity change. I will then look at different ways of interacting with a MySpace user as reflective of the power relationship between the actor and audience. Next, I will talk about the difference between *having* power to present, and *using* that power. Finally, I will show that the power to present on MySpace can be transferred into offline interaction.

*Power Continuum on MySpace*

The amount of power an actor has to present himself is a function of the amount of negotiation that can takes place between the actor and the audience. Less negotiation gives the actor greater power to present, while increased negotiation gives the actor less power to present. So we now have to answer the question: what makes the amount of negotiation between an actor and an audience increase or decrease? In MySpace, the answer is that the amount of negotiation that takes place in MySpace varies with the relationship between the actor presenting himself, and the audience receiving the presentation.

Let us apply the continuum here. If maximum power to present is presentation in the absence of negotiation, then a MySpace presenter will have the greatest amount of power with "Friends" who know her only through the page. For example, an actor will have the greatest power to present when interacting with a "Friend" who knows the actor only through MySpace. Similarly, a MySpace user has the least power to present through her page with "Friends" she interacts with on a daily basis. For example, an actor would have little or no power to present through his page when interacting through MySpace with a spouse. Most interactions will fall between these two extremes, and all interactions can be understood in comparison to each other. For example, interacting with a "Friend" who the actor knew from years ago, but now only keeps in touch with over MySpace, gives the actor greater power to present than interacting with a current roommate, but less power to present than interacting with someone the actor has only met briefly outside of MySpace.

We can look at this as an issue of resources. In this instance we can think of resources as information about the actor. The more information extraneous to the direct presentation an audience member has about an actor, the more able she is to critique an actor's presentation. On MySpace, negotiation resources include information extraneous to the MySpace page. Audience members who interact with an actor on a regular basis have more information about the actor outside of his page, and so have more resources with which they can negotiate the actors' identity. The audience members who interact with an actor solely or mostly through MySpace, have less outside information about the actor, and so have fewer resources with which to negotiate the actor's identity as presented on his MySpace page.

To illustrate this point, I will talk about how the participants in this study report their behavior as audience members for their "Friends" MySpace page presentations. Audience members use MySpace pages differently depending upon how they know the "Friend" that they are interacting with. For a "Friend" that the audience member interacts with regularly, MySpace is used mostly as a communication tool. For "Friends" that audience members interact with mostly through MySpace, the page is used to gather information about the actor.

> *Neal*: with close friends, i depend on nothing on pages because #1- I know them, so i don't need their page to tell me anything and #2 i know how some of my friends attitudes are, so they may put false information up there to either be funny, or to impress some girl, or whatever reason. With people i don't know, i have to put more stock in their myspace info, because that's the only information i have on them.

> *Sarah*: the friends i see everyday we mostly use myspace just as a way of dropping a little note every now and then to each other to brighten each others day or jokes etc. whereas with the friends that i hardly ever see we use it to keep

track of what each other is doing, keep in touch, announce the arrival of babies, engagements, weddings, send happy birthdays etc. Basically I stalk those peoples myspace pages to find out what is going on in their lives. i spend a lot of time looking at their pages and reading their comments to see what they have going on and where they stand on issues, etc. and how much they have changed since the last time i saw them (which is for the most part high school graduation)

*Megan:* People…that I talk to on a pretty constant basis I hardly ever look at their pages but people that I'd like to know how they are or what they are doing I tend to look at their pages more.

*Megan* then elaborates about the ways in which she uses the pages of "Friends" who she doesn't interact with regularly.

*Megan*: I find myself about once every other week going through my friends and looking at the pages of people that have moved to the back of my mind-it's neat to see what people are doing now or see pictures of weddings or babies etc. I don't really talk to anyone from my high school but could tell you a lot about several folks from my class/school. I also learn a lot from reading bulletins or blogs not just looking at pages.

Here, *Megan* is relying on the information from "Friends" pages to tell her who they are now, and what they have been doing. This is how she uses the pages of "Friends" that she does not interact with regularly. For those "Friends" who she does interact with regularly, she reports using MySpace more as a communications tool. *Neal* articulates that for "Friends" that he doesn't interact with regularly, the MySpace page is the only information he has for them. *Neal* then has fewer resources to negotiate the identity, and therefore those "Friends" have greater power to present than the "Friends" who *Neal* interacts with on a regular basis. *Sarah* uses MySpace to communicate with "Friends" she sees everyday, and to "stalk" the "Friends" she doesn't see regularly. MySpace is her source of information for those she hasn't seen since high school, because of this, her high school "Friends" have greater power to present than the "Friends" she sees daily.

*Matt* describes more specifically the ways in which he uses actor's MySpace pages differently depending on how well he knows them.

> *Me*: how much do you rely on friends pages to tell you things about them?
>
> *Matt:* depends on the friend I guess my closer friends I already know about my friend Courtney for example is a close friend, so there is nothing on her myspace page that I don't know from having talked or email with her anyhow old high school and college friends are different
>
> *Me*: Different how?
>
> *Matt:* just in that we aren't close anymore they've moved awaywe don't talk often especially since I'm on IM so much less now so seeing crap in their profile is about as much contact as I have with them. I find I use the search function to check up on people especially people from high school I don't necessarily list them as friends  or communicate I'm just sort of interested in how it all turned out for them

The "crap in their profile" is the only information that *Matt* has with his old "Friends".

This is particularly the case with those whose pages he looks at but never adds as a "Friend". Although *Matt* has very few resources with which he can negotiate his high school friends' identities, he still relies on their pages to find out "how it all turned out for them". He is defining them based solely on the actors own presentations (and definitions of themselves). Thus, *Matt's* high school friends have a great deal of power to present themselves to this particular audience (*Matt)* due to his lack of resources (information extraneous to the page) with which he can negotiate their ideal presentations.

Placement upon the power to present continuum is a function of the amount of resources available to the audience receiving the presentation. An audience member viewing the MySpace page of a "Friend" known only through MySpace gives the actor

much greater power to present than a "Friend" who she interacts with on a regular basis. To interact with a "Friend", outside of MySpace on a regular basis gives the audience member information about the actor extraneous to the actor's MySpace page. The more extraneous information gathered by the audience member, the more resources he has to negotiate the actor's presentation. The more negotiation resources an audience member has, the less power the creator of the page has to present himself to that audience member. Said simply, the more an audience member knows about an actor outside of his MySpace page, the less reliant he is on the actor's MySpace presentation in forming a definition of the actor's identity.

*Identity Change*

In an earlier section, I talked about actors using MySpace to reflect identity change. I look at this same issue now from a different angle to further illustrate the idea of "power to present". I now look at the ways in which participants understand the identity change presented on "Friends" profiles. Some participants describe using MySpace to find out new things about "Friends" they don't see often except through MySpace. In some cases this is just descriptive information (new job, new relationship, moving, etc.). *Megan* for example found out that her ex-boyfriend had three children. Similarly, *Dan* looks at pages of friends he's lost contact with to find out basic information about them.

> *Dan*:  I like to look at old friends pages to see if they're dating anyone new, or maybe if they've had a change of employment

> *Holla Holly*: It's interesting to see who is married and has babies now!

Others, however, have stories of not only finding out descriptive information about "Friends", but of looking at "Friends" pages who they do not have regular contact with and perceiving the "Friend" as a changed person. While participants seemed relatively aware of their own power to present, the same awareness was not necessarily afforded to the MySpace pages of others. That is, while participants report meticulously deciding how to construct an image of themselves through their MySpace pages; they look at the pages of others with a much less critical eye. This is in line with Whitty's (2007) findings about online daters. It was found that although her participants reported posting inaccurate information about themselves, they were appalled when others profiles were inaccurate. Similarly here, participants describe purposively including and excluding information about themselves, but look at other's pages as though they do not engage in the same selectivity process.

> *Holla Holly*: A girl that I went to high school with was always very homely looking and didn't take a lot of pride in the way that she looked. She was very insecure and stayed rather covered up. When I saw her Myspace picture just recently she had done a complete 180! She took a lot of pride in the way she looked, was confident, outgoing, and was a lot different from what I knew her as

Let us look for a moment at *Holla Holly*'s language. She says about her "Friend" that; "she had done a complete 180! She tool a lot of pride in the way she looked, was confident, outgoing, and was a lot different from what I knew her as". *Holla Holly* is not differentiating between her perception of her "Friends" page, and the reality of her "Friend" as a person. That is, *Holla Holly* does not indicate how much it *seemed* like her "Friend" had changed, but that her "Friend" *did*, indeed changes as a person. *Holla Holly* has few resources to negotiate this identity. As such, her high school friend has a greater

amount of power to present. So much so, that *Holla Holly* speaks as though the page represents reality.

Similarly, *Matt* has relies on pictures of old friends MySpace pages to direct his opinion of how these "Friends" looks have changed.

> *Matt:* there were a few girls in hs that were sort of frumpy and not put together and I guess they found themselves in college a few of the guys as well dropped weight learned to shower etc

Neither *Holla Holly*, nor *Matt*, mention the possibility that their "Friends" have created a page to reflect an ideal image of themselves. *Matt* for example does not explore the possibility that his "Friends" are not necessarily more attractive, but have posted only pictures which present them in a more flattering light.

Not only can the perception of a "Friend" be changed by looking at her MySpace page, but the MySpace page can be more effective in shaping perceptions than a face to face interaction. Three participants shared stories of opinion changes where an online presentation trumped an offline presentation. In all three cases, the relationship between actor and audience member was not a close one. That is, in all three cases, the audience members had few negotiation resources.

*Kristen* comes from a conservative Christian background. Her younger sister attends a Christian school. *Kristen* assumes that the people who work in the school share the same conservative values as the institution in which they work. *Kristen* defines people in a certain way (conservative, Christian) when they are placed in the context of being a of Christian school employee. One employee, however, interacted with *Kristen* through MySpace, altering *Kristen*'s definition of the employee's identity. The

employee's MySpace page is not contextualized by her position at the school and contained content that contradicted *Kristen*'s assumptions. Through this employee's MySpace page, *Kristen* redefined her perception of the employee. That is, *Kristen*'s understanding of the employee's identity is no longer contextualized by her position as a Christian school employee, but based on the content of her MySpace page. The content of the MySpace presentation is more salient in *Kristen*'s definition of her "Friend" than the position that this "Friend" holds offline.

> *Kristen:* There is this girl that helps out in my sister's art class…and after checking out her page, I realized that she wasn't quite the person I thought she wasn't quite the person I thought she was. It's a very conservative Christian school…so I had an idea about who she was, but her page has the word FUCK all over it, and I would be very concerned if some of the kids saw her page. I didn't think she would speak like that to my sister…but I guess I did begin to think that she perhaps wasn't the best person to be working at the school. I wouldn't try to "report" her or anything, I just have an opinion.

*Kristen*'s initial assumptions about this school employee are challenged by the content of her MySpace page. Based on the content of this person's MySpace page, *Kristen* feels that the employee is not fit to be working at the Christian school. *Kristen* feels that the two definitions of her "Friend" are contradictory. Rather than questioning the authenticity of the page, however, *Kristen* uses the page to negate the presentation of the employee as a fit teacher. That is, instead of viewing the page as a poor reflection a competent Christian school teacher, *Kristen* views the page as unveiling the "true self" of an employee who falsely presents herself as a competent Christian school teacher. *Kristen* bases her definition of the employee on her MySpace page rather than the employee's offline interactions.

*Meghan Sullivan Thompson* privileged the presentation put forth on a MySpace page over an offline friend's description of a third party. *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* had been hearing about a friend's boyfriend for a good deal of time. The friend described her boyfriend in a very positive light, but the MySpace presentation of her friend's boyfriend had a greater impact on *Meghan Sullivan Thompson*'s definition of him than her friend's offline anecdotes.

> *Meghan Sullivan Thompson*: well i had a friend who had this bf , and she would always talk about how sweet he was...and then i looked at his profile, and under the headline, it  read "Mother fucking newport rhode island, bitch" and i thought...wow what an immature punk! .....i cant believe that she is dating someone that would have that on his profile!!!! So my opinion of her bf, who i didnt know changed...and my opinion of her changed ...a little

*Meghan Sullivan Thompson* had two sources of information in constructing a definition of her friend's boyfriend; her friend's descriptions/stories, and the boyfriend's MySpace presentation. The presentation of the MySpace page proved to be the more influential source of information. She does not question the accuracy of the MySpace presentation (perhaps the headline was a joke, perhaps someone else wrote it, perhaps the MySpace page was a poor representation of the boyfriend). Rather, she questions the offline representation given to her by her friend. Moreover, she changes her opinion of her friend because her friend is dating someone who *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* now considers (based on his MySpace presentation) to be immature.

*Neal* met a girl first offline, and then became her "Friend" on MySpace. The MySpace presentation gave a different impression than her offline interaction. Because of the MySpace presentation, *Neal* changed his opinion of this person, assuming that her MySpace page revealed the "true self" that she hadn't presented offline.

*Neal*: she's not on my friends list anymore, but i met this girl through some friends, in the real world, and she seemed cool and semi-normal, but when i looked at her [MySpace] page and pics, he was definitely a Goth hahaha trenchcoat mafia

*Me*: did you continue to interact with her after you saw her page?

*Neal*: yeah, but my opinion of her was changed that sounds shallow but it's true

*Neal* differentiates here between "real world" and online presentations. Interestingly, what he calls "real world" (read: offline interaction) had less of an impact on his definition of his "Friend" than her online presentation. Based on their "real world" interaction, *Neal* defines her as *seeming* "cool and semi-normal" (whatever "normal" might mean to him). Looking at her page, however, he defines her as "a Goth", a member of the "trenchcoat mafia". I emphasized *seeming* in the previous sentence to differentiate the impact of her offline and online presentations. Her offline presentation made her *seem* a certain way, but her online presentation meant to *Neal* that she actually *is* another way. Her "true self", what she *is,* was defined by *Neal* through her MySpace presentation, not her "real world" interaction.

These stories provide a direct comparison of the reception of identity construction through MySpace and offline interactions. The presentation through MySpace has a more powerful impact than face to face interactions. It is through MySpace then, that an actor can have more power to present. This is not to say that all MySpace users are presenting an ideal self through MySpace. What it does say is that a presentation on MySpace is more readily accepted than an offline presentation. So if an actor wishes to present himself in an ideal way through MySpace, he would likely be successful in doing so in instances where the audience has few negotiation resources. It

should be noted, however, that all three of these cases involved actors and audiences that did not interact frequently outside of MySpace. As noted in an earlier section, those who do interact regularly outside of MySpace (those with more resources to negotiate an identity) pay little or no attention to the MySpace presentation. So this power to present through MySpace is limited to interactions with audiences that have few negotiation resources to begin with. As we will discuss shortly, *having* the power to present does not necessarily mean *using* the power to present.

I have said so far that power to present falls on a continuum. The less negotiation that takes place, the more power an actor has to present her ideal self. In MySpace, power to present is dependent upon interaction extraneous to MySpace. The less information outside of MySpace that an audience possesses, the more power the MySpace page is given in presenting the actor. Further, MySpace reality is seen as a "truer" representation of an actor's identity than face to face interaction (when face to face interaction does not occur on a regular basis).

Let us look now at what this means in light of the structure of interaction through the PIH. Offline interactions are constantly being negotiated, and being placed within a context that can shape how an actor is understood. Presentations are more subtle offline, with actors often *showing* rather than *telling* their audiences who they are. This leaves room for interpretation and negotiation. Offline interaction is placed within a specific context, shaping how action and presentation is to be understood. Presentation of self through MySpace, however, is overt. The actor tells the audience who she is. The presentation is pre-packaged, allowing the presenter to construct her image in the

absence of negotiation, and solidify it in writing prior to negotiation. The presentation is un-contextualized, allowing the presenter to guide the audience in understanding the presentation. Thus, presentation of self on MySpace is deliberate and direct, allowing the actor to be calculating in the construction of her image.

For those who have few negotiation resources, it is this calculated, deliberately constructed image which is thought be the actor's "true self". If the actor is believed to truly be this person, then the audience will interact with her as though she is this person. The audience thus, is interacting with the actor's ideal self as though it is her "true self", further reifying this identity. Through MySpace we can not only deliberately construct an ideal self, but increase our power to present an ideal self.

*Negotiation Through Comments*

We have talked about the power that an actor has to present himself through his MySpace page. I have said that the page is originally created in the absence of negotiation. Negotiation, however, can take place after the page has already been created. This can be done through public comments. "Friends" can comment on each other's "wall", blogs, and pictures. The comments can be seen by anyone who views the MySpace user's page. Comments then become part of the actor's MySpace page, and become part of the presentation. The comments can then either re-affirm or negate the actor's presentation. In order for a comment to negate the actor's presentation, however, the "Friend" who posts the comment must have the resources to do so. That is, to negate some piece of information on the page a "Friend" must have some degree of knowledge extraneous to the page.

Participants report using MySpace pages differently based upon who they are interacting with. For those whom participants interact with regularly, the MySpace page is used as more of a communication tool. *It's good to be a Romero* describes interaction with close friends through MySpace as "passing notes in class". For those whom participants interact with primarily through MySpace however, the page is used to gather information, learn about who a person is, or how they have turned out. By analyzing comments left on participants pages I will illustrate how information extraneous to the MySpace page provides an audience with greater negotiation resources.

I will illustrate my point by showing comments which negate the MySpace actor's presentation, and then analyzing the negotiation resources of the "Friend" who posted the comments.

> Picture: *S@r@* has pictures posted from a cruise that she went on over the summer. One picture is of *S@r@* in a dress pointing to a schedule board in the airport. The picture is captioned "on time".
>
> *Kristy*'s comment: "Awwwww... you with your makeup look so pretty!!!".

*Kristy*'s comment tells the audience that this is not what *S@r@* looks like naturally. *Kristy* and *S@r@* are close friends. They attend the same school and are involved in the same extra-curricular organization.

> Picture: *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* has a picture of herself hugging another girl in a dormitory. The picture is captioned "back in the day". The picture shows the background of the dorm and a head to toe side view of *Meghan Sullivan Thompson* wearing a fitted     shirt and fitted jeans.
>
> *Mark's* comment: Where's ur butt?

*Mark* is adding information to *Meghan Sullivan Thompson*'s presentation. She tells the audience in her caption that the picture is from a long time ago. *Mark* tells the audience in his comment that *Meghan* does not look like that anymore. More specifically, he tells the audience that she now has a larger butt. *Mark* is *Meghan Sullivan Thompson*'s fiancé, and they live together.

> Picture: I have a picture of myself sitting at a table holding a tequila shot with my mouth open, my tongue ring visible, looking ready to take the shot.

> *It's good to be a Romero*'s comment: Jen, everyone and their dog knows that one smell of this shot and you are drunk ;)

*It's good to be a Romero* tells the audience that this behavior is out of the norm for me. She indicates that I don't drink much, and that it doesn't take much to get me drunk. *It's good to be a Romero* is a classmate and a close friend of mine. We live close to each other and spend time together often.

The above are examples of "Friends" who have the resources to negotiate using their resources to negate actor's presentations. *It's good to be a Romero* knows that I don't drink much, and so is able negate the presentation put forth by my picture on MySpace. *Meghan Sullivan Thompson*'s fiancé sees her everyday, and so knows how her body currently looks. These same "Friends" also post comments which re-affirm the actor's presentations and post comments that are neutral (neither affirming nor negating, simply communicating)**,** but this does not take away from their *ability* to negate it. Contrarily, comments by "Friends" with few negotiation resources either affirm the actor's presentation or are neutral. These "Friends" cannot negate the presentation because they do not have the resources to do so.

Picture: *S@r@* has another picture from her cruise when she is in the airport about to come back home. This is the very last picture of the album.

*Meww*'s comment: Damn, Sara... You got kinda hot!

*Meww* is *S@r@*'s friend from high school. They don't see each other often. Since *Meww* has few resources to negotiate *S@r@*'s presentation, she assumes that the presentation is true. When she interacts with *S@r@* through MySpace, she interacts as if the presentation *is* true. Rather than *Kristy* who contrasts the way *S@r@* looks in these pictures to the way she looks naturally, *Meww* assumes that *S@r@* now looks the way she does in her pictures, and so tells *S@r@* that she is "hot", re-affirming the presentation that *S@r@* has put forward.

Comments thus, are public negotiations with MySpace presentations. These interactions follow the continuum of power to present. Those with more negotiation resources have the ability to negate a presentation put forth by the actor, giving the actor less power to present herself. Those with fewer negotiation resources do not have the ability to negate a presentation put forth by the actor, giving the actor greater power to present. This shows us that not only does an actor's power to present impact the ways in which his presentation is received, but the ways in which interactions take place between actor and audience. Those with fewer resources to negotiate, interact with the actor *as* the page. Moreover, when this is done publicly (through comment) it becomes a public re-affirmation of the presented identity.

*Having and using the Power to Present*

What has been established thus far is that power to present falls on a continuum. This continuum is based on the negotiation resources held by an audience. The more knowledge extraneous to a MySpace page an audience has, the more negotiation resources she has. So depending upon who we are interacting with, this power to present exists for all users of MySpace.

While we all *have* this power to present, we don't all necessarily use it in the same way. That is, having the power to present is not the same as using this power. This goes back to the different ways people use their MySpace pages. Those who use their pages primarily for communication and put little effort into constructing their pages are not fully utilizing their power to present. On the other hand, those who meticulously decide how to construct their pages (and so their identities) are more fully utilizing their power to present.

By looking at the ways in which participants decide how to construct their pages, we can see to what degree different people use their power to present. *Matt*, for example, utilizes his power to a lesser degree. That is, by putting less thought and effort into his page, he is not fully utilizing his power to present through this medium. His main purpose for using MySpace is gathering information about bands. He includes very little information about himself and has only three pictures (the least of all participants).

> *Matt*: it says very little about me as a person I think. Its almost a stopholder for my personal statsI guess the most it says about me is due to my likes and dislikes bands I like  movies I like etc I don't use the blog though I honestly don't think its a particularly good representation of  myself its like trying to get at the personality of a baseball player through a baseball card….I meet no new people on myspace. I also use it a lot just to keep up with bands and comedians I like the

> bulletins are really useful for finding out about free shows deals etc.I use it alot when I can't find emails

*Neal* forgoes his power to present in a different way. His page includes pictures, backgrounds and a good amount of information, but the presentation is tailored towards the "Friends" he interacts with on a regular basis. The information on the page would make little sense to a stranger, or to someone *Neal* didn't interact with regularly. Since it is "Friends" that don't interact with *Neal* regularly who will depend on the page to construct an understanding of *Neal*'s identity, his page gives him little power to present. The page then is more a form of communication and interaction with close friends rather than a presentation that will influence how his identity is shaped.

> *Neal*: my about me section is just lines from funny movies that my friends and I know… if a stranger looked at my site, they might think i actually live on East Capitol street, but I put that up there because I'm @ [the baseball] stadium so often. it's not my true location it's an inside joke for my friends…. i don't like to be serious, and also i'm not on myspace to meet people through myspace, even though i have a couple times so i really      don't need to put myself out there, like i'm selling myself.

*Neal* has met people through MySpace. With people met through MySpace, he has a great deal of power to present an ideal self. Someone he meets and knows only through MySpace has no information extraneous to his MySpace page, and so has no negotiation resources. Even though he has been in a position to have this power, (meeting someone through MySpace) he has not fully utilized this power, as his page is not a presentation of his ideal self , but rather a communication page with meaning only to close friends.

Other participants put more effort and thought into their pages, and so more fully utilize their power to present. *Megan* recognizes that her page will construct a particular

image of who she is. Because of this, she does not include anything that would negate

her presentation as a professional.

> *Megan:* I try not to post too many personal things A) for the professional world
> and B) I don't want the whole world to necessarily know about me**.**

*It's good to be a Romero*, as we said earlier, excludes information about her sexuality

because it would negate her presentation as a Christian. She also purposively includes

only things that she is "proud of", presenting an ideal self.

> *It's good to be a Romero*: I like who I am, I love my life and friends, why would
> I portray anything else the first line in the about me part says: proud to be... and
> this is true also all the things that I chose to expose on myspace are things that I
> genuinely celebrate!

*Meghan Sullivan Thompson* presents herself in a positive light, leaving out information

that would lead back to her darker past. She is one of the participants who has used her

page as a reflection and a tool in identity change. She presents the "new" her on her

page, helping to separate her from an old identity.

> *Meghan Sullivan Thompson*: [From looking at my page people would describe
> me as] crazy!  probably..also self-assured, confident, obsessed with my fiance
> and most importantly FUN! they wouldnt know that i grew up with a very heavy
> depression...they wouldnt know that my home life growing up was "less thenb
> satisfactory"...they wouldnt know that, thats the reason i have been planning to
> move to california since i was 10....they wouldnt know that i use to fell
> completely out of place, and that i would never find someone i could fit in with,
> someone to understand me...they wouldnt know how          much i have changed
> and grown over the last 6 years....they wouldnt know that i use to   have low self-
> esteem, unless they thought i was over-compensating for it, by being SO overly
> confident. [I don't include these things becaues] as open as i try to be, i dont feel
> comfortable throwing the other people involved under the bus...(my parents)  for
> friends that i had growing up and its not me now!

These MySpace users are aware of, and utilize their power to present. They know that the presentations on their MySpace pages will shape their "Friends" perceptions of who they are, and they construct the pages to shape these perceptions in a particular way. They include information which affirms their presentation of an ideal self, and exclude information which threatens the authenticity of their ideal self. *Matt* and *Neal* on the other hand, put little effort into presenting an ideal self. While all of these participants *have* power to present, they use their power in varying degrees.

*Dialectic*

Presentation on MySpace can impact not only the audience, but the actor as she works to construct her ideal presentation. That is, as an actor creates a MySpace page, that creation can act back upon the creator, influencing the way she defines herself and the ways that she interacts in order to live up to that definition. By laying out in writing "who" an actor is, it not only shapes the way an audience views an actor, but can organize for an actor how he sees himself.

I feel that I need to note here that this process was not articulated by many participants. On the contrary, most participants report that their page does not shape how they act or how they view themselves, but rather the page is seen as simply a reflection of who they are. Very few describe any impact that the page has back upon them. There are many possible reasons that these participants rarely articulate this process. The simplest reason would be that MySpace pages really do not impact their creators; they are simply true reflections of who the creator is offline. Knowing what we know about the self construction process, however, I don't think it is likely (or even possible) to

construct an image of oneself without being impacted by that construction. Another possibility is that participants are not articulate enough about the presentation process. Again, I find this unlikely, as my sample is biased by high educational levels. In particular, the interviewees are all at least in college, and many have earned, or are in the process of earning advanced degrees. A third reason (the reason I think is most likely) can be found by looking back to Goffman (1959).

Goffman describes an audience as those who receive a presentation. Thus far we have been talking about the audience as something/someone external to the actor (in the case of this study, the audience has been referring to a MySpace users's "Friends"). In addition, however, Goffman tells us that the same external processes that are occurring between actor and audience are also occurring internally within the actor. That is, the actor is a member of his own audience. The actor then has to make his presentation not only authentic to others, but authentic to himself (1959). Just as external audiences must not see the backstage preparation, the actor himself must blind himself, to an extent, from his construction processes.

Despite this dilemma, two participants did articulate a dialectic relationship between themselves and their MySpace pages. *LukeASS* talks about his MySpace page as therapy.

> *LukeASS:* I think there is a certain therapy to building a myspace page, a lot like a journal. Maybe it's because you have to pick out the parts of yourself that people can see.

*Sarah* talks about the transfer of her presentation from interactions on MySpace to

interactions in physical space. This occurs for her only with "Friends" who she interacts

with mostly through MySpace.

> *Sarah*: well i have always tried to live up to that image- at least when i am in
> front of people- even before i had the page but i think since making the page
> when i see people that i have as friends on myspace that i don't see on a regular
> basis i try even harder to uphold the image that i portray on my page. this is too
> hard to do on an everyday basis so i dont do it around people that i have a lot of
> contact with
>
> *Me*: Do you have any examples of this?
>
> *Sarah*: okay so when i go home and i run into people that i graduated high school
> with    that i still keep in touch with via myspace i try extra hard to make them
> think that i know       exactly what i am going to do with my life, that i have it
> all planned out and under perfect control by telling them that i know exactly what
> i want to do when i'm done with school, and i know where i'm going to live, etc.
> but in reality i have no clue what i am going to do after may or where i may end
> up, and my friends that i have contact with everyday know this- i dont feel like i
> have to put on the whole 'i know what i'm doing' show for them

She uses her power to present on MySpace to interact as her ideal self offline with

"Friends" who she doesn't see on a regular basis.  The MySpace page can give an actor

power to present herself to particular audiences. Without negotiation, the actor has a

better chance of having the audience's definition of her identity match her own ideal

presentation of her identity. Defining the actor by her MySpace page, the audience

interacts with the actor as the person presented on the page. Moving the interaction

offline, the audience will (at least at first) interact with the actor based on a definition of

the actor's identity formed through the page. That is, the actor will be better able to

achieve identity verification (Burke 2004), reifying her (ideal) identity.

These two examples (*LukeASS* and *Sarah*) show us that the MySpace page and the creator of the page *can* have a dialectical relationship. That is, as an actor constructs a MySpace page, the construction acts back upon the page creator, impacting how he defines himself. This can be transferred into offline behavior, as the actor behaves in accordance with his presentation, attempting to reach identity verification (Burke 2004). This is done most easily when interacting with "Friends" who have few negotiation resources. These are the only two concrete examples, of the reflexive process of a MySpace page creation. Most likely, the reason for this is that actors do not typically make themselves fully aware of their self construction processes in order to maintain an internal sense of authenticity (Goffman 1959).

6. CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that the PIH is unique. It combines the self presentation format of the personal homepage, with numerous interaction forms. It is then, I have argued, a unique structure within which interaction takes place. Because of this, the PIH should be examined to see how (if at all) it can help us better understand and build upon presentation of self theories.

Based on my analysis of the structure of the PIH, and the ways in which interaction takes place within this structure, I have found a dimension of power in the presentation of self process. I call this power "power to present". This is defined as an actor's ability to present an ideal self in light of varying amounts of negotiation. Power to present is seen on a continuum, where power has an inverse relationship with negotiation. The amount of negotiation that can take place during an interaction is dependent upon the audience member's negotiation resources, or information external to the presentation.

Through MySpace, an actor's power to present is based upon her relationship to the audience. The more interaction outside of MySpace between actor and audience, the less power the actor has to present herself through her MySpace page. Those "Friends" that the actor interacts with on a regular basis outside of MySpace have the resources to negotiation the actor's presentation, and don't often use the page to find out about the actor.

For those who interact mostly through MySpace, the MySpace page works as a reflection or a catalyst for identity change. As audience members, participants report finding out new things about their "Friends", and changing opinions about "Friends" they have not seen in awhile based upon the "Friends" MySpace presentation. They are granting authenticity to a potentially ideal presentation because they lack the resources to negotiate otherwise.

Although MySpace presentations are created prior to negotiation, public comments on MySpace pages can act to negate or affirm an actor's presentation. Again, we see that those with few negotiation resources leave either neutral or affirming comments. Most negating comments come from "Friends" with knowledge about the actor extraneous to the page. These "Friends" are able to negate the actor's identity because they have the negotiation resources to do so.

The presentation through MySpace can impact not only audience member's perceptions of an actor, but can also impact an actor's perception of himself. It is not surprising that this process was rarely articulated by participants, since Goffman (1959) tells us that we have to maintain internal as well as external authenticity. Two examples, however, do show us that reflexivity though MySpace is possible, and *Sarah* shows us that the extent to which a MySpace page can shape behavior may be dependent upon the power (to present) relationship between actor and audience.

Through this analysis I have argued that presentation of self theory needs to be built upon. I have argued that it can be built upon by adding the dimension of power.

This is illustrated in the structure and interactional processes of the PIH, as represented here specifically by MySpace.

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## APPENDIX A

**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY**
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Institutional Biosafety Committee    Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee    Institutional Review Board

**DATE:**    26-Jun-2007

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:**    DAVIS, JENNIFER
TAMU-SOCIOLOGY(00143)

**FROM:**    Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

**SUBJECT:** Initial Review

**Protocol Number:**    2007-0386

**Title:**    MySpace: Implications of the Personal Interactive Homepage on Interaction and Self Presentation

**Review Category:**    Exempt from IRB Review

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that the referenced protocol application meets the criteria for exemption and no further review is required. However, any amendment or modification to the protocol must be reported to the IRB and reviewed before being implemented to ensure the protocol still meets the criteria for exemption.

**This determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:**
(http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm)

45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior, unless: (a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

**Provisions:**

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

VITA

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