

THE METROBURB: AMERICAN VALUES IN FACEBOOK CULTURE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Using critical discourse analysis, fantasy themes were extracted from user profiles and postings to examine American values found in Facebook culture.

Core values found on Facebook worked to create not only socially recognizable identities enacted and communicated through the participants, but also a particular culture to which participants both reflected and contributed in Facebook. Themes and values extracted from findings indicate that Facebook users should be casual, technologically-aware, social, respectful and fair to others, “good little copers,” financially savvy while at the same time valuing higher education, a healthy lifestyle, family and travel.

Because Facebook is an interestingly fluid cultural location, with its users moving in and out of it and the location with which they physically subside, findings also revealed that certain values were reified placing participants as American Facebook users: being social, mixing with a wide array of friends (or neighbors), working hard and sacrificing for one’s family to succeed.

In the 1950s, Americans left the small city for the expansive and homogenous suburban life. In the 2000s, Facebook transforms the suburb/city metaphor and is, in essence, a third space that is neither city nor suburb, but instead a new MetroBurb, allowing the user to easily weave between city and suburb without the long commute or need to physically leave one’s home.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With over 700 million active users, Facebook has grown into what would be the third largest country in the world (“Statistics”, 2011). Users often access the site hourly via the Internet or by the minute on a cell phone, thus weaving in and out of this new “country.” Facebook becomes, in essence, a culture with its own values—its own ways of knowing. Facebook is an interestingly fluid cultural location, with its users moving in and out of it and the location in which they physically reside. This study will seek to understand this cultural fluidity by using critical discourse analysis to extract fantasy themes from user profiles and postings in order to examine the American values found in Facebook culture (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239; Minnick, 1957, p. 219).

Social media is a web-based medium designed to create dialogue and social interaction amongst its users. It is built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0<sup>1</sup>, which allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content<sup>2</sup>. The most popular form of social media at present is Facebook (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 200). In 2004, Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook to facilitate intra-campus socializing (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, p. 1818). It was originally limited to Harvard, but was shortly expanded to colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League and

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<sup>1</sup> Term commonly associated with web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to various kinds of media content that is publicly available and produced by the end user, or person who uses a product.

Stanford University. Facebook expanded to include high school campuses in 2005, and then the public and commercial organizations in 2006 (Zhao et al., 2008, p. 1818).

There have been various studies addressing Facebook since its creation, predominantly focused on the number of friends one acquires, specifically how each feature allows certain information to be presented, and privacy and security issues in a technological respect. Existing studies also focus on youth audiences, college students in particular, because most have come out of university research. College-age (18–24) users are not actually the dominant demographic on Facebook. Facebook users age 25–29 are growing in numbers on-line, but silent are in the literature (“Statistics”, 2011).

Current studies provide either metatheory or immediate usage outcomes. Something interesting is happening between these two points; Facebook is much more than simply usage outcomes to be quantified and measured. This study sees Facebook for what it is—a culture—and does not operationalize the site and its users. Additionally, previous studies are bound by time, focusing at just a moment in time. Shifting the focus to Facebook as a culture, while seeking to understand American values within, provides a richer understanding of Facebook at the present moment while also addressing the longevity of cultural values.

Language is active; it is both thinking and doing, creating the discourse through which meanings unfold within the world, creating a particular way of knowledge that simultaneously also discounts other modes of knowing. Knowledge, and subsequently discourse, is intrinsically value-laden and fully embedded with power; it is forever present in the way we talk. Knowledge and power are inseparable, constituting each

other. Knowledge is a creator and creation of power, while power is a creator and creation of knowledge.

With certain knowledge, partitioned into discourse(s), a system of distinction is constituted. “Certain things are worthy of being distinguished from others and [this] puts into play attributes to make that distinction” creating particular “systems of thought” (Deetz, 2003, p. 23). These “systems of thought” perpetuate certain social structures: traditions, institutions, and established ways of doing things: culture (Giddens, 1991, p. 70). Certain actions reify social structure, or culture, with three predominant meta-features: values, ideologies, and myths (including fantasy themes). Thus, for the purposes of this study, discourse is defined as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Foucault, 1994, p. 76).

Values are the deep-seated, persistent beliefs about essential rights and wrongs that express a basic orientation to life (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Ideology then serves to qualify or position an individual within a culture or subculture by functioning to show what exists, what is good and what is possible. Ideologies directly reflect the values and approved social reality and myths that serve as moral guides to the proper action, as governed by the cultural values (Deetz & Mumby, 1986, p. 374). “Myths provide legitimacy to a culture [and its values/ideologies] because the stories they tell are timeless ‘lessons,’ which serve as emotive forces for maintaining social order” (Meister, 1999, p. 5). Values, ideologies, and myths are intertwined. Imagine a cultural river. The grains of sand at the bottom represent individual values and the flowing water represent the

overarching cultural ideologies. The banks that hold everything together within the river represent myth. They work together concurrently to weave culture into value systems.

Cultures are developed within and reflect larger, broader cultures (Campbell, 1989, p. 101). The same is true for Facebook as its users are both moving in and out of Facebook and the location with which they physically reside. However, does it reflect American culture? In 1957, Minnick created a list of core American values (p. 219). This value list was broken into categories such as social, political, religious, economic, etc. Because Facebook is a social networking site, the emphasis of this study is on the designated broader social values. While there have been ideological shifts in American culture in the fifty-four years since Minnick's work, the top nine values noted are still reflected within American culture today. As such, this study will also analyze how the nine identified American social values based on the work of Minnick (1957, p. 219) in Hart and Daughton's *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (2005, p. 239) are reified or transformed in the culture of Facebook.

With post-World War II prosperity came a vast exodus from the city and a migration to the suburbs (Rapaport & Stayton, 2002, p. 45). Presently, many major city downtowns are experiencing a renewal with more young Americans seeking downtown living, and increased social, cultural outlets (Yen, 2010). With little physical space within the city to house more occupants, compared to the suburban outskirts, where do Americans seeking more social, cultural, and diverse interactions go if not to the city? Could it be Facebook? This study explores how the values of 1950s America are reified or transformed in Facebook culture, and how Facebook becomes a metaphor of the city/suburb.

This study took a discourse-based approach to provide deeper and richer insights into culture whilst also providing numerous starting points for future studies in communication, and insight for certain industries by asking the following research questions: what are the myths, ideologies, fantasy themes, and values within Facebook culture? And how does this culture tie into American social values (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239; Minnick, p. 219, 1957). Are they reified, and if so how? This study seeks to answer these questions by focusing on the discourse within Facebook in order to extract fantasy themes that reflect the larger values of Facebook culture.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following section discusses relevant literature that presents a foundation for understanding Facebook (its current research), power and knowledge, culture (ideologies, myths and values), and the top nine American social values. Following this chapter, the methods employed in this study will be described.

### **Facebook as Context**

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, introduced Facebook as a “social utility that connects you with the people around you,” playing off of the directory given to American university students at the start of an academic year to help students get to know each other better (“Statistics”, 2011). Facebook users are able to present themselves in a number of ways through their personal profile: displaying pictures in photo albums; listing interests and hobbies; listing friends and social networks; and interacting with other users via comments on profile walls, in-site chat and messages, which allows users to tag each other<sup>3</sup> in posts. Additionally, users have the ability to set certain privacy settings within their own network.

A January 2009 Compete.com study ranked Facebook as the social network service most used by worldwide monthly active users (Kazeniak, 2009). The site added

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<sup>3</sup> A user can tag another friend in any post (theirs or another’s) as a way to connect that post to their profile. It is a way to allow friends of friends to connect online.



to its popularity by incorporating additional features: events, birthday reminders, and a news feed. The news feed appears on every user's homepage and highlights the activity of their friends: profile changes, upcoming events, status updates, photo/video uploads, and birthdays of friends. Users can control some settings not only for their activity on friends' news feeds, but also for friends' activity shown in their news feed.

Since its introduction in 2004, Facebook has constructed its own particular language through unique features that provide relevance to this study. By 2005, the use of Facebook had already become so ubiquitous that the generic verbs "facebooking" and "unfriend" had entered popular discourse outside of the site (Soraya, 2005). In fact, in 2008, Collins English Dictionary declared "Facebook" as their new Word of the year, with the New Oxford American Dictionary following in 2009 by declaring their word of the year to be "unfriend" ("Unfriend," 2009).

### **Facebook Research**

There have been various studies addressing Facebook since its creation, predominantly focused on the number of friends one acquires, specifically how each feature allows certain information to be presented, and privacy and security issues in a technological respect. Previous research is addressed in this section.

Wittel (2001) refers to networked sociality as a flattening of social bonds as being akin to a database, in which the "disembedding and continual deconstruction and reconstruction of social bonds have been epitomized," positing a new morphology and "space of flows" (p. 52). Facebook is described as more of a horizontally structured flexible network with a subsequent need for the pursuit and acquisition of new contacts (Castells, 1996, p. 470; Miller, 2008, p. 393).

Shin and Kim (2010) refers to this as promiscuous friending with individuals communicating and reinforcing their existing identity<sup>4</sup> by behaving in ways that convey that identity (p. 118). These behavioral outputs depend on more than a stimulus-response, but also what is happening at the cognitive level with regards to computer-mediated communication within organizations.

Amiot, De La Sablonniere, Terry, and Smith (2007) posit the self as a multi-faceted cognitive structure and that one's social identity "changes in social context" (p. 375). Predominance is placed on database-like features such as number of friends, links, and irrelevant gestures or exchanges (i.e., pokes, super pokes, quiz result postings, etc.).

Miller (2008) coins the term phatic culture: non-dialogic and non-informational communication networks (p. 394). Within this culture, every item or "status update" possesses the same significance as any other, reinforcing the horizontality of the hierarchy-lacking network. Boyd (2007) presents one outcome of phatic culture: the concept of a friend is also flattened as "one's close inner circle sits alongside strangers under the same banner" (p. 20). Within a database, there is no individual significance to the data, it all reflects an equal importance, or perhaps unimportance.

Wittel (2001), Castells (1996), Shin and Kim (2010), Amiot, De La Sablonniere, Terry, and Smith (2007), and Miller (2008) all focus on the number of friends one acquires with either the identity, information presented by users, or Facebook as a proliferation of an insignificant database. Such studies highlight the lack of importance

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<sup>4</sup> Defined by Shin and Kim (2010) as a variety of attributes along the dimensions of physical and cognitive abilities, personal traits, and motives.

with what is being said by users, but pay little to no attention to what it is that is not being said by users. This study will provide the attention lacking by previous studies to properly foreground the cultural values embedded within Facebook user discourse.

Debatin (2009) investigates Facebook users' awareness of privacy issues and the perceived benefits and risks while utilizing Facebook (p. 102). Focus was specifically on the understanding of privacy issues and invasion and use. Results suggested, "users reporting privacy invasion were more likely to change privacy settings than those merely hearing about others' privacy invasions" (Debatin, 2009, p. 102). Focus was specifically on privacy settings with regards to measurable gratification, usage patterns and psychological mechanisms.

Boyd (2008) provides more analysis into Facebook privacy surrounding the launch of the news feed in Facebook citing it as a "privacy train wreck" (p. 13). The study examined privacy concerns and implications through vocalization by users or their discontent and the eventual forcing of the company to implement further privacy features into the site.

Lewis, Kaufman and Christakis (2008) perform an analysis of college students' privacy settings within Facebook, using privacy as the unit of analysis and analyzing predictive factors for having a private versus public profile (p. 79). Results indicated that behavior was an "upshot of both social influences and personal incentives" while providing indicators amongst users for having a more public versus a more private profile. Again, Lewis, Kaufman and Christakis (2008) contribute measurable usage outcomes with regards to Facebook users and their use without taking into account the social and cultural behavior within the profile (p. 100).

Lankton and McKnight (2011) use Facebook as a site to demonstrate “either interpersonal or technological trust characteristics” and “test two second-order factor structures that represent alternative ways to model the three interpersonal and three technological trust beliefs” (pg. 32). The results were structured around finding the best-fitting measurement model depicting personal and technological trust in the *site* of Facebook as a whole. However, what is missing is the *culture* of Facebook.

Debatin (2009), Boyd (2008), Lewis, Kaufmann and Christakis (2008), and Lankton and McKnight (2011) focus specifically on technological power, control, privacy, and trust within Facebook. However, Facebook was created as a social utility to connect users to those around them; it is more than a set of privacy features and tools, it is a new technological suburb for social connection and culture.

Current studies provide either metatheory or immediate usage outcomes. Something interesting is happening between these two points; Facebook is much more than simply usage outcomes to be quantified and measured. This study sees Facebook for what it is—a culture—and does not operationalize the site and its users. Additionally previous studies are bound by time, focusing on just a moment in time. Shifting the focus to Facebook as a culture, while seeking to understand American values within, provides a richer understanding of Facebook at the present moment while also addressing the longevity of cultural values.

## **Power and Knowledge**

Power and knowledge are intrinsically tied as power is omnipresent, produced at every moment in time and at every point; it is all over, “which does not mean it contains everything, but that it comes from everywhere” (Motion and Leitch, 2009; Foucault, 1994, p. 30). Power just is. It is embedded in that which then pre-defines our world, language. Language is active. It is both thinking and doing, creating the discourse through which meanings unfold within the world and particular ways of knowing are created. This unfolding of a particular knowledge simultaneously also discounts other modes of knowing. Every mode of knowing (gained through language and discourse) is a mode of differentiating that inherently values certain ways of knowing over others (Foucault, 1977, p. 76). Therefore, knowledge, and subsequently discourse, is intrinsically value-laden and forever present in the way we talk.

Therefore, “every linguistic system is a system of distinction putting into place certain kinds of social relations and values. Certain things are worthy of being distinguished from others and [this] puts into play attributes to make that distinction” (Deetz, 2003, p. 23). These certain kinds of social relations and values are distinguished as right or preferred while all others are seen as extraneous and outside. In essence, there is a “regime” of truth that is made up of discourses that are accepted as “common sense” and thus function as truth. Thus, discourses are then constituted by “systems of thought” (Giddens, 1991, p. 70).

## Culture

“Systems of thought” perpetuate certain social structures: traditions, institutions, and established ways of doing things: culture (Giddens, 1991, p. 70). Giddens (1991) proposes the theory of structuration to explain how human activity and agency fits within the larger social structure of culture (p. 70). In this theory, “human agency (micro level activity) and social structure (macro level forces) continuously feed into each other. The social structure is reproduced through repetition of acts by individual people” and therefore can change or not (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 107).

If certain ways of knowing work to produce a certain social structure or culture, how is this culture reified into producing certain actions? Hart and Daughton (2005) note three predominant features of culture that help to reproduce the repetition of certain acts over others:

1. Values: deep-seated, persistent beliefs about essential rights and wrongs that express a basic orientation to life;
2. Myths: master stories describing exceptional people doing exceptional things and serving as moral guides to proper action;
3. Fantasy themes: abbreviated myths providing concrete manifestations of current values and hinting at some idealized version of the future (p. 239).

It is these three predominant features, working in context, which set the context for individuals, placing them not as someone, but someone *somewhere*. And yet, “our cultural assumptions, treasured stories, ways of valuing and linguistic preferences are so deeply ingrained within us that we become mute without them,” embedding them in discourse (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 242). As such, culture is seen to then structure the way people think, feel, and act (duGay, 1996, p. 151).

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) extend this notion of culture into a web metaphor within which individuals “inhabit ‘a’ reality [but] not all realities” and that this particular reality is “constructed to give substance and meaning to what would otherwise be insensate behavior” (p. 123). Culture then is a sense-making, constructed reality displayed by those whose existence is, again, embedded in a certain set of webs (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 123). Using a web metaphor for culture provides the opportunity for multiple cultural contexts to coincide and coexist. Here, the door is open for such a fluid cultural location as Facebook, with its users moving in and out of it and the location with which they physically subside, to intersect certain cultural webs or contexts.

As many users are both ingrained with or embedded with American culture and subsequent values/myths, how could American culture be reified or transformed within the particular cultural discourse of Facebook? Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) posit looking at particular key communication activities: relevant constructs, facts, practices, vocabulary, metaphors, stories, rites, and rituals (p. 124–126). Therefore, by paying particular attention and unraveling these particular communicative acts, one can understand not only Facebook culture, but also how nine identified American social values can also be at work within the site (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239; Minnick, 1957, p. 219).

### **Values and Ideology**

In order to fully understand culture and the forthcoming nine American social values, it is important to understand what is meant by ideology (Minnick, 1957, p. 219; Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239). Deetz and Mumby (1986) preface ideology with

perception, a particular lens or view taken by an individual (p. 369). Five important aspects of perception are that perception is primary, participatory, positional, political, and protected opinion (Deetz & Mumby, 1986, p. 370–371). Perception works in concert with ideology because ideology is how an individual thinks, acts, and places him or herself in a particular paradigm or worldview. Ideology then serves to qualify or position an individual within a culture or subculture by functioning to show what exists, what is good, and what is possible.

Exactly how does ideology qualify individuals into a culture? It does so through the following accomplishments:

1. It does not exist as a set of dislocated and autonomous ideas and values, but instead is grounded in material practices;
2. It produces a selective and distorted view of material reality, while at the same time presenting that “reality” in factual and objective terms;
3. Maintains and reproduces sectional interests as universal interests;
4. Structures social reality such that system contradictions are masked, excluded from thought, or transformed into a more acceptable form;
5. Mystifies and naturalizes social reality by making human constructs appear fixed and external to those who created them;
6. An effective means of control through producing a dominant, shared meaning system into which there is both consensus and to which everyone “freely” consents. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 60–61; Deetz & Mumby, 1986, p. 370–71)

In essence, ideology creates certain human-constructed social realities that are mystified and naturalized into a “normal reality” of which everyone consents and aspires. Ideology can be pulled out from a culture’s material practices, “reality,” universal interests, and the larger contradictions embedded in cultural discourse. Ideologies



directly reflect and are reflected by the foundational values within a culture, the deep-seated, persistent beliefs about essential rights and wrongs (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 236). Thus, values are in essence the beginnings of culture, providing cultural members with a basic orientation to their culture and to life (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 236).

### **Myth**

If ideologies directly reflect the foundational values and approved social reality, then it is myths that serve as moral guides to the proper action, as governed by the cultural values. Certain categories of myth are found throughout culture: cosmological (why we are here, where we came from); societal (teach the proper way to live); identity (explains what makes one cultural grouping different from another); and eschatological (where they are going, and what lies in store for them in the short and long run) (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Myths provide cultural teachings about the past, present, and future, while also highlighting particular value systems. In essence, myths provide the definitive “we are,” while the ideologies provide information about what we should do.

Why use myth? Why are they so successful in reifying certain cultural values? This is because myth is *always* culturally binding; it becomes part of the ingrained consciousness of a culture (Campbell, 1989, p. 101; Meister, 1999, p. 6). Imagine a cultural river. The grains of sand at the bottom represent individual values and the flowing water the overarching cultural ideologies. The banks that hold everything together within the river represent myth. They work together concurrently to weave culture into value systems. This is because “myths provide legitimacy to a culture because the stories they tell are timeless ‘lessons,’ which serve as emotive forces for maintaining social order” (Meister, 1999, p. 5). Take into consideration the story about a

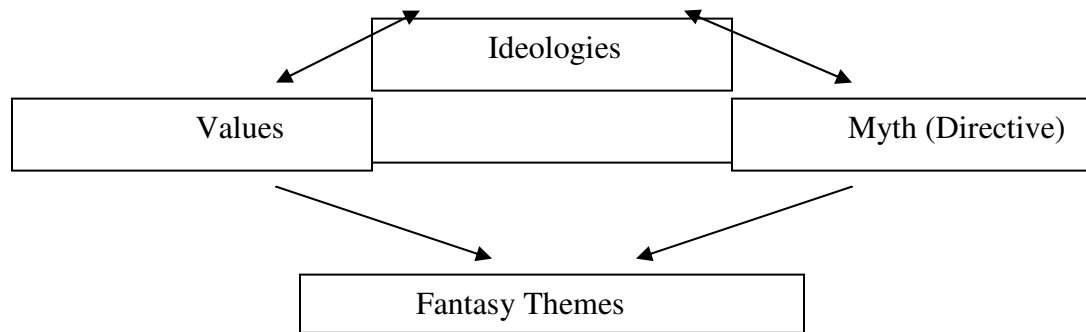
farmer and his wife who switch places. For one day, the wife works out in the fields, and the farmer in the house. All goes wrong during that day for each individual. What is learned is not that this one instance was a failure, but that individuals should not switch gender roles as a whole (Campbell, 1989, p. 101).

Myths provide a heightened sense of authority, continuity, coherence, community, choice, and agreement; it legitimizes culture (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 234; Meister, 1999, p. 5). Myths give meaning to the present by making it seem continuous with the past while also reaching across time and fashion “through references to historical and political events, and appeal[ing] to a material orientation in the world” (Bass & Cherwitz, 1978). Myths are able to create “whole” stories out of bits and pieces of these ideas. For instance, “Adolph Hitler wove British nationalism, Marxist imagery, Roman Catholic pageantry, and Freemason eschatology into Nazi whole cloth...to tidy up and bring together an audience’s emotional life” (Bosmajian, 1974). Myths are born when people admire the same heroes and revere the same moments in history, providing guiding directives to proper action.

### **Fantasy Themes**

The third pillar of culture, fantasy themes, is abbreviated myths “providing concrete manifestations of current values and hinting at some idealized vision of the future.” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 251). Fantasy themes can be referred to as mythic shorthand, or the grass roots of culture; the local, culture-specific expressions of both foundational values and directive myths (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p 251). They are short-lived, change from topic to topic, and are culture-specific.

Fantasy themes then become valuable tools when seeking to understand culture, serving as the intersection of foundational values and guiding myth. The following diagram showcases this cultural flow.



**Figure 1. Ideologies, Values, Myth, and Fantasy Themes**

Fantasy themes, then, serve to provide attractive vignettes that help to disguise the larger values and myths presumptions. “In a sense, fantasy themes become the everyday language of myth” in a highly sustaining fashion (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Their rhetorical and discursive power is shown by the adoption and echoing of the tales or visions to other individuals so that “everybody knows.” By foregrounding and extracting fantasy themes through discourse analysis, the directive myths and foundational values of a culture will subsequently be foreground and extracted.

For example, Kidd (1975, p. 37) used fantasy themes with regards to how popular magazines represented the social world to the female readers. She found that once premises of stories were laid out, “the fantasy themes were developed in considerable detail, with countless ‘case studies’ of happy and unhappy women used to add dramatic intensity to the ideas being stressed” (Kidd, 1975, p. 37). The fantasy themes expressed

the foundational value and directive myth that “women were fundamentally different from men and should behave accordingly, should avoid conflict under all circumstances and should clearly establish guidelines when interacting with others” (p. 252). The extraction of fantasy themes helped echo and sustain the known differences between men and women, providing cultural specific values that should be enacted and reified through discourse.

Fantasy themes, providing expressive insight into cultural values, can be used to not only understand one culture, but intersecting cultures. By comparing the values garnered from fantasy themes, cultures and subcultures can be compared and understood. Thus, extracting fantasy themes from user profiles and postings through critical discourse analysis will prove beneficial in understanding American values in Facebook.

### **American Social Values**

“That culture seeps into all messages is beyond question. Nobody escapes such influences completely” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 235). This may prove true for the culture of Facebook, as it is a fluid cultural location residing online with a user who physically resides offline. In order to provide a substantial comparative base for the forthcoming extracted fantasy themes and values of Facebook, this section will discuss the list of values for some 280 million Americans generated by Minnick in 1957 (p. 219).

The values were categorized based upon the following: theoretical values, economic values, aesthetic values, social values, political values, and religious values. Of particular interest are the nine identified American social values because of their alignment with Facebook, as a social networking site:

1. Americans should be honest, sincere, kind, generous, friendly and straightforward.
2. A person should be a good mixer, able to get along well with other people.
3. Americans respect a good sport; they think a man should know how to play the game and meet success or failure.
4. Americans admire fairness and justice.
5. A person should be aggressive and ambitious, should want to get ahead and be willing to work hard at it.
6. Americans admire a “regular guy” (one who does not try to stand off from his/her group because of intellectual, financial or other superiority).
7. Americans like people who are dependable and steady, not mercurial.
8. Americans like a good family man. They think a man should marry, love his wife, have children, love them, educate them, and sacrifice for his family. He should not spoil his children, but he should be indulgent with his wife. He should love his parents. He should own his own home if possible.
9. Americans think people should conform to the social expectations for the roles they occupy. (Minnick, 1957, p. 219)

It is risky to present a list of values for 280 million Americans, and admittedly Minnick put forth the values of white, heterosexual, Christian, middle-class males (1957, p. 219). The cultural critic today can therefore ask: to what extent do these values remain relevant? Why focus on values generated from the 1950s? While values wax and wane over the years, “they only change radically after massive social upheaval because...values represent *basic life orientations*” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 240). And yet, despite several shifts in ideology over the course of 54 years ago, these values continue to serve as the base for how we are as Americans and give guiding ideologies to

our behavior. These nine American social values become relevant touch points in the extraction and comparison of Facebook cultural values to American social values.

### **The Suburb and the City**

“With post-World War II prosperity came a vast exodus from the city and a migration to the suburbs” (Rapaport & Stayton, 2002, p. 45). Families looking for homes to raise their booming families combined with the sharp inflation of downtown real estate prices. Dedicating the city to businesses pushed Americans outside the city center into the suburbs. Those fleeing the city and flocking to the suburbs were overwhelmingly white, middle-class American families. And thus, the suburb became the 1950s homogenized outlet for socialization serving as the location for block parties, barbecues, and family activities outside of the city and the workplace.

The suburb still proliferates the American landscape and the American dream. “Since 1950, more than 90% of all growth in U.S. metropolitan areas has been in the suburbs, intensifying during the 1970s” (Kotkin, 2005, p. 100). Throughout the 1980s up to the present, construction on homes in pre-planned, HOA (Home Owners’ Association)-driven communities has skyrocketed.

As existing suburbanites look to escape the bland homogeneity of planned communities, rambling neighborhoods, and isolation, many major city downtowns are experiencing population growth, residential apartment construction, and increased social, cultural outlets (Yen, 2010). There is indeed a “boom” in city centers. However, “the total growth in housing units between 1970 and 2000 was about nine percent, or approximately 35,000 units; in contrast, construction of suburban housing units almost doubled to 13 million units during the same period” (Kotkin, 2005, p. 100). There isn’t

room for everyone in the city, so where can Americans seeking an urban lifestyle go if not to the city? With its vast opportunities for socialization amongst a large group of diverse individuals, Facebook seems to offer the diverse culture found in a city. Yet extensive privacy settings and features allow users to create online homogenized suburbs. Do the fantasy themes, myths, and values inherent in Facebook culture reflect urban or suburban ideals and behaviors? If Minnick's values are found in Facebook culture, do they reify suburbia, city lifestyles, or do they reflect something else? Such questions are answered by comparing Facebook and American values within Facebook culture in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Critical discourse analysis, a methodological expression of critical theory, was used to extract fantasy themes from user profiles and postings to generate a list of foreground-reflected Facebook values. These values were then compared to American social values to understand the reification and/or transformation of these values in Facebook. Methods surrounding data collection, participant recruitment, and analysis will be discussed in this section.

### **Appropriateness to Study**

Discourse analysis proved to be appropriate for this study because discourse, and texts such as those found within Facebook, are not only “a transcript of what is said, [but also] one can see meaning-making going on by looking at how individuals respond to each other” and by what is left unsaid (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 6; Gee, 2011a, p. 21). These things unsaid are “understood based upon the listeners’ [(in this case reader’s)] knowledge of the context” and shared cultural knowledge. The interest of this study is on extracting fantasy themes and values from Facebook. And since Facebook is a textual context being written on the Internet, looking at the textual discourse proves necessary. The specific method of critical discourse analysis applied in this study will be discussed in further detail following the methods of data collection and participant solicitation.



### **Data Collection**

For the purpose of this study, Facebook profile walls serve as public/private documents depending upon their profile privacy setting. Advantages to this collecting data from public/private documents are: the ability to obtain the language and words of participants, they are accessible at times convenient to the researcher, and the written evidence saves time and expense of transcribing/word tracing. Printouts of Facebook pages from May to June 2011 were utilized to monitor all Facebook activity during the course of the month.

### **Participants**

This study focuses on the discourse of the dominant Facebook demographic group, 25–29 year olds. Recruitment of participants was through the Communication, Research and Theory Network (CRTNET). In addition, an email was sent through university professors and out-of-state colleagues to pass along to their students. Approval by the Institutional Review Board was obtained in May 25, 2011 (See Appendix B for approval document). Upon approval, access was gained to the Facebook pages of ten participants solicited and screened by the following criteria: residence in the United States of America, posted above two times a day and had greater than 400 friends. Participants in the study remained anonymous, were of no relation or connection, and had no interaction amongst each other.

Participants consisted of six females and four males, and skewed toward the lower age range with five participants of age 25, one each of age 26, 27, and 28, and the final two being of age 29. All participants had large friend bases, with seven participants

having over 700 friends (two had over 1,000 friends), and the remaining three participants having friend numbers in the 500s. At the time of solicitation for participation, all ten participants made references to smaller segmented, more homogenized groups of friends designated in their privacy features. For the sake of this study, full access was granted to the researcher to provide a more comprehensive view of participants' Facebook discourse.

Three participants were married, while a fourth appeared to be in a relationship by the way she posted/spoke of one particular friend. However, since it was not explicitly stated, it was inconclusive as to whether she was or not actually in a relationship with that individual. As such, for the purposes of the study, this participant was treated as single. The remaining six stated their relationship status as "single" on their profiles.

All ten participants noted their race as White/Caucasian and therefore the study inherently privileges a majority racial group due to the make-up of the participants. This will be noted later as a both a limitation of the study and as an area for future research. Participants resided in the following northwestern states: Oregon (1), Idaho (6), Washington (1), and Colorado (2). Participants' postings, along with the profiles were analyzed using critical discourse analysis.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis, a methodological expression of critical theory, is neither a homogeneous or necessarily united approach confined only to method. Despite a great diversity in methods and objects of investigation, studies all deal with discourse and have at least seven dimensions in common:

1. An interest in the properties of '*naturally occurring*' language use by real language users
2. A focus on *larger units than isolated words and sentences*.
3. The extension of linguistics *beyond sentence grammar* towards a study of action and interaction
4. The extension to *non-verbal (semiotic, multimodal, visual) aspects* of interaction and communication
5. A focus on dynamic (socio)-cognitive or interactional moves and strategies
6. The study of functions of (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) *contexts of language use*
7. An analysis of a vast number of *phenomena of text grammar and language use*: coherence, topics, interactions, politeness, turn-taking, and may other aspects of text and discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2010, p. 2)

A common misconception is that the objects under investigation have to be related to negative or exceptionally serious social or political experiences or events. This is not the case. "Any social phenomenon lends itself to critical investigation, to be challenged and not taken for granted" (Wodak & Meyer, 2010, p. 2). Because ideologies, values and myths work concurrently to set the context for individuals, structuring thought, feeling and action, they warrant challenge and analysis through a critical lens. "The critic's job thus becomes one of examining the *presuppositions* imbedded in the discourse, its *non-argued* premises, its *taken-for-granted* assumptions" (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 237–238),

For this study, critical discourse analysis weaves fantasy themes, which are presupposed, non-argued and taken-for-granted, to the foreground by analyzing:

significance and situated meanings, socially recognizable activities and identities, relationships (especially those taken for granted), connections and sign systems/ways of knowing in users' profiles and postings (Gee, 2011b, p. 125).

### **The Big “D” Discourse Tool**

Discourses are deeply intertwined within institutions and wider social or cultural communities. The Big “D” Discourse tool is the culminating tool used in this study to acquire what (D)discourse that language is part of, how it's used as well as what actions, interactions, values, beliefs, and language use is within the particular (D)discourse. The Big “D” Discourse Tool seeks to answer three questions:

1. How is the person using language, as well as ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects, tools and technologies (all found within the written posts in Facebook) to enact a specific socially recognizable identity and engage in one or more socially recognizable activities,
2. What kind of person (identity) is the speaker seeking to enact,
3. What sorts of actions, interactions, values, beliefs, objects and tools, technologies and environments are associated with this sort of language within a particular Discourse<sup>5</sup>?

This allowed the researcher to understand “distinctive ways of doing/knowing *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking and believing” in order for participants to enact specific socially recognizable identities (Gee, 2011b, p. 125).

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<sup>5</sup> In this case, the Discourse is that of Facebook.

To finish the analysis the researcher analyzed how the person was using language, what Discourse that language is part of, and the ways of interacting and valuing that enact or are recognized as a particular kind of identity within a particular Discourse.

Therefore, the Big “D” Discourse Tool was the final tool utilized in order to extract fantasy themes from user profiles and postings. Extracted fantasy themes were then aggregated to create a list of the top Facebook values for comparison to the top American values. The following chapter discusses the findings of said analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Language is “used to build seven things: significance, activities, identities, relationships, connections or relevance and finally, sign systems and knowledge.” (Gee, 2011b, p. 125). This chapter breaks down the findings in relation to the aforementioned “tasks” with particular attention being paid to (D)discourse to extract fantasy themes from user profiles and postings.

### **Building Significance**

Building significance within the posts involves locating the situated meanings that are backgrounded within the posts and bringing them into the foreground for further analysis. Posts were analyzed with regards to the situated meanings of words, phrases, people, places, dates, times, intertextuality, and relevant institutions (discourse models).

#### Words and Phrases

Participants' posts were laden with words and phrases that highlight several situated meanings: casualness, American English, technology, and the Internet.

Due to the casual nature, explicit knowledge of proper American English spelling, grammar, and punctuation was necessary in order to fully read and understand postings. Participants utilized improper punctuation, little to no capitalization as well as loose spelling to translate spoken tone or speech pattern into the written word. Eight of the ten participants wrote in all lower case letters and without correct punctuation. However,

there were more popular punctuation marks, so much so that they were often overused in the same post. These marks were periods (or ellipses) and exclamation marks. This was found throughout all of the participants' postings to express excitement, ("awesome!!!!!!"), frustration or to simply emphasize a level of speech.

One participant couples this with loose spelling, "shuuuuuut uuuuup!!!!," to inform the reader (the friend) to prolong the sound of the "u" when reading to emulate how the poster would speak outside of Facebook. Another posts, "No waaaaaay!!!!" in response to a surprising comment. Knowledge of correct spelling is crucial to understand how it relates to phrasing, tone, and feelings participants wished to express. Other particular American words or phrases include: "epic fail," "suck at life" or "this guy." Such examples are used frequently throughout the participants (five of ten) and are consistently recognized by participants' friends in likes and comments.

Internet and SMS shorthand extend this shorthand into "text images" known as emoticons. Every participant used the smiley face or a winking smiley face emoticon. "Thanks to everyone who came out to the party with us! I had no idea we could fit so many people in our home. ☺" or "The pain from this bike accident hurts worse than my ACL surgery. ☹" Several other emoticons and shorthand such as <3 (to reflect a heart) and xx (to reflect hugs) were utilized and understood by friends. Such words or "text images" must be understood in the whole, and not by its parts. For instance, the smiley face must be understood as emoting happy, as opposed to a colon and end parentheses.

Three participants utilized shorthand familiar with the microblogging site, Twitter. In some cases, this was because Twitter posts were posting to their Facebook account. In Twitter, a pound sign (#), or hash tag, is used to add an aside to a comment.

For example, one participant posts, “My apartment complex just decided to be completely reasonable. #colormesurprised.” A non-Twitter Facebook user may not understand the use of the pound sign, but could using some deduction to understand the aside. However, the full extent of the meaning, and how the hash tag is used is lost.

### People

Facebook provided some easily identifiable ways to present significance utilized by participants: friend tagging, spousal fields, and Facebook places.

All ten participants were frequent users (approximately 65% of the total posts) of the tagging feature. Such emphasis sets up a certain significance of relation to the poster that may or may not be defined. In some, significance could be found by checking the spousal field on the profile or through additional language within the post or previous posts.<sup>6</sup> For instance, several female participants referred to their husbands as “my hubby” or “hubs” along with their name.

There were numerous instances in which participants would tag multiple friends in one post. One participant, when describing her perfect celebration of the summer solstice, tagged seven users in four different listed activities. Other instances were for coordination and planning of “reunions,” trips, or other social activities. This tagging not only shows a significance between the participant (poster) and the tagged friends, whether understood or not, but also increases the social value of the participant.

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<sup>6</sup> It is up to the user to indicate a spouse on their profile, and the name of the spouse can only be viewed if that spouse also has a Facebook profile. As such, if the spouse does not have a profile, and a friend is not aware of spousal names, the meaning loop may not fully be complete.



According to usage from the ten participants of this study, when dealing with a non-Facebook friend, that friend is either named fully (both first and last name) or mentioned in generality (husband, sister, etc.), and never in between. One participant's post used the latter option, "had fun hanging out with my sister last night. girls night's rule." Here the sister is not identified by name, but instead only by the relation of "sister." Another referenced a "date night with the hubs." Because of the tagging feature, value is given to those friends with Facebook accounts. And yet, some participants would seem to attempt to rectify this by using the full name of these friends.

### Places

Places named and/or tagged within posts<sup>7</sup> were very localized, emphasizing the current city in which the participant resides. This requires a very location-specific understanding to fully comprehend the post. And yet, at the same time, several posts were anything but local, emphasizing travel.

Participants emphasized locality by seeking advice regarding activities or recommendations specific to their current city. One participant asks, "Any suggestions in Boise, ID for a tenant/landlord/lease lawyer?" Another asks, "Who wants to go hot springing near McCall?" Another participant takes this a step further by asking about a specific pond surrounding her apartment complex, "Did anyone else see the fireworks over Quinn's pond last night?" Particular knowledge surrounding that area was crucial for the interaction.

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<sup>7</sup> Certain places having a presence of Facebook via a page can be tagged within posts. Places can also be noted as check-in locations stating where a user is at the moment.

Participants most often posted about places that involved health and/or fitness or specifically outdoor activities: yoga studios, outdoor camping locations, pubs, and specific races. For example, one participant regularly posted about or checked into a local yoga studio while another highlighted biking trails in his current city. Two participants frequently posted in reference to local pubs or drinking-related locations. One participant checked into “Beer Club at Old Chicago” every Sunday night with several tagged friends.

All ten participants referenced future travel plans or current trips, showing a great deal of wanderlust. One participant “would give anything to go back to Greece,” while also wanting to visit a Scandinavian country and Asia. Another participant in the course of two weeks posted a photo album titled “A Week in Germany” and an update that he was “Indianapolis bound, then, come Sunday, on to Charlotte.” Participants consistently used posts to highlight travel (national and international), as if to announce, “I’ve been everywhere man, I’ve been everywhere,” as one participant aptly titled his travel album.

### Dates and Times

Facebook posts are time and date stamped. This already provides significance with regards to the date and time of posting. But it goes much deeper; certain dates, times of year or times of day can connote as well as denote particular celebrations, seasons, feelings, and/or values.

This is particularly true with regards to holidays and awareness (random and celebrated) days. One participant wished their friends a “Happy International Handstand Day!” Such a holiday is not well known, but friends of this particular participant are familiar with the existence of “random” or lesser-known holidays and thus, do not

discount this holiday to exist. Even further, friends responded with multiple likes (10) and several “awesomes” in the comments, more than any other holiday-related post.

Other participants frequently referred or posted about national American holiday observances such as Memorial Day and Flag Day. Though the holidays may not have been specifically stated, the date and time stamp, and cultural understanding of the American observed holidays (meaning days off from work) are understood. One participant states, “Car washed, waxed, and vacuumed...back to showroom condition. Nice way to spend the morning on Memorial Day.” Here the day off is hinted at, while valuing productivity and activity more so than celebrating the reason for the holiday.

Father’s Day also passed during the course of this study and was observed by one participant who again signifies relationships by wishing a happy Father’s Day to her husband, “Happy Father’s Day Timothy. You are a wonderful father.” Two other participants referenced the holiday with a general post, “Happy Father’s Day,” giving significance to their fathers. Such a statement gives meaning to celebrating, supporting, and loving one’s spouse/father, while also identifying one as a good spouse/child by doing so publicly.

Three participants wished friends a “Happy Summer Solstice,” while another expressed her perfect way of celebrating. As such, these dates and times are also related to particular seasons, summer in this case, and the associated feelings, values, and situated meanings: healthy bodies instead of sick bodies, outdoor adventures, beaches, and summer vacation. Three participants experienced illness over the course of the month, and each expressed frustration and impatience: “I think my body is protesting

summer,” and “Sinus infection. Still.” Summer becomes the season for health and activity.

### Intertextuality

With the webbed structure of the Internet, intertextuality<sup>8</sup> is prevalent through Facebook tagging features/profiles, shared links (articles, videos), written quotations, as well as history and popular culture (movies, film, historical, and current events/figures).

#### Facebook Tagging and Posts

Participants’ posts often were vague in their full meaning, and thus in order to understand them, allusions to profile sections or previous posts was needed. This was the case with all ten participants. Whether it was familial, spousal, or event ties, often referring back to previous posts or the profile was necessary to garner understanding. One uses a post to announce big news in the next day’s post, “Breaking news!!!!....coming your way tomorrow. ☺” The subsequent post then states, “Here it is!!!!” Thus, taking the notion of intertextuality between posts to the full extreme.

#### Events/Activities Outside of Facebook

Often events, activities, or situations were alluded to, but never explicitly stated. For example, another participant refers to “hating how her writing is not coming along” while later posting “stuck: how do you ask people about the quality of their relationships after they’ve broken up?” It would appear that this participant is working on a study, perhaps a Masters thesis or Doctoral dissertation? Another states, “my apartment

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<sup>8</sup> How words and grammatical structures are used to quote, refer to, or allude to other “texts” or other social languages (Gee, 2011b, p. 125).

complex just decided to be completely reasonable.” This alludes to some situation or issue that is then also mentioned in a previous post asking for a recommendation for a “tenant/landlord/lease lawyer in Boise.”

### Links

Facebook provides a feature allowing users to easily share links with their friends, and all ten participants used this functionality to share articles, websites, or Facebook pages. Predominantly, the links shared were used to support the participants’ point of view or to initiate open discussion surrounding a topic. Several participants used the phrase “this is an interesting debate...” when posting links. Nine out of ten participants used these links to highlight their liberal stance, while one participant was more conservative. This could be shown by the topics of choice: gay marriage/homosexuality, medical marijuana, and animal rights.

Other links posted were used to accentuate or support choices or activities of the participant. For instance, one participant is an avid cyclist and runner. As such, his linked posts predominantly revolved around health and cycling, advocating for the sport as well as for overall healthy living. Four other participants had similar postings with regards to health and fitness.

Links also involved discussions on math (“Math isn’t Just Computation. So Why is That All We Teach?”), a blog (2000hours.blogspot.com) recording every hour of work a teacher puts in, as well as a linked article emphasizing the importance of early childhood education:

Don't think early education is worth it. Think again. This large-scale study showed that children that began their educational experience at age 3 had higher levels of educational attainment, socioeconomic status, job skills, and health insurance coverage as well as lower rates of substance abuse, felony arrest, and incarceration. Just one more reason why early education needs to be a priority.

Here the link was also posted with a short abstract of the article itself.

Five participants also referenced daily deals or electronic coupons such as Groupon, Living Social, or a local news organizations discounts page. Such deals or coupons were either referenced in an attempt to get more people to purchase the same deal, utilize an attached coupon, or were simply posted as daily postings on the participants' wall.

### Quotations

Quotations were utilized in posts originating from historical figures, film, music and Twitter personas. Participants used quotations properly, with quotations and author citation, with quotations and no author citation, or neither. Participants used author citation when the individual was seen as historically significant such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dale Carnegie: "Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get-Dale Carnegie." A second participant utilizes an un-cited quote to also speak of success, "Doing it because it's profitable. Doing because it's valuable. Doing it because it's worthy. Greatness [(success)] lies at the intersection."

Another participant references a Twitter persona by posting a different take on success, “The secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made.” Here, success and happiness is found through “faking it.” This was noted throughout several participants’ postings, the use of quotes to put forth a thought (controversial or a humorous critique) without needing to take credit, (or abuse?) for it.

Quotations were also used more casually to attribute songs or films to possible current life activities, events, or situations. One participant quotes the song “Closing Time.” Nothing accompanies the quote, but by understanding the song and its use to commemorate change, perhaps there is a change occurring in this participant’s life. And yet, there are no other references or allusions to such an event. Perhaps, it is meant for insider knowledge, or simply alluding to having heard that song. Two other participants quote a film (“Hocus Pocus”) and a Doublemint Gum commercial by posting, “Double, double toil and trouble” and “Double the fun. Double the trouble.” The first provides no other references; perhaps she is watching the movie, or perhaps she is feeling adventurous. The latter accompanies a mobile upload of two identical cars parked next to each other. In either case, the quotations are used to emphasize humor.

#### Current Events and Politics

Allusions to current television shows (“South Park,” “Futurama,” “Iron Chef America,” and “Desperate Housewives”) place emphasis on humor, “less scandal and more booze,” satire as well as American culture. One book that was alluded to, “Bossypants,” was written by a modern American comedy icon, Tina Fey. A participant writes, “I am 14 pages into ‘Bossypants’ and have laughed out loud at least 10 times already.”

One participant ties the comedy show “South Park” to a current political sex scandal by posting, “well, I think it is safe to say that there’s definitely an evil wizard alien hanging out in independence hall causing Anthony Weiner’s sex addition. (as trey parker and mat stone are usually right about this sort of thing).” Current politicians were referenced in manners that allowed the poster to place inherent value judgments on bad behavior: Anthony Weiner and his sex scandal, John McGee and charges acquired of driving under the influence and grand theft. Value is then tied to critiquing those in the public eye of wrongdoings and “bad” behavior.

Two participants extended similar critiques to big business and advertisers by placing value judgments on poor slogan choice/food and grammatical mistakes in advertisements. The participant posts, “Arby’s ‘It’s Good Mood Food!’ ain’t no ‘I’m loving’ it’.” Here Arby’s slogan is explicitly stated, but the other slogan’s owner is not. It is understood within American popular culture that it is McDonald’s slogan. Here the participant praises McDonald’s slogan, while also expressing distaste for Arby’s. However, another participant provides critique for a McDonald’s television commercial:

So there’s this McDonald’s commercial I keep seeing on TV but can’t find it online to post here. The beginning talks about ‘Getting your just desserts,’ but I SWEAR it actually says deserts. As in dry sandy place as opposed to sweet treat after a meal. Way to go McDonalds.

A commenter provides support stating, “Indeed it does. I noticed this a few days ago as well. Made me say ‘ugh’ out loud,” showing value in critiquing businesses.



### Discourse Models

Participants used intertextuality to willingly or unwillingly signify certain situated meanings and values. These meanings and values are connected and integrated across posts and participants through Discourse models. These are learned from social/cultural groups to help individuals learn what is “normal” or “typical.” Discourse models are distinguished in regard to three issues: espoused models<sup>9</sup>, evaluative models<sup>10</sup>, and models-in-(inter)action<sup>11</sup> to present or show “appropriateness.”

#### Espoused Models

Facebook is a social networking site that is functionally built around connecting individuals by friending, but also through individuals posting status updates. Thus, one could argue that every post involves espoused Discourse models. For instance, participants’ posts highlighted themselves as hard workers, who were also very appreciative of the play outside of work, healthy and active, a good spouse/friend, humorous, and a concerned citizen. Posting humorous observations or thoughts, “Gatorade should make popsicles” and “If you are on a date and whip out a smart phone, consider the date an epic fail,” highlight humor as championed and rewarded with more likes/comments on average than serious posts. Participants also promoted activism, advocacy, and knowledge of current political events by posting links with local, national,

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<sup>9</sup> Models that we consciously espouse.

<sup>10</sup> Models that we use, consciously or unconsciously, to judge others and ourselves.

<sup>11</sup> Models that consciously or unconsciously guide our actual actions and interactions in the world.

and international events: gay rights/marriage, Anthony Weiner, U.S. and U.K. economics/austerity plans, local senate initiatives, and the national presidential primary race.

### Evaluative Models

When digging deeper into the posts, participants not only espouse certain Discourse models, but also use evaluative models to judge themselves and others. Two participants named popular American celebrities directly evaluating their fashion and song lyrics with regards to what it means to be female and reality: “Ok Ke\$ha and Katy: where are these parties with glitter? I’ve never heard of or been to a party with glitter...” and “Alright Ashley it’s time to pull it together! You’re making the female population look b-a-n-a-n-a-s.” Here participants are judging these celebrities, and themselves, against what it means to be a good female/woman: dressed appropriately, fun loving and party going.

Politicians are evaluated as good/bad based upon behavior critique, good/clean versus dirty, sex-addicted, and unlawful. The government is praised, “one more step to equality,” or chastised, “Idaho is 1 of only 3 states in the U.S. that does not have a felony animal cruelty statute,” through written posts with linked articles. For instance, the latter quote above included a link to the Idaho Human Society’s ballot initiative. Thus, in this instance, not only is the Idaho government being evaluated and judged in comparison to other states, but also the participant is setting up a scenario for the friend to evaluate themselves as good citizens. Other participants, noted in the intertextuality discussion, posted evaluative judgments on businesses with regards to using proper grammar and

spelling in commercials, speedy and functional customer service, and technological integration across platforms.

### Model Discourses

Several Discourses that guide actions and interactions in the world are found within participants' postings. Such Discourses are marriage, friendship, and health/fitness. Three of the participants were married, and thus, overarching Discourse surrounding spousal relationships are unconsciously or consciously guiding their posts. For instance, a "good" spouse shows love, support, and pride in their spouse. As such these participants praised their spouse through sharing/praising videos they've created, adventures or activities, work successes, and for being "a wonderful father." Participants frequently wrote and tagged about "reuniting" or performing activities (biking, drinking, dinner, etc.) with friends. Thus, a good friend is one that is social, online and in person; friends celebrate together, travel together, and be together in person. Not only must a good person be a spouse/friend that is available and physically present, but a good person must also be active and healthy.

### Institutions and Discourses

These significances from the previous discussions, in turn, bring about certain discourses/institutions that can be (re)produced, stabilized, and transformed (Gee, 2011a, p. 125). Thus, to summarize, the discussion on significance, institutions, and Discourses that are present and fluent amongst the ten participants were: marriage, government/citizenship, friendship, work versus play, family, technology, and "appropriate" businesses advertising (proper grammar). Thus, due to its inherent public nature as well as the aforementioned findings regarding building significance within

posts show that situated meanings and intertextuality are key to the start of foregrounding the understood value discourse and Discourse models within Facebook.

### **Building Activities**

Activities posted within Facebook work to shape the culture/subculture while at the same time transforming and (re)producing certain values and discourse. This is especially true since findings have shown that particular actions (said and unsaid) compose the activities and sub-activities, leaving the post(s) to be much richer than simply stating an activity or thought of a certain day. The activities, sub-activities, and actions found will be discussed in this section to continue the foregrounding of Facebook values.

#### Main Activities

Originally, the Facebook status update was a way for users to answer the question: what are you doing? Even though the update has expanded with additional linking opportunities added, users still use the post to report on past, current, and future events/activities. As such, numerous posts provided a somewhat play-by-play of the day's activities. Several examples of such a post are as follows: "The Pride Festival today was a great success," and "Yesterday my job took me to a court case, a semi-stakeout, and some Internet sleuthing." Thus, a common main activity was that of reporting activities. One participant humorously posted, "Thought I was having deja-vu but it turns out I do the exact same things every day." And yet, postings are not the same every day. Reporting of activities comes with a caveat, that it must also be interesting, exciting, or relevant. As such, it is not the only main activity within Facebook posts.

Another main activity found within participants' posts was that of sharing information/news regarding their life or local, national, or international events. Two participants frequently linked to local news articles. One participant posted a local article in Boulder regarding marijuana, another posted about a local senator committing a DUI and grand theft, while another posted about a traffic accident involving a car and cyclists. Other news was that relating to specific interests: technology articles, health-related articles, or articles related to unique knowledge concerning niche topics. One participant posted an article from Wired Magazine about new speed cycling helmets and another cited bicycles as aiding feminism and women's rights.

A final main activity is that of offering social commentary or critique revolving around politicians, celebrities, and people who "suck at life." A participant provided critique on a common dating faux pas: cell phones and dates calling the combination of the two an "epic fail." Another used "suck at life" in relation to a drunk driver hitting several cyclists. One participant, who was an economist by profession, posted, "If this bothers you, you might check on how the UK economy is doing with their austerity measures—then you'll really be worried" in addition to a link titled "How I Ruined the Economy and All I got Were These Lousy Tax Cuts." Another critiqued another business, Netflix, by posting, "what's happened to our middle class?" while also linking to a Reuters story titled "Cable companies worried about poverty, not Netflix." One participant posted, "Just when it was looking so bad, it had to get worse: in regards to a paper reporting that the domestic partner law was unconstitutional." Here participants sought to not only share news, but also provide commentary or critique on the item or topic shared.

### Sub-Activities and Actions

There are several main activities at work within participants' posts, but these activities are also composed of sub-activities presenting deeper insight into Facebook values. These sub-activities involve confirming/reaffirming relationships, showing relevancy as a sharing source, and building evaluating judgments.

When participants provided the play-by-play reporting of activities, all ten participants would frequently include tagged friends. As such, the act of tagging not only reports with whom an activity is conducted, but also confirms or reaffirms the relationship of the tagged individual. For instance, tagging a spouse reaffirms that this particular individual is the spouse, thus cementing and approving certain activities according to this relationship. The sub-activity of tagging a friend confirms/reaffirms the friendship, and thus subsequently provides significance to those tagged. It also increases the social value of the activity posted.

Posting articles, videos, and the like not only shares news and information, but it also sets the poster up as a relevant and current sharing source with specific judgments concerning proper or "good" behavior for individuals and businesses that should be enacted and valued. Such behavior is associated with particular identities working to transform and (re)produce those values and "proper" behavior. The next section will present the findings regarding how participants built and enacted certain identities.

## **Building Identities**

Social/cultural identities, similar to activities, are an additional performance supported by communication working to transform and (re)produce certain values and discourse. Identities relevant to the participants in this study that are taken-for-granted or under construction will be discussed in this section.

### Healthy

The aforementioned identities privilege certain actions, knowledge, beliefs, and values. For instance, when presenting a healthy or athlete identity, values and beliefs privileged include: physical activity through fitness endeavors such as hiking, cycling, running, and yoga. Each listed activity was found through participants' posts such as "Headed to my weekly hot yoga class," "this is the waterfall we ran today," "hiking Colorado's largest mountain," and posting marathon or biking photos. Participants in valuing health and fitness subsequently disvalue "unhealthy" feelings or activities. One participant posts with regards to unhealthy behavior, "don't worry—it's just what you put in [(or do with)] your body." Three participants' negated feelings of sickness with frustration, "sinus infection is STILL here" or "being sick suck!!!!!" Thus, all ten participants sought to portray a healthy identity.

### Social Coordinator

Another identity presented by participants was that of planner or coordinator. This was done either by seeking participants for a hike on "Colorado's highest mountain," or seeking others to join in on other activities. For instance, this participant works to coordinate an outing after purchasing a daily deal, "A few of us just bought this

super fun LivingSocial deal<sup>12</sup>! If we can get 14 people to join use, we can book our OWN limo-bus! Let me know if you buy it and we can all do a big tour together! Woooo!” Three other participants suggested “reunions” amongst certain tagged friends, and within the comments of these posts began coordinating dates, times and travel arrangements for such reunions. Participants were acting as social coordinator for their friends’ activities.

### Fiscally Responsible

Along the lines of the aforementioned LivingSocial deal, six participants espoused the identity of being fiscally responsible, placing value in the value of a dollar spent. Three participants regularly subscribed to daily deals that were posted on their profile: one shared a coupon for discounted Herbal Essences, another shared a deal for movie tickets, and the last participant shared a story about not getting enough wear out of a dress. “I put on a dress this morning (after I picked it up from the dry cleaners last week) and a bead on it shattered. I wore the dress once. So mad right now.” The dress should have lasted more than one wear, so the participant was upset when it didn’t because it diminished the value of the money she paid. Another participant stated, “I want my money back” while watching the St. Louis Cardinals lose their baseball game. As such, participants’ espoused values attributed to fiscal responsibility, and thus negated anything that was not of a perceived proper value.

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<sup>12</sup> The deal was for a local wine tour.



### Advocate: Conservative or Liberal

As noted earlier, one participant presented values associated with a conservative identity, and the other nine participants presented values associated with a liberal identity. These values were embedded within articles or statements with regards to current American politics, local and national. For instance, the liberal participants greatly valued the New York Senate approval of gay marriage, while also participating in gay pride parades and advocating for equal rights. One participant writes, “With the wedding on Saturday, New York’s victory, conversations with friends and general thought have led me to a question. Why is the state involved in marriage at all?” The liberal participants used the values and Discourses of equality, fairness and justice weaved throughout these postings to show their liberal attitude. One participant provided his liberal stance by devaluing the stance of conservatives through posting an uncited quote, “I wish I was a corporation or a fetus so that republicans would treat me like a human being.” The conservative participant was less vocal with her views, but did reference the Bible in her stance against gay marriage in two postings, a common conservative talking point.

### Traveler

All ten participants referenced future travel plans or current trips showing a great deal of wanderlust. To reiterate the significance discussion, participants showed value in travel, particularly international, while presenting the identity of a traveler. Participants traveled from their originating city for university or career, while at the same time visiting locations such as Italy, Costa Rica, and outdoor adventure locations within America, such as Malad Gorge, national parks, and camping grounds. References and posts were also made to passport renewals, TSA security procedures, as well as flight

paths currently in progress. Another participant referenced a product that until recently was only available abroad, “I am embarrassingly excited that magnum ice cream bars are now available in the states. Yum!” Thus, traveling for education, work, social (reunions), and overall pleasure was greatly valued and thus enacted as a steady identity.

### Funny

Humor was greatly valued by all ten participants, and rewarded with likes/comments and additional humor by friends. Humor was presented through funny observations, activities, video links, and in random thoughts. One participant ponders, “Just a random thought: if there is a food source called fat, why isn’t there a food source called skinny?” while another posted a link to a YouTube video of a 100-year old woman on The Tonight Show, exclaiming, “This woman is funnier than Jay Leno! I LOVE her!” In fact, 90% of the videos posted were comedy videos from YouTube. One participant even admitted in his post to rewriting the headline of the linked article to make it funnier. Thus, participants greatly valued humor using Facebook features, methods, observations, and thoughts to present themselves as humorous or funny. One participant went a step further, and stated on his profile that he “Knows Sarcasm (Fluent) and gibberish.”

### Good Little Coper

Finally, one other identity greatly stood out amongst all ten participants: that of a productive and hard worker. Participants presented posts that not only presented them as successful, but also as “good little copers” (Tracy & Tretheway, 2005, p. 171). This refers to individuals dressing the part, acting the part, sacrificing (mother/father and child), and self-imposing long hours to be considered successful and hard working,

generating from American entrepreneurial and organizational discourse. One participant posts at 7:24 a.m., “Overnight shifts suuuuuuck!!!!!! I was having fun jamming to tunes all by myself, but four hours later...I’m tired and I’m only halfway done.” Based upon the time of the post and her stating “four hours later,” her shift began around 3:24 in the morning. Another states, “this would be an excellent day for some day drinking and pool time...too bad I’m stuck in class all day.” The first is sacrificing sleep, while the latter is sacrificing what it is that she really wants to do. This want versus need was found in several other posts. One participant was “managing insomnia by proofreading syllabi” while another was “finally drinking a beer and stuffing my face at Pie Hole after 11.5 hours working.” As such, participants posted successes (two participants received rewards at work), as well as proof of them working to get the job done.

#### Good Spouse/Family Member

Three participants listed “married” on their profile, with one of the three participants also being a mother. Another identity that is reinforced is that of a good friend/spouse. A good friend/spouse celebrates the achievements, presence, and is thankful/support of their friend/spouse. Two other participants greatly referred to their siblings by spousal relationship on their profile and subsequently through tags in posts, while another mentions her father via a mobile upload as “her wingman.” As such, presenting oneself as a good spouse/family member was quite prevalent through the findings. Here a good spouse/family member is loving, supporting, proud, and celebratory.

The postings surrounding Father’s Day serve to celebrate, support, and love one’s spouse/father, while also identifying herself publicly as a good spouse/child. Another’s

husband was a frequent uploader of videos to YouTube, to which the participant shared proudly by tagging her husband as well as giving praise and value to each video as “hilarious” or “this is Dan’s [(husband)] video...and it’s awesome!!!”

Others showed this pride, love, and support in reference to their work or role of provider. “Could not be prouder of my husband, Timothy...congratulations on passing your PE exam,” and another gives praise to her husband for adding a math certification to his teaching license. A different participant subsequently shows pride in her husband’s work, but also praises herself for “being a good wife,” posting “I think I’m going to bake myself a dessert for being the spouse of a teacher that survived another end of the school year.” Thus, it is not only necessary to be a good spouse, but to do so publicly.

One married participant frequently posts photos of her son, while two other participants, though not married, gave numerous nods to siblings. One publicly wishes her sister a happy birthday, while also stating how she celebrated by taking her sister to “Biaggi’s for her birthday.” Another tags her sister in more posts than any other friend, while also praising her for not only graduating from college, but also on obtaining a job. As such, the goodness of a spouse also translates to that of mother, father, and sibling.

There is a deep relationship between privileged social values and those that are subsequently discounted in identity presentation and portrayal. Thus, due to its inherent identity communicating processes, participants use identity to espouse privileged identities and values while simultaneously discounting other social values and identities within Facebook.

## **Building Relationships**

Along with identity construction/communication, Facebook emphasizes social networks and relationships. And yet, numerous relationships, whether between individuals, language or (D)discourses, are taken for granted or under construction. Aside from the already discussed tagging and relationships that are understood and taken for granted, there are various discourse relationships that are also taken for granted. Such relationships that were found throughout the ten participants were: work versus play, normal and different, as well as social activities and drinking.

### Work and Play

Tracy & Tretheway's (2005, p. 171) posit the notion of "good little copers" to explain how employees become frustrated by a lack of balance in work and home life, but refuse to give up time at work. Participants in this study did show frustration, or perhaps exasperation, for the long hours worked, often noting the wants versus the needs. An example is the participant who wants to be drinking by a pool, but instead needs to be in class. Others noted similar feelings when asked to join in certain activities, often responding with "I'd love to, but I have to work" or "I can't, I have work that day." Again, participants are choosing the need to work over the want to have play.

There is also an emphasis on furthering one's education, professional certifications, and/or stature in one's field. One participant received "her first revise and resubmit from a major journal," another's husband finished his "Professional Engineer Certification," another's husband added a "math endorsement to his teaching certificate," a fourth was working on her Masters' Thesis, and the final two highlighted long hours for their work. Thus, the value is advancement in one's career, working hard, while at the

same time “playing hard” through active play posts referring to social activities, or other adventures such as hiking, biking, kayaking, and traveling. As such, there is an interesting dichotomy working with participants concerning work and play.

### Same and Different

Participants in this study presented an interesting relationship between acceptance and difference/uniqueness. When posting a special post in honor of Special Education Week and Autism Awareness Month and “all the children made in a unique way,” a participant writes, “Kids with special needs aren’t weird or odd. They only want what everyone else wants...to be accepted.” Here emphasis is not on being the same, but instead being “different.” For instance, the same participant, when advocating for equality on another topic, also writes “Homosexuality isn’t a choice. Showing oppression to those who are different than you is.” The notion of, equality and fairness, treating all the same, exists throughout participants’ posts. One person reports a Senate decision as “one step closer to equality.” Two other participants discount instances where equality is not available surrounding gay marriage and homosexuality.

In essence, it is okay, in fact privileged, to be different. Another participant writes, “In case some of you all haven’t figured it out yet, I’m super weird.” One person who commented then agreed writing, “one of the many things I like about you!” Another cheekily describes his family as “a rare breed.” Other participants emphasize posts that present their uniqueness as well. One participant emphasized his uniqueness by referring to himself as a “Living legend in the REC” because when he “is out of the REC... they still give [him] high-fives and fist-bumps.” Thus, significance is placed upon those

unique qualities that differentiate. However, everyone is still equal and should be treated with fairness.

### Social Activities and Drinking

As discovered in the previous sections, Facebook certainly emphasizes the social. And, according to seven of the ten participants, they should also include social drinking. Two participants checked into local pub's beer clubs each week, suggesting that this was a frequent social outing for beer drinkers and lovers. One participant, including her tagged husband, frequently references two different drinking games "Beer4Life" and "Booze Clues" that are played with "members" who also happen to like the Beer4Life Facebook page. The same participant posts on her page for others to like the page and join, while also warning that she is "awesome at this game." Here, not only is drinking a social activity, but *the* social activity. Two participants are meeting to celebrate an alcoholic beverage, while another is using drinking as a social game.

Drinking a beer, or referencing beer drinking, was noted by several participants in response to a long day at work, or in accordance with beaches or pools. The LivingSocial deal posted and purchased by a participant also involved social drinking through a Northwest Wine Tour. The final participant posts about an upcoming "old-fashioned progressive dinner party tomorrow. But with less scandal and more booze!" Another participant frequently attaches beer and or "margs"<sup>13</sup> to events or activities with friends. In these instances, alcohol serves the purpose of a relaxing beverage or a beverage that adds/enhances the social fun in an activity.

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<sup>13</sup> Short slang for margaritas.

### **Building Connections**

Building connections in Facebook becomes easily traceable, allowing for connections to move backward, forward, and across postings or friends' profiles. This section will present the findings with regards to how connections are made and their relation to intertextuality.

Easily recognizable connections within Facebook are those of previous, past, and future posts, albums, tags, profiles, and conversations. But there are also not as easily recognizable or explicit connections to events or activities that are not described or defined on Facebook: for instance, marriages, births, and familial history. One participant recounts certain physical traits her son received from her side and her husband's side of the family. And yet, aside from her husband, other family members are not tagged, named, or visually represented. There are also numerous references to reunions, dinner parties/dates, and trips to visit friends; but what is not noted or presented is how and/or when certain individuals met. Often, this connection is only understood by those connected, leaving other friends guessing.

Common connections also abound across participants that are understood due to the commonality of the event/activity/connection. For instance, the aforementioned meeting of friends scenario. But travel connections are also highlighted, whether it is the actual connections taken to get somewhere, "Minneapolis, Atlanta, Stuttgart," or alluding to future or past travels. All activities associated are also connections: booking flights, hotels, passports, packing, etc. Other connections found throughout participants' posts were that of American academia, or schooling. There were connections found that



related to the start/end of the academic year, writing/grading papers, research (for journal entry or thesis), as well as eventual completion of schooling.

Intertextuality provides additional connections because there are written sources available at any time, no matter how old the post. But also written evidence to the date, time, and often societal/cultural events can be used as reference. Thus, as noted above, posts and profiles are easily accessible, but links and videos also provide connections across interaction. For instance, one participant posts and refers to three videos created and posted to YouTube by her husband. Connections include such past activities of filming, creating, viewing, and sharing of the video. The same can be said for articles, with connections made to the writing, reading, and sharing of the article.

And then, there lies perhaps the ultimate connection: that of the participant posting something, and the friend reading and responding, or not, to the post. Therefore, with every post an inherent connection exists to future acts of the friend reading, reviewing, and understanding the post.

### **Building Significance for Sign Systems and Knowledge**

With posts there are certain sign systems and ways of knowing that are relevant. This includes larger Discourse as well as national and social languages. By placing privilege of particular sign systems and ways of knowing over others, participants knowingly and unknowingly make value judgments. Sign systems and ways of knowing that were found relevant across participants' are discussed in this section: American English and the Internet, technology, academia, work-specific, humor and sarcasm, and local knowledge.

### American English and the Internet

In order to begin with ways of knowing, one needs to consider both national and social languages. In this case, all participants posted in English. But as noted earlier, it is in particular American English, as opposed to British English. Aside from previously noted misspellings and misuse of punctuation, shorthand of popular phrases are also utilized, “ok” instead of “okay,” “ain’t” instead of “isn’t,” and “ish” as in “\$3,000ish.” Internet and SMS shorthand proliferates posts through the use of emoticons.

As discussed earlier, the microblogging site, Twitter, also provides a unique sign system through its use of the hashtag. But, it is important to note the appropriate sign systems and ways of knowing within Facebook specifically. Therefore, language such as liking, tagging, checking-in, cropping, and mobile uploads are not only known, but understood and utilized frequently.

### Technology

Seven participants presented themselves as heavy users of the Internet and technology in general. As such, technology was, for them, a particular sign system that filtered throughout their posts. During the course of the month observed, two participants received and, in turn, were able to dispense invites to Google + Beta. Knowledge of the technological process of “beta testing” provides a particular set of phrasing with regards to private testing. It also speaks to the necessity of having a Google account in order to participate in and use Google+. Each participant who was dispensing invites had 15–16 comments of individuals wanting an invite, so this opportunity to join the “beta testers” as early adopters was greatly valued.

Several other links or postings were “technology advice” pieces with information and/or infographics on “How We Use the Mobile Web,” to “Social Media Engagement with Users,” and “8 Tips for Better Internet Searches.” Two of the four participants appeared to also be frequent readers of the page, Slashdot.org, which labels itself as “News for nerds, stuff that matters” (Slashdot.org, 2011). Of the seven articles posted from this source, five were technology related with the following content: social media background checks, Apple patents and iPhones, Internet privacy, Google App and account integration, and smart phones. This is a certain terminology for a certain technology-laden telephone that is associated with a particular way of knowing (phone apps, mobile websites, etc.). In fact, all ten participants posted at least one post that was designated as being posted from either an Android or iPhone smart phone. Another very specific technology-oriented post involved “Windows error reports.” Instantly, this discounts any Apple users, as these error reports are specific to Windows. Therefore, technology in general, as well as more specific instances, present a particular sign system and way of knowing what Facebook users are proficient in.

### Academia

Because three participants were undergraduate, graduate students, and/or assistant professors (as noted on their profile), with a fourth who was the spouse of a teacher and a fifth who held a Masters degree, academia and higher learning provided another privileged way of knowing. One participant not only advocated for education, but also did so by linking a “large-scale scientific study” and providing a short abstract to accompany the link. An understanding of scientific research, abstracts, and procedures provides a certain way of viewing the poster, as well as the link posted.

One participant was writing her Masters thesis and thus gave numerous references to her writing and research strategy, even asking specific advice on how to word a question. However, the question is not specifically stated as having to do with her thesis. It simply starts out with “stuck: how do you ask people about the quality of their relationships after they’ve broken up?” But, with accurate knowledge of how one can be “stuck” during the process and the specific phrasing she used (quality of as opposed to something more casual), someone familiar with academia makes that leap.

The college student, assistant professor, and spouse of a teacher frequently discussed “surviving the school year,” participating in “summer session,” as well as specific universities or university buildings. The assistant professor also posts that she “got my first revise and resubmit from a major journal...tons of work to do but very exciting!” Those familiar with academia and the publishing steps for an article or study to be included in a major journal will understand the “revise and resubmit” process. Using context, someone unfamiliar could gather that she is about to publish something, and yet the entirety of the “tons of work to do” as well the process and meaning behind the publishing opportunity will be missed. Thus, academia presents another sign system or way of knowing that is relevant to participants.

### Work-Specific

As discussed earlier American and Internet slang/shorthand was utilized by participants. However, this shorthand and specific language carried over into the work-related posts of six participants. One participant posts, “could not be prouder of my husband...congratulations on passing your PE exam!” What does PE mean? Physical Education? Primary Electrician? Actually, it is found within the comments by a friend

who responds with, “as in Professional Engineer?! If so w00t! If not, w00t TOO!” The participant confirms this in the next comment. Here two work-specific terms are used: professional engineer and w00t. Both give reference to a specific career and subsequent way of knowing. Another participant references her husband’s addition of a “Math endorsement to [his] teaching license.” This is also very specific to a certain level of teaching, primary or secondary, that also provides a certain set of knowledge surrounding endorsements, continued education credits, and the like that a non-teacher may not fully understand or recognize.

Two participants referenced their specific employers throughout their posts, one in reference to winning an Edward R. Murrow Award and another solely as an abbreviation, “IPT” (Idaho Press Tribune<sup>14</sup>). Friends recognize the Edward R. Murrow Award as an award, but only those in her industry will recognize and understand the prestige, the background of the award, and even Edward R. Murrow. It is also referred to on her page by numerous congratulators as “a Murrow.” The participant who refers to who works at IPT immediately gives privilege to those in the know with the abbreviation, but also posts activities related to her job, furthering a certain sign system or way of knowing: stakeout, spent time in court, and “some Internet sleuthing.” Work and specific work knowledge was very relevant to participants’ posts.

### Humor and Sarcasm

One participant greatly sums up a unique way of knowing, sarcasm, by stating on his profile in the language setting that he “Knows Sarcasm (Fluent).” All ten participants

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<sup>14</sup> Listed as her employer on profile.

heavily favored humor, in particular, sarcasm in their posts as well as within the comments. For instance, one participant states, “I’m sarcastic? Really? Is that news?” Another uses sarcasm and humor to point out the close relationship she has with her father, “So my dad is my wing man...what’s the problem?” Without understanding humor/sarcasm, and what typically it is used for and how it can be used, the four statements above would have a completely different meaning than was intended.

Two other participants use sarcasm and humor with a much more evaluative intent. To describe the lack of follow up by a business, one participant writes, “I’m pretty sure my Windows ‘error reports’ end up the same place my letters to Santa do.” Within the comments of the post a friend reciprocates with sarcasm, “Wait, what are you saying about Santa? He’s an evil oligarch who buys out creative rivals to stifle the competition? So that’s what happened to the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy and the Great Pumpkin. Things are finally starting to make sense.” Both the poster and the poster’s friend are using sarcasm to openly critique. Another poster uses a similar technique to critique and chastise the TSA. “I get to choose between a TSA agent groping my son who is 18 months or letting him get scanned by their cancer causing screenings next month.” Without understanding the taunting and sneering uses of sarcasm, these critiques would be greatly misunderstood. Therefore, humor, especially sarcasm, is its own unique sign system and particular way of knowing.

### Local Knowledge

Facebook has the ability to connect users from across the globe; and yet, as garnered from participants in this study, it is surprisingly local. Here local refers to not only nation-specific histories, events, and locations, but also to the cities with which the

participants reside. As mentioned earlier, participants frequently referred to American national news with regards to Senator's indiscretions, historical figures (Martin Luther King, Jr.), and politics/debates. At the same time, users frequently posted news about a local representative's arrest, concerts, restaurants, activities, and weather. For instance, one participant writes, "wish the thunder and lightning would be a little more frequent, cool view from my window and balcony!" Knowledge pertaining to the specific storm is essential.

In particular, local knowledge becomes extremely relevant when seeking advice within posts, "I want to go camping this weekend! Somewhere we haven't been...near water. Anyone have suggestions?" In this post, knowing not only where the participant resides, but also camping areas near water that are a short distance away (an assumed weekend trip) becomes *extremely* relevant for understanding, but also engaging with, the post. The same is true for the participant seeking advice on "tenant/landlord/lease lawyers in Boise, ID." Events and activities from participants are very often alluded to, but never specifically defined, such as one participant who thanked everyone who came to the party. This post presumably left numerous Facebook friends out of the loop as well as the original party invite. Thus, local knowledge can move from anything as broad national knowledge down to the more micro-level event.

Therefore, the way participants posted was inherently value-laden with particular ways of knowing that then discounts all other ways of knowing. In essence, each post provides parties, with not all friends receiving the specific invite. They could infer what's going on, but as it goes with parties, sometimes you just have to "be there" to

really get it. Thus, participants are knowingly, and unknowingly, including and excluding through value judgments stemming from sign systems and ways of knowing.

### Intertextuality

Participants used intertextuality to willingly, or unwillingly, signify certain situated meanings and values. And often this intertextuality not only gave emphasis to, but also sometimes provided, exact sign systems and ways of knowing needed. For instance, posted articles regarding scientific studies or from certain websites (Wired, CNN, Idaho Statesman, etc.) provided the groundwork for how one will/should post as well as how one will/should read and react. Specific language use like “cancer causing screens,” or emoticon use, instilled a certain necessary knowledge to not only understand the post, but also certain appropriate reactions. When searching to understand cultural/social values, it is important to understand how words and grammatical structures are used to enact certain identities and (D)discourses.

### **The Big “D” Discourse Tool**

The Big “D” Discourse tool is the culminating tool used in this study to acquire what (D)discourse that language is part of, how it’s used, as well as what actions, interactions, values, beliefs, and language use are within the particular (D)discourse.

Thus, this section will pay particular attention to the written language use to enact these socially recognizable identities and activities. Findings from this study utilizing this tool will be discussed in this section.

The use of language begins with a casual, friendly use. For instance, all but two posters did not use proper capitalization or proper punctuation unless it was absolutely



necessary because of tagging or to place emphasis. Among favorites by participants were the exclamation point (to show celebration, excitement), and question marks (when seeking advice or for humorous emphasis). Participants also then utilized loose spelling to translate spoken tone or speech pattern into the written word. For instance, “Happy birthday to my awwesome sister!” or “My sister roooooocks!!!! Graduated last week, found a job today. Atta girl!” Here the particular tone or phrasing (through the intentional misspelling) highlights the praise the participants are giving, thus highlighting the identity of supportive, proud, and congratulatory spouse/sibling.

Tagging friends, a specific use of the Facebook connection aspect, was used specifically to not only highlight the above, but also the social coordinator in posters. Tagging friends and using words such as “reunite with” or “need a date night with” highlights not only that the poster is a planner, but specifically planning with these specific friends. Others also use phrasing relevant to planning by initiating the idea, “Who wants to hike the highest mountain in Colorado” or “Let me know if you buy it [(a LivingSocial deal)] and we can all do a big tour together!” Here they are alluding to future activities through the language, but also they are the initiating coordinator and touch point for the activity. This is reminiscent of friends gathered together deciding what to do next, or what previously would have also occurred over email or phone. The planning and coordinating of activities with friends is a very recognizable social activity, and a socially recognizable identity that is common for at least one individual in each friend group to possess.

Others use “active” language and “active” postings to highlight a healthy or athletic identity. Highlighted activities such as biking, yoga, and hiking are direct

representations of healthy identities and lifestyles. And the more postings of such activities, of which there were of a great number with each, presumably represents the healthier one is. But also by posting links regarding health information and including verbiage such as “Check” or “Don’t worry—it’s only what you put in your body” insinuate that the poster is healthy. For instance, “check” refers to crossing off of a list as complete, while saying *your* body refers to the reader and not the poster. If it did, it would most likely say “our bodies.” Here, participants also used juxtapositions to highlight healthiness. For instance, three participants were sick and thus showcased their summer health by stating the irregularity of sickness in the summer, as well as surprise with the length of the sickness.

Fiscal responsibility or an awareness of monetary value is shown through language use, such as “I only wore it once” referring to a broken dress, or “I want my money back” referencing a bad baseball game. But it is also shown through specific tools in Facebook that become part of the written discourse: daily deals and Internet coupons. Five participants referenced daily deals, with one purchasing and actively praising its good deal by seeking more buyers, “A few of us just bought this super fun LivingSocial deal<sup>15</sup>! If we can get 14 people to join use, we can book our OWN limo-bus!” Another posts a coupon for discounted Herbal Essences while another shared an “Awesome deal” concerning movie tickets. By not only subscribing to, but also sharing such deals, participants are using the language of Facebook to highlight their fiscal responsibility and awareness of monetary value.

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<sup>15</sup> The deal was for a local wine tour.

All ten participants used language, photo albums, and mobile uploads, as well as references to past and future travels to highlight themselves as travelers. Another identity all ten participants valued and espoused was that of a humorous or funny individual. This was presented through random thoughts, observations, funny pictures, or YouTube links. Using words such as “rewrote the headline to make it funnier” or “this woman is funnier than Jay Leno! I LOVE her” and “Knows Sarcasm (Fluent)” definitely highlight this identity and its subsequent behavior. For instance, “love” in the above quote is written in all capital letters, “LOVE,” to put an even greater emphasis on the importance or value of humor. And because this participant found the funny video, posted, and shared it, it reflects on her as humorous.

As noted above, participants are incredibly active individuals. Active in a healthy lifestyle, but also social and travel plans. But, an additional identity and activity that is easily recognized is that of a productive and hard worker who works long hours and/or weekends in order to succeed/advance in their career as “good little copers” (Tracy & Tretheway, 2005, p. 171). This is shown in language regarding the actual work, “11.5 hours working,” “spending my Sunday morning,” or “Overnight shifts suuuuuuck!!!!!!” But, it is also shown in the juxtaposition of want versus need. For instance, one participant uses the beach and drinking as a want, but instead she *needs* to be in class all day. The participant could easily choose the previous, but instead it is inferred that she instead chooses the latter.

So to summarize, what kind of person (identity) are the participants seeking to enact or be recognized as? A funny, healthy person who works hard (and understands the

value of the dollar) to enjoy the friendships, travel, family, and issues (advocacy) that are near and dear to their heart.

The following chapter proposes the top Facebook values, generated by the above findings, that will then be compared to the top nine American social values (Minnick, 1957, p. 219; Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239). Key concepts discussed in the review of literature will also be discussed in the context of this study with focus on support and extension into the Facebook culture, followed by discussion of several theoretical and practical implications of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Analyzing, utilizing, and building upon the fantasy themes garnered from the findings in the previous chapter, this section will propose a list of core Facebook social values. Because culture is not created in a vacuum, and Facebook, in essence, is a culture within the broader American culture, the generated Facebook values will then be discussed in relation to the top nine American social values (Minnick, 1957, p. 219; Hart & Daughton, 2005, p. 239). The chapter concludes by addressing implications for both Facebook users as well as public relations use.

### **The Top Nine Facebook Values**

Garnering information from the findings of the critical discourse analysis, the following is a list, and discussion, of the top nine Facebook social values as shown by the ten participants in this study.

1. Facebook users should be casual, technologically aware and social, mixing well with a wide array of friends through various networks (online and off) while also serving as a social coordinator for their more immediate or intimate friends.
2. Facebook users should respect the opinions/perspectives of others, often openly seeking discussion or debate.
3. Facebook users admire and should advocate for fairness, equality, and justice.
4. Facebook users believe in ambition to succeed at work, and be willing to work hard and sacrifice to achieve success.

5. Facebook users value higher education, most likely to help fulfill the previous.
6. A Facebook user should be financially responsible and savvy, while also sharing this savvy through good deals with others.
7. A Facebook user should actively work to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
8. Facebook users value family. People should value and love his/her spouse, parents, siblings, and children. This should also be shown publicly through love, support, praise, and congratulations for achievements and “good” behavior.
9. Facebook users value travel as an educational value, a social outlet, and as a reunion tool for friends and family.

These nine values listed above will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

#### Casual, Technologically Aware and Social

Facebook users should be casual, technologically aware and social, mixing well with a wide array of friends and serving as social coordinator for the more immediate or intimate friends. Facebook users should be very well versed in the Internet (often posting tips or tricks), heavy users of additional social media (Twitter and Google +), and make frequent use of mobile technology (smart phones). But the important factor is that of being social with a wide array, or network, of friends. And yet, though speaking to a large number of friends, Facebook users should frequently serve as the social coordinator for, perhaps, a more intimate group of friends, suggesting reunions, evening dinners, parties and much more via the Facebook feature of tagging.

### Respect Opinions and Seek Discussion

Facebook users should respect the opinions/perspectives of others and often openly seek discussion and debate. Users should hold strong opinions on social, political, and cultural events or debates and be willing to share, highlighting and advocating for their ideas, but it should be done in the spirit of debate, not attacks. A Facebook user can have their opinions and share them, but at the same time he/she should allow other perspectives or ideas into the conversation.

### Advocate for Fairness, Equality and Justice

Facebook users should admire and advocate for fairness, equality, and justice by showing and allowing multiple opinions and perspectives, but also in overall feelings toward humans. Facebook users should serve as an advocate by sharing and chastising instances of inequality (gay marriage shown here) or towards the government for a lack of justice (similar to the animal cruelty post) or to provide critique and commentary on the improper behaviors of public figures. Therefore, Facebook users should take it upon themselves to point out where injustices lie, or to provide satirical justice.

### Successful Hard Work and Ambition

Facebook users believe in ambition to succeed at work, and be willing to work hard and sacrifice to achieve success. Instances of “coping” should be highlighted and shared to show the users’ sacrifice, hard work, and long-hours spent on the job. Activity that highlights this and maximizes productivity should frequent a user’s postings. Successes should be shared, and in turn, commented on. In fact, Facebook users should share in each other’s “coping” by providing the appropriate empathetic post. Any

additional training, certifications, workshops, or education should be sought after, completed, and shared publicly on a profile to show hard work and success.

### Higher Education

Facebook users value higher education, most likely to help fulfill the previously discussed value. Educational background and degree should be accurate on a profile, as well as advocated on all levels from preschool through elementary and secondary education all the way to post-graduate studies. Education not only provides a means to success in work, but also within other avenues of society that are valued: less likelihood of criminal behavior, greater earning income, more likely to have health insurance, higher propensity to be an engaged citizen, etc. Education, in particular higher education, provides Facebook users with a greater chance of valued success.

### Financially Savvy and Sharing of Values/Deals

A Facebook user should be financially responsible and savvy, while also sharing this savvy through good deals with others. Users should subscribe to daily deal services such as Groupon or LivingSocial. Upon purchasing, these deals should be shared with friends in order to show the purchase, but to also share the deal with others. Any other e-coupons or sweepstakes should also be shared with friends. Facebook users should also use posts to help friends stay away from bad deals, bad customer service, or to complain about a bad value situation where the user was “wronged” monetarily.

### Healthy Lifestyle

A Facebook user should actively work to maintain a healthy lifestyle coupled with assisting their friends in doing the same. Healthy activity (running, sports, outdoor



pursuits) should be posted and/or serve as the activity of coordination with friends.

Articles espousing healthy living tips, tricks, or information should be shared with friends to not only share, but also highlight the lifestyle and knowledge of the poster. When necessary, juxtaposing the unhealthy (linked article or stating sickness) with the healthy can provide more emphasis to how one should work to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

### Family

A Facebook user should value family by loving his/her spouse, parents, siblings, and children. This should also be shown publicly through love, support, praise, and congratulations for achievements and “good” behavior. Family members who are Facebook users should be tagged in posts appropriately and/or set as featured friends on the profile page. Praise and support should be given by highlighting achievements or events (birthdays, holidays, etc.) through posts. These should be done, not only to show the obligatory praise and support, but to also set oneself up as a “good” spouse or family member publicly. Photo albums of weddings, family travels, and children should also highlight the loving family unit.

### Travel

Facebook users value travel as an educational value, a social outlet, and as a reunion tool for friends and family. Users value the interaction with friends in Facebook, but whenever possible should coordinate with and visit friends outside of their physical location. This should be done within Facebook by tagged postings, and then followed up with mobile uploads of photo albums of the visit. International travel is greatly valued by Facebook users, as such it should warrant multiple postings showing wanderlust for as

well as actual travel and the processes associated: planning, packing, passport renewals, and even specific itineraries or flight paths.

### Facebook and American Values

Facebook is also an interestingly fluid cultural location, with its users moving in and out of it and the location with which they physically subside. As such, how do the American values work within Facebook culture? Thus, analysis comparing the posited Facebook values to the American values of the 1950s will provide a current look at American and Facebook culture, while also understanding how the longevity of culture works within subcultures. The following chart compares side-to-side values generated from this study and the values generated by Minnick in 1957 (p. 219).

1957 American Social Values	2011 Facebook Values
Americans should be honest, sincere, kind, generous, friendly and straightforward.	Facebook users should respect the opinions/perspectives of others, often openly seeking discussion or debate.
A person should be a good mixer, able to get along well with other people.	Facebook users should be casual, technologically aware and social, mixing well with a wide array of friends through various networks (online and off) while also serving as a social coordinator for their more immediate or intimate friends.
Americans respect a good sport; they think a man should know how to play the game, and to meet success or failure.	No matching value.
Americans admire fairness and justice.	Facebook users admire and should advocate for fairness, equality and justice.
A person should be aggressive and ambitious, should want to get ahead, and be willing to work hard at it.	Facebook users believe in ambition to succeed at work, and be willing to work hard and sacrifice to achieve success. Facebook users value higher education, most likely to help fulfill the previous.
Americans admire a “regular guy” (one who does not try to stand off from his/her group because of intellectual, financial or other superiority).	A Facebook user should be financially responsible and savvy, while also sharing this savvy through good deals with others.
Americans like people who are dependable and steady, not mercurial.	No matching value.
Americans like a good family man. They think a man should marry, love his wife, have children, love them, educate them, and sacrifice for his family. He should not spoil his children, but he should be indulgent with his wife. He should	Facebook users value family. People should value and love his/her spouse, parents, siblings and children. This should also be shown publicly through love, support, praise and congratulations for achievements and “good” behavior.

love his parents. He should own his own home if possible.	
Americans think people should conform to the social expectations for the roles they occupy.	No matching value.
No matching value.	A Facebook user should actively work to maintain a mentally and physically healthy lifestyle.
No matching value	Facebook users value travel as an educational value, a social outlet and as a reunion tool for friends and family.

**Figure 2. American Values and Facebook Values**

After analyzing and building upon the findings to create the top Facebook social values, there is a major correlation between Facebook and American culture, but with just enough deviation for Facebook to truly hold its own as a culture.

### Transforming Values

Core values found on Facebook worked to create not only socially recognizable identities enacted and communicated through the participants, but also a particular culture participants both reflected and contributed to in Facebook. The American values of: game-playing, admiring a “regular guy,” liking people who are dependable and steady, honesty, sincere, kind, generous, friendly, and straightforward were transformed in Facebook culture. These “new” values are instead: a respect for perspectives and debate, financial responsibility, a healthy lifestyle, and travel. Why the transformation? What is it about Facebook culture that causes this change? Possible reasons include: the culture of social media, e-movement, and locations with which participant resided.

Social media is a web-based medium designed to create dialogue and social interaction amongst its users, allowing and emphasizing the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The inherent appeal of social media is highlighting oneself as

unique and interesting. As such, it would be hard to admire a “regular guy” who does not try to stand off or out. Within Facebook, being average or typical does not warrant much interaction, even with friends. Instead participants posted to show themselves as exciting travelers, adventurous, observant, funny, and really interesting. In particular, discussions that allowed participants to showcase their knowledge and important opinions were highly valued by both poster and friend. Therefore, whether it is insightful articles about the importance of early childhood education, debate concerning gay marriage, exotic trips, and really good monetary deals, it all is seen and valued as a-typical and above average.

Technology plays a huge role in Facebook culture. Products such as smart phones, and applications, or services focusing on Facebook sharing inundated participants’ posts. LivingSocial, e-coupons, and Facebook-only promotions surrounded profiles. Facebook users valued the “really good deal;” creating a new shared financial savvy. Perhaps it is the declining economy, reversing the economic boom surrounding World War II and the 1950s, coupled with the ease of online purchasing. Coupons, sales, and bring-a-friend deals have been around for some time; however, until recently, it involved a certain amount of time and effort put in by the receiver. With the advent of LivingSocial, and other similar sites, this time and effort is not only diminished, but essentially non-existent. Such deals are available upon immediate login or found via a friend’s post. Therefore, even though the excitement in receiving and sharing (or “bragging”) about a good deal has always been present, it has exponentially increased in value within Facebook culture.

The value of education and a healthy, active lifestyle are other interesting transformations, and two that perhaps have more to do with the specific participants in this study and the seasonal timing than the other values. Due to the methods of participant solicitation (through a university setting, colleagues, and CRTNet), participants reflected a really specialized group of individuals with a possible higher emphasis on education than the average Facebook user. All participants resided in the Northwest, predominantly in the states of Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and Colorado, states known for widespread access to nature and outdoor activities. The observation period also occurred during the summer months, a more active outdoor season than the colder winter months.

However, there is another possibility. The advent of the Internet allows for a greater amount of niche information to become available. Because there is greater access to information pertaining to any and all topics, interests, activities, and thoughts on the Internet than through other avenues like television, newspaper, or weekly/monthly periodicals, it allows for niche, and perhaps more obscure, information to be found and shared. Thus, the very wide and yet niche capability of the Internet coupled with the locations of participants could provide insight into the importance placed on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Therefore, the fantasy themes served to extract a set of core values within Facebook, creating not only socially recognizable identities enacted and communicated through the participants, but also a particular culture to which participants both reflected and contributed to in Facebook.

### Reproduced Values

Findings also revealed that certain values were reified, placing participants not only as Facebook users, but *American* Facebook users. American social values that were reified within the generated Facebook values are as follows, people should: be social (a good mixer), admire fairness and justice, as well as be an ambitious hard worker and a good family man.

But why these values in particular? Because Facebook was created as a “social utility that connects you with the people around you,” it makes sense for the values concerning social mixing to be consistent (“Statistics,” 2011). Since an American, born in and residing in the United States, created Facebook, it makes sense that this value would be extremely coherent between American culture and Facebook culture. Therefore, features like tagging friends to show connectivity, highlighting important family relationships on profiles, posting events, checking in to places, and the sharing of posts/deals/pictures perpetuate this notion.

The value of admiring fairness and justice is a little harder to find such a succinct connection between the two. And yet, maybe not? Facebook is set up as a social networking, identity construction/communication site; but, it also has expansive sharing capabilities to post thoughts, links, articles, and videos. Such features and capabilities allow more Americans an outlet to be vocal, and thus as shown here, advocate for fairness and justice to a larger group of friends than prior to Facebook’s inception. These American Facebook users are using Facebook to extend the American values of fairness and justice through a social, yet very public, outlet. Therefore, the culture of Facebook reflected this in the advocacy posts as highlighted in the findings.

Both American and Facebook values privilege ambition and hard work. Despite a greater value shown on higher education, hard work, sacrifice, and ambition remain. As discussed earlier, culture is not created in a vacuum; it is often found within larger, broader cultures. Here is where the Facebook culture of participants in this study is situated within the larger, broader American capitalistic and entrepreneurial culture. Not only is modern work discourse reified, but also the ambition seen in 1957. In the 1950s, it was valued to work hard, support a family, and own a home. In 2011, Facebook users value hard work to support a family, succeed at work, and publicly show themselves “coping” with the sacrifice that comes with success and ambition.

With many families spread across cities, states, and even countries, Facebook allows a quick and easy way to share. As such, participants utilized this to maximum levels with specific albums of wedding pictures, children’s photos, and public praise for family members’ achievements. Thus, users’ posts and profiles showcase their “good” family, but also *publicly* highlight themselves as “good” family members who value and love their spouse, parents, siblings, and children.

What is interesting is there is one American value not necessarily valued in Facebook, but instead is intermixed throughout several. This value is that people should conform to the social expectations for the roles they occupy. For example, when a participant listed themselves as being married, it was very apparent because they conformed to the role of a “good,” supportive wife. Students were similar in that they were sacrificing vacation and fun for class and homework. Participants who espoused a healthy identity continued to assume the role in comments on other profiles through events attended and continued posts confirming this role/identity. Therefore, even

though they themselves didn't explicitly state that people *should* conform to the roles occupied, participants certainly exuded conformations to appropriate roles according to larger American, gender, and other discourse(s).

What does this mean? How do societal roles work 54 years later than they were noted as an espoused value of American culture? Could societal roles be that much more embedded, presupposed, and taken-for-granted 54 years later? It would almost appear to be so. Participants posted in accordance to the social roles listed and espoused; and yet, there were no findings that showed *expectations* or *pressures* to conform to social roles.

What, then, does this say for cultures within cultures, or subcultures? It shows that broader cultural values, and subsequent societal roles, run deep into subcultures. For instance, in this study, Facebook users fully enacted their own unique culture while at the same time reflect American values first extracted generated 54 years ago.

### **Facebook: The MetroBurb**

Fantasy themes extracted from user profiles and postings reflects the values of Facebook culture, which in turn, were found to reflect a technologized version of 1950s American values. Findings generated from this study posit that Facebook is, in essence, a third space that is neither city nor suburb, but instead a technologized amalgamation of the two. For young Americans, Facebook is *the* most popular socialization outlet. As less and less cityspace is available for this large demographic to occupy, it appears that participants are using Facebook to socialize with diverse groups of individuals. Not only did they have large quantities of friends, but they also were heavy posters, interacting with what amounts to a small city within the confines of their profile. This reflects



participants' valuing mixing well with a wide variety of individuals in Facebook, and through other social networks/technological outlets.

Participants valued being vocal and an advocate amongst their friends by posting thoughts, opinions, questions for respectful debate or commentary, and critique on social injustices. All of these activities are associated with town criers, or protests within the confines of a city, not a suburb. Work, originally associated with city life, has also crept into the suburbs as more and more people work from home. In the 1950s, work and home life were in two locations: the city and the suburb. On Facebook, the two are increasingly blurred. Participants' family members, friends, professional contacts, and quite possibly, employers or colleagues are all now situated within the same social sphere. Facebook provides the diversity, culture, and blurred social constructs that a city provides, without requiring Americans to be physically located in a city center.

While Facebook has the potential to function as a city replete with a broad array of social and cultural influences, participants subdivided these large numbers of friends into smaller segments through their privacy settings, or by using tagging features, particular sign systems, and ways of knowing, to speak to and with a more intimate or immediate group of friends. Facebook gives participants not only a fluid location between American culture and Facebook culture, but instead an all-together new location that extends beyond the city and the suburbs.

It appears that Facebook provides a completely new space: a suburb within the city. In the 1950s, Americans left the small city for the expansive and homogenous suburban life. In the 2000s, with little physical space for a downtown, center metropolis, it would make sense for the Internet to provide the space. Mark Zuckerberg combined

the Internet and online social interaction into a location (Facebook) that holds both the diverse allure of the city and the private intimacy of the suburb, serving as the “social utility that connects you with the people around you” (“Statistics,” 2011). Findings from this study show that Facebook transforms the suburb/city metaphor into a new MetroBurb, allowing the user to easily weave between city and suburb lifestyles without the need to physically commute between the two.

### **Implications**

The findings and analysis in this study present implications for not only the Facebook user and American culture, but also for the field of communication, especially with regards to public relations.

#### The Facebook User

From this study, a Facebook user can gather greater insight into the meaning making and values inherent in their profile and postings within Facebook. This insight can help a user to understand that there is significance to posts, no matter how mundane or trivial it appears on the surface; and thus, perhaps gives the user time to pause before posting should they wish to maintain a certain identity for professional purposes or otherwise.

Findings from this study can help to understand that the broader culture of a user is not wholly reified within Facebook, but is reified just enough that it acts as a sign system or way of knowing touch point. This would bode extremely relevant for those who have a wide array of friends in suburbs across the pond, or other geographic locations, to communicate with each more completely and wholly.

And yet, at the same time, there is enough deviation from the broader culture to create a unique subculture that could be expanded upon and molded to the overall consensus of values between the user and their friends. Different users and their friends groups, and their friends' friends groups create online suburbs within the cityscape of Facebook. Therefore, Facebook and its ability to widen, *and* narrow one's social groupings provide an interesting cultural outlet for those mitigated on the outside.

As noted in the analysis, 1950 Americans explicitly valued conforming to their expected social roles. Participants in this study didn't explicitly state that people *should* conform to the roles occupied, but certainly did exude conformations to appropriate roles according to larger American, gender, and other discourse(s). Thus, the Facebook user can understand that within the subculture of Facebook, American societal roles appear to be more deeply ingrained in user discourse. By being aware of this, a user can be more aware of social roles they "occupy" and how they, and their friends, are perpetuating and enforcing these roles.

### American Culture

As discussed, Facebook is a fluid cultural location that has shown to incorporate American social values with new or transformed values generated by the Facebook cultural members. So what does this mean for American culture? American culture was proliferated to a certain extent within Facebook, serving as the broader culture for American Facebook users, who are at the same time creating and reinforcing their own subculture. And at the same time, the subculture of Facebook has crept into modern American culture. As such, culture is not fixed, sometimes allowing for subcultures to

poke their heads into aspects of the broader culture. Some examples include hip-hop, women's liberation, and now Facebook.

This has been seen with the recent film, "The Social Network," and the large quantities of public figures, businesses, organizations, and causes who have created a presence in Facebook. Even mobile phone companies and businesses like Nike are incorporating the Facebook value-system into their product offerings. American culture has caught the very tip of the Facebook culture. Time has yet to tell just how much of this Facebook culture will be swept up into the broader American culture. But more and more Americans join Facebook everyday and subsequently consent to the value-system attached with its culture, so it would seem to suggest that perhaps more of the Facebook values will also be reified to some extent in the larger American culture. Studies seeking to understand, or extract, these values would be interesting discussions of subcultures adding to the discourse of the broader culture.

#### Broader Field of Communication

Understanding the American values within Facebook culture not only provides implications for public relations, but also for the broader field of communication. By looking at the top nine values revealed here, interest is generated in the fields of interpersonal, organizational, and cultural communication.

Facebook culture, and the American values found within, is all about social relationships. As such, it becomes of interest to interpersonal researchers with regards to familial, spousal, friend, and even acquaintance dynamics. How do these relationships in the physical American location translate and work within the online suburb of Facebook? But even deeper than how the relationship dynamics, what about the translation,

communication of, and reactions of friends to big life events occurring outside the neighborhood such as dates, weddings, deaths, births, and divorces. Such news travels through suburbs, with neighbors often responding with food. How does this same news travel through Facebook friends, and then how do these friends react within the online suburb of Facebook? Such questions would provide exciting starting points for future investigation into Facebook culture.

American Facebook users reify current capitalistic and entrepreneurial discourse that proliferates the American business world and popular culture with “gurus” such as Oprah or Doctor Phil. Findings here show that participants were using Facebook to highlight their sacrifices and achievements in order to receive congratulatory or sympathetic, maybe more so empathetic, comments that are perhaps not necessarily being received in the workplace. Or perhaps instead it presents an opportunity for users to construct a “crystallized self<sup>16</sup>” in order to help highlight multiple facets (specifically non-work) of an individual other than just that of the sacrificing and hard worker (Tracy & Tretheway, 2005, p. 171).

Previous studies have been bound by time, focusing on phenomena at just a moment time. This study provided not only a richer understanding of Facebook at the present moment, but also addressed the longevity of cultural values. Not only does this fill a gap, but also inherently opens the door for similar studies of extracting reifying or transforming cultural values within subcultures. Intercultural and technology

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<sup>16</sup> Using language or discourse to elevate the non-work self by emphasizing different facets and angles of individuals.

communication researchers will find such studies could provide great insight into how cultural backgrounds translate into online cultural values.

### Public Relations

Since its inception, public relations professionals have looked to Facebook as a new medium or avenue to reach their target publics. And yet this has been a blind leap. Facebook's popularity exploded quickly, and as such, professionals leaped in without taking into consideration how to effectively communicate within this medium. But rather than looking at Facebook as a medium (like the television or radio), and instead focusing on it as a site of meaning-making and value consensus provides a clearer directional path for practitioners.

Public relations strategies revolve around meaning-making and consensus building. In order to be effective, it is necessary to understand the meanings, identities, and ideals valued by the target publics. By using these findings, practitioners can find the messages that will resonate with American Facebook users in order to help advocate grassroots political or cause campaigns through either the organizations themselves or through Facebook users. Focusing on the fantasy themes, myths, and values extracted here will ensure messages are received and shared with great value amongst users. In other words, practitioners should help to reify the Facebook, and subsequent American, values privileged through campaign messaging: family, casualness, technology, travel, good monetary deals, advocacy, justice, fairness, and healthy lifestyles.

But more importantly, the take-away for public relation practitioners is that Facebook users want more than anything to be social, and have a wide array of friends through various networks. They possess great social capital that can be used to help a

campaign, or hurt a campaign. Tailoring messaging and meaning construction to fit the values within the culture will serve to help campaign, while ignoring the culture will eventually hurt the campaign. Therefore, treating Facebook, and its users, as simply another medium to push a message through devalues the deep, rich culture that exists.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Findings from this study have importance and relevance due to the ever-growing popularity of Facebook. It is critical, then, to understand what particular cultural values and ideologies are present within Facebook culture in order to understand its appeal, its uses, and how culture works within a fluid location such as Facebook. As demonstrated in this study's findings, culture is not created in a vacuum; and Facebook, in essence, is a culture within the broader American culture. Therefore, by using critical discourse analysis to extract fantasy themes from user profiles and postings that this study found, Facebook culture reflected a technologized version of the 1950s American suburb

Core values found on Facebook worked to create not only socially recognizable identities enacted and communicated through the participants, but also a particular culture to which participants were both reflected and contributed to in Facebook. The American values of: game-playing, admiring a "regular guy," liking people who are dependable and steady, honesty, sincere, kind, generous, friendly, and straightforward were transformed in Facebook culture. These "new" values are instead: a respect for perspectives and debate, financial responsibility, a healthy lifestyle, and travel. Possible reasons discussed include: the culture of social media, e-movement as well as the participant solicitation process, and their locations of residence.

This study revealed that certain values were reified, placing participants not only as Facebook users, but *American* Facebook users. American social values that were



reified within the generated Facebook values are as follows, people should: be social (a good mixer), admire fairness and justice, be an ambitious and hard worker, and be a good family man. These values in particular were reproduced due to several factors: the inherent social nature of Facebook, its sharing features, overarching American capitalistic discourse, and its ability to connect a wide variety of connections into one virtual location.

This study also posited an interesting observation surrounding societal roles. Americans in 1957 explicitly valued conforming to the societal roles they occupied (Minnick, p. 219). And yet, participants didn't explicitly state that people *should* conform to the roles occupied, participants certainly exuded conformations to appropriate roles according to larger American, gender, and other discourse(s). It posed questions concerning how societal roles could be reified, transformed, even further presupposed over the course of 54 years of American culture. This study showed that broader cultural values, and subsequent societal roles, ran deep into the Facebook subculture of participants.

It appears that Facebook provides a completely new space: a suburb within the city. Findings demonstrate that Facebook is, in essence, a third space that is neither city nor suburb, but a MetroBurb. In the 1950s, families were looking to find and build houses to raise their booming families, with the suburbs becoming the social location and outlet of the time (Rapaport & Stayton, 2002, p. 55). Families, friends, and neighbors gathered for frequent block-parties and barbecue's serving as social functions to connect those in the neighborhood. Mark Zuckerberg pioneered Facebook to serve as the "social utility that connects you with the people around you" that has seen massive growth in a

short time-span, similar to the American suburbs of 1950 (“Statistics,” 2011). Facebook, in essence, has become the online suburb for a technological generation. So, how does one define Facebook culture? Take the 1950s suburb and add a constant influx of technology.

### **Limitations of Study**

Because all ten participants listed in the qualifying survey noted their race as White/Caucasian. This inherently privileges a majority racial group due to the participant make-up, leaving other races, cultures and social groups silent in this study. As such, it is difficult to say if the top nine values espoused in this study would also be relevant to other cultural groups. Therefore, a study focusing on a different cultural, social, or racial group would provide an interesting comparison.

The season/timing of study (during the summer months) could have inherently brought certain values to the posts and thus, discourse analysis, because of the activities and values associated with the summertime versus the wintertime. A similar study performed during a winter month would help to complete a richer description of Facebook cultural values.

All participants resided in the Northwest, predominantly in the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Colorado. These states are known for their widespread access to nature and outdoor activities such as mountain biking, boating, hiking and cycling. Thus, a study from a different region of America or that encompasses a wider net (geographically speaking) may or may not change the top nine values found here.

Due to the methods of participant solicitation (through a university setting, colleagues, and CRTNet), participants reflected a really specialized group of individuals with a possible higher emphasis on education than the average Facebook user. A study with Facebook users not associated with higher education as a graduate student or faculty/staff member may or may not reify this value on education.

### **Areas for Future Study**

This study focused on analyzing American values in Facebook by extracting fantasy themes from users' profiles and posts to foreground the reflected values. This study sought to fill a gap in the field of communication by both looking at the moment and longevity of values across culture and subculture whilst opening the doors for numerous areas of future study.

As this study used critical discourse analysis to extract fantasy themes to generate a list of the top Facebook values for comparison to social values generated in 1957, an extension of the study into the overarching ideologies and their symbolic representations in Facebook culture would provide even deeper insights. Further research into the symbols and myths found here, or within another group of Facebook users, could lead to richer findings surrounding Facebook culture. Studies focusing on the specific identities and social roles of Facebook users in response to, or within, this value system would also be beneficial for further understanding. Comparative analysis between these deeper insights and the equivalent in American culture would prove to be an even richer study of culture and subculture.

This study focused on discourse analysis in order to foreground the presupposed and taken-for-granted. Using a survey, focus groups, or in-depth interviews to gather

stated values by Facebook users would provide an interesting comparison and contrast to the discovered fantasy themes and values extracted in this study.

As more and more Americans join Facebook everyday, expanding their cityscape, and their more intimate suburbia, how does the subculture of Facebook creep into the overarching American culture? Facebook discourse such as “friending” and “liking” have already entered popular American discourse. Thus, it would be worth further analysis as to whether Facebook cultural values are reified in the larger American culture.

Future research regarding familial, spousal, friend, and even acquaintance dynamics would provide starting points for analysis of interpersonal communication. How do these relationships in the physical American location translate and work within the MetroBurb of Facebook? Future studies revolving around the Facebook Gladys Kravitz’s<sup>17</sup> and the translation, communication and spreading of news surrounding big life events occurring outside the neighborhood such as dates, weddings, deaths, births, and divorces. How does this same news travel through suburban Facebook friends, and then how do these friends react within the larger online city of Facebook?

Research surrounding organizational communication, especially with regards to Tracy and Tretheways’s (2005, p. 171) discussion of “good little copers” and the “crystallized self” provides an interesting research avenue. Facebook users reify the American entrepreneurial and capitalistic discourse asking workers to sacrifice and work long hours. But could this reverse, and instead, help to crystallize oneself? Or instead

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<sup>17</sup> The fictional character of the American situation comedy “Bewitched.” She has entered the American lexicon, used today as a synonym for a nosy neighbor or colleague (Saks, 1964–1972)

will it continue to reify this discourse? And finally, how do Facebook values regarding work translate into online working environments, networks, and virtual workers within both brick-and-mortar and virtual offices?

This study provides relevance to the communication field by examining the American values found in Facebook culture in a study emphasizing a current moment *and* longevity of culture. Core values found on Facebook worked to create not only socially recognizable identities enacted and communicated through the participants, but also a particular culture participants both reflected and contributed to in Facebook. Facebook user's values transformed nine American social values identified in the 1950s, but findings also revealed that certain values were reified, placing participants not only as Facebook users, but as American Facebook users, reflecting a completely new residential space: the MetroBurb.

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## APPENDIX A

**Fantasy Themes, Values, and Myths in Facebook Culture**

<b>Fantasy Themes</b>	<b>Myth</b>	<b>Value</b>
Use of Internet shorthand. Lack of proper punctuation, spelling, capitalization. Heavy use of tagging feature.	A good Facebook user has a large number of friends and writes casually while using various forms of social media.	Facebook users should be casual, technologically aware and social, mixing well with a wide array of friends through various networks (online and off) while also serving as a social coordinator for their more immediate or intimate friends.
Shared strong opinions with linked articles as citations. No attacks. Respectful.	A good Facebook user advocates and shares opinions in a respectful manner.	Facebook users should respect the opinions/perspectives of others, often openly seeking discussion or debate.
Chastising instances of inequality or injustice. Provide satirical critique or commentary.	A good Facebook user takes it upon themselves to point out where injustices lie, and/or provide satirical justice.	Facebook users admire and should advocate for fairness, equality and justice.
Highlighted and shared sacrifices, long-work hours, successes, and provided empathy.	A good Facebook user is also a “Good Little Coper” who shares this sacrifice publicly.	Facebook users believe in ambition to succeed at work, and be willing to work hard and sacrifice to achieve success.
Accurate educational backgrounds posted. Advocated for on all levels.	A good Facebook user accurately posts educational background and advocates for.	Facebook users value higher education, most likely to help fulfill the previous.
Daily Deal subscriptions and sharing. Posting when wronged monetarily.	A good Facebook user subscribes to deal apps and actively shares with friends.	A Facebook user should be financially responsible and savvy, while also sharing this savvy through good deals with others.
Post/share healthy activities/information.	A good Facebook user is fit and active.	A Facebook user should actively work to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
Showed connection through tagging or featured friends. Publicly show love, support through postings and photos.	A good Facebook user is publicly loving, supportive, praising and congratulatory of family members through proper use of posts and profile features.	Facebook users value family. People should value and love his/her spouse, parents, siblings and children. This should also be shown publicly through love, support, praise and congratulations for achievements and “good” behavior.
Posted about all pieces in the travel process. Used photos as visual proof of travels.	A good Facebook user must have wanderlust and provides visual proof of their travels.	Facebook users value travel as an educational value, a social outlet and as a reunion tool for friends and family.

**Figure A.1. Fantasy Themes, Values and Myths in Facebook Culture**

APPENDIX B

**Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**



**Office of Research Compliance**  
 1910 University Drive  
 Boise, Idaho 83725-1138  
 HumanSubjects@boisestate.edu | 208.426.5401

**DATE:** May 25, 2011

**TO:** Heather Carlson (PI)  
 Mary Casper (co-PI)

**FROM:** Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
 Office of Research Compliance

**SUBJECT:** IRB Notification of Approval  
 Project Title: *Power Enactment and Normalization within Facebook*

The Boise State University IRB has approved your protocol application. Your protocol is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (#0000097) and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

<b>Review Type:</b> Expedited	<b>Approval Number:</b> 008-SB11-060
<b>Date of Approval:</b> May 25 2011	<b>Expiration Date:</b> May 24, 2012

**Your approval is effective for 12 months.** If your research is not finished within the allotted year, the protocol must be renewed before expiration date indicated above. The Office of Research Compliance will send a reminder notice approximately 30 days prior to the expiration date. The principal investigator has the primary responsibility to ensure a RENEWAL FORM is submitted in a timely manner. If the protocol is not renewed before the expiration date, a new protocol application must be submitted for IRB review and approval.

Under BSU regulations, each protocol has a three-year life cycle and is allowed two annual renewals. If your research is not complete by May 24, 2014, a new protocol application must be submitted.

All additions or changes to your approved protocol must also be brought to the attention of the IRB for review and approval before they occur. Complete and submit a MODIFICATION/AMENDMENT FORM indicating any changes to your project. When your research is complete or discontinued, please submit a FINAL REPORT FORM. An executive summary or other documents with the results of the research may be included.

All relevant forms are available online. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, 426-5401 or HumanSubjects@boisestate.edu.

Thank you and good luck with your research.

**Dr. Mary E. Pritchard**  
 Chairperson  
 Boise State University Institutional Review Board

## **Figure B.1. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval**