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Title: The Facebook Effect: Social Network Sites and Changing Experiences of LGBT Students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Course: Anth411 Section 1G and 1U (Methods of Cultural Anthropology) Fall 2007 -- Nancy A Abelmann

About the Author: 1. I was born on December 31, 1975, in Bryan, TX, a small town I have currently spent the majority of my life in and continue to hate. It is three hours south of Dallas, two hours northwest of Houston, and two hours east of Austin.

2. I was raised Catholic, but am now an atheist and attend the Unitarian Universalist church.

3. It is difficult for others to identify my ethnicity. I was called a "chink" when I was in first grade and was recently referred to as Jackie Chan here in Chambana. In actuality I am a white Mexican-American.

4. I identified as bisexual for a long period of time, but have recently begun identifying as "mostly straight."

5. I have never identified with masculinity.

6. For my dissertation I am investigating how the response that gay men in Tokyo have to the emphasis on visibility in transnational gay discourses is being affected by the growth of social networking technologies.

7. I was an undergraduate at Texas A&M University from 1994 to 2000. I began in computer science and switched to psychology, with a minor in philosophy and religious studies. I did not take any classes in anthropology. I was a graduate student in the Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago from 2001-2002. I focused on psychological anthropology/cultural psychology and wrote my thesis on the experiences of gay Catholics. I was also a graduate student at Purdue University from 2004-2007. There I studied cultural anthropology and wrote another thesis on the experiences of gay men in Tokyo who attended a gay English conversation class sponsored by the gay and lesbian Japanese organization OCCUR.

8. I believe that humans are driven by a desire for pleasure, which exists in many forms.

Keywords: Facebook, Internet, technology, communication, LGBT, GLBT, GLBTQ, GLBTQI, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender

Abstract: For my project I addressed the effect that LGBT students use of Facebook has on their use of LGBT services associated with the university. I interviewed a gay student and Curt McKay, the director of the Office of LGBT Resources,

and found that students' use of Facebook both diminishes and enhances LGBT services offered by the university in a complex relationship. Facebook empowers LGBT students by enabling them to find other LGBT students outside of the LGBT services associated with the university. However, these same services use Facebook to reach LGBT students, and the construction of Facebook contributes to additional advertising for these students. Whether or not students use these services, though, they are still considered to perform a symbolic function that the Internet is incapable of replacing.

Initial Exercises: This entry does not readily relate to the rest of my project, but it does highlight some of the ethical quandaries that can arise when doing research on a minority population.

Reading Response

#1 Reading Response

The easiest place for me to start is by considering the issue of feminist ethnography raised by Stacey (1991) in "Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?" The moment I want to seize upon is that in which she appears to experience the greatest dilemma, where a "research participant" asks that Stacey leave the part of her history involving a lesbian relationship out of the ethnography, because she has since married and converted to fundamentalist Christianity (Stacey 1991:113-114). Stacey states that she was obligated to comply with this request, on the basis of "principles of respect for research subjects and for a collaborative, egalitarian research relationship." However, in also stating that such a move would force her to "collude with the homophobic silencing of lesbian experience," I feel the answer to her dilemma is clear. If it is an accepted aspect of feminist ethnography to expose power differentials, especially as they relate to gender, then I feel that Stacey's goals as a feminist can only be achieved if she reports this information in her ethnography.

Stacey also argues that, while postmodern ethnography addresses many of the same issues as she has faced in feminist ethnography, postmodern ethnography does not offer a sufficient answer to the issues raised in feminist ethnography. On this point, I disagree, though Stacey admittedly might not be happy with the answer. In my understanding of postmodernism, the answer to Stacey would be that, counter to the goals of most forms of modern feminism, it is not possible to eradicate power differentials, but we can act to minimize its oppressive effects. Thus, while Stacey claims that postmodern ethnography "acknowledges, but does little to ameliorate, the problems of intervention, triangulation, or inherently unequal reciprocity with informants" and cannot "resolve the feminist reporting quandaries," I feel that this is a result of postmodernism's discovery that these problems cannot be entirely ameliorated nor "feminist reporting quandaries" completely resolved. On these grounds, however, I may very well have to agree with Stacey's assessment that (modern) feminist ethnography is not possible.

With respect to the ways in which an ethnographer can minimize the effects of power differentials between them and their research participants, Duneier (1999) does a good job of showing some of the possibilities. For example, where other researchers have attempted to level the playing field by simply including the voices of their research participants in their ethnography in addition to their own voice, Duneier went beyond this by not only including the voice of one of his research participants, but by also sharing some of his profits with his research participants. Duneier also went to great lengths to insure that his research participants were comfortable with the way that they were represented in his ethnography.

Further insight into Stacey's dilemma can be garnered by reflecting on Twine's (2000) treatment of race and research methodology. Twine notes that as a black woman she expected to share an overlapping vantage point with "Brazilians of salient African ancestry," but instead they denied their "familial connections to African slavery," accused Twine of being racist for even raising questions about "racial disparities," and assumed that she was either "a maid, the illegitimate sister of [her] white partner, or his whore." In a similar regard, I feel that it would serve Stacey's interests to also de-essentialize her notion of feminism, as she already addresses on some level, and accept that not all women share the same goals simply because they are women, which would in turn offer Stacey a leverage point from which to address her dilemma. Again, though, this does add further resolve to the argument against the possibility of a (modern) feminist ethnography.

The American Anthropological Association's code of ethics acknowledges the complexity of the situations that researchers might find themselves in, and thus states that it "provides a framework, not an ironclad formula, for making decisions." At the root of this framework is the dictum that researchers "avoid harm or wrong." Though, as Stacey's dilemma elucidates, even this relatively simple dictum can indeed be terribly difficult and complex to resolve in actual practice.

Initial Exercises:

Observation

This entry does not directly relate to the rest of my project, but it does provide a background for thinking about the way in which what we observe is embedded in a particular temporal, and cyclical, background, as well as drawing attention to question of who is not present when we observe a particular context.

#2 Observation

Fountain of Coffee: The Illini Union's Courtyard Cafe

For my observation I went to the Courtyard Café in the Illini Union (only my second visit). Keeping Becker's notion that "everything has to be someplace" in mind, I first made a small diagram of the café, which I added to throughout

the hour when I noticed an additional detail. The Courtyard Café consists of three sections. In the middle there are approximately twenty-two tables that can each sit four people. On each side of this section, to the east and west, there are raised sections that have a number of booths. In the middle of the south wall there is a small stage, and near the southeast corner of the room there is an Expresso Royale Café (a coffee shop). On the southern half of the east and west walls of the middle section there are power outlets, as well as an additional outlet on one of two pillars in the middle section that are also in the southern half. In each of the sections on the side of the room there are four televisions on the northern and southern halves of the inner borders that face away from the middle section (the televisions on the western half appear to be newer flat-screen televisions, while the ones on the eastern half are older non-flat-screen televisions). Finally, there are four entrances on the northern half of the room, as well as an entrance near the southeast and southwest corners.

Keeping Becker's other notion that "everything has to be sometime" in mind, I was also careful to note that I started observing the café at precisely 9:00 a.m. (I had just gotten out of my Japanese class at 8:00 a.m.) The attention I paid to time came to be an important element of my observations, as you will see below.

At the table next to mine an older couple appeared to be having a meeting; a student got in line at 9:05 a.m., got his coffee and a snack at 9:08 a.m., and left through the west entrance; a young girl at a table further away was texting someone, and I noticed that she had purchased a banana; and an older man on his cell phone said, "I've got to make copies, so I probably won't see you until twelve-thirty, so go ahead and eat – see you on the patio" (shortly after he told some friends who arrived that he there was some "miscommunication" and he wasn't going to have a meeting after all – a "minor setback" – and then he left).

In a moment I felt would make Stilgoe proud, I saw a young man grab a table's edge, then gently shake the table, apparently deciding it was too wobbly to sit at. He then walked to another table, repeated his investigation, but decided that this table was satisfactory, and sat down to do his homework. (Another girl later sat at the "wobbly table" without checking its structural integrity.)

At 9:45 a.m. the "older man on his cell phone" came back and started a meeting with a student; five students who were occupying tables by themselves left between 9:45 a.m. and 9:46 a.m.; the meeting next to me finishes at 9:51 a.m. (perhaps it was a job interview); the space is very empty and the chatter has disappeared enough for me to hear the televisions, which sound as if they are showing the news; and at 9:57 a.m. there is a very long line at the Espresso Royale Café and the room is quite full again with new people.

One of the questions that emerged from this space for me was a simple consideration of "who" it is that comes to use this space. Unsurprisingly, the space was primarily occupied by students, but there were also a number of adults here too, as shown by the "older man on his cell phone," and the couple meeting next to me. The space was also primarily "white," though the people who filtered through the space may have represented the general makeup of the university. I also noticed that there was a relatively equal breakdown in terms of gender in the space.

However, to better discern the social forces that operate in this space, I would not only have to communicate with the people who frequent this space, but also those who do not. One important reason for this is that culture does not only emanate from this particular space, but is also brought to this space with the set of interpretations that all of the individuals who come to this space carry with them. (A point I felt was missing from Emerson, et al.'s treatment of checkout lines in grocery stores.)

Initial Exercises:	#3 Analysis of a Text
	ttp://www.odos.uiuc.edu/lgbt/downloads/lgbtcampusclimatefinalreport.pdf
Analysis of a Text	Intertextual Social Discourses of Intolerance and Harassment: A Textual Analysis of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Campus Climate Project

Ewell exhorts universities to perform what he calls an "institutional reality check," because, while every institution has a mythology, "at most institutions, they mythology is out of sync with the reality." Ewell says that "errors" in an institution's mythology can keep them from "solving problems and seizing opportunities." To address these "errors," Ewell suggests that an institution first discern what its myth is by eliciting responses from faculty, students, and staff, and by analyzing its documents. The institution should then "test" its myth by comparing it with "detailed statistical information" that carefully takes sub-populations into account. In large part, this is the process that took place in creating the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Campus Climate Project, which is the text I analyze for this assignment. I should note that I find this to be a very complex document, because it is the document itself that I must analyze, and not necessarily the experiences of the people they describe, which I automatically found myself doing. I will first treat the text using insights from Strauss, then Fairclough, and follow up with my remaining observations.

The Campus Climate Project was created in response to the understanding that, "Colleges and universities are more aware of the challenges facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and ally members in their communities," and, "Literature from the past two decades documents the harassment,

discrimination, and violence experienced by LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] people on campus." The report is based on responses to a survey conducted in the spring of 2004, where over twenty five hundred students and over twelve hundred employees participated.

The first concept that Strauss proffers is "shared cultural assumptions." I find it difficult to get at such a notion with this text, because I am so removed from the authors of the document. Strauss advises that it is necessary to carry an extended conversation with someone to discern their assumptions, which is not possible in this situation. It is also difficult to perceive the assumptions that are present as a result of the consultants that produced the document, the university that asked for the document to be produced, the consultants consideration of the university they were producing the document for, or the voices of those who participated in the study.

The next concept that Strauss uses is "social discourse." Strauss advises that one way to discern the presence of discourse is the use of jargon. At first glance, jargon appears to be absent from the Campus Climate Project, but on the other hand words such as LGBT, and "climate" (which appears in the title of many of the references), could be considered to be a jargon of sorts. And though it might be invisible to some, these "keywords" point directly to the social discourse that the University of Illinois is aligning itself with in this document, where intolerance and harassment are frowned upon.

The last concept that Strauss uses is "public opinion." Here Strauss again stresses close treatment of someone's statements to discern those moments when they perceive conflict between their beliefs and those of the public at large, yet this document is not prone to such an analysis. However, inasmuch as the document notes those instances where LGBT persons were harassed, it must be clear to the university that some members of the public hold differing opinions, yet the university is also clearly disregarding those opinions, since its goal in creating this document is to eradicate intolerance and harassment towards LGBT persons.

Turning to Fairclough, the first concept put forth is that of "existential assumptions," or "assumptions about what exists." At a basic level, the Campus Climate Project assumes the existence of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons. This might sound absurd, because surely it is the case that these people were not fabricated, but instead what I refer to is the social construction of the categories "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," and "transgender" themselves, terms which have not existed throughout the entirety of history. The report itself points to tension surrounding these terms when it notes that "85 individuals who are uncertain about their sexual orientation responded to the survey" and explains, "[In recent research] some considered the "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender" categories to be predominately white social constructs of identity, and therefore not relevant to

their personal experiences."

Fairclough next uses "propositional assumptions," or "assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case." One obvious "propositional assumption" is that the university has the power to have an impact on the campus climate for LGBT persons. This assumption is especially important, since the report states, "Respondents felt most safe in the Illini Union, Main Quad, classroom buildings, Krannert Center for Performing Arts, and in campus libraries, and felt least safe at parking lots and fraternity and sorority houses."

Finally, Fairclough uses the concept of "value assumptions," or "assumptions about what is good or desirable." This is the easiest to place, since the Campus Climate Project is the result of an attempt to address intolerance and harassment, though it is likely that there are more subtle value assumptions that are more interesting and complex to be found in the document.

Although this is a very "faceless" document, making it difficult to attend to the nuance that would allow for the discernment of hidden or buried assumptions, there are still moments in the text that allow a certain humanness to shine through. For example, there is a brief glimpse of underlying assumptions when the amorphous author of the document shows their surprise and states, "It is interesting to underscore that 2.4% (n = 85) of respondents indicated that they were "uncertain" about their sexual orientation, and 2.2% (n = 80) did not respond to this question" (which gets back to the discussion about sexual orientations above).

It is also interesting (no pun intended) to note the intertextual nature of the discourse surrounding the treatment and experience of intolerance and harassment at the University of Illinois. For example, one respondent said, "The Chief, which is always a racist symbol, continues a climate of hate and intolerance on this campus, which trickles down to LGBT issues, because, as someone on the QGrads list pointed out, sexuality and race can and often are interconnected," and another said, "I think "Students for Chief Illiniwek" foster an idea of tradition over growth, and so the ideals are solidified in other areas of the campus community. I assure you that most of the LGBT community is anti-chief. It's a huge division between the LGBT community and the rest of the campus."

Initial Exercises:

A Practice Interview

This entry does not have an apparent relationship to my project, but it did allow me to gain some insight into the experiences of a LGBT student at the university.

#4 Practice Interview

The Reasons I Came Are Not the Same Reasons I Stayed

Sore and tired from a weeklong stream of steady activity, I sat at my computer late Tuesday morning trying to figure out whom I could interview. I searched through my mental list of friends and thought of someone who would be perfect to interview – but she was unable to meet me. However, she was able to direct me to a place in town where I would be likely to find a student who was part of the gay and lesbian "community."

As I walked there I tried to think of the questions I might ask. "How did you end up at the U of I?" did not offer a straight path to the issues I was interested in, namely being gay or lesbian in this academic environment. But I also knew that I could not necessarily formulate any questions in the absence of dialog, so instead of trying to think of questions I decided that I would just remember those places I wanted to explore and look for ways to build paths to them as we conversed.

I entered the room, nervous about how I would be received, and went up to the only person there. I told the young black man that I was doing an assignment for class, and as he set down his sandwich and paused the show he was watching on television, I asked if he had time for an interview. He thought for a moment, and then said, "Sure."

As I sat down I noticed that "Brandon" was watching the television show Weeds, and I asked which episode it was – it was the second episode of the new season. We talked about getting drawn into the last season of the program and the anxious cliffhanger it ended on. I told him that I had seen this episode, and that it was extremely good, also ending on quite an anxious note. My worries about how I might be received subsided a bit in light of this unanticipated connection, and I immediately felt more comfortable.

After Brandon and I went over the consent form and I explained the assignment, he told me that he had applied to five schools in Illinois, including Northwestern and the University of Chicago, and had been accepted to all of them, which he said boosted his self-esteem and convinced him that he really could succeed in college. Brandon, who said he always knew that he would go to college, said that he only applied to schools in Illinois because he did not want to be too far from his family who live in the suburbs of Chicago. He also said that when he was deciding which school to go to he did not necessarily consider the social environment, but instead placed more emphasis on the quality of the schools' natural sciences programs. However, Brandon did say, "I honestly think this is a great town." As an "active learner" Brandon said he sought out resources and felt that there was a lot to do in Champaign-Urbana. Brandon also said that here in a "rural area" you don't see some of the things you would see in a larger metropolitan area.

A few years after Brandon came to the University of Illinois, however, his interests changed. While Brandon originally came to study the natural

sciences, he was now studying in the social sciences. Brandon said that coming out had a lot to do with his loss of interest in engineering. Brandon also said he felt "marginalized" in his natural science classes because of a general lack of people of color who were not international students. "I feel like there is not enough support for people of color on this campus," said Brandon. When Brandon switched to the social sciences he thought, "Wow, I feel more in place." In the social sciences Brandon said he had female teachers, gay teachers, and other people of color in his classes.

I asked Brandon what he thought about the person he used to be, the person who chose to come to the University of Illinois for reasons much different than the ones that kept him here now. Brandon laughed, and said, "That's an interesting question." Brandon said he felt like he was still the same person, with the same "passion for learning" and care for education. "I guess the major difference is that I have a better idea of what I want to do," said Brandon. He told me that he was doing something that ignited his "passion" instead of just offering "security," and that he could have worked for a computer company, but knew that his "emotional happiness would not be so great."

I asked Brandon if there was anything he would like to add or if he had any questions for me, something I have learned to do from previous training, but he had nothing to add, and, seeming surprised that I had opened myself up for inquiry, had no questions to ask. Still, I briefly told him about my work on gay men in Japan, consciously trying to show that my interest in gay and lesbian issues was genuine. And then I told him I looked forward to running into him again so I could see what he thought of the conclusion to the episode of Weeds he was watching when I arrived.

Immediately after I thought back on my performance: Was there anything I forgot to ask? Was there anything I forgot to do? Was there anything I should have done differently? Fortunately, I was pleased with how the interview went, and did not feel that anything was particularly amiss. Most of all I was happy that he and I were able to discover and create something so interesting around a rather innocuous question that I was admittedly not very passionate about asking.

One thing I found particularly interesting about the interview was how little a role Brandon's sexuality or "race" played in the narrative he weaved, which in turn made it somewhat difficult to address these issues. For example, although Brandon's loss of interest in the natural sciences was partially related to his act of "coming out," this did not appear to have affected the coherence of his story about the reasons he initially came to the University of Illinois in any way. And Brandon only mentioned his negative experiences with "race" when I directly asked if it had in any way played a similar role to his experiences with sexuality, using my knowledge about the controversy surrounding the Chief as a means of broaching this issue. Above all, I wanted to see if Brandon would

raise these issues without being primed, such as with sexuality, and I also tried to draw on contextual relationships to raise issues that did not spontaneously occur, such as with "race."

Question: #5 Question

2007-10-24:

My project addresses the dialectic between the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Resources and LGBT students, as it pertains to computer-mediated communication. For example, LGBT Resources recently publicized an upcoming conference on the popular website Facebook. Thus, I will inquire into the ways in which LGBT resources uses new technologies to engage LGBT students at the University of Illinois, and the ways in which these attempts at engagement figure into the practices that LGBT students have developed around these new technologies. Specifically, I will interrogate the new opportunities for sociality that have developed around these new technologies, the way these new technologies have affected previously existing forms of sociality, and the new dangers that LGBT students are presented with by these technologies.

2007-10-02:

For my project I would like to take up some of the questions raised by the Campus Climate Project, which I analyzed previously. The Campus Climate Project reports, "Respondents felt most safe in the Illini Union, Main Quad, classroom buildings, Krannert Center for Performing Arts, and in campus libraries, and felt least safe at parking lots and fraternity and sorority houses." However, new spaces have been created by the recent growth in computer-mediated communication, and especially social networking websites such as the popular website Facebook. These spaces also raise new dangers, as recent attention given to "cyber-bullying" has shown. Thus, I will investigate whether or not gay and lesbian students at the University of Illinois feel safe in a "space" such as Facebook, and discern how this website mediates their experience of the university.

Plan: #5 Plan

2007-10-24:

To conduct my project I will interview staff members of the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Resources regarding their use of new technologies to engage GLBT students, and GLBT undergraduates regarding their experiences here at the University of Illinois, with an emphasis on the practices they have developed around the website Facebook. I will locate students for my project through existing campus resources, as well as my own

personal social networks, and Facebook itself. Although the Campus Climate Project did not address experiences related to use of the Internet, I will still be able to use this report as a context for the experiences of the gay and lesbian students I interview, and to get a sense of any changes that have taken place.

2007-10-02:

To conduct my project I intend to interview gay and lesbian undergraduates regarding their experiences here at the University of Illinois, with an emphasis on the practices they have developed around the website Facebook. I will locate students for my project through existing campus resources, as well as my own personal social networks, and Facebook itself. Although the Campus Climate Project did not address experiences related to use of the Internet, I will still be able to use this report as a context for the experiences of the gay and lesbian students I interview, and to get a sense of any changes that have taken place.

Data: #6 Project Interview

A Project Interview

There is a constant tension between our interests, the knowledge we have, and the questions we would like to ask, especially in the beginning stages of research. Sometimes our interests and knowledge guide us towards asking questions that address situations that do not actually exist. This is part of the reason for the delay in producing this interview.

For my project I intended to look at the way that GLBT students at the University of Illinois were using new technologies, specifically Facebook, to navigate the university, and see whether or not these new technologies resulted in new dangers for students. However, as I poked around cyberspace, I failed to find any indication of practices built around Facebook among GLBT students, and I became discouraged.

This all changed, though, when one of my friends on Facebook joined the group for the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference 2008. I had been unaware that this group existed, and when I joined the group myself and took a look around I noticed that it had been organized by the Office of LGBT Resources. This was just the connection that I had been looking for.

On Tuesday, October 23, 2007, I met with Curt McKay, Director of the Office of LGBT Resources, to discuss the Office's use of technology. (Just before we began the interview we briefly discussed migraines, I provided a brief personal background, and I answered McKay's question regarding how I came to study Japan.) I asked McKay how long he had been involved with the Office, and he said, "I've actually been here on campus for 20 years. This is the 21st year. I was a public school teacher and when I came out I thought, okay, northern

Illinois, real conservative community, quit teaching. I didn't bother to find out if I needed to or not. [laughter] But I just did. And so I came here to learn to be a children's librarian, and once I got here had the opportunity near the end of that master's degree to become the assistant dean of the library school doing recruiting and student affairs kinds of stuff. So I did that for 16 years altogether, and the first six years I was here doing this it was just a quarter time. The office was staffed at a half-time level, and so there was a quarter-time male and a quarter-time female, co-directors of the office. But of course, that meant that we were hardly ever here, and so the door was often closed."

In 2004, McKay explained, the interim chancellor gave money so that there could be a full-time director. However, there had been discussions about having an LGBT office with full-time staff since 1983 when many changes took place at the university. Sexual orientation was added to the university's non-discrimination clause, the university began offering domestic benefits to same-sex partners, the Office of LGBT Resources was created, and the university also began allowing residence hall directors to live with their same-sex partners. McKay said this all came about when a residence hall director was initially told that it would be no problem to live with their same-sex partner, and then told that this would not be possible. This lionized the campus into action, leading to the above changes. (I hesitated and then explained that in Japan there has been a resistance to an American/Western gay identity politics predicated on visibility, because there has been relatively little oppression of gays, perhaps because of the relative absence of Christianity. I further explained that Elizabeth Armstrong, in her book about the formation of the "gay field" in San Francisco, cited a reference that said minority oppression can have two effects. If it is strong, then it can cause minority groups to cease their political activities. But if it is mild in nature, then it can serve to lionize minority groups. McKay said, "That's really… That is interesting. And that really is sort of what happened here.")

I asked McKay when the Office started using technology. McKay said, "Probably not too long after the beginning of Facebook. Because Facebook became this big sort of boon to student affairs, as a new way of getting at students. In our case, one of the first things it did was to give us a greater sense of, [and] access to, who we were. Because, of course, at this point there was virtually no demographic information collected about LGBT people on this campus or anywhere else. And so suddenly with the advent of Facebook you have these profiles that originally allowed people to put in their physical attractions, and you could search by it. And so I was able to go in and say, oh wow, there are a lot more people here who say they are interested in relationships with men if they're men or women if they're women or both than we see coming to programs and stuff. So it was a very crude way to sort of measure how many of us there are on campus."

McKay continued, "It also then began throughout student affairs, or at least

throughout the Office of the Dean of Students, but I think throughout student affairs in general and campus administration in general, people started thinking, oh, here's a way we could also advertise. And one of the early things that occurred to me was, oh, we have all these names of people who say they are interested in same-sex relationships, or both opposite and same-sex relationships. We could send them emails inviting them to things. But we never did that, because somehow that felt invasive to me, in a way that putting a pop-up ad or creating a Facebook group doesn't. You know, then you're putting the information out there and they can look at it. But somehow it just felt like it would really scare someone to death to suddenly realize, oh my god, here's this information about me that the entire world can see, and maybe I don't want them to. And I didn't want to scare what might have been beginning steps that might have felt anonymous because the electronic environment feels anonymous, or at least did. To be able to reach out in that way to what might have been a first act of coming out for someone might very well scare them back into the closet, so we never actually did that. And I don't know if people at other schools did or not."

McKay then explained some of the new dangers that have been presented by Facebook: "Even more recently parents of incoming students are using Facebook to find out about their child's roommate before they get here. And so housing has seen this year and probably last year increasing numbers of people they call helicopter parents … checking out roommates, probably without the knowledge of their own child, and then calling to say, I don't want my son or daughter to have a black roommate or a gay roommate … So it's headaches on the parts of housing professionals because they have a whole other set of headaches to deal with that hinder them in their … attempts to broaden the worlds of the students who live in housing instead of only exposing them to more of the same sorts of people they have always known."

I next asked McKay about a recent "stereotype party" that had taken place, which garnered public notice when pictures from the party were posted on Facebook. McKay said that in contrast to the "Tacos and Tequila" party that took place the year before, where the university was able to reprimand those involved because they were part of the Greek system, this more recent "stereotype party" had been conducted privately, and thus there was less room for the university to discipline these students. I noted that events such as this called attention to the blurry line regarding what we consider to be "the university," and McKay said that in this particular instance informal steps were taken, where these students were not reprimanded, but university officials did meet with them to better educate them about why events such as these are hurtful to other students and held a townhall meeting to discuss the event.

I also asked McKay what he thought was different about Facebook that allowed it to play such a prominent role in comparison to a website like MySpace. McKay said, "One of the things is that Facebook still is largely a

college student phenomenon. You know I've seen reports about how the makeup of Facebook is quite different from MySpace in terms of who's involved in it. And I think maybe that … because it's college students who are still feeling their way toward becoming whole adult individuals in a different way than MySpace people are, because MySpace people I think are more likely, because it's not so college refined, to involve people who are already out there being real adults. … They're doing all this stuff that a college student does, but in a much more protected environment. That's purely hypothesis." McKay added that there are many affluent students on campus, which in turn presents a special problem for students who come out and are disowned by their parents, because they are typically not eligible for financial aid. McKay concluded by saying, "They have a strong sense of security, and the sense of privilege that they have, often even if they are of color, is such that just by the fact that they are students here, that demonstrates a level of privilege, for most, not for all, but for many. And so they never had to think about any of [these] other social justice [issues]."

I noted that one of the nice things about Facebook is that it allows you to see who is coming to an event. McKay responded, "And so you see lots of people are going, that will encourage people. Especially people who are [thinking], maybe, maybe not. And because you can tell who's coming as well, it's not just an anonymous, 'I'm coming,' you see somebody you know, somebody from your high school who doesn't go to school where you do pops up and you're, 'Oh, I didn't know he was gay,' and he's going to this – well maybe I should go too. … I think it really can build momentum for an event."

McKay added, "Somebody told me that their group … [doesn't] flyer anymore. They only use electronic means of getting the word out about their events and it seems to work pretty well." McKay said that this helps address the issue that when flyers for LGBT events are posted around campus, they often get torn down. McKay said that the Office probably does not use Facebook enough as it should, in part because he does not use it much, though other Office staff members do. McKay also said that the Office has money to hire undergraduate interns, and one of them is going to be a marketing/media position. McKay explained that one of the reasons for this shift is that flyering is becoming less useful, in part because flyers become covered so quickly.

Although we had been focusing on the Office of LGBT Resources's use of technology, I asked McKay if he thought that the university should make it part of their mission to educate the student body about the use of online spaces. McKay responded, "Absolutely." However, McKay pointed out that the university "has a hard time keeping up," and may have difficulty responding to this need because the university is so decentralized.

For my last question I asked McKay if he felt that the Office of LGBT Resources was competing with the new spaces that have been opened up by

new technologies, such as Facebook, because although it allows the Office to reach the students in new ways, it also empowers the students to bypass the university and connect to other students on their own. McKay said that rather than the university's resources and the spaces opened up by new technologies running parallel to each other, as I suggested might be the case, these resources intersect and overlap each other.

McKay told me a story about the way that some students use the Internet to play with other identities, such as one student who creates different accounts on Craigslist to talk to other men. About the way that students spend time on the Internet more generally, McKay said, "If you go and look over the shoulders of people who are using the public access terminals out there, they're very likely, unless they're working on a paper, they're very likely to be open to one of three things I think: Facebook, Craigslist, or Wikipedia."

Before ending the interview I asked McKay if he had any questions or anything else he would like to add, and he said, "I don't think so. This has been fun!"

Data: #8 The Archive

The Archive http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/archon/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=5570&q=41%2F2%2F46

Digital Barriers to Historical Access

In my previous experiences I have always encountered a tension between historical and ethnographic sources. It seems that historical sources should play a role in ethnographic projects, but he difficulty is in discerning just what that role should be. Here I will address the most salient issues I face.

In maintaining a set of archives about itself, the University of Illinois presents an incredible historical resource for those doing research about the university. However, for this resource to be useful there has to be an item that actually relates to the project in question. In my case, where I am looking at the way that the Office of LGBT Resources and LGBT students are using new technologies to operate through the university, the archives does contain a resource that bears some relevance to my project. The description for item 41/2/46 states:

"Records of Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns (1942-2001) include correspondence, newsletters, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, photo albums and scrapbooks relating to gay, lesbian, transgender issues and, specifically, the Gay Illini, a student organization formed in 1975. The series also includes three scrapbooks compiled by Buell Dwight Huggins, a University student, and, later, a member of the Mattachine Society, an early gay activist group."

However, while this resource has an obvious connection to my project, the question of how relevant these materials might be for my project gets at some of the tensions I experience between historical and ethnographic sources. I understand the way in which historical sources might provide a context for contemporary ethnographic research, but for these historical sources to provide a context I argue that there must be an existing line of continuity between the historical and contemporary moments in question. In other words, I argue that historical sources can only provide a context for a contemporary situation up to the point of discontinuity, which, of course, can be analytically interesting in and of itself.

Regarding historical sources, then, I am faced with a problem that is possibly insurmountable. Since I am specifically interested in the mediating effects of new technologies, I feel that it is difficult to surmount the discontinuity between the historical sources in the archives and the contemporary moment. Admittedly, it would be interesting to compare previous practices with contemporary practices, but I am skeptical that this kind of information would necessarily be contained in the archives.

My interest in new technologies also raises questions about what the university archives should or could contain. For instance, students on Facebook produce an incredible amount of information about themselves that captures the university in an intimate dialogical way that I argue is difficult to find in traditional historical articles, letters, and scrapbooks. Thus, it seems that this would be an important resource for the university archives to contain.

Unfortunately, however, there are serious questions regarding the degree to which students on Facebook consider the information they produce to be public, and thus, whether this information would be suitable for inclusion in the university archives, no matter how interesting or important it might be.

In the end, this may not simply be a problem for historians but also for ethnographers, where there is an explosion of analytically interesting communication between individuals that forms an intimate part of their lifeworlds, yet is information that is not readily visible, and thus hidden from the eyes of researchers. This is an important moment, then, to consider the methodological interventions that might be necessary to address this issue.

Data: #9 Additional Interview

Data Continued Like I said, I'm really interested in how new technologies are changing the experiences of GLBT students, and a lot of this is focusing on Facebook. So, how much time would you say you spend on Facebook?

"It varies day to day, because I have my random spurts of boredom where I

will be on it for hours. But usually, only twenty minutes a day."

Do you consider that to be a lot?

"It feels like a lot when my paper's don't get done. I don't think it's a lot compared to some people. I don't really look at other people's profiles overly much. Unless I see something big in the news feed, I don't make a point to check every single person's profile. And unless I was someplace where they took a bunch of pictures, I usually don't go look through old photo albums or anything like that."

So you try to limit it?

"I try to limit it because I feel like I should be interacting with people. In a way that feels to me more meaningful. [Pause] Or to try not to fail out of school."

[Laughter.] What other kind of websites do you spend time on?

"Gmail, a comic book discussion message board, and news sites, like BBC. Those are probably I'm on as much as Facebook, if not more. I'd like to say more, but I can't be sure. [Laughter.] Then I have a MySpace, but I rarely ever use it anymore."

Why don't you use MySpace that much anymore?

"I just don't. I guess I just lost interest because nothing ever seems to be happening in it. I used to use it a lot when I was younger, like in high school, because it was my only outlet to speak to other gay people and to meet people and stuff like that. Whereas now I have friends I can just go out to a bar and meet people and stuff like that. Also, too, Facebook feels, I guess just sort of, safer? And in that you're more sort of like at the university, and you don't have a lot of random people like fifty-year-olds from Oklahoma messaging you trying to get you to come hook up with them …"

[Laughter.]

"So, it just feels safer. I think that's probably the best word I can think of right now. Now all MySpace seems to be is viruses and random robot things sending you pictures of naked girls."

So one of the things that made you feel not safe on MySpace is just… It seems to be populated more by strangers.

"Yeah, more by strangers, more by people who you can't be sure if they are who they say they are. And also too I just get annoyed with the influx of messages from like older people who are trying to get… And not just older

people, just from random people who are like, 'Oh hey, let's meet and hook up,' as opposed to like, 'Oh hey, you seem interesting, because we like to read the same books, so let's talk about that.' It seems more specifically geared towards like, let's hook up, let's go out and get drunk together, as opposed to like, let's actually meet and … we could be friends or we could wind up developing … Like, let's go on a date, as opposed to, lets hook up."

I asked Charles how he met the friends he has now, and he said that, "ironically enough," he had "inadvertently" met them through Facebook, because he had "kind of" found his boyfriend Andrew through Facebook. Charles explained that he first met Andrew in person, but they didn't talk until Charles messaged him on Facebook, and Charles met a lot of his current friends through Andrew.

Charles explained that he had met Andrew at a restaurant, and later recognized him in a friend's pictures on Facebook. After looking at his Andrew's profile on Facebook, Charles realized that they had much in common, which pushed Charles to contact him. Charles said that since he wasn't actually speaking to Andrew face-to-face, he didn't have to risk the "awkward stuttering, losing train of thought, or inability to make eye contact." Charles said that speaking to Andrew online and knowing Andrew's interests made him less nervous when they met in person.

I advised Charles that "helicopter parents" were now checking up on their children's roommates, and raised the issue of safe on Facebook, and Charles said that he feels less safe on Facebook now that "they're letting onto it" whereas before it was "a cool way for us to meet university students." Charles realizes that schools check Facebook and MySpace "to review you as a potential candidate," but this didn't worry him, because there was didn't have anything that was particularly bad on Facebook, and he also knew others with similar content that had no trouble getting into law school or grad school. Charles did say, however, that he felt that when parents check on their children's roommates, it is an "invasion of their privacy," and inhibits their autonomy and personal growth.

I asked Charles if there was ever anything that he thought about putting on Facebook but decided not to, and he said that he would sometimes put up pictures of friends that were potentially embarrassing, and his friends would say that he could leave them up, as long as he didn't tag them in the photos.

I then asked Charles if he had ever had any negative experiences on Facebook, but he had not. We discussed how this was likely the result of the fact that most of the activity Charles sees on Facebook is generated by his friends, and none of his friends would do anything that was or join any groups that were offensive.

I also asked Charles if he had ever used MySpace to "hook up," and he said he had a long time ago, but only because he didn't have any other venues to meet people.

"I feel like now parents and kids are more open with each other, but parents aren't always as accepting. So we don't completely lie to them like people used to or we don't just wait until college like people used to. We come out about it and our parents are often not okay with it, and so the Internet becomes this sort of, like basically what the city and parties used to be. It's kind like a safe… Well, in some ways safer, in some ways not as safe. It's like, you're not going out to a party with people you don't know, but you're talking to someone who could be lying to you about who they are."

Charles and I talked about The Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference, also referred to as "The Big Gay Conference," and Charles argued that the name was too long, and that it should be called "The Midwest Queer College Conference."

So you knew about the Facebook group [for the MBLGTACC] pretty early on?

"I think someone had invited me. I don't remember. I usually try and keep my Facebook groups to about thirty – it's just like a compulsion."

[Laughter.]

"'Cause when I first got here, I joined like eighty of them, and I felt like, 'This is really stupid,' and I deleted most of them. I left that in there just to kind of like in a very very small way to get people to look at it more."

So you joined it kind of so other people would see it?

"Yeah. And also too it was a good way to keep in touch with everyone. Basically, it's a very very useful way to get everyone to, like, if you want to join our group, ok, this is the event. It seems almost as useful as email in that respect. And it provides almost a website so they can like [see] what's been going on. I don't really know if they do that with this Facebook group, but…"

I told Charles that one of the nice things about Facebook is that you can see who is going to an event, and asked if he had also joined the group so that others would see that he was going.

"It's sort of like, I'm involved in it, and when other people see that I'm involved in it, they can get involved. I just know a lot of people who are like, oh, I'll go if you're showing up."

Charles talked about his experiences as a gay teen, and I pointed out that

there seemed to be a transformation in the way that he uses Facebook, where he now uses it to kill time rather than to meet people.

"A way to kill time, and a way to keep in touch with friends who go to different schools. Just kind of be like, oh, you know, how you doing, like write on their wall or send them a message. You know, we're all so busy now with school and RSOs and all that stuff that, you know, we don't have time to call each other or chat on AIM. It's like, you can send them the message, and they can respond that way. You can send them a link on Facebook. You can look at their pictures."

Why is it better to send a message on Facebook than send an email, per se?

"I'm not exactly sure. Maybe I just have the association in my head that Facebook is for social things and email is for like school or work related things. I'm not sure why. … For me email just feels more official, I guess. I'm not sure why. I guess that's just more of a personal association. That's the way it just happened to develop. Because professors, fortunately, aren't on Facebook. [Laughter.] And therefore, they email you. But your friends are on Facebook, and therefore they instant message you. I don't know. I don't think it's necessarily better, but it's like, you know, you go on Facebook and you can send your friend a message, and then you can go look at pictures of what they were for Halloween."

I asked Charles about the Office of LGBT Resources, and he mentioned that they have several groups. I then asked if he had gotten involved with any of those groups.

"Not really. I never really had the desire to go to PRIDE. I'm on their mailing list in case they have an event that looks interesting that they're sponsoring. But at the same time I don't… I just don't feel like its… I don't know, it's just like, from what I've seen, the kind of stuff they do, and from what I've heard from other people whose opinions I respect is that they're not really involved that politically. It's more like a social thing. So I just never had the urge to get involved with that. It's like I can do my own social things, and I don't really need to go to these like gay themed events. I just have like my friends that I hang out with. And if I'm going to get involved in something like that I would like for it to have more of an activist leaning. I don't know. Like, I knew about these things and people were telling me about them, or I would get a Facebook invite, or I would get a flyer, or see it on quad day. Most of them just didn't appeal to me because they had this support group leaning to them. And it was just like, I don't feel the need to do that, I don't want… I don't need a support group. I mean, it's good that they exist for people who do need them."

Finally, I asked Charles if he thought that Facebook was changing the social fabric that institutions like the Office of LGBT Resources had been predicated

on.

"I think it's more like just a reflection of both gay culture and American culture as a whole. I can't really speak for other cultures, but I know that people just tend to meet each other more through online venues both in and outside of gay communities. And I know there are places in a lot of other… Like, I know a lot of other countries have Facebook. [I was overseas] and a lot of people I met, I met on Facebook, and we would talk to each other on Facebook because it was cheaper than calling each other. … So I feel like people, like culture as a whole are taking on this sort of Internet level that it didn't have before the Internet existed. And I think that's being reflected in the gay community. And I also think that as a whole the gay community is moving away from becoming a community. There was some article that they had posted about… I think it was the New York Times about how like gay enclaves are losing their force."

How they're not having the party in Chelsea?

"Yeah. And like gay people as a general just aren't sort of… There's this disconnect because we're not as ostracized by society so we don't band together like that anymore. I think that there will always be a place for gay organizations, but I don't think they're becoming quite the social haven that they used to be, because you can find friends now who will accept you for who you are, regardless of whether or not you're gay. Like, you can have an identity outside of the gay identity because you just like, society won't insult you for that anymore, like it's just becoming more commonplace, and therefore we don't really need to band together with people. Because gay people aren't the only other people that accept us now. A lot of other people will. So, we don't feel the need to build this sort of gay identity."

Do you think the Gay Straight Alliance (which Charles was involved with in high school) is a better model for the future?

"Um. Kind of. I feel like there needs to be sort of more of a… A more diverse ideology I guess, because I feel like…"

Something that goes beyond queer?

"Well, yeah. I think it needs… I mean, I'm not really sure what words would be used, but I think it needs to be less of like an us against them ideology and more like an us with them. Because it's like, okay, well, you know it's great that now we've asserted our identities and are now pushing into mainstream culture. But now that means we need to start interacting with that mainstream culture, and like bringing in people who don't identify as queer in any way and working with them as allies to make a positive change. And therefore, it shouldn't be just a gay group, it should be like a gay and straight group."

And so, with these changes that are taking place, where do you think the LGBT resources office fits into all of this?

"I still think it's really important because, I just think that every group. Because no matter how many strides we make, it'll be a really really long time before it becomes to the point where it's like it doesn't even matter whether or not you're gay. And I think to an extent, human beings, we just all have this tendency to put labels on each other, and to develop our own preconceptions about people whether they be negative or positive. And I do think it's important to have a resource there for people who… Because when I grew up like, yes, I fought with my parents, but now they're both very accepting of it. And I grew up in schools that were more accepting of it. And while at my second school there were always things that were very homophobic, I never felt like scared to be who I was. I knew I would have to argue with people. I knew I would have to stand up for myself. But I never felt like I was going to be lynched after school. But there are kids who did come from that sort of community, and therefore I think that the Office of LGBT Resources is really important for that. And I also think it's important too to keep fighting to make sure we don't lose the strides we've made, because I think that's something that has happened with a lot of minority groups."

Well, I mean, for me the question is, you know, the way the office functioned in the past was to provide this kind of…

"Safe haven."

But also kind of a public, like a social meeting space, but some of that's getting torn away at a little bit, because people are able to find each other, you know, using the Internet.

"Yeah. But I think now, and I'm not really sure because I [don't] know how the LGBT Office worked before I came here. And like when I came here my year, my class, is kind of it seems when Facebook really took off."

When you were a freshman?

"Yeah, when I was a freshman. It just seemed… I'm trying to think of how to phrase it… I don't know if it was like sort of a social safe haven, like, before Facebook. Because I feel like now it is a meeting space, and part of that's the fact that there's free food there. [Lowering voice.] Actually, that's often why I go there. But it provides a place where we meet that… I guess I think it serves as almost like a symbolic significance where, like, okay, this is our place, and we can go here, we can have our meetings, about, like, 'The Big Gay Conference,' and like, this is our spot, and we've won this, or people in the past have won this for us and we're going to keep using it. So I just don't know how much the

Internet has impacted that because I don't think that any Internet can ever replace that sort of like we have our own meeting space. Because, the thing about the Internet that I find, I think a lot of gay people find appealing, is that sense of anonymity. Because I have a friend who almost invented his own identity when he was working through his coming out process through the Internet. He used a different nickname online than he used in real life, which is really funny because that's now the nickname he always goes by, because he met all these people he was talking to online."

[Laughter.] Okay.

"I think that's been the most extensive use of the Internet that I've ever encountered in that respect. He invented a new persona for it that he had to repress in front of his family. And so I think that like the LGBT office serves the exact opposite, like a very visible sort of like, this is who we are, and to show that we are asserting ourselves, and to show that we have rights and that they are protected. So I don't think it will ever become obsolete because of the Internet, because I don't think anything on the Internet can ever come close to providing that kind of visible sort of… Because, I mean, anyone can make a website. You don't need permission to make a website."

So, you feel very strongly that that kind of visibility…

"Yeah, definitely. It shows that the university, this institution is behind us, and we've won that institution's support, and this is a symbol of our success. And therefore kind of serves as a footstep for all of the activist groups."

And at the same time the Office is able to make itself present on Facebook as well, so even the Office is adapting itself.

"Yeah, definitely. But I just don't think that the Internet could ever come close to providing that sort of tangible… Because I think the Internet always has something that's intangible, which is why a lot of people like it. Does that make any sense?"

Yeah.

"But, while all that has its place, especially when you're working through coming out… I don't think a Facebook group can ever have the sort of oompf that a physical site does."

That's all my questions. [Laughter.] At the end of the interview I always ask if there are any questions that you have or anything additional that you would like to add.

"Not particularly that I can think of. I think technology has had a big impact on

how people develop their identities, but I don't think it's quite the driving force between gay communities dispersing. I think that it's reflective of cultural trends as a whole. But I don't think that it's really under rooting anything, and I don't think that it will ever take the place of something as tangible as the Office of LGBT Concerns or meeting groups like PRIDE or the gay conference or anything like that."

Data: #11 Video

Video/Plan See attached or visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voL7nZ2srWU.

Discuss: #10 Discussion

I began this project with the simple hypothesis that Facebook has undermined face-to-face resources for LGBT students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, though the reality turned out to be much more complex. While it is true that there are ways in which Facebook empowers LGBT students to meet each other outside of the spaces provided by the Office of LGBT Resources or the student organization PRIDE, there are also ways in which Facebook acts to strengthen these spaces.

Before continuing I feel it necessary to comment on the relevance of Facebook and provide a brief explanation of what Facebook is. Initially I was unsure whether or not Facebook was significant enough among the experiences of students at the University of Illinois to constitute an aspect of research. However, after discovering a previous EUI project that anecdotally referred the popularity of Facebook; hearing Curt McKay, Director of the Office of LGBT Resources, comment on students' constant use of Facebook; and discovering a group for PRIDE and an event listing for the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference (MBLGTACC) on Facebook I was convinced of its relevance.

That said, it is difficult to describe exactly what Facebook is, especially since it serves so many functions. Here I focus on two aspects. One crucial aspect of Facebook to point out is its reliance on a network of friends, who primarily generate content in the form of "status updates" and "wall posts," as well by posting notes and pictures, joining groups, or by adding events. This content allows individuals to easily share daily minutiae as well as important personal experiences with friends in an incremental fashion. Another crucial aspect of Facebook is individuals' profiles, which list various characteristics, such as sexual orientation, relationship status, and favorite books and movies. This allows someone to learn an extensive amount of information about a friend on Facebook without speaking to them, which provides individuals with resources to use when deciding whether or not they want to build a social or romantic relationship with someone.

With respect to the ways in which Facebook undermines the LGBT resources

available at the University I do not have an extensive amount of material to draw from, but I do have one salient example. Charles, a gay student I interviewed about his experiences with Facebook, said that he had "ironically" and "inadvertently" met his current friends and boyfriend through Facebook. Charles met Andrew in a restaurant, then happened to see him in a friend's photo on Facebook, and decided to contact Andrew after looking at his profile and finding that they had much in common. Thus, in this particular instance, Charles was able to find other gay students outside of the LGBT resources that exist on campus.

At the same time, however, there are ways in which Facebook contributes to the strength of LGBT resources at the University. For example, the LGBT student group PRIDE has a group on Facebook with 106 members (as of December 8, 2007). There is also a group on Facebook for the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference 2008 (MBLGTACC) with 442 members (as of December 8, 2007), which is being sponsored by the Office of LGBT Resources. In addition to these groups gaining visibility by having a presence on Facebook, they gain additional advertising at a grassroots level when individuals on Facebook see friends join these groups or events associated with these groups. In fact, I personally first heard about the MBLGTACC when I saw a friend join their group on Facebook, and this was in turn the resource I used to find Charles, the gay student I interviewed. Finally, Curt McKay said that he looks at the exchanges that take place electronically as beginning steps to forming the face-to-face relationships that are at the heart of the office's mission.

Outside of the face-to-face relationships that LGBT students form – either through Facebook or through the services offered by the university – LGBT resources on campus are also understood to serve a symbolic purpose. For example, even though Charles formed his current relationships through the use of Facebook and does not currently use the LGBT services available through the university, he still thinks that the Office of LGBT Resources has a strong "symbolic significance": "It shows that the university, this institution is behind us, and we've won that institution's support, and this is a symbol of our success." Charles also made it clear that the LGBT services provided by the university are "tangible" in a way that the Internet is not: "I don't think that [the Internet is] really under rooting anything, and I don't think that it will ever take the place of something as tangible as the Office of LGBT Concerns or meeting groups like PRIDE or the gay conference or anything like that."

It is thus the case that the process of shifts in the social fabric of LGBT students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a result of Facebook should be treated much more carefully than I initially imagined would need be the case. While LGBT students have been empowered to find each other outside of the LGBT resources provided by the university as a result of Facebook, consideration must also be given to the ways in which the

very construction of Facebook provides incentives for participating in public social events as well as the university's own use of Facebook to reach LGBT students. In addition, these practices must be bracketed off from the symbolic importance of LGBT services provided by the university, which influence the affective experiences of students even when they do not make use of these services.

I end here with a reflection on the methodological and theoretical questions that are raised by research conducted around a social networking website such as Facebook. My most immediate concern is in discerning "where" it is that I should go were I to conduct participant observation. Certainly, I could go to LGBT meetings on campus, or I could spend time on Facebook observing the interactions that take place "there" (especially after it recently occurred to me that there is a wealth of information that individuals produce about themselves on Facebook). However, there is a pressing way in which those who I am most concerned with would be missed by this kind of research. For example, in focusing on campus events and Facebook I would miss those people who find and contact each other through private messages that would never be visible to me, and it seems as if this is the population that I would be most interested in when pursuing the question of how social networking technologies undermine public LGBT groups and services. As of yet I do not have an answer to this particular dilemma.

Theoretically I wrestle over how to situate the new social networking technologies that have emerged with respect to subjectification and practices. For example, is it too much to say that these new technologies have in turn resulted in the creation of new subjectivities? Or is it instead the case that since we remain immersed in a consumerist discourse that it is only the practices that have changed and not subjectivities? Perhaps I am simply splitting hairs and should be satisfied with the importance of capturing the experiences and practices of individuals, as well as the relationship between their experiences and practices, such as the way in which particular technologies such as Facebook enable individuals to have a particular set of experiences.

Research Proposal:

#12 Research Proposal

In the past decade the Internet has had a recognizable impact on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adolescents. Yet, while some attention has been given to the use of the Internet by LGBT adolescents (e.g., Gross and Woods 1999:; Benjamin 2004) and the effect of communications technology on social movements (e.g., Myers 1994), there has been no research on the effect the Internet has had on LGBT college students' use of university resources for LGBT students. In this study I will discern how use of the social network site Facebook has both diminished and enhanced the importance of LGBT resources at the University of Illinois at

Urbana-Champaign, specifically the Office of LGBT Resources and the LGBT student group PRIDE.

Research Problem

During the past decade the Internet has had a tremendous impact on the experiences of LGBT persons. Silberman (in Benjamin 2004:353) says, "The on-line world is the biggest thing to happen to queerdom in a very long time and it's the best thing that has happened to queerdom in my lifetime." One of the greatest effects that the Internet has had on LGBT persons is that it has made it easier for them to come out, especially in the case of teenagers. As Kingston (in Benjamin 2004:353) notes, "[The Internet] has made it possible for so many to come out much younger."

In recent years a group of websites known as social network sites (SNSs) have risen in popularity among Internet users. A number of SNSs exist, such as Bebo, Facebook, Friendster, MySpace, Orkut, and Xanga (Hargittai 2007). However, Facebook has been found to be the SNS that is used most by college students (n.a. 2007), and recently surpassed MySpace as the most popular website among those between the ages of 18 and 24 (Bulik 2007).

One notable feature of SNSs, especially with regard to LGBT college students, is that they allow individuals to find others that share similar pleasures, such as a desire for those of the same sex. These connections are facilitated by profiles, considered to be the cornerstone of an SNS (boyd and Ellison 2007), that often list an individual's sexual orientation and dating status, in addition to their favorite books, music, and movies, among other things. However, while LGBT college students may be empowered by their use of Facebook, this raises questions about how their enhanced ability to find other LGBT students in private affects their use of LGBT services offered by universities, where they are available.

After conducting pilot research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign during the fall semester of 2007, I discovered indications that LGBT students' use of Facebook both diminishes and enhances LGBT services offered by the university in a complex relationship. For example, one gay student I spoke to, Charles, said that he had "ironically" and "inadvertently" found his current boyfriend and many of his current friends through Facebook. Charles met Andrew at a restaurant, and later noticed him in a friend's picture on Facebook. Charles then found the he and Andrew had much in common, and, after getting to know each other on Facebook, they met in person again and began dating. In this instance, then, an LGBT person was empowered by Facebook and able to meet another LGBT person outside of the LGBT resources provided by the university.

On the other hand, Facebook can also attract individuals to the LGBT

resources provided by the university. For example, Facebook is constructed in such a way that when an individual's friends join a group or event on Facebook, then that individual sees this activity when they visit the website. This both generates additional advertising for those groups or events as well as creating an incentive to participate. The Office of LGBT Resources and the LGBT student group PRIDE have recognized this potential of Facebook and focused on the website as a way of reaching LGBT students. Curt McKay, Director of the Office of LGBT Resources, has a profile on Facebook, and there is an event listed on Facebook for the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference (MBLGTACC) 2008, which is sponsored by the Office of LGBT Resources. PRIDE has a group on Facebook and has previously purchased ads for display on Facebook.

Whether or not LGBT students actually use the services provided for them by the university, however, these services may serve a symbolic function. For example, Charles said, "[The Office of LGBT Resources] shows that the university, this institution, is behind us, and we've won that institution's support, and this is a symbol of our success." Also, while Charles understands that Facebook may enhance LGBT individuals' abilities to find each other and assist them through the coming out process, he does not think that the Internet "will ever take the place of something as tangible as the Office of LGBT Concerns or meeting groups like PRIDE or the gay conference or anything like that."

Research Plan

To discern the affect that the use of Facebook by LGBT students has had on their use of the LGBT services provided by the university, I will conduct my research over the full academic school year 2008 to 2009, which will allow me to observe the cycle that LGBT frosh go through as new students. During the fall semester I will begin by conducting fieldwork on Facebook itself. I will use the event listing for the MBLGTACC and the group listing for PRIDE as starting points to map out a network of LGBT students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, much as anthropologists created kinship charts in the past (Crane and Angrosino 1984). Through these individuals' profiles, where they have allowed access, I will be able to see what other groups and events they have joined in addition to learning personal details about them and seeing how they network and interact with others, which will allow me to discern the "assumptions" that make up this group's symbolic universe (Fairclough 2003) and analyze the way in which these assumptions relate to each other and to the university at large (Strauss 2005). This will also allow me to locate other LGBT individuals at the university who have not joined the event listing for the MBLGTACC or the group listing for PRIDE.

During the spring semester I will contact LGBT students that I have found through Facebook to interview at least 20 to 25 of them regarding their use of

Facebook and their experiences at the university, taking care to attend to a representative range of genders, ethnicities, and years in college. I will begin by asking the students to "walk me through" (Weiss 1994) the way they use Facebook, which will help me to discern the role that Facebook plays in their daily lives and discover the practices that they have developed around Facebook, much as others might attend to the relationship between established practices and the features of a particular location (Becker 1998). I will also ask the students if they have used Facebook to create "offline" relationships with other LGBT students, which will allow me to discern the ways in which these students have been empowered by Facebook to find other LGBT students outside of the LGBT resources provided by the university. Finally, I will ask the students if they are familiar with the LGBT resources associated with the university in order to investigate whether or not they have used these services and why, as well as what these services mean to them.

Research Ethics

Given the ambiguous nature of the information located on Facebook, in terms of being public or private, I will take special care to avoid the inclusion of data that would readily identify not only anyone I speak with but also those individuals whose information I use from Facebook. The reason for this special care has to do with the search capabilities of Facebook and other Internet search engines, which make it possible to easily identify individuals using textual information taken directly from Facebook that it is even slightly idiosyncratic in spelling or content. Thus, in those instances where it appears that quoted information from Facebook would compromise an individual's identity, I will either not include it at all or perform slight modifications that would make it difficult to locate.

Research Significance

The significance of this study is twofold. This study will provide insight into the ways that the use of Facebook by LGBT students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign affects their use of LGBT services associated with the university. These services will then be able to use this information to both modify existing programs or produce new programs, as well as to assess their relevance to LGBT students. Other universities will also be able to draw from this information to perform similar a similar intervention regarding their own LGBT services.

Also, while this research focuses on the experiences of a very particular group of individuals in a very specific context, it will provide a vantage point from which to consider the effect that growth in communication technology, particularly social network sites, has had on the practices of minority populations. Researchers and activists will in turn be able to use this

information to analyze the relationship between communication technology and involvement in social movements.

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EUI Links: #7 EUI Links

The Other Campus - http://hdl.handle.net/2142/1409

Shaunita Levison's project focuses on the experiences of African-American students at the University of Illinois, but the way in which her project links to my own project, which focuses on the way in which new technologies mediate the experiences of LGBT students, does not directly relate to this. Instead, the link between our projects rests with an ethnographic comment Levison makes about students' use of Facebook.

In The "Other" Campus Map Levison describes her experience of branching out of her "English Building" to "attend [a] lecture at the School of Law." One of the first things that Levison noticed was how well dressed everyone was ("The people all seemed over dressed to me.") and how nice the building was ("As I entered the building I noticed how beautiful and brand-new everything looked. The quality of the interior showed that it was done to impress.")

However, despite the various markers for class difference that Levison saw on this "other" side of campus, she did find one, and only one, commonality with her "side of campus": the students use of Facebook. As Levison said, "For example, the students had wireless hookups that allowed them access to the Internet at anytime, so while their teacher could be deep in concepts for a class lecture, my friend said 7 times out of ten the class would be facebooking. And that was actually quite similar to the side of campus that I am familiar with. ... But, that is as far as the similarities went in my opinion."

Although anecdotal, this does offer support for the need to investigate the role that new technologies, such as Facebook, play in the experiences of students, especially since "facebooking" is apparently a practice that students share across class boundaries, and also likely share across "race," and gender boundaries, among others. The ubiquity of the practice of "facebooking" also raises questions about what we consider to constitute "the university" and how we should conceptualize a website like Facebook as a "space."

Reflect: #12 Reflection

The most important reflection that my research this semester has produced is in regards to the limits of ethnographic methodologies as the symbolic worlds we are interested in become more and more private as a result of individuals

connecting with others using new communication technologies. As Geertz has said, "Anthropologists don't study villages, they study in villages" -- but what do you do when there is not even a village to study in? Ethnographers may draw on research performed in urban settings to approximate they approach they should take to communities that maintain relationships using communication technologies, but the absence of literature that deals directly with this issue exacerbates the problem.

One of the greatest effects this reflection has had on my work has been to reassess my goal as an ethnographer. Instead of conceiving a spatial location at the center of my work, I now understand that it is the network (of people) itself that should be at the center of my work. (Indeed, it may very well be the case that the network was always the center of ethnographic work, but was hidden by its association with a particular spatial location.) Using this concept will aid me in making theoretical connections that will assist my interpretation of social phenomena. For example, the networks of individuals that exist today bear some connection to the band societies that existed in the past, which provides novel ways to conceive of contemporary social activism. The concept of a network also allows me to tap into the vast literature on social networks. Finally, the network concept allows for connections to be made with Deleuze's concept of the assemblage and rhizome, and treatment of nomads, which has ready social and political implications built in.

Recommendations: #10 Recommendations

1. The university should start a program to educate students about safe usage of social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace.

2. The university should maintain and/or increase its efforts at outreach to students on social networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace to educate students about university programs and services.