

AUTHENTICITIES ONLINE:
UNDERSTANDING CYBERSPACE IDENTITY

by

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Abstract

Science fiction has long envisioned a space where users can enter an electronic world. William Gibson, in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, paints a particularly vivid picture of this electronic world, coining the term cyberspace. As technology advances, his vision becomes less of a futuristic dream and more of possible reality. Right now, users are shopping, working, and maintaining relationships online. They are having unique experiences in cyberspace, some of which are impossible offline.

This dissertation builds a framework for understanding cyberspace identity and cyberspace experiences based on authenticity. By focusing on authenticity and expectations of authenticity, this framework can incorporate all kinds of cyberspace platforms across what it calls the "Cyberspace Gradient." More importantly, using authenticity as the foundation for its conceptualization means it is not bound to a particular theory of identity but can incorporate a wide variety. As a result, an authenticity-based conceptualization presents a more robust and comprehensive understanding of cyberspace identity that can account for all the different ways users self-represent in cyberspace.

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.

-- William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

Introduction

Gibson's (1984) canonical book *Neuromancer* introduced the world to the idea of cyberspace. It presented a whole new "space" for the user to enter, an electronic world for them to explore. Every day, with every advancement in technology, Gibson's (1984) vision becomes less fantasy and more reality. Users are telecommuting to work. They are shopping, learning, and starting - and maintaining - romantic relationships in cyberspace. The internet has truly become an interconnected ecology (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

With so much of life entangled with cyberspace, there is a growing need to understand what it means to possess an identity in cyberspace. Personal identity is a foundational concept. An identity is needed to function at all. Scholars have argued that, without an identity, people cannot achieve agency, autonomy, or a rich inner life (see, e.g., Oshana, 2010). In "Exploring the Meaning of 'Dissatisfaction' with Health Care," Coyle (1999) connects feelings of being disempowered, dehumanized, and devalued with personal identity threats. There are even types of torture specifically designed to try and destroy a person's identity (Pérez-Sales, 2016). Without a personal identity in cyberspace, users cannot function. Platforms demand users craft identities in the form of profiles and usernames. It is through these identities that users make connections with other users and to experience cyberspace in any meaningful way.

This dissertation explores how users develop the cyberspace identity needed to have cyberspace experiences. It finds is that, by focusing on expectations of authenticity, a more robust and comprehensive conceptualization

can be developed. This project argues that one of the primary reasons for the robustness of an authenticity-focused conceptualization comes from authenticity's ability to incorporate different theories of personal identity. Focusing on a single theory of identity presents an incomplete and fractured understanding of cyberspace identity. By being able to encompass how each personal identity theory plays out in cyberspace - and how users reference those theories in their self-representations - an authenticity-based conceptualization of cyberspace identity can account for how users self-represent across all platforms.

One example of how a better understanding of cyberspace identity can help comes from the development of new platforms. Developers, community managers, designers, and anyone else involved in cyberspace can better understand how each element they add to their platform impacts user self-representation. A platform focused on physical fitness, for example, can build in a conceptualization of cyberspace identity that features a goal-oriented system structure that supports positive identity models. A platform focused on user support, on the other hand, can develop a system structure focused on inter-user connections. By better understanding how cyberspace identity functions, a platform can be more closely tailored to achieve its goals.

Chapter One establishes the framework for understanding cyberspace identity. It begins the exploration into cyberspace identity by presenting what this project calls the Cyberspace Gradient as a unifying theory of cyberspace identity. Currently, cyberspace identity is separated into two main camps. One camp (e.g., Cover, 2016; Chayko, 2017) focuses on how identity works on social media

platforms. The other (e.g., Owen, 2017; Waggoner, 2009) focuses on how identity works in video games. The problem is the two camps present entirely different conceptualizations of cyberspace identity while failing to account for what happens in the *other* camp's territory. The Cyberspace Gradient theory can account for how identity works in both social media platforms and video games, providing an account that is both more comprehensive and more explanatory.

The first step in developing the Cyberspace Gradient as a unified theory of cyberspace identity is to clarify the vocabulary in use. Currently, terms such as "online identity," "digital identity," and "virtual identity" are used interchangeably. However, by establishing some semblance of a controlled vocabulary, the terms can be used in more nuanced ways. The more nuanced use, in turn, allows scholars to better focus their research on a particular type of cyberspace identity.

The most obvious term that needs explaining is "cyberspace identity" itself. Cyberspace identity, in the simplest terms, is how a user chooses to self-represent in cyberspace. That being said, cyberspace identity is anything but simple. The sheer number of different cyberspace platforms, each with their own system structures and communities, make it incredibly complicated. In this project, cyberspace identity serves as an umbrella term. It includes all types of electronic self-representation, from Tinder to *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013) to email. It represents times where users are alone, on some electronic device, and times where they are connecting with others through any form of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Cyberspace identity is chosen over

"online identity" to prevent the misconception that offline electronic experiences - such as playing *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013) - are not worth analyzing. Following Gee's (2014) footsteps, this project uses "offline identity" for those offline rather than "real-life identity" to prevent the assumption that cyberspace experiences are not "real" experiences.

Under cyberspace identity are the concepts of "digital identity" and "virtual identity." Digital identity is conceptualized here as cyberspace identity that is inherently rooted in a user's offline identity in so much as their cyberspace identity should be a one-to-one self-representation of their offline identity. Put more succinctly, a user's digital identity is an authentic cyberspace self-representation of their offline identity. Virtual identity, on the other hand, is conceptualized as cyberspace identity not inherently rooted in an offline identity. Virtual identity holds no connection (or as little as possible) between a user's cyberspace self-representation and their offline identity. Put more succulently, virtual identity is an authentic self-representation of itself, with no regard (or as little as possible) to any offline identity.

Not every platform will fall neatly into digital or virtual identity categories, however. Most will pull from both and will do so to varying degrees depending on the platform's specific system structures and community, which is where the "Cyberspace Gradient" comes in to play. The Cyberspace Gradient places digital and virtual identity at the opposite ends of a gradient. The gradient, rather than a strict measure of identity, acts as a measure of immersion in cyberspace. On the top end of the gradient exists digital identity. Here, users are

slightly immersed in cyberspace. They have "stuck their toes in the waters of cyberspace," so to speak. At the bottom of the gradient exists virtual identity. Here, they are completely immersed in cyberspace. They have "dived into the water of cyberspace."

Some platforms are easier to place along the Cyberspace Gradient than others. Tinder, for example, is seen as a digital identity platform, as its sole purpose is to connect two offline identities. *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013) is another easy one. As a virtual identity platform, its sole purpose is to give users the chance to experience Lara Croft's story. Platforms such as *Second Life* (Linden Lab, 2003), however, do not fit nicely into either type of cyberspace identity. The Cyberspace Gradient sets up the framework for explaining what happens on easy to define platforms *and* on those 'in-between' platforms which do not quite fit as either digital or virtual.

Chapter two focuses on expectations of authenticity as a new way to conceptualize cyberspace identity. As this project argues, the gradient - and all of cyberspace identity - works because of the underlying expectations of authenticity. When a user meets someone new, they can only build a friendship if they believe the other user is being authentic with them. If they expected everyone they met on Tinder, for example, to be catfishing them or every person on LinkedIn to be scamming them, the platforms would fail. They would never plan a date or apply for a job. However, with these expectations in place, they can build relationships and connections, expecting those they meet to be authentic cyberspace identities. In this way, understanding authenticity provides a way to

build the foundation for understanding cyberspace identity and, in turn, cyberspace experiences.

As this project argues, authenticity is typically conceptualized in two ways: the Social Constructionist View (SCV) and the Realist View (RV). SCV argues that authenticity comes from social norms. Imagine a user wants to present themselves as an authentically outdoorsy person. No objective standard exists for "outdoorsy." Rather, society, and the people who participate in being "outdoorsy," defines what it means to be "authentically outdoorsy." RV, on the other hand, conceptualizes authenticity is something a person has in relation to themselves. The basic idea of RV can be argued to stem from the saying, "Be true to yourself."

This project shows that SCV and RV are, on their own, insufficient to explain cyberspace identity, however. RV explains how a user creates their "outdoorsy" profile to reflect who they believe they are and why they believe the profile to be an authentic self-representation. SCV, on the other hand, explains what happens when another user sees the profile and comes to the conclusion that it is not "outdoorsy." It explains how their socially constructed standard may not be the same as the creator's and why that leads them to believe the cyberspace identity inauthentic. In other words, RV explains the "sending out" side of cyberspace identity, while SCV explains the "receiving" side. Neither can explain both sides, creating what this project calls the sender/receiver-problem.

This project argues for a merging of SCV and RV into what it calls "Perspective View" (PV) to solve the sender/receiver-problem. In cyberspace,

users need to do more than know they are, themselves, being authentic in how they self-represent. If they want to make real connections, they must convince others they are authentically self-representing. PV makes it possible to analyze both the "sending" and "receiving" of cyberspace identities while leaving room for the disconnect between the two without requiring one be right and the other be wrong. For example, a user can be authentic in creating their outdoorsy profile (RV's authentic to themselves), while being judged inauthentic by others (SCV's social norms). Acknowledging the disconnect is particularly important when addressing abstract or subjective terms such as outdoorsy. For the sender, outdoorsy may mean hiking a lot. For the receiver, outdoorsy may mean spending much of their time contributing to ecologic causes. Neither user is inherently wrong; they - like millions of other people - simply have different subjective standards for what it means to be "outdoorsy."

Chapter three turns to theories of personal identity. It focuses on framing how the theories work in cyberspace and how different system structures and user communities impact what theories are in play. That is, as much as authenticity builds the foundation for understanding how users self-represent in cyberspace and how self-representation creates a cyberspace identity, it needs to point towards *something*. Users need a self to be authentic towards. Understanding authenticity, then, means understanding personal identity. Rather than focus on repeating how every theory of personal identity works - something many other scholars have already done (e.g., Kind, 2015; Perry, 2003; Olson, 2015) - chapter three argues for the need to move beyond the standard "performative" approach.

The crafted nature of cyberspace identities has made performative identity theory the de facto approach to cyberspace identity (e.g., Cover, 2016; Shaw, 2014). Users log onto a platform and create a profile. They intentionally choose what picture of them to upload and what to write in their bio. The picture itself is also often intentionally crafted, with carefully controlled lighting, angles, and editing. Everything a user does when creating their personal identity in cyberspace is crafted to show others what the user wants them to see.

However, this project shows that focusing on the crafted nature fails to grasp the complexity inherent in cyberspace identity. Each platform has a built-in understanding of personal identity, which stems from the system structures and communities of the cyberspace platform. The system structure, in particular, has a significant impact on how users self-represent on the platform. Much of the assumed flexibility in personal identity is stripped away and confined to *how* the system structures allow users to perform. Tinder's system structure, for example, puts a user's body first, embracing a physical approach to identity. User paradigms serve to encourage or disrupt a platform's system structure. In the case of Tinder, the community encourages the platform's system structure by shifting the biography section away from a place to add information about one's self and towards a place for jokes and pick-up lines. Between the system structure and user paradigms, identity performance within Tinder has to conform to this bodily approach, as the platform does not have affordances for any other type.

Not every platform is as restrictive as Tinder. Many have room for multiple theories based on how the system structures and user paradigms play out.

Instagram, while it may seem to be a body theory focused platform, incorporates a wider variety of underlying theories. Travel influencers or foodies, for example, post images focused on *their experiences* rather than their bodies. As a result, these types of users embrace an understanding of personal identity closer to Hume's Self as Fiction (Hume, 1911; Thompson, 2006). Journalists, on the other hand, may use the platform to tell stories, focusing on an understanding closer to Narrative Theory. However a user decides to post, the options they have in performing their identity depends on the flexibility within the platform's system structure and user paradigms. Instagram happens to be more flexibility than first appearances make it seem, giving users a variety of underlying identity theories to base their self-representations on.

Chapter four argues that, by using phenomenology as more than a shorthand for the affective nature of cyberspace and combining it with narrative theory, a better understanding of how users experience cyberspace can be developed. How users self-represent in cyberspace - and what cyberspace identities platforms acknowledge as valid - matters in part because cyberspace experiences are affective in nature. As much as some may want to argue that "it is just a game" or that "it is just a website," cyberspace experiences can impact users in deep and meaningful ways, which makes phenomenology and narratology a perfect framework for connecting cyberspace experiences to cyberspace identity. Phenomenology is the study of experiences themselves. The primary element of it, as far as this project is concerned, is the setting aside of any metaphysical questions or, in other words, not asking "is cyberspace real?" but

instead asking "What does it mean to experience cyberspace?" Narratology, then, unites these disparate experiences into a single story and provides a user a way to make sense of those experiences as part of their cyberspace identities.

Life is moving into cyberspace at an astounding rate, and this project develops a new conceptualization of the resulting cyberspace identities that users develop as they shift towards cyberspace. It presents a conceptualization that starts by refining the concepts of cyberspace identity, digital identity, and virtual identity. From there, it develops the Cyberspace Gradient as a theory of cyberspace identity. The Cyberspace Gradient works across every platform because it is based on authenticity, which provides a consistent way for users to frame cyberspace self-representations, both their own and those of users they connect with. Using authenticity as the foundation has the added benefit of providing a way for users to frame cyberspace experiences as authentic experiences, without having to use qualifiers. Authenticity, personal identity, phenomenology, and narratology are all key to understanding cyberspace identity. Each provides unique insight into what it means to self-represent in cyberspace. Through concepts such as these, users, developers, and everyone in between gain the tools needed to take the first step towards a rich and beneficial cyberspace life.

Chapter 1 - On the Cyberspace Gradient

Introduction

Cyberspace is vast and varied and anything but uniform. Different cyberspace platforms demand entirely different understandings of cyberspace identity. Some demand users bring their offline identities with them. Others demand users leave their offline identities behind. Without a unified understanding of cyberspace identity, it becomes much harder for users to gain the foundational knowledge about how to self-represent within the chaos that is cyberspace.

To help establish what it means to possess a cyberspace identity, this chapter develops what it calls the Cyberspace Gradient. The main benefit of the Cyberspace Gradient is that it provides a new way to approach inherently different platforms with different sets of expectations of authenticity. That is, every platform demands that users be authentic in their cyberspace self-representation, and what that demand is changes what it means to be authentic on that platform. Tinder, for example, demands user's cyberspace identity be authentic to their offline identity. The focus on offline identity creates the digital identity end of the Cyberspace Gradient. Other platforms, such as *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), demand a user's cyberspace self-representation be authentic to the character's in-platform identity. This focus on the character (or avatar) creates the virtual identity end of the Cyberspace Gradient.

Between the digital and virtual identity sides of the Cyberspace Gradient exist all the platforms that do not fall neatly into either category, such as Reddit or

Final Fantasy XIV (Square Enix, 2013). These "in-between platforms" are what make cyberspace identity so complicated. However, by knowing where they fall on the gradient, it becomes possible to understand what it means to have a cyberspace identity on an in-between platform. If a user knows the platform falls more towards the digital identity side, for example, they know their authenticity relies heavily on their offline identity and can self-represent as such. Knowing the expectations of authenticity and how to self-represents provides a foundation to build on, to build connections with others and to experience cyberspace in meaningful ways.

Digital Identity

The conception of digital identity developed here focuses on the connection between a user's offline identity and their cyberspace identity. Users are embracing digital identity to leverage the power of cyberspace to tell others who they are offline. Social media platforms, with their inherent focus on the offline, are the quintessential example.

Within social media platforms, the connection between offline and cyberspace identity is found in a wide range of activities, including how users choose to participate in dating in cyberspace and filter potential matches by economic preferences (Ong & Wang, 2015), in general "mate preference" (Hitsch, Hortacsu, & Ariely, 2010), and in how users handle intimacy problems (Bridges, 2012). The connection is found in how users build cyberspace communities (Voorhees, Call, & Whitlock, 2012) and how gender roles play out in cyberspace (Walkerdine, 2007; Sundén & Sveningsson, 2012). It shapes user communication

online (Danet, 2001; Baron, 2008) and the development of meaningful connections (Baym, 2015).

Different understandings of identity also show the connection between digital identity and offline identity. Thomas (2007) presents an example of a body-focused connection and argues that the body "constructs the surface of identity and [emphasizes] that there is an intimate connection between the body and the virtual self" (p. 1). She further elaborates on the connection, citing Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos, and Kirby (2003), by explaining that "The body '... can be seen as the site at which experience is realised', where experience is considered as the way the body is impacted upon during the interactions of an individual with other people, places, things and activities" [sic] (p. 9). Cover (2016) echoes Thomas' (2007) inclusion of the body in cyberspace by arguing that everything from playing video games online to talking with someone on skype necessarily includes the body. Cyberspace is worn on the wrist with smartwatches and held in hand with smartphones. Whatever a user does in cyberspace, their body is inherently part of that experience (Cover, 2016, p. 103). While Thomas' (2007) and Cover's (2016) presentations of a body-focused connection are not the only possibilities, they serve as a strong example of how the connection manifests. They show, in all these different areas and in all the different ways these interpersonal connections play out, users trying to let others know who they are offline. The users are connecting pieces of their cyberspace self-representations to their offline identities.

The foundation of digital identity is the expectations of authenticity that come with the connection. Users create the connection between offline and cyberspace identities intentionally, not accidentally; and, more importantly, they *expect* others to create the same connection. Any picture a user posts is expected to match how they look offline. Any job a user lists is expected to be one they work. Any hobby a user claims to participate in is expected to be one they enjoy. Every aspect of their cyberspace identity is expected to maintain a one-to-one connection to their offline identity.

Users are approached by expectations of authenticity the moment they create their profiles. They are approached - through the system structure, spoken and unspoken rules, user behavior, and any number of other things - with expectations about how they are supposed to self-represent and how they can expect others to self-represent. For cyberspace identity platforms in general, the expectations mean the moment the user creates the profile, they are making the statement, "This is who I am on this platform." For digital identity platforms specifically, that statement includes a claim of, "This is who I am offline." For example, if Sara creates a profile claiming she is a lawyer, she sets up the expectation, not that she pretends to be a lawyer online, but that she is a practicing lawyer offline. The nature of social media-type platforms makes it so ever one of Sara's claims establishes a set of expectations about who she is, both on the platform and offline. As long as users meet these expectations, they can build real connections with each other. They can trust the people they meet on the platform are whom they claim to be. If these expectations are not met, however, the user

who self-represents inauthentically is often accused of lying, catfishing (Schulman, 2014), or trolling (Phillips, 2015).

The existence of expectations of authenticity does not mean that all identity curation is problematic. Users maintain the ability to choose which pictures to post and to actively curate their digital identities (Gray, Norton, Breault-Hood, Christie, & Taylor, 2018; Davies, 2014). The ability to curate one's identity can be a good thing (Marshall, 2015). The existence of these expectations only means the identity curation that does happen is necessarily limited. Users may post pictures that are touched up, but the pictures are always of them. The idea of acceptable levels of limited curation fits in with Shafie, Nayan, and Osman's (2012) findings that users carefully select each item they post to create an identity that reflects characteristics their peers consider valuable (p. 138). In other words, users stay close to who they are in real life but select the parts they want to share to make sure they fit into the social groups they find valuable.

Users may be under so much pressure to curate their digital identities to show the best of themselves that they feel they *have* to curate them. Some users have responded to this by creating multiple accounts on a single platform. On Instagram, for example, users may have a publicly facing account that is highly curated and presents that best self and a private account - a "finsta" or "fake Instagram" - account. They often reserve the private account for close friends, those they are willing to let see their unflattering pictures and day-to-day life. (Wiederhold, 2018, p. 215) If users lose the ability to curate the perfect digital

identity, it can negatively impact their social inclusion and emotional management practices (Robinson, 2018). Possessing the ability to curation can even determine what friends they make. Wang, Moon, Kwon, Evans, and Stefanone (2010) found that users are more likely to initiate friendships with users who have attractive profile pictures (p. 230-2).

The need to present a perfectly curated digital identity can, in turn, create a sort of feedback loop¹ that reinforces the connection between offline and digital. The feedback loop means that both what users do offline and what they share in cyberspace - and how what they share is received - influences their offline identity. In their study on social media use among school-aged girls, Mascheroni, Vincent, and Jimenez (2015) found the connection to be so strong that some girls saw approval of their digital identities as approval of their offline identities. As a result, the girls would post pictures designed to get the most likes by conforming to prominent social norms and beauty standards, sometimes going to extremes in their diets and clothing - or lack of clothing - choices to garner the desired likes. In this study, the girls actively changed the way they acted *offline* based on how people perceived them *online*. When they took a selfie that they felt positively represented their offline identity, they posted that to social media. If that picture

¹ While similar, the feedback loop is distinct from Baker's (2009) "blended identity" in the same way Katie convincing Sara to go skydiving is distinct from Sara convincing herself to go. For Baker's (2009) blended identity, Sara's digital identity and offline identity are the same. Here, Sara (digital identity) is convincing herself (offline identity) of something. For the feedback loop, Sara's digital identity and offline identity are distinct (though connected) identities in the same way Katie and Sara are distinct (though connected) persons. Here, Katie (digital identity) is convincing Sara (offline identity) to go skydiving, both impacting and feeding off each other, as best friends often do. The distinction is especially important when considering digital identity as part of a cyberspace gradient that includes virtual identity.

received a positive response, it evoked positive feelings offline. These positive feelings then encouraged the girls to push their offline identities further to encourage a more positive reception online.

Identity curation is not limited to individuals, either. Corporations curate their images, too. Blanco Ramírez and Palu-aya (2015) found that many universities spend much of their time ensuring their digital identities reflect, not their actual identity, but their desired identity. Just like the girls, this desired identity remains tied to a university's "body" but is touched up in many of the same ways. Organizations will pick a profile picture and upload images that portray them in ways that do not necessarily align with reality. Universities may, for example, present themselves as more diverse or more progressive in order to appeal to prospective students and donors.

The problem with the way the universities curated their digital identities is that they violated the expectations of authenticity set within the digital identity platforms. Rather than present themselves as they are, the universities tried to present a false picture of themselves. They tried to convince other users that they possess certain characteristics and qualities that they do not. Ideally, it is at this point that the feedback loop kicks-in in a positive way and encourages the birth of an actual diverse population within those communities, which would bring the university's digital identities back within the realm of authentic self-representation.

Users want to connect with each other. They want to build connections that go beyond cyberspace. Digital identity brings with it a set of expectations of

authenticity that help users understand how to self-represent and what to expect of other's self-representation. While these expectations may not be perfectly enforceable rules, they help establish norms that provide the foundation for building meaningful connections that move beyond a simple offline/cyberspace dichotomy.

Virtual Identity

While digital identity comes with the assumption that a user's cyberspace identity and offline identity are inextricably linked, the conception of virtual identity developed here argues the opposite. Virtual identity argues that there should not be any connection (or at least as little as possible) between the user's cyberspace identity and their offline identity. As stated above, virtual identity is a cyberspace identity authenticity based on the identity of the character the user is self-representing through. When a user embraces a virtual identity, they leave behind their offline identity. What job their cyberspace identity does, what their cyberspace identity looks like, or what race or gender their cyberspace identity is not expected to match up with the user's offline identity.

Roleplaying games are the quintessential example of virtual identity. They embrace the idea of virtual identity because they are designed around "roleplaying" as someone else (MacCallum-Stewart & Parslery, 2008). In a roleplaying game, the first thing the user often does is create a character meant to be their self-representation and act in their stead (Waggoner, 2009). Through the character, the user will relate to the world and connect to others (Owen, 2017). Add in the cyberspace nature, and the user gains the freedom to include or leave

out as much of their offline identity as they want (Chan, Whitman, & Baumer, 2009, p. 144).

At the heart of roleplaying games is a willing suspension of disbelief. Willing suspension of disbelief is the idea that users can set aside the fact that they do not believe the in-game world exists so as to participate more fully in the experience and identity of their in-game virtual identity. (MacCallum-Stewart & Parslery, 2008 p. 226) Roleplaying games, in particular, benefit from a willing suspension of disbelief in that they are built around pretending to be someone else and stepping beyond one's self. Describing how users take advantage of the concept of a willing suspension of disbelief, MacCallum-Stewart and Parslery (2008) state,

We feel that role players see role-playing in a number of ways: as a testing of personal ideals; as morally challenging, involving issues of teamwork and conflict resolution (or not); as mentally or physically demanding; as opportunities to act out characteristics or beliefs they might not usually express; as granting a sense of agency that encourages feelings of influence, control, and power; as engrossing; and finally, as escapist. (p. 227)

King and Krzywinska (2006) phrase it this way, "Players are generally very happy, and willing, to 'suspend disbelief,' however, to allow themselves to be taken in by the illusion that the worlds in which they play are more than just entirely arbitrary constructs" (p. 119).

The willing suspension of disbelief establishes the connection between the user and their character that begins the shift towards virtual identity. Bartle (2003) claims the connection is deep enough that the distinction between user and character disappears. The user is no longer roleplaying their character; the user becomes their character. They share a singular identity. When the character dies,

the user does not feel as if the character has died; instead, they feel as if they, themselves, have died. While Bartle's (2003) explanation may be on the extreme side, many scholars support the idea of a connection between user and character. Li, Liau, and Khoo (2013), for example, argue that the connection is made up of four elements: "feelings during play, absorption during play, positive attitudes toward character, and importance to identity" (p. 260). For "importance to identity," Dunn and Guadagno (2012) found that users use character "as a means of self-representation and impression management" (p. 104). For "feelings during play" and "absorption during play," Steen, Greenfield, Davies, and Tynes (2006) found that users often treat their in-game characters as themselves (p. 366). In studying virtual harm and its impact on the user, Wolfendale (2007) argues in-game characters should be afforded moral considerations as they are a form of identity realization in the same way attachment to friends, family, beliefs, cultures, and such can be forms of identity realization (p. 112).

Bartle's (2003) and Li, Liau, and Khoo's (2013) conceptualizations present two different understandings of what it means for a user to identify with their in-game character. Imagine a user sits down to play *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013). In Bartle's (2003) conceptualization, the user identifies so closely with Lara that they experience what it is like to *be* Lara. In Li, Liau, and Khoo's (2013) conceptualization, the user only identifies with Lara to the extent they experience what Lara experiences without feeling as if they *are* Lara (Tronstad, 2008). They are only expected to identify with Lara to the extent that they can interact and respond to what happens within the in-game world (Taylor,

2003). Roleplaying - and virtual identity - fits more closely with Li, Liao, and Khoo's (2013) conceptualization in that users do not become their character so much as experience what their character experiences.

The shift towards virtual identity can become so strong, in fact, that it can be a punishable offense for violating it (Chan, Whitman, & Baumer, 2009). On platforms that embrace virtual identity to this extent, users place all expectations of authenticity on the character, expecting other users to leave their offline identity behind. If the offline enters their magic circle, they are quick to reject it (Calleja, 2015). If another user fails to act authentically according to their character rather than themselves, they are banned. Now, the punishment is not about forcing users to create a specific virtual identity. Rather, it is about the value of roleplaying as an act in and of itself. As Vannini and Williams (2009) point out, the value of being authentic in roleplaying comes from simply being a person and having experiences as that person. Users want to leave behind all the limits of their offline identity and embrace new experiences as their virtual identity while remaining authentic (Zook, 2012, p. 220).

When creating their character, the user is not limited by any expectations of authenticity placed on them by their offline identity (Lemke, 1998; Christopher, 2009; Jansz, 2015). Through roleplaying, users gain the freedom to talk, act, and *be* in ways that would be considered inauthentic offline or on digital identity platforms (Friedline & Collister, 2012). These freedoms include being able to draw from their offline values, beliefs, and emotions or leave them behind and use roleplaying to play with different moralities, emotions, and the like.

(Deen, Schouten, and Bekker, 2015, p. 115). Users are free to create whatever character they want. The only limitations come from the game world itself and the magic circle it creates (Calleja, 2015). For example, a medieval world would preclude the creation of a character who was a Navy Seal; and a modern, war-torn world would preclude the creation of a medieval knight. Beyond that, the user is free to create whatever they want. If the game allows the user to be an Elf, they are free to be an Elf. If the game allows them to select their sex or gender, they are free to choose whatever they want. No other user is going to expect their offline or digital identity to match their virtual identity. After all, everyone knows that everyone else is roleplaying the virtual identities they have created.

On virtual identity platforms, users are free to create multiple characters, either within the same game world or across multiple game worlds. The characters can be entirely different, with different roles, morals, beliefs, appearances, and the like (Hooi & Cho, 2014). Having different characters provides users with the chance to experience different things, no matter if they create every character for the purpose of experiencing some paradigm shift (Christopher, 2009). For example, the fact that a lot of male users choose to play female characters is, in and of itself, not notable. A male user playing a female character is relatively common in the gaming community and done for a variety of different reasons (Alexander, 2009). Some do it because they prefer the way a female character look and see the model as more aesthetically pleasing. Others may see the female model's appearance as better conforming to what they want the character to do to do (e.g., the female Night Elf looks more like a rogue than

the gorilla-esque male Night Elf) (Tronstad, 2008; Extra Credit, 2016).

Regardless of why users create new characters, they always gain new experiences, whether they want to or not. New experiences are, after all, the heart of roleplaying. So much so Bartle (2003) argues that every action a user takes inevitable impacts their offline identity.

Turkle's (1995) story of a young girl named Julee provides an example of finding new experiences and identity insights without looking for them. At the start of the story, Turkle (1995) mentions that Julee has a poor relationship with her mother and how she has dropped out of college as a consequence of it (p. 186). During a politically themed roleplaying game, Julee is faced with her in-game daughter, who has decided to join the opposing faction and is scripted to "betray, even kill, her mother" (p. 187). After learning this, Julee talks with her in-game daughter: "Huddled in the corner of an empty classroom, Julee had the conversation with her daughter that her own mother had been unwilling to have with her" (p. 187). Describing the conversation, Turkle (1995) states, "[Julee's] role-playing is psychologically constructive. She uses it to engage with some of the most important issues in her life and to reach new emotional resolutions" (p. 188). Turkle (1995) goes on to explain that roleplaying games can help users work through personal issues because they are more than games. Roleplaying games are spaces that rely on virtual identity - the ability to craft an entirely new identity to experience the game world through - where users gain the freedom to create an identity that allows them to experience things in a way that they may not be able to offline.

Roleplaying, or Identity Tourism, as Nakamura (1995) calls it, may not be perfect. Nakamura (2002) may be right when she claims that identity tourism is inherently shallow and superficial because it is an act of recreation that the user can step away from (p. 55-56). Nevertheless, these experiences remain valuable. Just as play and pretend is valuable for children to learn things (Goldstein & Lerner, 2018; Hopkins, Dore, & Lillard, 2015; Lillard, 2017), roleplaying is valuable for "the *one*" to learn about "the *other*" in maybe the only way that is possible. Just as roleplaying helped Julee gain some insight into what it meant to be a mother without being a mother, it can help users gain at least a simulacrum of what it is like to be someone else.

Cyberspace Gradient

Not every cyberspace platform falls neatly into the digital or virtual identity category. Some platforms incorporate aspects of both, and to varying degrees. Some will incorporate far more from digital identity than from virtual identity. Others will exist as the reverse. These in-between platforms are the biggest puzzles when discussing cyberspace identity; authenticity provides the solution in the form of the "Cyberspace Gradient." Before diving into what the Cyberspace Gradient is, however, it is important to understand what complicates these in-between platforms.

With strictly digital identity or virtual identity platforms, the expectations of authenticity are straight forward. A user playing a game such as *The Liar Princess and the Blind Prince* (Nippon Ichi Software, 2019) knows no one can be a werewolf offline. They know they can set aside any expectations based on that

and fully embrace the virtual identity involved in the game world. On a platform such as Tinder, users know their potential match can be a doctor offline and embrace digital identity by holding on to the expectations that knowledge establish. With an in-between platform such as *Second Life* (Linden Lab, 2003), however, users do not know which bit of another user's cyberspace identity is digital identity and which bit is virtual identity. The doctor they met may be "playing doctor," or they may be a doctor offline. It can often be impossible to tell which is true, making it just as impossible to set expectations about what it means to have an authentic cyberspace identity. The conceptualization of a Cyberspace Gradient alleviates much of the complication in-between platforms create by connecting digital and virtual identity and explaining how to understand those between the two extremes as part of cyberspace identity.

Imagine Sara goes to the beach. As she stands in the sand, she is at the beach but not in the ocean. She can choose, with each step, how much she immerses herself in the water. She can stand on the wet sand, wiggling her toes; or she can dive in and enter an entirely different world. Sara's journey down that sandy incline is similar to her journey down the Cyberspace Gradient. With digital identity, she wiggles her wet toes in the sand and participates in "the ocean." With virtual identity platforms, Sara completely submerges herself; she leaves the beach behind completely and participates entirely in the water-world beneath the waves.²

² While some scholars, such as MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2008), argue that full immersion is impossible, or at least rarely achieved, the idea holds merit here. For the purpose of this project, users do not need to forget that they are not, in fact, werewolves

Sara takes her first step into the ocean with platforms such as Reddit. According to the website, Reddit is "a great example of a site that has become far more than simply a social-networking or link-sharing utility and has grown into a real online community that can get things done" (Reddit/about, n.d.). Subreddits (sub-forums), each focused on a specific topic, make up the platform's core; and everything from politics (r/politics) to the simple act of stapling bread to trees (r/BreadStapledToTrees/) has a space. Reddit is a platform that welcomes everyone; anyone that wants to can navigate to Reddit, create an account, and start commenting and creating posts.

Once on Reddit, the first thing a user does to become part of the Reddit community is create a username. The username is rarely their real name, with most Redditors using a pseudonym to help maintain their anonymity. The use of usernames in place of real names creates an acceptable break from the user's offline identity, making it that "first step" into immersion. Through usernames, users are free from the expectation of using their real names to self-represent. As a result, users can immerse themselves in cyberspace a little bit and create that small part of their self-representation as virtual identity.

Even with the freedom of pseudonyms, digital identity expectations limit the user. After all, when Sara wiggles her toes in wet sand, she is mostly outside of the water's immersion. As such, users on Reddit are mostly outside of virtual identity and mostly within digital identity. As a result, anything the user claims

and simply participate in the suspension of disbelief involved in virtual identity to be considered having achieved full immersion.

about themselves - be it that they are a fireman or that they love chocolate ice cream - carries the expectation that it matches their offline identity.

With platforms such as Reddit, the distance down the gradient is relatively clear: users immerse themselves in cyberspace to a very slight degree. They gain anonymity through one virtual identity element while keeping expectations of digital identity tied to the rest. As users move closer to the center, however, interpretations change. What it means to be in the center depends on how a platform incorporates (or actively does not incorporate) both digital and virtual identity elements.

Thomas (2007) provides an example of two girls – Tiana and Jandalf – interacting on a roleplaying forum that illustrates the center of the gradient. As the two girls roleplay, they often switch to "out of character" (OOC) – a conversation that happens beyond the roleplay world – to discuss how a scene should go. When they shift OOC, they shift from an understanding of virtual identity as the current paradigm to an understanding of digital identity as the current paradigm. Tiana and Jandalf signal they are switching by putting any OOC comment in double-parenthesis – "((Now THAT was an evil scene.))" – then move back into character and continue the scene by simply typing out a comment normally – "'You transported her away?' he growled." (Thomas, 2007, p. 143) By switching how they type, the girls let each other know whether they are out of character or in character and signal which paradigm is active. When they are out of character, they are themselves, their digital identities. When they are their characters, they are acting entirely virtually.

Viewing Tiana and Jandalf's situation from a session or platform perspective, the girls act both digitally and virtually. They are not "one or the other." To use Roen's (2002) language, they are not bound to an "Either/Or" or "Both/Neither" situation. The design of the platform creates a space such that users participate in both digital and virtual identity during a single use-session. However, viewing their situation from a comment perspective, the girls switch between the extremes rather than inhabiting a single spot on the gradient that perfectly blends the two, as no comment exists that embraces aspects of both digital and virtual identity. Instead, each comment serves as either/or, as either in character or as OOC. As long as the girls signal to each other what paradigm they are in, they can freely switch between digital and virtual identity without ever being inauthentic.

League of Legends (Riot Games, 2009) (from here on referred to as LoL) is another example of a platform that occupies the middle ground in the Cyberspace Gradient. Unlike Tiana and Jandalf's roleplaying situation, LoL exists less as an either/or and more as neither/nor. It exists as something of an authenticity void, with a system structure that embraces neither digital identity nor virtual identity.

Within the game world of LoL, users "assume the role of an unseen 'summoner' that controls a 'champion' with unique abilities and battle against a team of other players or computer-controlled champions" (What is *League of Legends?*, n.d.). The role of summoner, however, has no virtual manifestation and is nothing more than the username - summoner name - chosen at account

creation. The summoner name acts the same way as a username on Reddit: it carries with it no expectation that it represents the user's offline identity. For example, no one believes that Jason Tran, who goes by the summoner name of WildTurtle, is a wild turtle offline. The disconnect between the summoner name and the user's offline name moves LoL away from digital identity. LoL moves further down the Cyberspace Gradient by leaving out any space for users to discuss their offline identities. Nothing in the game's system structure actively enables users to bring any of their offline identity into the game world.

As for virtual identity, LoL never makes it far enough down the gradient to be considered a virtual identity platform, as there is no virtual identity for the user to be authentic to. In LoL, a typical match lasts approximately forty minutes; and, rather than have a consistent character across all matches, users are free to choose a different champion for each. For one match, they might select Leona, a female human templar. For another match, the user might select Ziggs, a male Yorddle explosive expert. Choosing which character to play is less about the character and more about their function on the team, though. If the team needs the user to fulfill the role of jungler, someone free to move about the map and support all three lanes, the user may choose Hecarim. If they need to fulfill the role of support but want someone with a strong lane presence and good CC, they may choose Sona. Sona could be any identity, any gender, and any race. Users do not choose her because she is female or Ionian; they choose her for what she can *do*. The user is never meant to assume the identity of the champion. They are only meant to "act" as the champion in so much as they can use their kit (spells,

abilities, and the like) as efficiently and effectively as possible, preventing virtual identity from setting up any expectations based on the champion.

With no real shift towards digital or virtual identity, LoL presents an expression of the middle of the Cyberspace Gradient that acts as an authenticity void. Users are neither expected to act authentically in reference to their offline identity nor to their summoner name or chosen champion. There are no external expectations brought in, nor are there internal expectations set in place. If anything could serve as the most authentic part of a user and, therefore, the source of cyberspace identity within the platform, it would have to be the user's skill and playstyle. As Marwick (2013) argues,

One way of understanding such self-representation is the information and materials people choose to show others on a Facebook profile or Twitter stream. But identity is also expressed through interacting with others, whether over instant messenger or email. Since there are fewer identity cues available online than face to face, every piece of digital information a person provides, from typing speed to nickname and email address, can and is used to make inferences about them. (p. 355)

The user's skill and playstyle provide the most information about them. Faker, arguably the most famous player on LoL (Erzberger, 2016), is known for being able to pull off "Faker moves." Mostly, these moves are viewed in a positive light (Taide, 2015). However, some have become negative traits associated with him, such as not paying attention to his champion while recalling (Kim & Hyun, 2018). These in-game plays mark Faker as authentically Faker, beyond his summoner name. While it may be difficult to hang identity on skill and playstyle - regardless of them blending digital and virtual by mixing a physical skill with the virtual outcome of those muscle memories - they do make LoL's expression of the middle ground the perfect example of the concept of play: freed from all

expectations, users can experiment with personalities and identities in ways that may not be possible in other situations.

Platforms such as *Final Fantasy XIV* (Square Enix, 2013) (from here on referred to as FFXIV) fall towards the virtual end of the spectrum. FFXIV is a massive multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) where thousands of users come together to explore and experience an entirely new world. Unlike LoL, FFXIV focuses on user-created characters that server as long-term in-world self-representation. While the character creation for FFXIV is not as robust as some, it includes a decent selection of options. For example, while the game only has the option of two genders, it offers six fantasy races, each with an array of skin colors. It also offers users the chance to adjust approximately twenty of the character's physical features, depending on the gender and race selected. Among the standard characteristics are height, hair color, eye color, and other facial features. The more specific ones are characteristics such as tale shape and length on the Miqu'te and Au Ra races. Through these characteristics, the user can freely choose, at least in some detail, how they look within the world.

After the user chooses their character's appearance, they choose a name for their character. The name goes beyond Reddit and LoL usernames in that it is supposed to act as that character's name. Kithra Morningdew will always refer to the same in-game character (identity). If the user decides to create an alt - a second character - that character will have a unique name and, therefore, its own identity. In this way, the name is meant to signify more than a username.

FFXIV is a particularly interesting example as it combines both digital and virtual elements but does not occupy a single location on the gradient. Instead, it exists as more of a fuzzy spot on the gradient. Even calling it a spot is a bit misleading as it is more of a section or blob across the virtual end of the gradient. In fact, FFXIV would fall into the same category as Tiana and Jandalf's roleplaying, with users freely moving in and out of character with ease, if it were not for the paradigms set up in-world by users and out-of-world by system structures.

The character creation process provides the first shaping of FFXIV's location on the cyberspace spectrum through its interactions with expectations of authenticity. In creating a character, the user establishes no explicit expectations of authenticity. No one expects Kithra Morningdew to be a Miqu'te offline or the user behind the character to necessarily be a woman. Rather, Kithra Morningdew carries no digital identity expectations.

The lack of explicit expectations of authenticity in the character creation process should place it in the middle of the spectrum. However, the fantasy nature of the possible races and the intentionality of the creation process pull it towards the virtual side of the spectrum. As mentioned, when creating a character, the user can choose between several different races. None of the available options are meant to include the expectation that the user chooses the one that best matches who they are offline, though. More often than not, most of the options are ones that are impossible to match to a user's offline identity. For example, of the six available races in FFXIV, only the Hyur resembles humans;

and the designers chose to named differently to provide what distance from humans they could. The other races include cat-type folk (Miqo'te), dragon-esque type folk (Au Ra), and rabbit-type folk (Vera). (Oda, Fox, & Ishikawa, 2016)

None of the character options selected are chosen for how they impact the character's abilities or playstyle. For example, Lalafels' small stature does not afford them a smaller hit box than the towering Vera; nor does the Hrothgar's muscular physique make them a better Paladin than a Miqo'te or a worse White Mage than an Au Ra. Rather, the user chooses the character's race because of how it looks. Even if the choice is nothing more than to click the random button on the character creation screen, the user maintains some intentionality by clicking that button and accepting the results for the character. That intentionality carries with it implicit expectations in the sense that the user *chose* the character to look the way she does. Kithra Morningdew was specifically designed to be a female Miqo'te and given that specific name. The intentionality with which the character is created - and the long-term nature of the character as in-game self-representation - establishes a very specific identity *for that character*. When Sara chose all the details for Kithra – picking them specifically or hitting random on the character traits screen - she gave Kithra a unique identity.

The narrative surrounding the character within these types of platforms also pulls it towards the virtual identity side of the gradient. In FFXIV, users play as the "Warrior of Light" (Oda, Fox, & Ishikawa, 2016, p. 15). While the story is fascinating in and of itself, what is important here is that it presents a static journey all users take, one that is unique to the world of Eorzea. During this

narrative, users will do things and go on adventures that are not possible offline. They will travel this fantasy world, fight fantastic enemies, and slay Primals (FFXIV's version of the old gods) (Oda, Fox, & Ishikawa, 2016). All of these experiences help establish the user's character as their virtual identity.

The bit of digital that keeps FFXIV from being fully virtual enters the way it does with most multiplayer games: through user interaction. Many of the adventures within Eorzea require users to work together. The Primals, for example, require a party of eight to defeat. To help users form groups for these fights, the developers integrated a variety of social tools. Users can add others to a Friend List. They can invite each other to different events. They can band together and establish user-run groups called Free Companies. Each element builds the connection between different users.

Just as with Reddit, users are expected to be authentic to their offline identities with what they share with each other. If Sara tells Katie that she is a carpenter offline, Katie expects Sara to be a carpenter offline. She expects Sara's statement to be an authentic digital identity statement in the same way that she expects Sara's statement about having killed the Primal Ifrit to be an authentic virtual identity statement.

The developers of FFXIV try to limit how much users share about themselves to keep the platform firmly in the virtual side of the gradient, though. For example, the Prohibited Behavior policies include the statement, "Disclosing or indicating personal information such as contact details with the aim of meeting up in the real world" as an example of what can be considered harassment in-

game (Prohibitions in *Final Fantasy XIV*, n.d.). While this statement is most likely included to discourage stalking or to prevent users from trying to force each other to meet outside of the game world, it does constitute a clear statement about how much of the offline world the developers want to enter the game and how much they want the game to stay firmly on the virtual section of Cyberspace Gradient.

Even so, users have a significant impact on where the platform falls on the gradient through user-constructed paradigms, such as setting up unofficial server designations. Balmung, for example, is the unofficial roleplaying server. On this server, users are encouraged to more fully embrace their character's virtual identity. They can develop elaborate and interesting backstories and motivations that go beyond the game's narrative. Faerie, on the other hand, is the unofficial LGBTQ server. Users on Faerie are encouraged to focus less on their character's virtual identity and more on their own offline identity. They are encouraged to bring in aspects of their offline life and connect with other users who can act as a support system within the game. (EquisPe, 2018)

How far a user moves down the Cyberspace Gradient depends on how comfortable they are with the idea of immersion. Imagine Sara has recently learned to swim. She is not going to be a great swimmer, and she may have some concerns about going out too far. As soon as the water goes above her waist, she stops. She is perfectly fine going that far out but refuses to go much further. Sara's discomfort in the water is akin to someone who is not comfortable - or experienced - in immersing themselves in cyberspace. They may be willing to go

on Tinder or muddle around on Reddit. However, they are not willing to embrace the virtual identity needed to create a character on Balmung. Even sitting down to play *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013) is going to be more similar to watching an interactive movie than connecting with the character.

Not wanting to or struggling with moving down the gradient is not necessarily a bad thing in the same way that not wanting to swim out into the ocean is not necessarily a bad thing. Users will have their own levels of comfort and their own sources of enjoyment. What matters here is understanding how the user experiences identity in cyberspace.

One potential issue with the idea of a Cyberspace Gradient is the idea of user distance. Banks and Bowman (2016) argue for four dimensions of character association. The first one is "identification: seeing oneself as similar to or the same as the game character" (p. 1259). Distance expands on this standard idea of identification by including how far a user has to go to be able to identify with the character, allowing it to take into account that different users will have to travel different distances to be able to relate to the same character.

To illustrate the idea of distance, imagine Sara is a professional surfer. She is so good that she has become the title character of the newest *Pro Surfer* game. Now, if Sara decides to sit down and play *Pro Surfer* and, more importantly, play as herself, the game would not fall very far down the gradient for her. In this situation, *Pro Surfer* could be argued to be a digital identity platform for Sara, since the in-game Sara character is an authentic self-representation of Sara's offline identity.

Katie, on the other hand, is not a pro surfer. She is a high school student from Wyoming. She has never seen the beach, let alone learned to surf. Katie has to travel a greater distance down the gradient than Sara when connecting with the character. She would also have to travel further than Tara, a college student from California who surfs on the weekends. Katie does not have the connection that Tara has to surfing, nor does she have the connection to the character that Sara does. She has to immerse herself more in the character's virtual identity than either of the others. For her, *Pro Surfer* is an entirely virtual identity platform.

Two main ways exist to address the problem of user distance. The first is by acknowledging that, while the problem does exist, it is a fringe situation. The problem will only ever appear at all if both a platform exists in which a user could be self-represented in a digital identity fashion and if a user exists that can fulfill those requirements. Continuing the sports example, the US Bureau of Labor lists 7,080 people employed as Athletes and Sports Competitors in spectator sports during 2018 in America (27-2021 Athletes and Sports Competitors, 2019). The US Census estimates the American population to have been 325,719,178 in July of 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, n.d.). Assuming that every single athlete included in that 7,080 is in a sport with a game created for it and that they appeared in the game still leaves an incredibly small percentage of the population that could ever encounter this problem within the sports genre of games. For most platforms, the chance of this fringe situation occurring is much small, if possible at all.

The second way to address the distance problem is by focusing on what other users expect and what expectations the platform sets up. Marwick (2013) argues that every platform comes with idioms of practice or norms around how people use said platform (p. 358). Users refer to these norms when developing expectations of authenticity for a platform and to understand where that platform falls on the Cyberspace Gradient. For platforms on the virtual side of the gradient, these expectations mean users embrace the character's identity rather than their own. The fact that it is easier for Sara to do so because the character's identity matches her own is irrelevant; the expectations are placed solely on the character. Users are free to set aside any concern for user distance and, instead, focus on the game world's idioms of practice and expectations of authenticity.

Conclusion

Marwick (2013) states, "The term 'online identity' implies that there is a distinction between how people present themselves online and how they do offline. But any split between 'online' and 'offline' identity is narrowing" (p. 358). While Marwick (2013) focuses on social media, his idea applies across the entire Cyberspace Gradient. Users are becoming more and more connected to their cyberspace identities. They embrace digital identity, using modern technology to share their offline identities with others; and they embrace virtual identity, using characters to have experiences that would be impossible without it.

By focusing on the expectations of authenticity, users can understand how to approach cyberspace platforms across the entire gradient. On each platform, they can know exactly what to expect from other users and what other users

expect from them. In the FFXIV, for example, if a user claims to be a programmer, it is safe to expect them to be a programmer offline, as that job does not exist within the game world. The same applies to any platform that is not strictly digital or virtual identity. On each platform, users can approach them knowing when and where to apply expectations of authenticity. Knowing both what is of them and what they can expect from others establishes a foundation for building an identity and having unique experiences on that platform.

Chapter 2 - On Authenticity in Cyberspace

Introduction

Banet-Weiser (2012) writes, "In the US, the 21st century is an age that hungers for anything that *feels* authentic." (p. 3) People are starving for it (Erickson, 1995). Everything from how people spend their time to what they buy to how they present themselves is entangled with their desire for authenticity (Fine, 2003, p. 153). It has become such an important concept that people will go to extreme lengths to prove they are not 'sellouts' (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 3). Bolstered by facetime, filters, and similar photo-manipulation technology, this desire for authenticity only grows stronger in cyberspace (Vannini & Willaims, 2009, p. 1). Users want to know they are being authentic. They want to know those they connect with are being authentic, too.

Chapter One set up what it means to have a cyberspace identity and explained how that changes based on individual platforms and where they fall on the Cyberspace Gradient. All of this, however, depends on the concept of *authenticity*. After all, the Cyberspace Gradient and, as a result, cyberspace identity are founded on authenticity. The problem here is, as Banet-Weiser (2012, p. 10) points out, authenticity can be difficult to define. Beyond a vague intuitive sense, it is often unclear what authentic means, so much so that its "definition has been the subject of passionate debates involving far-ranging thinkers, from Plato to Marx, from Andy Warhol to Lady Gage." (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 3) Ferrara (2009) goes so far as to state, "More people use one version or other of this concept than there are people who use the word." (p. 21) Not every version is

useful in cyberspace, though, and those that are, are limited in their applicability. For example, the two most prominent views - "Social Constructionism" and "Realism" - each only provide half the picture when discussing how authenticity works in a computer-mediated environment.

Nevertheless, both the Social Constructionist View and the Realist View are important to understanding authenticity in cyberspace. By combining aspects of both views, along with some conceptual elements of its own, this chapter proposes a new view: the "Perspective View." The Perspective View embraces aspects of both the Social Constructionist View and the Realist View. Combining features of both puts the Perspective View in a unique position to address both sides of cyberspace interactions. By addressing both sides, it becomes possible to address what, exactly, it means to be authentic - and inauthentic - in cyberspace and how expectations of authenticity arise.

What Authenticity is Not

Before diving into discussions of what authenticity is, however, it is worth discussing what authenticity *is not*. The first thing that authenticity is not is "sincerity." While the difference between authenticity and sincerity is nuanced, it is an important one. Sincerity, as Trilling (1972) states, "refers primarily to a congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (p. 2). Think about the fear catfisher. They have decided that their authentic self is not worth loving and have created their idealized self in hopes of attracting a match. While their match may not know who they really are, the fear catfisher can sincerely care about their match; and they can feel as if they have made a real connection. As a result,

when they say, "I love you," they mean it. What they "avow" matches what they feel. In this way, they are sincere about their feelings while being inauthentic about their identity. Baym (2015) discusses this difference when she states,

Authentic self-representation is not always a simple question of true and false... With its potential to liberate people from the constraints of their social context, people may also be seen as becoming *more honest* in mediated encounters. This advice column letter-writer admitted to Abby that she had presented a deceptive identity online, yet claimed the emotions and relationships predicated upon it were real: I am deeply in love with a man who is handsome, smart and loving. We are engaged and happy together. The problem? We met on the Internet. Abby, he thinks, I am 26, but I'm not. Everything I've said to him has been a lie. I am really 12. (p. 44)

Baym's (2015) statement is reflected in Trilling's (1972) understanding of identity, "The word 'authenticity'... [suggests] a more exigent conception of the self and of what being true to it consists in..." (p. 11). Authenticity is about presenting one's *self* honestly. Sincerity is about presenting one's *feelings* honestly.

The second concept authenticity is not is "genuineness." In discussing English Language Teaching, Buendgens-Kosten (2014) provides a good example of the difference. She argues that someone can be taught authentic English without being taught genuine English. Imagine that Sara is trying to teach Katie English. She pulls out a handful of academic journals and uses those to teach Katie. At some point, Katie becomes fluent in English. The problem is that Katie now speaks English as if she were an academic journal. While she may speak authentic English, she does not speak genuine English. If Katie tried to order a sandwich at a deli speaking the way an academic article is written, she would, at

the very least, get some very odd looks. In the same way, a user can be authentic in how they self-represent without being genuine about their identity.

The final concept that authenticity is not is "typical." In discussing food, Weiss (2011) points out how authenticity is not the same as the typical. One example is a typical lasagna. What is thought of as a typical Italian lasagna may not be an authentic Italian lasagna. Another good example is that of a sports fan. Someone is not an authentic fan simply because they are a typical fan. Buying the team's jersey, going to home games, watching the away games every Sunday, having the bumper sticker, etc. is not enough to make someone authentic. It is only enough to be *typical*. Authenticity is different. In the same way, users need to be careful not to judge another user's self-representation as authentic simply because it is typical.

Social Constructionist View

Having established what sets authenticity apart from similar concepts, the next step is to look at the two main understandings of authenticity itself. The Social Constructionist View (SCV) conceptualizes authenticity as "socially constructed" (Vannini & Willaims, 2009, p. 3). SCV rejects the idea that authenticity is inherent in objects, people, places, etc.; and, instead, argues authenticity is "centered on its *in situ* social construction, as operating in practice and in relation to local relevancies." (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 123) For SCV, authenticity is something that must be "experienced and constructed in the interplay among self, other, and institutions via cultural codes" (Weigert, 2009, p.

38). More simply put, SCV's conceptualization places social norms as the source of authenticity (Auslander, 1999).

To illustrate SCV's focus on social norms, Auslander (1999) turns to "rock authenticity." Auslander (1999) argues, "Rock authenticity is performative... rock musicians achieve and maintain the effect of authenticity by continuously citing in their music and performance styles the norms of authenticity for their particular rock subgenre and historical moment." (p. 88) For a musician to make authentic rock music, they need to perform music that fits within the societal conception of rock music at the time. The time element is important because music and norms change: what may be considered authentic rock at one point in history may not be considered so at another (Auslander, 1999, p. 88).

While citing social norms as the source of authenticity tends to focus SCV on the interpersonal, a few scholars argue for a more intrapersonal approach. Lewin and Williams (2009), for example, present a conceptualization where authenticity is "a morally oriented quest oriented towards self-discovery... and an effort to stabilize reality in the postmodern condition." (p. 66) Here, authenticity continues to cite the social norms a person exists within but from a more intrapersonal perspective. Lewin and Williams' (2009) conceptualization is about how a person positions themselves vis-a-vis societal norms rather than how others judge them vis-a-vis those norms.

Nevertheless, the more typical SCV conceptualization focuses on the judgment of others as the source of authenticity. As Gubrium and Helstein (2009) put it, authenticity is "interactionally produced" (p. 123). A person presents

themselves as authentic in some way, and others judge whether they are, in fact, authentic. Gubrium and Helstein (2009) go on to claim the interactional nature means authenticity only matters when questioned (p. 123). Someone who has always been part of a group never has to worry about what it means to be authentic within that group. For that person, the concept of authenticity retreats and is forgotten (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 123). Only when a person presents themselves as authentic does the question arise.

Conceptualizing authenticity in terms of interaction and social norms means authenticity must be created. If authenticity must be created, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) argue, it must be work. People must spend time crafting authenticity and interpreting what it means to be authentic. Someone has to actively claim whether another person, object, feeling, etc. is authentic (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Gubrium and Holstein's (2009) understanding of authenticity as crafted becomes especially apparent when looking at punk subculture.

Punk subculture is all about being authentic. Unlike many other subcultures, however, punk's understanding of authenticity possesses "no specific properties." (Lewin & Williams, 2009, p. 76) For punks, being authentic is about being real, about what creating instead of consuming. (Lewin & Williams, 2009, p. 76) To be punk, a person does not have to follow specific trends, requirements, or dress code. The lack of rules does not mean a specific punk style does not exist, though. Dickie, a punk interviewed by Lewin and Williams (2009), argues punks are "fucking filthy and dirty" (p. 75).

Eve, another punk interviewed by Lewin and Williams (2009), illustrates her form of punk authenticity through her story of reconciling her Christian faith with being a punk,

It took me a couple years and a couple bad mistakes to realize that being punk doesn't have to mean fuck this - you know, fuck fill in the blank... It definitely means that instead of just sort of giving that knee jerk reaction of rejection towards things to really actively think about them and to create my own viewpoint. (p. 72)

In her story, Eve follows the punk social norm of creating rather than consuming. She does not just consume what she is told. She does not simply adopt what her friends tell her it means to be punk. Instead, Eve embraces the heart of punk - at least as Dickie describes it - and creates her own ideal without the need for any specific properties.

By embracing the creation aspect of punk authenticity, Eve also embraces Lewin and William's (2009) intrapersonal conceptualization of authenticity. She follows her moral compass to discover her self and "stabilize reality in the postmodern condition," even when her moral compass goes against what her friends believe is punk. That being said, Eve still has to face Gubrium and Helstein's (2009) interpersonal conceptualization of authenticity. She still has to contend with her friends' beliefs and their questioning of whether she can be Christian and authentically punk.

Dickie's and Eve's constructions of authenticity within the punk subculture lines up with how Henri Kamer, an African art trader, defines a cultural art piece as being authentic. He states, "An authentic African piece is by definition a sculpture executed by an artist of a primitive tribe and destined for the use of this tribe in a ritual or functional way, never lucrative." (Quoted in Beurden, 2015) In

other words, for a piece to be authentic, it does not need to have any specific properties, such as being created according to some tradition. Instead, it only needs to be created *by* a member of the community, *for* a member of the community. When Dickie berates the two girls, he is not berating them for buying their look. He is berating them for buying it from someone who is outside the punk community and is only creating a punk look for lucrative means. To Dickie, the girls do everything that goes against Kamer's explanation of what makes something culturally authentic. (Lewin & Williams, 2009, p. 75)

Focusing on brand culture, Banet-Weiser (2012) takes a softer approach to crafted authenticity. She can accept crafted authenticity as a form of authenticity while admitting that it is often seen as such simply because it *is* crafted and not commercial. Having the room to admit that it is seen as authentic only because it not commercial allows her to accept that the difference between the crafted and commercial - between the authentic and the commoditized - is beginning to blur. Within contemporary brand culture, people are beginning to see that the authentic self and the commodity self are becoming the same, and they are accepting this. They are accepting that authenticity can be branded and commoditized. (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 10-11) It is this acceptance that creates a space where the two girls can be authentically punk. They can reject the overly consumeristic culture and turn towards the creative aspect of punk by focusing on the creation of their looks, rather than the creation of their articles of clothing. As long as others see their focus on punk's creativity instead of the focus on money spent, the girls can achieve SCV's conceptualization of authenticity.

Realist View

"Be true to yourself," Feldman (2014) states, "It's a dictum so ubiquitous that it can seem like an empty truism. But it is also a piece of wisdom held by many to be something like the meaning of life." (p. 9) This piece of folk wisdom is so ubiquitous that, in a study on how individuals view authenticity, Franzese (2009) found that all participants were familiar with it. Be true to yourself could also be said to be the heart of the Realist View of authenticity (RV).

As the phrase "be true to yourself" suggests, RV argues authenticity is an inherent quality and is something a person possesses in and of themselves. Think of Katniss from *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Collins, 2008; Collins, 2009; Collins, 2010). According to Coatney (2012), Katniss fails when she pretends because she cannot *seem to be*; she can only *be*. She fails at pretending to be in love with Peeta. She fails at acting in the studio for the rebels (Collins, 2009; Collins, 2010). She fails any time she tries to pretend to be something she is not. Katniss only succeeds when she stops trying to seem and starts to be (Coatney, 2012). She has an internal "Katniss" she must be true to, and only when she embraces the be true to yourself conceptualization of authenticity does she succeed.

While Katniss' story makes it seem easy to be true to yourself, reality may not be so simple. As Feldman (2014) points out, be true to yourself can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. Feldman's (2014) own possible interpretations include Authenticity as Strong Will, Authenticity as Psychological Independence, Authenticity as Wholeheartedness, Authenticity as Self-Knowledge, and Authenticity as Moral Conscientiousness. Each interpretation

maintains the same central ideal of be true to yourself. For example, Authenticity as Strong Will means being true to yourself by resisting temptation and acting in "accordance with your best judgments." (Feldman, 2014, p. 15). Authenticity as Psychological Independence means making decisions despite outside pressures, and Authenticity as Moral Conscientiousness means being true to yourself by acting according to one's conscience (Feldman, 2014, p. 16). Each maintains the central be true to yourself but tells a person to be true to themselves in different ways.

By placing the focus on being true to yourself, authenticity turns intrapersonal in nature and becomes "the condition of owning yourself in the face of social pressures that push you to lose yourself in a social role or in conventional expectations" (Schmid & Thonhauser, 2017). At times when RV drifts into what seems to be interpersonal territory, the intrapersonal focus remains. Leroy, Verbruggen, Forrier, and Sels (2015), for example, include in their conceptualization a requirement that one be authentic when interacting with others. They argue that being truthful with others is, in fact, an act of being truthful with one's self (Leroy, Verbruggen, Forrier, & Sels, 2015, p. 27).

The inclusion of these limited interpersonal aspects of authenticity does mean RV shares some similarities with SCV. In Franzese's (2009) conceptualization, "Authenticity... is defined as an individual's subjective sense that their behavior, appearance, self, reflects their sense of core being." (p. 87) The subjective sense connects to SCV's idea of subjective judgment in a similar way to Dickie's and Eve's judgment about what is and is not punk. The difference

is the external judgment relies on whether the person is being true to their core self. Imagine that Katie is telling Sara that she is not being authentic. Here, Katie's judgment or belief is not what determines Sara's authenticity. What determines Sara's authenticity is whether Sara is fulfilling the requirements set forth by RV's be true to yourself core. The interpersonal aspects merely create a space where one person can "call out" another on not being authentic to their true self.

Another similarity between the two views is that both can take contextual authenticity seriously. For SCV, context determines which social norms are important, allowing a person to embrace Goffman's (1959) idea of performativity while remaining authentic. For RV, context does not impact what it means to be authentic; the context instead changes which facet of a person's true self serves as the foundation for authenticity. Machin and Messenger-Davies (cited in Van Leeuwen, 2001) present a study where children aged eight to twelve are asked to discuss television programs. The study found that children responded differently depending on the context of the question. In an exercise focused on social responsibility, the children denounced *Eastenders* as "encouraging smoking, violence, and bad language." In a separate exercise focused on characters, the same children spoke of how much they enjoyed Joe "because he is a bit nutty." Van Leeuwen (2001), when examining this research, argues that each response is an authentic representation of how the children think. If the question needed a broader, more societal-focused answer, the students responded based on what they believed to be true. If the question needed a narrower, more personal answer, the

students responded based on what they felt or enjoyed. In both cases, the students stayed authentic by staying true to different facets of themselves.

Van Leeuwen's (2001) argument for the children's contextual authenticity matches Feldman's (2014) five interpretations. In each interpretation, authenticity depends on the context. When the children answered the societal question, they showed Authenticity as Moral Conscientiousness. They responded based on what they believed to be their "own best moral judgment." (Feldman, 2014, p. 16).

When the children answered the narrower, more personal question, they showed Authenticity as Psychological Independence. They responded based on what they enjoyed, answering for themselves and accepting that those programs might not be the best things for them to watch.

The same idea of authenticity in context can be understood when looking at a person at work. In a work environment, people are expected to act differently than they would at a party, as they are acting in a role particular to that context. The difference is not because the person's true self has changed. Rather, the context demands the person put a different facet of themselves on display. For example, Sara might be an adrenalin junky outside of work; she is known as a risk-taker when she goes base jumping. The risk-taker aspect of her is part of her true self. At work as an accountant, however, she is reserved and calculated and entirely risk averse. She is not being "inauthentic" at work by not being a risk-taker. Instead, she is being authentic to who she is *in that context*. The difference between Sara's authenticity as "the accountant" and Sara's authenticity as "the base jumper" does not come from citing different social norms. Sara's

authenticity comes from participating in different contexts: one where she is responsible for herself alone and one where she is responsible for her clients' finances. Each context brings out a different facet of who she is: her professional self and her private self.

The Perspective View

While both RV and SCV present compelling arguments on how to conceptualize authenticity, they both have shortcomings when it comes to applying them to authenticity in cyberspace, especially when considering that cyberspace interactions are all computer-mediated communications (CMC) to one degree or another. Consider user profiles here.³ In terms of authenticity, the CMC nature of user-profiles means they have two main parts: the creation and reception. RV does well with the creation of the profile. When a user creates the profile, they are creating a self-representation. The profile is meant to be an authentic self-representation that embodies RV's intrapersonal be true to yourself mantra. SCV, on the other hand, does well when a user receives a profile. Here, the profile becomes a claim of authenticity from the user who created it to the user who received it, and it is up to the receiving user to judge whether that claim

³ While the focus here is digital identity, the perspective view of authenticity applies in exactly the same way to virtual identity. The difference is that the identity behind the statement "be true to yourself" and the identity the relevant other is judging simply shifts from the user's offline identity to the avatar's in-world identity. Imagine the claim "I'm a carpenter." For digital identity, the statement is authentic if Sara is a carpenter offline. For virtual identity, the statement is authentic if Kithra Morningdew is a carpenter in-world. Nothing in how authenticity functions changes when shifting from digital identity to virtual identity - or any spot on the gradient in between - except what is being examined as authentic.]

is interpersonally authentic. Neither view, however, can handle both profile creation and profile reception.

The Perspective View (PV) developed here, however, is designed to take into account both the perspective of the profile creator and the perspective of the profile receiver. PV takes the perspective of the profile creator into account by bringing in aspects of RV's "be true to yourself" conceptualization. PV takes the perspective of the profile receiver into account by bringing in aspects of SCV's social norm-based conceptualization. By blending aspects of both RV and SCV, PV follows in Hall and Mao's (2015) footsteps and includes both intra- and an inter- personal aspects. The combination of the two aspects, in turn, provides a way for PV to achieve a more robust conceptualization of authenticity that embraces both sides of cyberspace's CMC nature.

Intrapersonal authenticity, as stated, is authenticity towards one's self. It is the ubiquitous "be true to yourself." As Feldman (2014) points out, this simple saying can be interpreted in a myriad of ways, each with different benefits and applications. Nevertheless, that piece of folk wisdom is popular because it has at least some truth to it. Everyone wants to live in such a way as to not feel "self-estrangement or self-alienation" (Erickson, 1995). Everyone wants to live such that "their behaviors over time and across situations will be harmoniously integrated" (Leroy, Verbruggen, Forrier, & Sels, 2015, p. 30).

The RV side of PV embraces all the possible interpretations of the be true to yourself mantra, with each presenting a different situation where a person may feel that self-estrangement when denied. For example, a guilty conscious,

something most people have experienced at one time or another, comes from violating Feldman's (2014) Authenticity as Moral Conscientiousness. Where PV breaks away from a purely RV standpoint is in rejecting the idea that the inherent qualities intrapersonal authenticity rely upon are ones a person is necessarily born with. Rather, PV accepts these qualities are developed and influenced by the culture and environment a person grows up in. The qualities, then, become inherent through being so ingrained in a person's identity that they fit better with the be true to yourself understanding than any SCV conceptualization. Even Dickie, the epitome of SCV, is likely to argue posers are lacking the wholeheartedness and psychological independence characteristics Feldman (2014) puts forth.

PV completes the move to a broader understanding of intrapersonal authenticity by shifting Williams' (2006) conceptualization of intrapersonal authenticity. Williams (2006) argues, "The authentic self is one that commits to a personal life project and is not controlled by outside influence" (p. 177). Framing authenticity in terms of a personal life project works particularly well with PV as it does not necessarily require the inherent quality that typical RV interpretations do. For PV, a person's life project does not necessitate following anything inherent in that person, which opens up intrapersonal authenticity to the broader interpretation PV takes.

Williams' (2006) framing of intrapersonal authenticity as a personal life project comes with two main effects. The first is encouraging a broader range of interpretations of "be true to yourself." Everything from Leroy, Verbruggen,

Forrier, and Sel's (2015) interpretation of be true to yourself as being true to "one's values, needs, wants, thoughts, emotions, and preferences" (p. 27) to Feldman's (2014) five interpretations to Dickie's discussion of posers become acceptable. The second is that Williams' (2006) framing explicitly includes Schmid and Thonhauser's (2017) autonomy requirement - "owning yourself" - for intrapersonal identity. By embracing both the broadened interpretation of be true to yourself and the explicit inclusion of autonomy, PV's conceptualization of intrapersonal authenticity stays true to RV's idea of a core self for people to be authentic to while adding in the flexibility needed to understand what that means in a range of situations and platforms.

Interpersonal authenticity, as stated, is authenticity in relation to others. Unlike a strict SCV interpretation, PV argues that taking the relational aspect seriously means interpersonal authenticity needs to reflect parts of both RV and SCV. Consider the characteristic of being outdoorsy. To Sara, being an outdoorsy person may mean going for a hike in the local national park once or twice a month. However, to Katie, Sara is not outdoorsy but simply enjoys hiking. To Katie, being an outdoorsy person means going camping, sans all electronics and any so-called creature comforts; anything less is not enough.

SCV aspects of interpersonal authenticity enter the picture in that Katie's rejection of Sara's claim to authenticity works because outdoorsy is a characteristic based on social norms and, therefore, necessarily subjective. There may be some intuitive understandings of outdoorsy; for example, it may be easy to exclude those who only go to the local, manicured park. However, there is no

clear line that can be referred to when trying to decide who is and is not authentically outdoorsy. Rather, Sara has to claim to be authentically outdoorsy; and Katie has to judge whether that statement is true. As Peterson (cited in Williams, 2006) argues, "authenticity is a claim made by or for someone, thing or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (p. 177). Here, Katie is the relevant other. It does not matter whether Sara sees herself as authentically outdoorsy. If Sara wants to connect with Katie as a fellow outdoorsy person, she needs Katie to accept her as being authentically outdoorsy.

PV breaks away from a purely SCV standpoint in that it adds authenticity requirements to a person's self-representation. If Sara wants to be interpersonally authentic, she must be accepted as authentically outdoorsy *by Katie* and be authentic in her self-representation *to Katie*. Sara must accomplish two things if she wants to be authentic in her self-representation. The first, which is where the RV aspects come into play, is that Sara must be honest with herself. Feldman (2014) argues that self-knowledge is one form of authenticity. Hall and Mao (2015) describe self-knowledge as "knowing one's own values and commitments" (p. 3). While Hall and Mao's (2015) description may fit Feldman's (2014) understanding well, it comes into conflict with the subjective nature of some interpersonal characteristics. As mentioned, there is no way for Sara to *know* she is outdoorsy. She cannot have the self-knowledge she is outdoorsy; she can only *believe* she is outdoorsy. As such, PV introduces Authenticity as Self-Belief. To be authentic in her self-belief, Sara needs to do nothing more than honestly believe she is outdoorsy.

The second requirement for authentic self-representation is honesty towards others. Hall and Mao (2015) argue that authenticity requires being “consistency between one’s self-knowledge and one’s actions” (p. 3). Sara must believe she is outdoorsy and present that belief honestly. If Sara does not honestly believe she is outdoorsy, she cannot authentically self-represent as outdoorsy to Katie.

The requirement that Sara self-represent authentically becomes paramount when connected with Peterson’s conceptualization of authenticity and Dickie’s poser example. Imagine Sara and Katie meet at a bar. Sara is fascinated by survival TV shows. With this knowledge at hand, she proceeds to convince Katie that she is authentically outdoorsy, *up to Katie’s standards*. Sara does not believe that she is outdoorsy, yet she has been presented herself - and been accepted - as outdoorsy by Katie. Without the “be honest” requirements, Sara would be authentic in an interpersonal sense, without ever having been camping in her life.

The same mistaken acceptance of authenticity also happens when reversing the two parts. Imagine Sara sincerely believes she is outdoorsy. She sincerely believes going hiking twice a month is enough to be outdoorsy. Sara also knows Katie disagrees with her. To avoid an argument, Sara dishonestly presents herself as *not being* outdoorsy. In this situation, as in the previous, Sara is being interpersonally inauthentic. She is not authentically self-representing. For her to be authentic, she must be honest in both parts. She must be honest with herself and translate that honesty into how she expresses herself to others (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Finally, PV incorporates its own conceptualization of an "objective" aspect of authenticity. Objective authenticity focuses on characteristics that can be said to be *objectively true* about someone. Either a person is six feet tall, or they are not. There is nothing subjective about a person's height, nor is height about cultural norms. Being tall may be understood differently based on the current culture, developmental stage, or platform (e.g., Tinder vs. NBA.com's forum). "Being such-and-such height," in terms of actual physical measurement, however, is an objective fact. Height and other similar characteristics are things a person can be authentic towards in an objective way.

Any characteristics that are not necessarily inherent to a person but are not subject to fluctuating social norms can be considered part of objective authenticity. For example, if Sara says to Katie, "I am a lawyer," Katie can objectively measure the statement's truth. She can check to see if Sara has a law degree from an accredited university, has passed the bar exam, and is honestly and legally employed as a lawyer. As long as Sara meets all these requirements, she is objectively authentic in her statement, "I am a lawyer."

The fact that the standards for what it means to be a lawyer are socially constructed - the accreditation, degree, bar exam, etc. are all created by social structures - does not remove the statement from the purview of objective authenticity, either. The concept of being a lawyer is fundamentally different from other socially constructed norms, such as punk or outdoorsy, in the same way having a height of six feet is fundamentally different from being tall. Six feet is a socially constructed measurement. However, changing measurement systems

does not change Sara's height. She could as easily be described as 183cm tall, eighteen hands, or 1.075 Smoots. Each number and unit is a measurement of Sara's height. Both Sara's height and her employment as a lawyer are characteristics that can be objectively checked.

The inclusion of objective authenticity fills in the gap between intra- and interpersonal understandings of identity. With intrapersonal authenticity, a person's authenticity is measured against inherent qualities within themselves. With interpersonal authenticity, a person's authenticity is measured against subjective qualities based on social norms. Objective authenticity exists between these two concepts. Sara's height and law degree are not characteristics that are inherent in her, nor are they socially constructed in the same way as being tall or a good lawyer. Being considered tall or good at a job can be debated based on changing norms. Being six-feet tall and being a lawyer are different; and, while they do not fit neatly into either intra- or inter- personal categories, they can be judged as authentically or inauthentically self-represent.

Where PV shines, though, is when SCV and RV come into conflict. Imagine Sara is the most popular professional surfer. One day, she sits down and plays the game *Pro Surfer '19*. She selects herself and starts a match. She wins her match against SurfingStar05, who happens to be fourteen-year-old Katie from Wyoming. She performs tricks in the game that she does every day during practice. When the match ends, she thanks Katie for the game and tells Katie her offline identity. Katie, however, does not believe Sara is who she claims to be. Katie believes Sara is lying.

Sara's situation is problematic because she can be considered to be acting both authentically and inauthentically, depending on whether SCV or RV is the dominant view. When Sara plays the game and tells Katie her identity, she is being *intrapersonally authentic*. She is actively portraying herself in cyberspace as she is offline. When Katie, the relevant other, judges Sara to not be who she claims to be, Sara becomes *interpersonally inauthentic*. Worse still, RV's intrapersonal perspective completely disregards Katie's experience, while SCV's interpersonal perspective disregards Sara's. Sara fulfills every requirement for being true to herself. She is being as honest with herself and with Katie as possible. Katie, however, does not see the situation in the same way. She sees someone lying to her. To Katie, Sara is not being authentic at all. Prioritizing either RV or SCV over the other means placing either Sara's or Katie's experience over the other's.

PV, on the other hand, accepts both perspectives as important. Sara can be authentic while being in an inauthentic situation. As long as Sara is honest with herself and with Katie in how she self-represents, she is authentic. Sara's intrapersonal authenticity, however, is not enough to create a connection. Katie has to accept her claim to authenticity. If Katie rejects Sara's claim, it does not mean Sara becomes inauthentic. It is not as if Katie rejecting Sara's claim to be Sara the pro-surfer could cause Sara to cease to be a pro-surfer. Sara is objectively a pro-surfer and is self-representing in an intrapersonally authentic way; Katie simply does not believe her. PV argues that the only thing Katie's rejection makes inauthentic is the situation, as a connection never forms.

Sara and Katie's scenario is not necessarily farfetched, either. Tony Hawk, a professional skater, is known for sending out tweets when someone fails to recognize him or fails to believe he is, in fact, Tony Hawk (LaConte, 2018). With SCV or RV alone, Tony Hawk would have to be deemed as either authentic or inauthentic without any consideration for how the situation played out or for how it impacted him and the others involved. With PV, these scenarios can be approached with consideration for both the perspective of Tony Hawk and the perspectives of the TSA agents or people on the planes. Unlike SCV and RV, PV accepts that Tony Hawk remains intrapersonally and objectively authentic while being in an inauthentic situation that fails to create any real connection.

Expectations of Authenticity in Cyberspace

With an established understanding of how authenticity works in cyberspace complete, the next step is to look at how platforms put that understanding into practices to create "expectations of authenticity." Here, expectations of authenticity are this chapter's conceptualization of how platform system structures and user paradigms place expectations of what it means to authentically self-represent on users. That is, when a user logs onto a platform, they are expected to self-represent in a particular way to be considered authentic. What that way is depends on the platform, as both system structure and userbase interact to create those expectations.

The need for understanding expectations of authenticity in cyberspace comes from the fact that cyberspace is not some a zero-sum relational vacuum (Jurgenson, 2012, p. 85). Most users actively bring the offline with them into

cyberspace. Reich, Subrahmanyam, and Espinoza's (2012), for example, found that adolescents use SNSs to connect with friends they already know offline. Studies on social media use among undergraduates (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011) and adults (Young, 2013) found the same results. Participants in Young's (2013) study went so far as to suggest that they would only friend someone online if they knew the person offline (p. 8). Many SNSs actually encourage these types of "anchored relationships" (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, cited in Ranzini, & Lutz, 2017, p. 83). When users bring offline relationships with them, what they are bringing are the expectations of authenticity those relationships already have in place. When Katie accepts Sara's SNS connection, Katie expects Sara to be, on the SNS, the same person she goes out to get coffee with. She has that expectation in place for Sara. The fact that those expectations originate offline does not change them.

Users also gain an intrinsic motivation to be authentic through new connections they make in cyberspace. As profiles shift from anonymous online profiles to "nonymous online profiles" (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) and as more romantic relationships begin online (Rabby, 2007. p. 316), suddenly, every connection has a chance of leading to a face-to-face meeting (Ellison, Hancock, & Toma, 2012). Ellison, Hancock, and Toma (2012) argue, "*The profile constitutes a promise made to an imagined audience that future face-to-face interaction will take place with someone who does not differ fundamentally from the person represented by the profile.*" (p. 56, emphasis in original) With the existence of this

potential, users lose the chance to experiment with their identities (Strano, 2008; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

The potential for an offline meeting does not have to be realistic or desired. Meeting could be extremely unlikely or virtually impossible. However, the fact that there is *some potential* for an offline meeting shapes how users approach these platforms. This potential forces them to keep in mind – consciously or subconsciously – that they remain connected to the physical world. They are being tied to their offline names, with every action in cyberspace a reflection of who they are offline. This reflection - and the very real possibility of fallout from actions performed in cyberspace - results in new connections exerting pressure on users to maintain an authentic self-representation.

What it means to be authentic on a platform is influenced by that platform's systems structure and any user established paradigms. Each platform frames "be true to yourself" and how claims of authenticity are made in different ways. Tinder's system structure, for example, is very image-first. When a user opens up Tinder to look for potential matches, they see the potential match's images first. They see a picture that serves as the user's digital self-representation. They do not read a potential match's story nor learn about their beliefs and values but see how the potential match chooses to physical self-representation on the platform. By placing images as the main focus, the authenticity of any future meetings becomes based on how the user self-represents their physical appearance. Users can then either accept the system structure in place and this framing of authenticity or struggle against them and establish their

own user paradigms and change what it means to self-represent on the platform (van Dijck, 2013, p. 199). In the case of Tinder, users have shown their embrace of the platform's physical-appearance focused nature by linking to Instagram, another image-dominant platform, to provide more pictures for potential matches to view (David & Cambre, 2016).

The embrace of linking Tinder to Instagram shows the importance of the picture and how the written biography plays a distant second. A one-night stand, for example, is not necessarily concerned with the other person's life goals or family history, as physical attraction drives the connection. Bosker (2017), in her article "Why Tinder has us addicted: The dating app gives you mind-reading powers," states,

Tinder has lured people in by unabashedly offering a place to do all the things we love doing online, but won't admit to: act shallow, make snap-judgments based on looks, obsess over what people think of us and boost our egos.

Interviewing users, Bosker (2017) found statements such as, "I think of it as a beauty contest plus messaging" and "[Judging on Tinder is] mostly based on looks." Bosker (2017) goes so far as to argue, "Tinder is like The Facebook before it became Facebook: a pure, unadulterated means of dissecting people's physical appearances." When Tinder is talked about as a "proper dating app" (MacKee, 2016), when users argue that it is "less superficial than other platforms" (MacKee, 2016), and when users tell stories about finding long-term love on the app (Weigel, 2015), the platform is still referred to as the "hookup app" (MacKee, 2016; Weigel, 2015; David & Cambre, 2016)

The interaction between system structure and user established paradigm determines how users self-represent on a platform and, in turn, shapes expectations of authenticity. With a straightforward platform such as Tinder, users have brought with them a hook-up culture as the dominant paradigm, and long-term dating as a secondary paradigm. Both paradigms include the implied goal of a face-to-face meetup and align perfectly with how the developers' established the system structures for the platform, giving Tinder a clear, singular source for its expectations of authenticity.

Not all platforms have such obvious paradigms and goals as Tinder, however. Some platforms may be used in a variety of ways by different communities within them or focus on goals that are not so clearly shaped by the system structures. In these cases, the expectations can come from users building the communities on the platform instead of embracing the developers' system structures. Williams (2006) gives a story of how the straight edge subculture developed. While this might not be the same as the development of an online platform, it can serve as an illustration of how these expectations arise.

In the first song, titled "Straight Edge," lyricist Ian MacKaye wrote about how he differed from other youth in his disdain for recreational drug use (alcohol, cigarettes) and promiscuous sexual activity. In another song by Minor Threat, titled "Out of Step," MacKaye claimed, "I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't fuck, at least I can fucking think! I can't keep up, can't keep up, can't keep up! Out of step with the world." These lyrics were almost immediately appropriated by many punks as a set of subcultural norms or "rules." (Williams, 2006, p. 175-76)

Here, the two songs help create the "set of subcultural norms" that establish what it means to be part of the straight edge subculture. MacKaye makes his statement about how he lives his life. Others hear this statement and choose to adopt it as

their own. Along with the statement, they take the title of the first song and use it as a label for their own lives. They have taken a song and made the lyrics the system structure and the label the platform. The audiences are the users, creating a paradigm of expectations out of what one musician's simple claim about how he lived his life.

The straight edge subculture is a good analogy for platforms such as Reddit. The developers created Reddit as an open forum platform. They state, "Our mission is to help people discover places where they can be their true selves, and empower our community to flourish." (Reddit/About, n.d.) To encourage this idea of "true selves," Reddit uses usernames, or handles, in place of a user's real name, adding a level of pseudonymity to the site. Users can post and share under their usernames, build Karma (Reddit's point system) through upvotes, and become "Reddit famous."

Reddit has set up a way for users to connect without exposing their offline identities. It has established a system structure that allows users to be their true selves without being weighed down by unnecessary offline elements. For example, no one expects someone with the username "IMATIMETRAVELER" to be a time traveler offline or "PatronSaintVanilla" to be the Patron Saint of Vanilla. Other users only expect a regular person to be behind the username. That being said, users have established some particular expectations of authenticity of their own. For example, while usernames on Reddit do not carry any expectations of authenticity, expectations of authenticity do apply to what users *say* on Reddit. If a user logged on and created a post claiming to be Sir

Patrick Stewart, other users want proof before accepting that claim, which is why, when Sir Patrick Stewart did an AMA (Ask Me Anything), he had to provide proof that he was authentically who he claimed to be, regardless of his username being "sirpatstew." (Stewart, 2015). The same goes for claims of events that go beyond what is considered a regular occurrence.

Comparing Reddit's expectations of authenticity to a platform such as Tinder, LinkedIn, or Instagram shows how expectations of authenticity change. On Reddit, only expressly made claims are subject to expectations of authenticity. A post titled "This neat statue" is not subject to much scrutiny, whereas a post titled "I made this neat statue" may have Reddit detectives searching to see if the user who posted the picture did make the statue. On Instagram, the name may not be subject to expectations, as it can follow Reddit's lead of pseudonymity; however, the images are subject to certain expectations. If the picture is of a person, the user is expected to be the one shown. If the picture is of nature, the user is expected to be the one who took the picture. The only exception is when the user who posts the picture expressly states that they are not the ones who took it (e.g., titling a post "This is my friend" or "This is an Instagram account of beautiful pictures I found online"). On Tinder, the expectations apply to the picture and the name. Other users expect both elements to match up with the person's offline identity. The biography section, however, has less scrutiny. Often, a biography that gives away no real information but is charming may be more accepted than one that does give away personal information. On LinkedIn, the biography, the name, *and* the picture are expected to be authentic self-

representation of a user's offline identity. When a recruiter opens up a LinkedIn account, they expect all the information to be true. The work history needs to be the person's actual work history. The name needs to be the person's actual name, and so on. Every element carries with it that expectation of authenticity.

Platforms also influence how much deviation there is in reference to their expectations of authenticity. Imagine a user posts a profile picture of themselves on Tinder where they weighed significantly less than they do now. With the immediacy of the platform, the picture may be considered far more inauthentic than it would be on a platform such as eHarmony, where the goal is more longer-term focused. The authenticity level changes because the platforms have differing degrees of acceptable deviation when it comes to bodily identity. The nature of eHarmony may provide space for the picture to be accepted as either an older picture that has not been updated, representative of a goal the person is working towards, or as temporary fluctuations from life changes. On eHarmony, a successful relationship means users will know each other for years and years and see each other change and grow over time. On Tinder, however, matches may only see each other for a single night. There is no time for them to watch each other grow and change. The difference in immediacy changes how much deviation is acceptable in authentic cyberspace self-representations (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

Baym (2015) argues, "One reason for uncertainty in mediated environments is that, with fewer visual and auditory social cues, people are not sure whether or not they can trust other people to be who they claim to be. This is

the central problem of anonymity." (p. 41-2) Cyberspace lacks the same cues as the physical world, making it much harder to tell when someone is being authentic. Expectations of authenticity are set up to alleviate this problem. The expectations are set by developers through system structures, and they are set by users through the use of the platforms. These agreements and expectations allow users to connect with each other in situations where pseudonymity and anonymity may keep them apart. These ground rules help users trust their connections are real. Without them, users may end up eternally disconnected from each other.

Inauthenticity in Cyberspace

One of the hardest parts about self-representation in cyberspace is balancing a kind of self-promotion and idealized self with the expectations of authenticity (Whitty, 2008). Whitty (2008), for example, found that slightly over half of their sample willingly admitted to some form of inauthentic self-representation in cyberspace (p. 1714-5). Another study by Toma, Hancock, and Ellison (2008) claims that "fully 81% of participants provided information in their online profile that deviated from at least one of their observed characteristics" (p. 1028). Toma, Hancock, and Ellison (2008) even found that most of the inaccuracies were likely intentional as the participants knew about them (p. 1029). Hancock and Toma (2009), when looking at user pictures in online dating profiles, found that forty-six of the fifty-four examined had some level of discrepancy regarding physical appearance between the picture and the actual person.

With the number of users including deceptive elements in their profiles, Baym (2015) is right to ask,

What if the selves enacted through digital media do not line up with those we present face-to-face, or if they contradict one another? If someone is nurturing face-to-face, aggressive in one online forum, and needy in another online forum, which is real? Is there such a thing as a true self anymore? Was there ever? (p. 11)

The heart of Baym's (2015) questions comes down to, "What happens when users do not represent themselves authentically online?" The problematic answer to that question is, "It depends." It depends on a platform's system structure and how the community's own choices in accepting or rejecting those system's structures impact how users approach inauthenticity. It depends on which aspect of PV is most in focus.

Statements that violate PV's Objective authenticity - such as claiming to be a lawyer on Reddit's r/Ask_Lawyers or r/LegalAdvice - often result in being banned from the platform. Statements that violate Intra- and Inter- personal authenticity, however, are often only result in accusations. For example, there are several subReddits such as r/thathappened and r/quityourbullshit that were created for the sole purpose of calling users out on their inauthenticity. Users create threads on those subReddits talking about how and when someone has posted something in cyberspace that is inauthentic. In most of those cases, the inauthenticity is something relatively harmless, such as a person gloating about something they have never done or claiming a picture that they did not take is theirs. Inauthenticity in cyberspace is not always harmless, though. Catfishing, for example, can result in significant harm.

Catfishing is all about identity deception (Donath, 2003). The basic idea is that a user creates a fictitious account, typically on a dating platform, and tries to convince another user the inauthentic self-representation is, in fact, authentic. The most prominent reasons for catfishing tend to fall into two categories: trolling and fear. Trolling is defined as "a repetitive, disruptive online deviant behavior by an individual towards other individuals and groups" (Fichman & Sanfilippo, 2016, p. 6) and is motivated by boredom, a desire for attention, or a desire for revenge (Shachaf & Hara, 2010, p. 357). Users who troll out of boredom or a desire for attention are often trying to fulfill some fantasy or escape their current situation through catfishing. In many cases, these trolls may be in a loving, committed relationship and see trolling as simply another form of entertainment (Phillips, 2015, p. 33). For revenge, the troll wants to hurt their target. They want to get back at them. One of the primary elements of this motivation is that the troll has a specific target. They want to catfish a particular person and often have a very specific outcome in mind (Shulman, 2014, p. 28).

The catfisher confronts authenticity from the moment they create their false profile. As they add in details that do not match their true self, they invoke the intrapersonal aspect. This aspect, however, is of the least concern to the troll. They are not creating the profile as a self-representation. Their goal is to be as intrapersonally inauthentic as possible. They want whomever they hook to believe they are an entirely different person. The same applies to the objective aspect. The troll will be as objectively inauthentic - often presenting as an entirely different gender - as they need to be to catch their prey.

When the catfisher sends the profile out into cyberspace for other users to interact with, they invoke the interpersonal aspect. The interpersonal aspect is of the greatest concern to the troll. In a way, the troll is trying to achieve interpersonal authenticity. They are actively trying to convince others to judge their profile as authentic according to whatever social norms they are trying to cite. For example, if a male troll is trying to present a female profile, they are trying to achieve interpersonal authenticity in the sense of being female. If a male troll is trying to present themselves as more attractive or in better shape, they are trying to be judged as authentic according to those social norms. Returning to Peterson's (cited in Williams 2006) understanding, if interpersonal authenticity is "a claim made by or for someone, thing or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others," it is possible for a troll to achieve authenticity (p. 177). It is possible for the troll creates such a convincing profile that others judge it to be authentic.

At the same time, it seems dubious to argue that anyone catfishing is authentic in any way. However, by including the sources of identity, claims to interpersonal authenticity gain a reference point from which to be judged. It then becomes not "is this profile something that can be judged as authentic" but "is this profile something that would be judged to be authentic when connected to the source of identity for those expectations of authenticity." In this way, the profile is judged in reference to the user and not in and of itself. After all, the profile only matters in so much as it is an authentic self-representation of the user who created it.

In cases where fear is the motivation, catfishers, instead of presenting their actual selves, present a kind of "possible self," one that represents how they wish they were or how they hope to be. They derive a possible self from seeing other people. They see those around themselves and those in popular media and decide how they *should* look or how they *should* be based on what those others value (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). The idealized self can include both characteristics the catfisher can never achieve, such as being taller, and characteristics that are possible to achieve, such as losing weight, gaining muscle, or participating in a certain activity more (Shulman, 2014). Once they have constructed their ideal self, they post it online (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

While fear catfishers may share some characteristics with trolls when it comes to interpersonal authenticity, the difference comes from the focus. With trolls, they want others to judge them as interpersonally authentic in whatever way they can. For the fear catfishers, they want others to judge them as interpersonally authentic *in a particular way*. They want others to judge them as authentic in whatever way "fixes" the part of themselves they believe to be unlovable. This focus on that part of themselves means authenticity shifts from interpersonal to intrapersonal. As a result, the fear catfisher can be inauthentic in three primary ways. First, those whose idealized self is taller or shorter, in a different career part, or the like are objectively inauthentic. These are characteristics that are not open to judgment. They are lies the catfisher feels they need to tell to be attractive and lovable. Second, they are being inauthentic in a Psychological Independence way. Feldman (2014) argues that Authenticity as

Psychological Independence means to think for one's self, to resist submitting to the judgment of others, and to resist problematic societal norms and expectations (p. 15). What Feldman (2014) argues for here is exactly what the fear catfisher is doing. They are letting what they believe others believe they should determine whether they are lovable. Finally, the fear catfisher is violating PV's Authenticity as Self-Belief. The fear catfisher does not believe they are their idealized self; they only self-represent as such because they *wish* they were their idealized self.

Complications do arise with fear catfishers when their fear motivates a change. Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) had one participant in their study who lost 44 pounds after starting online dating. She stated, "[Because] the first guy that hit on me, I checked my profile and I had lied a little bit about the pounds, so I thought I had better start losing some weight so that it would be more honest" (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 426). Here, the user realized that she had been inauthentic when she created her profile and decided to fix it. She set it as part of her personal life project to match what she claimed. She violated Authenticity as Self-Belief in that she did not believe she matched her profile and objective authenticity when she listed her weight incorrectly. However, she ends up accomplishing what she set out to do. She arrived at a point where she became authentic in both a Self-Belief and objective way.

Finally, some users unintentionally present an idealized self. For these users, they see themselves in what Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs (2006) call a "foggy mirror" (p. 428). The foggy mirror is the difference between how the user sees themselves and how others see them (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 428).

This difference or gap can come from self-deception, such as convincing themselves they are something they are not, or from a different semantical understanding of "textual self-descriptions," such as when two people have a different understanding of what athletic means (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006, p. 428). In both situations, the sharing of photos tends to clear up any "fog."

The first group of foggy mirror catfisher is in an interesting position in terms of intrapersonal authenticity. The foggy mirror catfisher believes their self-representation - based on their self-perception – is authentic. The honest belief means that, unlike the fear catfisher, the foggy mirror catfisher passes PV's Authenticity as Self-Belief. Where the foggy mirror catfisher fails, however, is where the fear catfisher succeeds. The fear catfisher knows that their self-representation is not accurate. They accept any "painful and often obscure truths about [themselves]" (Feldman, 2014, p. 16). As such, the fear catfisher passes Feldman's (2014) Authenticity as Self-Knowledge. The foggy mirror catfisher, on the other hand, fails Authenticity as Self-Knowledge because they have not faced up to those truths, which is why they can believe their self-representations are authentic.

For the second group, the foggy mirror catfisher runs into the same issue as Sara, where she believes she is outdoorsy but Katie does not. In this situation, interpersonal authenticity comes to the forefront. Here, the inauthenticity comes from a situation where they are completely disconnected from whatever subjective term they are enacting, such as the user claiming to be outdoorsy who only ever goes on picnics at well-manicured parks in the heart of downtown. For

that user, there is no subset of the group of outdoorsy people that would include them, resulting in their foggy mirror inauthenticity. The difficulty with this scenario is that, except in extreme cases, it can often be hard to tell if the user is a foggy mirror catfisher or if they possess a different definition of the subjective term. The only way to balance these situations is to refer back to what the societal norm is for that term and try to discover the acceptable deviation for it.

Conclusion

Authenticity is a foundational concept in everyday life, and it matters just as much in cyberspace. Users strive for it. They strive to craft authentic cyberspace identities, and they expect others to do the same. However, understanding authenticity in cyberspace is not simple. It requires understanding what it means to be authentic when crafting a cyberspace identity and when viewing others' self-representations. PV, the proposed view in this chapter, combines elements from both SCV and RV to do exactly that. By conceptualizing authenticity in a way to account for both sides of cyberspace interactions, it becomes easier to understand how, exactly, system structures and user paradigms establish what it means to be authentic in cyberspace.

Chapter 3 - On Personal Identity in Cyberspace

Introduction

Any discussion of cyberspace identity will inevitably end up as a discussion of personal identity. After all, a user creating an authentic self-representation in cyberspace is about creating a personal identity. With the conceptualization of the Cyberspace Gradient in Chapter One, this project presented a way for users to self-represent across all cyberspace platforms. For the gradient to work, however, it needed to be based on something that applies to all cyberspace platforms. Chapter two provided that base through a more robust conceptualization of authenticity. All conceptualizations of authenticity must refer to some "self" that can serve as the source of authenticity, and understanding that "self" means understanding personal identity.

The difficulty in understanding personal identity is that it is, as the name suggests, personal. Everyone has their own "strong intuitions" about what should serve as the foundation for the self, and each intuition has a theory to back it up (Perry, 2003, p. 7). For example, how Sara views herself and what is important to her, might not be how Katie views herself or what is important to her. In fact, their differing views on identity may be entirely disparate, making it difficult to discuss personal identity outside of the broadest descriptions.

Cyberspace platforms, as it turns out, are just as complex and diverse as intuitions when it comes to personal identity. No single theory works for every platform. Certain platforms demand users embrace one particular theory while rejecting another. Other platforms provide a selection of theories for users to

embrace. Regardless of which platform is the focus, understanding different theories of identity is paramount to understanding cyberspace identity.

While covering every identity theory might be interesting, that task is beyond the scope of this project. Rather than repeat work that others have already completed (e.g., Kind, 2015; Perry, 2003; Olson, 2015), this chapter will begin by discussing performative theory in relation to the crafted nature of cyberspace identity. From there, it will argue that performative, while serving as a strong "top-level" theory, falls short when approaching each platform's underlying theory of identity. With that in mind, the chapter will select a few other theories to serve as examples of how different theories apply to different platforms in different ways. Limiting the selection of theories provides the chance to examine how, exactly, the theories work on the chosen platforms.

Approaching the Theories

Before examining how different theories of personal identity interact with different cyberspace platforms, there are two specific elements worth spending the time to understand. The first element is the questions of identity. There are three primary questions of personal identity. Not every theory needs to answer all three questions; most theories will only answer one or two. The fact that a theory answers more questions than another theory does not make it inherently better. What makes a theory better or worse is how it performs in any particular context, whether it provides the information needed to understand user self-representation as it applies to the platform at hand. Theories should be approached with an understanding of what, exactly, is being asked of them, which

is where the three questions come in. Each question sets up a particular way to approach a personal identity situation and an understanding of how users and platforms work together to create cyberspace identity.

The first question is called the identity question (Vesey, 1974, p. 38) or the identification question (Kind, 2015, p. 3). Swinburne (1984) states,

The first [question] is: what are the logically necessary and sufficient conditions for a person P2 at a time t_2 being the same person as person P1 at an earlier time t_1 , or, loosely, what does it mean to say that P2 is the same person as P1? (p. 3)

In Kind's (2015) simpler terms, "What properties must a being have to count as a person?" (p. 3) Here, the heart of the question asks what it takes for a person to have an identity, to be a unique person.

The second question is called the persistence question (Olson, 2015), the unity question (Vesey, 1974, p. 38), or the reidentification question (Kind, 2015, p. 3). Swinburne (1984) states,

The second [question] is: what evidence of observation and experience can we have that a person P2 at t_2 is the same person as a person P1 at t_1 (and how are different pieces of evidence to be weighed against each other)? (p. 3)

Again, in Kind's (2015) simpler terms, "What makes a person the same person over time?" (p. 3) Here, the question asks, once a person has a unique identity, what it means for that person to persist through time as that same person, with that same unique identity.

The third question is Kind's (2015) own the characterization question (p. 3). This question asks, "What makes a person the person that she is?" (Kind, 2015, p. 3) Here, the question does not ask what makes a person different from everyone else, nor does it ask what makes a person the same person over time.

Instead, it asks, "What makes Sara Sara?" What gives Sara her personality, her strengths, her flaws, her *character*. Not just, "How is Sara different from Katie" - which is what the first question asks - but "Who is Sara, on a personal level?" This question helps broaden the scope of personal identity and keeps the theories from forgetting that personal identity is, after all, about the personal.

The second element is that of thought experiences. Thought experiments provide a great way to approach personal identity. Two thought experiments in particular - both updated versions of Williams' (2003) original body swap thought experiments - show the importance of understanding how to think about personal identity when approaching the different theories (Williams, 2003). In the first experiment, an evil scientist kidnaps Sara and Katie. The evil scientist then tells the two that he will torture one of them and give the other one million dollars. The complication in the scenario is that, before the torturing starts, the scientist will swap Sara's and Katie's bodies. Sara's mind will go into Katie's body, and Katie's mind will go into Sara's body. Before the evil scientist does the swap, however, he asks Sara which body she wants tortured and which she wants to receive the money. (Kind, 2015)

In the second, similar experiment, an evil scientist once again kidnaps Sara and threatens her with torture. Instead of swapping Sara's body with Katie's, however, the scientist plans to shoot Sara with the "deprogramator," which will "eliminate all [her] memories, all of [her] beliefs, all of [her] bad habits, even all of [her] good habits. It will completely erase [her] mind." (Kind, 2015, p. 77) After everything is erased, she will be given "an entirely new set of

memories, beliefs, and habits - some good and some bad" (Kind, 2015, p. 77).

Kind (2015) argues that this second thought experiment, while being a different situation than the first, has the same result: Sara loses her mental state but retains her body. What outcome should be chosen - who gets the money and who gets tortured; whether Sara loses her identity when hit with the deprogramator - helps expose preexisting biases and beliefs about personal identity.

The three questions and two thought experiences each have their own strengths and weaknesses. What makes them important is that they provide different ways to approach the different theories that encourage understanding and analysis. Theories need to be looked at and examined. They need to be understood. Different approaches are important because they provide different perspectives when performing that very examination.

Performative Theory and Crafted Identities

One of the differences between offline identity and cyberspace identity is the extent to which users control the crafted nature of cyberspace identity. With offline identity, a person has many elements within their control. They can choose how to dress, what hobbies to pursue, their personal values, and so on. However, there are certain elements they cannot control and boundaries that limit their offline identity. They cannot, for example, choose how tall they are or make sure others only see them at their best. Cyberspace identities, on the other hand, are often freed from these restrictions. In cyberspace, users have even more control over how they craft their cyberspace identities, which is why many

scholars (e.g., Cover, 2016; Shaw, 2014) focus on performative identity theory when discussing cyberspace identity.

Made famous in large part by Goffman (1959) and Butler (1991; 1993; 1997), performative theory, at the most basic level, argues identity comes from performing the self according to societal norms (Cover, 2016). For example, if a person wants to perform the identity of a doctor, they cite societal norms for doctors. They wear a lab coat. They carry a stethoscope. They work in a medical office or hospital treating patients. Through their actions, they perform societally recognizable behaviors associated with being a doctor.

Cover (2016) argues there are four "nodes" that explain how the theory functions (p 11). The first node rejects the idea of a central or absolute identity. In place of an absolute identity, performative theory argues for an identity constructed in individual contexts, such as an identity for work and an identity for play. The idea that a person constructs a single, coherent identity at all only exists because of the desire to find something to call the self. Rather than looking for the self that created the context, performative theory focuses on looking for the context and find the identity that results from it (Cover, 2016, p. 12).

The first node is the most obvious when discussing cyberspace identity. The crafted nature means users can perform the perfect identity for whatever context they are entering. On a dating platform, for example, Sara might decide to feature her athleticism. On a networking platform, she might want to feature her prowess as a lawyer. Each aspect is a different part of her self that she specifically chooses to perform off based on the platform's context.

The second node argues that identities are crafted and performed through citing things such as social and cultural "norms, categories, stereotypes, labels, and expressions" (Cover, 2016, p. 12). Those societal norms, categories, etc., in turn, dictate acceptable ways to express certain identities. One of the primary ways a masculine or feminine identity is performed, for example, is through clothing. A heteronormative masculine identity would never include a skirt, while a heteronormative feminine identity may. The difference between the two is dictated by societal norms and conventions.

The same idea of societal norms and clothing can be broadened past gender constructs and into cultural constructs. For example, if Sara wants to be seen as a sports fan - or as a fan of a particular sports team - she wears the logo and colors of that team. If she wants others to see her as a part of a specific subculture - the punks, hipsters, geeks, etc. - she dresses the way relevant others within those cultures dress. By performing in these different ways, Sara is *signaling* she is part of that culture, or, more precisely, the culture is part of her identity.

Signaling, in its most basic form, is transmitting an idea to another person (Gleick, 2011). Everything - from what a person wears to how they act to the words they choose when they speak - is signaling. Goffman (1959) begins his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, by stating that, any time a person enters the presence of another, they try to learn about that person (p. 1). A person's clothing, body language, hairstyle, and so on all work together to tell others about their socio-economic status, worldview, perception of self,

presentation of self, how they relate to others, and so on (Goffman, 1959, p. 1). For example, when a person dresses to match a certain subculture, they are *signaling* that information to everyone else and, therefore, performing an identity based on the societal norms others recognize.

Signaling happens on two levels: consciously and subconsciously (van Dijk, 2013; Cover, 2016). As mentioned, skirts are typically considered part of a feminine identity rather than a masculine identity. Nothing about skirts inherently makes them feminine. Rather, people are taught the type of identities skirts signal and subconsciously conform to those social constructs. Wearing a sports jersey, on the other hand, is conscious signaling. Sara actively goes out of her way to wear *that particular team's jersey*. She is consciously trying to let others know that she is a fan of *that particular team* and not a different one. Though the skirt and jersey examples here are fairly clear cut, the break between conscious and subconscious signaling may not always be as distinct.

The second node is particularly important when considering the crafted nature of cyberspace identities. In cyberspace, most connections (or decisions to connect) happening based on profiles rather than interactions. As a result, users must craft their cyberspace identities to *signal* to other users specific aspects of themselves. When Sara wants to be accepted as an authentic fan of her favorite team by other authentic fans, she crafts an identity that signals her membership in that community. She wears the jersey and quotes the stats. Each element signals the authentic fan identity she wants to perform.

The third node presents the idea that identities can be created, recreated, and altered depending on what situation a person finds themselves in (Cover, 2016, p. 12). Building off the first two nodes, the crafted nature of cyberspace identities means it makes sense to accept performative identity as capable of being changed as needed. An individual interviewed in *Gender and Sexual Identity: Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory* illustrates the third node well when they say,

[Gender] can also be situational...in certain situations I'll play a more masculine role, in certain situations I won't. With certain women I'll play a masculine role. Gender to me is a concept that suits the need of a particular time. When I'm talking on the phone about somebody, about fixing my car, I don't speak with a high voice, though I can. I speak with a masculine voice, because it gets me a better price. When I'm trying to go out and pick up a girl at a bar, I'll moderate my tone, just so it's not quite so confusing. It's situational. Gender is not a black and white construct. You can use it to your advantage. (Nagoshi, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2013, p. 99)

Here, the individual is talking about how they perform gendered identity and about how their fluid performance of gender changes based on the situation. In some, they want to be perceived as more masculine. In others, they want to be perceived as more feminine. In each situation, this individual performs their gendered identity differently.

The same idea of fluidity and changeability applies to performative identity on a cyberspace platform. Users perform whatever identity is appropriate, changing as they change from one platform to another. Sara, for example, performs differently on Tinder than on LinkedIn. The performance may not arise consciously - or at least not entirely consciously - in the sense of Sara thinking to herself, "I ought to behave differently on this platform." However, she continues to act appropriately in each situation. On Tinder, she may say things

and approach people in an entirely different way than on LinkedIn, reconfiguring her performance and identity to match the context. The change does not mean Sara is authentic on one platform but inauthentic on another; it means Sara is free to choose which aspect of her identity to show off at which time. For example, imagine Sara uses a wheelchair. As she crafts her cyberspace identity, she can choose how and if she wants to signal her wheelchair as part of her identity. She can look at the situation and determine if her wheelchair is a relevant part of her. For example, on a platform dedicated to wheelchair technology, she could choose to highlight it or move it into the background. On a platform dedicated to painting, she could choose to leave it out entirely. It is up to Sara to choose how she wants to handle different situations.

The final node claims that identity is performed within the confines of a "narrative of coherence over time" that is made up of an "array of identity categories... which include common axes of discrimination such as gender, ethnicity, ability, and age but might also be comprised of spurious experiences that are less easily categorizable and less well demarcated in an identity/difference dichotomy" (Cover, 2016, p. 12). The final node is focused on a person telling the world who they are by telling their story. How difficult it is to signal the story depends on how much of it falls across the common axes. Masculine and feminine genders, for example, are fairly easy to signal since they are common axes. Society knows and understands the norms for them, much the same way society knows and understands the norms for jock or geek and how those identities are signaling. Other identities, such as non-conforming/non-

binary gender identities, are harder to signal - and fall into the "less easily categorizable and less well demarcated" part - because society is learning what it means to signal those identities. When a person tries to tell the world about the part of their identity that falls into a less easily recognized category, they often have to explain their narrative. They have to be more vocal rather than letting their non-verbal signals tell others about their identity (Cover, 2016, p. 12).

The concept of common axes plays an important role in cyberspace identity. Imagine Sara wants to signal membership in a particular group. By focusing on the common axes of that group, Sara can craft a profile that signals her membership. For example, when Sara wants to signal she is an authentic fan of a specific sports team, she crafts an identity that conforms to the common axes of that team's community, such as wearing the team's jersey or painting her face the team's colors. Colors tend to be a primary focus in sports because they create a common axis that is easily recognized and reproduced. Even non-mainstream communities can embrace their individual common axes to improve membership signaling. The bisexual flag, for example, is much less well-known than the LGBT flag. With the crafted nature of cyberspace identities, users within the bisexual community can include the flag in their images, profiles, etc. as a form of shared common axes to signal their membership in that particular community.

When Hume (1911) said, "The mind is a kind of theatre," he may not have been referring to performative identity; but the sentiment applies all the same (p. 178). When a person performs their identity, they are performing for someone, be that another person or themselves. The performance, then, comes from the person

actively controlling how people see them by following the "script" set forth by the social norms involved in the current situation or scene (Goddard & Carey, 2017, p. 107). Each of Cover's (2016) nodes helps provide insight into how the performance works to construct performative's understanding of identity.

In cyberspace users can embrace all four of Cover's (2016) nodes when crafting their identity to an extreme not available offline. They can control the lighting, angle, and location. They can use filters and photoshop to alter their appearance, making sure they are only seen in the best possible ways. They can craft their perfect identity (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). When a user creates any cyberspace self-representation, what they are doing is intentionally choosing which aspects of themselves to feature. Every aspect they can change means that much more control over how they perform their identity.

System Structures and User Paradigms

Every platform, at least to some extent, works through aspect-featured performance. Users join the platform by creating a profile. That profile then serves as a crafted performance of whatever part(s) of the user's personal identity they find relevant to the platform's community. As such, performative theory works well as a "top-level" theory. That is, the theory does well at explaining the outcome of the cyberspace identity creation process: a user crafts a performance to show others.

The problem with focusing solely on the crafted nature of cyberspace identities, however, is that it ignores the complexity and diversity of cyberspace platforms. As mentioned in Chapter 2, each platform has its own set of system

structures and user established paradigms that limit cyberspace identity creation. With authenticity, these concepts function in an influential role, shifting authenticity one way or another. With identity, however, system structures and user paradigms play a much more foundational role.

System structures are particularly important when discussing cyberspace identity since they act as a platform's metaphorical laws of nature. Think of the law of gravity. The law of gravity cannot be violated, no matter how much someone wants to try. In the same way, if a platform requires a username to be unique, all posts to include a picture, or any other built-in requirement, users are bound to follow that requirement. There is no choice in the matter, the same as there is no choice in obeying the law of gravity.

The limitations set by system structures is why performative theory only works as a top-level identity theory in cyberspace. Performative theory is an incredibly flexible theory, opening a myriad of possible ways for users to express themselves and signal their personal identities. System structures remove much of that flexibility. A platform whose system structure sets up body theory as the underlying identity theory requires all users to perform their identity according to body theory, whether they want to or not. Most of the control that users gain from the crafted nature of cyberspace identities only exists within the limitations set up by the system structure. The ability to craft the perfect biography is only possible because the system structure creates a space to write a biography. The ability to craft the perfect profile picture is only possible because the system structure

creates a place to upload profile pictures. If the system structure removed those spaces, the user would lose that control.

User paradigms, on the other hand, act similar to the rules of a game. They are restrictions that each player (user) agrees to when they join the game (platform). As long as both players abide by the rules, the game continues. In chess, for example, both players agree that the rook always moves in a straight line and that the knight always moves in an L-shape. The big difference between rules of a game and laws of nature here is that rules can be broken. A player can physically move a rook diagonally or a knight in a straight line. As soon as the rules of the game are broken, however, the game ceases to be a chess game; and the other player has to choose how to respond. They can accuse the first player of cheating and stop the game, or they can accept the game has changed and continue playing the new game with the new set of rules.

When a user joins a cyberspace platform, they agree to the user paradigms in place. Sometimes, the user paradigms will be unspoken rules, and users will make mistakes and be taught the rules. Other times, the existing community will explicitly state what the user paradigms are in place, and users will know what is expected of them ahead of time.

As much control as users have over these rules, the user paradigms have to be implemented in a way that works within a platform's system structure. For example, on a picture focused platform, users may implement a user paradigm that accepts text as an appropriate way to self-represent. However, users can only include text if they post it *within a picture*, as that is what the system structure

demands. Anything outside of pictures is beyond the platform's affordances. In the same way, on a text-based platform, users can only include pictures by linking them through *text-based links*. The system structures, as the platform's laws, set these limitations.

Regardless of what platform a user chooses, the existence of system structures and user paradigms means they are not completely free when creating their cyberspace identities. Different platforms give different freedoms. Some demand users self-represent in very specific ways. Others provide a variety of options. No platform, however, gives users *carte blanche* in self-representation; the system structures and user paradigms always restrict cyberspace identity.

Tinder and Body Theory

Tinder contains all the hallmarks of a crafted identity platform. When a user creates a profile, they choose what type of identity they want to perform. If a user wants others to see them as outdoorsy, nerdy, or professional, they perform in such a way as to signal to other users that aspect of their identity. If they want to highlight a different aspect of their identity, they can shift their profile to signal the new aspect.

What makes Tinder particularly interesting, however, is that any signaling done has to happen *in a particular way*. While users may be free to craft whatever identity they want, they are not free to signal it in whatever way they want. Instead, users have to signal how Tinder's system structures make them. They have to signal their identity according to body theory.

At the most basic level, body theory claims a person's body is the source of their identity. As long as they maintain the same body, they maintain the same identity. Swinburne (1984) states,

The most natural theory of personal identity which readily occurs to people, is that personal identity is constituted by bodily identity. P2 is the same person as P1 if P2's body is the same body as P1's body. The person to whom you are talking now and call 'John' is the same person as the person to whom you were talking last week and then called 'John' if and only if he has the same body. (p. 3)

Bodily identity is arguably the most commonly used personal identity theory in everyday life (Noonan, 1989). Imagine Sara is walking through a park and spots a friend. She recognizes Katie because of her physical appearance, because of her body. Sara does not need to question Katie to find out if she really is her friend. Instead, Sara accepts Katie is her friend because Katie has the same body as her friend. In other words, "the material part in the human being is what makes the whole person distinctively individual" (Fitzpatrick, 2017, p. 80). The focus this everyday life type of physical recognition so common the law is built around it. Lineups at the police station and witness questioning such as "Is the culprit in the room?" come from the idea that identity comes from some bodily source (Kinghorn, 2005).

Tinder's embrace of body theory as its underlying identity theory stems from the platform's image first nature. Every system structure is designed around the idea that a user's picture is the best form of self-representation. As mentioned in chapter 2, when a user opens up Tinder, their potential match's image fills the screen. If they want to know more about their potential match before deciding how to swipe, they have to actively scroll down to the profile. By placing the

image upfront, and the biography hidden below, Tinder's system structure encourages a body theory understanding of identity.

Any signaling a user does focuses on their body in context. If they wish to signal an outdoorsy identity, they have to signal it by placing their body in relation to what it means to be outdoorsy. The user can take pictures of their body out in nature. They can wear the appropriate clothing: hiking clothes to show they enjoy hiking, a swimsuit to show they enjoy the beach, or snow gear to show they prefer cold environments. In the same way, if a user wants to show their interest in sports, they can do so by wearing their favorite team's jersey, taking pictures at a game, or playing themselves. Each element provides that necessary signal. The only catch is that, with body theory being Tinder's underlying identity theory, users must signal by placing their body within the context they want others to see.

Tinder's focus on the body is so complete that it includes what it calls "Smart Photos" (Seppala, 2016). The Smart Photos feature uses an algorithm to measure matches and actively organizes a person's photos to place the ones that receive the most swipes upfront (Seppala, 2016). The app does not do this in general, either. It measures individual user swiping patterns to make sure they see the pictures most likely to cause them to swipe right. For example, if Sara swipes more often on pictures that are in nature, profiles she sees will always place nature shots first. The Smart Photo feature does not just reorder the images on Sara's profile. It reorders other user's images and places the ones she is most likely to swipe on first.

A platform's community still has some control over self-representation through user established paradigms. These user paradigms can either accept or reject the system structure. In the case of Tinder, the user paradigm embraces the system structure's body theory focus. When testing the Smart Photos feature, for example, Tinder found the match rate increased by over ten percent (Seppala, 2016). Other ways users have embraced the body-focused nature of the platform is through behaviors such as linking to other imaged based platforms and transitioning the biography section from an authentic biographical self-representation to a space where jokes and pick-up lines result in more matches (David & Cambre, 2016).

As a result, Tinder works in much of the same way as Sara's recognition of Katie. When a user posts a picture, they are claiming, "this is who I am; this body is my identity." The profile picture serves as the digital version of the user's bodily identity. Other users then see the posted image - the statement about bodily identity - and choose whether to match based on that information. When users do not post a picture of themselves, it hides their body and, therefore, their identity (David and Cambre, 2016, p. 5).

As stringent as Tinder's system structures are, users gain some wiggle room through essential properties. The concept of essential properties came about as an answer to the problem of vagueness in the notion of same body. (Kind, 2015, p. 79) Imagine Sara buys a brand-new car. Every time she leaves her house, she recognizes the car as *her* car because its body is the same color, size, and shape as the car's body she knew the day before. For Sara, the car's bodily

continuity provides a foundation for its identity: it continually has the same body. Six months later, however, Sara performs some standard maintenance, including replacing the oil and a few filters. At that moment, she has to ask if the car has the same body or whether its body has changed. With the vagueness of the same body criteria, the answer may not be clear.

Essential properties solve the same body problem by conceptualizing how the car's body has changed. Essential properties is the idea that there exists within each identity "essential properties which constitute its form" (Swinburne, 1984, p. 6). In the case of the car, it is recognizable as *Sara's car* because it has the essential properties that make it her car. Until she replaces those essential properties, the car remains *her car*. In the same way, the idea of recognizing those essential properties as a basis for identity applies to people, as "[people] too are substances." (Swinburne, 1984, p. 6)

For Tinder, the ephemeral nature of the platform means users are not so much concerned with whether their match has the same body this week as last week or the same body as before their dental procedure so much as they are concerned whether their potential match has the same body at an offline meeting as they do in cyberspace (as their picture shows). Luckily, the concept of essential properties works with Tinder by giving users a way to answer the question, "Is my match the same person offline as in cyberspace?" The wiggle room comes from the fact that neither Tinder's system structures nor its user paradigms dictate what counts as essential properties beyond the vague notion of physical appearance.

Traditionally, the vagueness of essential properties is considered a fault, as it circles the issue back around to the vagueness of same body. Here, the vagueness becomes a benefit. Users can decide for themselves what they consider essential properties in terms of physical self-representation. If a face-to-face meeting does happen, both users are free to choose whether their match maintains those essential properties between their cyberspace and offline identity.

The scandal surrounding Sarah McDaniel illustrates the idea of being free to choose essential properties well. Sarah McDaniel is an American Model (Sarah McDaniel, 2019). Her rise to fame happened when *Playboy* selected her to be the cover girl for their rebranding as a non-nude non-photoshopped magazine (Chamary, 2016). *Playboy* chose her because she looked authentic. She looked like the "girl-next-door" everyone wanted to know. (Goldberg, 2019) She also has a very specific bodily characteristic that everyone latched onto: she has heterochromia. Sarah McDaniel has one brown eye and one blue eye, and the internet loved her for it. Her eyes become her essential property (Goldberg, 2019).

Problems arose for McDaniel when her dad posted released pictures from her childhood showing her with two brown eyes. He claimed her heterochromia was faked, and the internet responded by losing its collective mind (flower, 2016; pm_me-gratefulness, 2019). Fans denounced her. Rumors started going around that she went to India to have surgery performed on her eye to give herself the heterochromia iridum she claimed to be born with (poop_dawg, 2019). McDaniel had put forth a single characteristic that defined her bodily identity, and relevant

others accepted it as her essential property. She was the girl with heterochromia. When that essential property came into question, however, a rift formed between her and her fans. The possibility that her essential property was a lie meant her entire identity was a lie.

When users try to signal something in cyberspace, they have to narrow it down to what is important. When others receive that signal, they have to decide which properties are important. Each side chooses the essential properties and decides how much deviation from them is acceptable. McDaniel set up an essential property with no wiggle room: she either does or does not have heterochromia. Other users may find themselves in a situation with more wiggle room or with a match who does not focus on the same essential properties as them (e.g., a certain filter is used but not important). The vagueness in essential properties means each user is free to embrace them as they see fit, as long as they work within the confines of Tinder's body identity system structure and use paradigms.

Beyond Images of Instagram

While finding Tinder's underlying identity theory is fairly straight forward, not every platform is the same. Many will embrace multiple theories. On platforms without a single underlying theory, which theory takes center stage depends on what any particular user focuses on at any particular time. For example, Instagram, at first blush, seems like a very body theory oriented platform. Its primary form of communication is, after all, images. For fitness influencers and models, body theory may be the platform's underlying identity

theory. They make a living by showing different aspects of their body, so it makes sense for their cyberspace identities on Instagram to be primarily connected to their bodily identity.

For other Instagram users, however, a focus on body theory as the underlying theory that shapes their performances may not make sense. Travel influencers or foodies, for example, do not fit into a body theory conceptualization. Rather than being focused on their own bodies, these Instagram users are focused on *their experiences*. For these users, performing their cyberspace identity falls more in line with self as fiction, rather than with body identity.

Hume (1911) developed self as fiction as a rejection of absolutist notions of identity. He believes that any absolutist notion is inherently flawed in that it could not account for change (Noonan, 1989, p. 77). When a person grows and changes, absolutist notions have no way of incorporating those changes into the person's identity. Self as fiction solves the change problem by shifting away from the idea of essences and essential properties and towards the idea that the self is a fiction constructed to help make sense of the world (Thomas, 2007, p. 32). Accepting the self is a fiction made up to help make sense of the world does not mean rejecting the idea of a self, though. Rather, it simply means a non-inherent or non-essential property foundation for identity needs to be chosen, which is where experience comes in.

Self as fiction argues for experience as the foundation for identity because experiences are not inherent in a person. Experiences come from outside a

person, from their perceptions of the world around. More precisely, a person perceives the world around them, and their imagination takes the causal connections between those perceptions and stitches them together into something that person can make sense of (Vesey, 1974; Noonan, 1989, p. 78). Hume (1911) states, "We may observe that the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are linked together by the relation of cause and effect" (p. 247). Different experiences, different sets of perceptions, work together to "mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other" (Hume, 1911, p. 247). For self as fiction, a person's perceptions create causally related experiences within them that their imagination uses as the basis for creating an identity; or, as Thompson (2006) explains, "What we describe as the self in [Hume's] account is really a continuous series of perceptions and experiences that we bundle into a unity and describe as 'me.'" (p. 32)

Self as fiction works as the underlying identity theory for travel influencers and foodies because their cyberspace identity - the answer to Kind's (2015) characterization question - revolves around the experiences they share with their followers. Every image is meant to perform those experiences. When a foodie posts an image to Instagram that shows what they are about to eat, the image is not focused on them performing through body identity. The image is focused on them performing an experience.

While the foodie's or travel influencer's body may be necessary to the experience (eating and traveling both require a body), their body is neither the

focus of the performance nor of the picture. The experience - the food or location - is the focus of both. Simply placing their body in the context of the food, restaurant, or travel destination is not enough. The purpose of the picture is to show the followers what the experience was like, what the foodie or travel influencer perceived and how those perceptions impacted them. What matters - what the foodie or travel influencer is trying to share with their followers - is what it would be for the follower to have those same experiences.

The accepted practice of images not necessarily requiring the Instagrammer's body to be the central focus is what provides the user paradigm that supports self as fiction as an underlying identity theory. @SpoonForkBacon, for example, is an Instagram account dedicated to two food bloggers, Fisher and Park (Fisher & Park, n.d.; Lopez, 2015). The posts on the SpoonForkBacon Instagram page focus almost entirely on the food. Each picture shows the outcome of different recipes the two blog about and serves as a "feast for [the] eyes" (Lopez, 2015). Other users who follow the account do so for the framed food experience, not for the Instagramers themselves (at least, not directly). Without the profile picture and small blurb at the top of the Instagram page, it would be nearly impossible to know who was behind the Instagram page. The (experience of the) food is the entire focus, and it can be because the system structures and user paradigms provide the room to self-represent this way.

Even adding self as fiction to the list of underlying identity theories may not be enough to describe Instagram. Journalists on Instagram may be all about sharing their narrative identity. They construct their cyberspace identities on

Instagram by using pictures to tell stories about themselves and their experiences (Atkins, 2008; Bruner, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013). A mother may use Instagram to share her relational identity, constantly showing off her children and partner (Rodogno, 2012). As unlikely as it may at first seem, Instagram has incredibly flexible system structures and user paradigms that support a wide range of user self-representations; and understanding Instagram's flexibility in user self-representation requires understanding a variety of identity theories.

Conclusion

Cyberspace platforms are complicated. Each platform has its own system structures and user paradigms that determine how users on the platform must perform their identities. Not every platform will have the same set of options. Not every user will embrace the same choices. Each theory plays an important role in how users craft their cyberspace identities. By understanding the different theories, users gain a better understanding of what it means to have a cyberspace identity.

Cyberspace identity is complicated, and it is easy to over-simplify it by focusing on performative identity. After all, a user's first act on any platform is to craft an identity performance based on that platform's norms. They choose exactly how they want their profile to look and exactly what they want to signal about themselves to other users. However, every choice they make is restricted by the platform's system structures and user paradigms. It is these system structures and user paradigms that determine the underlying personal identity theory a platform embraces. Not every platform will have the same set of options,

and not every user will embrace the same choices. By understanding a range of different identity theories, users, developers, and everyone involved in cyberspace can better understand what it means to develop a cyberspace identity.

Chapter 4 - On the Authenticity of Cyberspace Experiences

Introduction

Imagine a user named Sara sits down to play *Transistor* (Supergiant Games, 2014). She loads it up and gets swept away in Red's story. As Sara goes through the game, she faces down the Camerata. She hears the voice of the man the *Transistor* killed, and she watches Red fall in love with him. To Sara, these are not the experiences of someone else; to her, they are all first-hand experiences. When Red cries, she cries. When Red dies, she dies. It does not matter that it is "just a game." For Sara, it is just as real, just as authentic, as any offline experience.

The previous chapters have established what it means to have a cyberspace identity, how that identity is based on authenticity, and how authenticity references different theories of personal identity. The next step is understanding user experience. After all, understanding how users establish an authentic cyberspace identity means understanding how they establish a connection to their cyberspace self-representation to have authentic experiences.

This chapter turns to the fields of phenomenology and narrative theory to help explain how cyberspace experiences can be so meaningful. Phenomenology is the movement to go "Back to the things themselves!" (Husserl 1950, p. 6) It is the view that the experience of something should be examined in and of itself, rather than focusing on how that experienced occurred in the first place. This chapter goes beyond using phenomenology as shorthand for signaling the affective nature of cyberspace and presents a variety of tools that can be used to

explain how, exactly, cyberspace achieves that affective nature. Narrative theory is focused on the idea that stories help people understand their own experiences (Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, & Warhol, 2012). By connecting phenomenology with narrative theory, it becomes possible to develop a structure for understanding how users experience cyberspace and how users make sense of those experiences as part of their lives.

Affective Cyberspace

The first step in understanding the authenticity of cyberspace experiences is to understand that cyberspace experiences have an affective aspect. After all, if an experience does not make a user feel something, it can never be viewed as authentic. A horror movie, for example, is not considered scary unless it induces fear in the viewer. The movie does not become an authentic *horror* movie if it is not scary. The same can be said of cyberspace experiences: they are authentic when they are impactful.

In their article, "What's Wrong With Virtual Trees?," de Kort, Meijnders, Sponselee, and Ijsselsteijn (2006) examine whether simulated nature - images and videos - could produce the same restorative effects as actual nature. They found that, by immersing subjects in the simulated environments, the subjects gain the benefits of renewing "diminished functional resources and capabilities," enhanced "ability to focus attention," reduced stress, and more "positive affective states" (p. 32). In other words, looking at simulations of nature results in a physiological response; images and videos have an affective quality. Building on this research, Valtchanov, Barton, and Ellard (2010) examine whether the same restorative

effects could be experienced from entirely computer-generated virtual reality simulations. They found that users experienced the same restorative effects when experiencing entirely computer-generated nature as when experiencing actual nature, despite the computer-generated nature being an "artistic interpretation" rather than a replication of a physical location (Valtchanov et al., p. 509). On top of these benefits, Valtchanov et al. (2010) found that it did not matter if users know the environment is a fictitious simulation; they have a positive affective experience nonetheless. Reynolds, Rodiek, Lininger, and Mcculley (2018) found that immersing subjects into virtual reality simulations of nature could be used to help reduce anxiety in people with dementia. In their pilot study, they found that "a virtual nature experience significantly reduced heart rate..., and while not statistically significant increased pleasure and decreased anxiety within only 10 minutes of exposure" (p. 188). Wiederhold and Bouchard (2014) found benefits in using virtual reality for treating a wide range of anxiety disorders, including aviophobia, arachnophobia, acrophobia, claustrophobia, PTSD, and social anxiety disorder. Breaking away from the restorative aspect, Lagos et al. (2011) found that virtual reality could help improve golf performance.

Not all cyberspace experiences are positive, however. Lin (2017), for example, studied feelings of fear in virtual reality horror games. For her research, subjects played the demo for *The Brookhaven Experiment* (Phosphor Games, 2016). Of the 145 subjects (53 male; 92 female) who participated, only one subject reported not being afraid while playing. Looking at subjects' overnight and next day fright, Lin (2017) found,

Only one or two people experienced nightmares or dreamed about the game. In addition, fewer than 5% of the participants experienced negative reactions, such as being too scared to sleep, constantly hearing zombie voices, or being afraid to walk alone at night. Fewer than 10% were afraid that someone would attack them from behind... The participants also indicated other reactions through open-ended options, such as the Tetris effect (seeing the game environment when closing one's eyes; Ackerman, 2016), feeling as if living inside the game, or relief and enjoyment after leaving the game ("So nice to actually be alive")." (p. 357)

Lin (2017) even found that three students reported being frightened the next day.

While the percentages may seem small, they do show that negative experiences can linger after the cyberspace experience ends.

More worryingly, experiences of virtual sexual harassment and sexual assault can be deeply impactful (Wolfendale, 2007). Belamire (2006) tells of her encounter with sexual assault in virtual reality in vivid detail,

Remember that little digression I told you about how the hundred foot drop looked so convincing? Yeah. Guess what. The virtual groping feels just as real. Of course, you're not physically being touched, just like you're not actually one hundred feet off the ground, but it's still scary as hell. My high from earlier plummeted. I went from the god who couldn't fall off a ledge to a powerless woman being chased by an avatar named BigBro442. (Belamire, 2016)

Here, Belamire (2016) describes how, even though she was "not physically being touched," it still felt as if she were. The affectation resulted in her feeling as if she were really being touched. She goes on to say,

What's worse is that it felt real, violating... The public virtual chasing and groping happened a full week ago and I'm still thinking about it... Now that the shock has mostly worn off, I'm faced instead with the residual questions about the unbridled misogyny that spawns from gaming anonymity. (Belamire, 2016)

Belamire's (2016) experience was real. She was sexually assaulted. What is worse, to use her wording, is that it did not go away when she left the game. A week later, she says, and the shock has only "mostly worn off." It is not

completely gone. This experience is not unique to Belamire (2016), either. Fox and Tang (2017) studied women's experiences with sexual harassment in online games. They found that "even after the game was over, women continued to think about the sexist comments, rape jokes and threats, and other sexually related comments that they received while playing with men." (Ohio State University, 2016)

Even after the game ends and the user leaves cyberspace, the affective aspects persist. The user continues to feel the impact of the experience. In the case of Belamire's (2016) experience - and any other person who has experienced similar harassment - the affective aspect is a terrible thing. However, in cases of treating anxiety, PTSD, and the restorative aspects, users can benefit from cyberspace experiences. Regardless of whether the focus is on the good or the bad, it is clear that the affective nature of cyberspace experiences can have a lasting impact on users.

Cyberspace Experiences

The first element to consider when examining cyberspace experiences is where they fall on the Cyberspace Gradient. As chapter one argues, the Cyberspace Gradient is the idea that users can choose how much to immerse themselves in cyberspace in the same way a beachgoer can choose how deep to immerse themselves in the ocean. They can go a little way into the water or enter entirely into a new undersea world. In the same way, users can choose how deep they want to immerse themselves in cyberspace, sliding down the gradient for a greater degree of immersion.

The Cyberspace Gradient is divided into two main categories: digital identity and virtual identity. Digital identity is when a user is simply transmitting their offline identity via digital means. Social media sites serve as good examples of platforms that embrace digital identity. On social media sites, the first thing a user does is create a profile. This profile is meant to be their cyberspace identity. More importantly, it is meant to be an authentic self-representation of their offline identity. It is supposed to let other users know who they are offline.

Virtual identity, on the other hand, is when a user steps away from their own offline identity and embraces the identity of their avatar. Video games are a good example of platforms that embrace virtual identity. In a video game, users assume the role of the protagonist. In *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), for example, users assume the role of Lara Croft. They run around as her, visiting different locations and experiencing a narrative about her. With virtual identity, they immerse themselves in *being* her. The acceptance of moving from user identity to avatar identity does, however, assume an agreement - either explicitly or implicitly - between users that it is acceptable to focus on the identity of the avatar rather than the identity of the user.

Cyberspace experiences can be thought of along the same lines as the delineation between digital and virtual identity. With digital-style experiences, it is easy to see how users have authentic experiences. Imagine Sara creates an account on a dating platform, adds a picture of herself, and tries to find matches. Rather than the positive experience she expected, Sara finds a negative one. Other users tell her she is ugly or that her pictures are awful. They tell her that

her hobbies - those listed in her profile - are dumb or worthless. While each of these comments is about her digital identity - the bits and pieces that make up her profile on the dating platform - they are still necessarily about *her*. They are about how *she* looks and about what matters to *her*. There is no distance between her and her cyberspace dating profile because her digital identity has a clear one-to-one connection with who she is offline.

Virtual identity, however, does not have the same connection to offline identity. Instead, virtual identity provides a distance between Sara and, say, her Miqu'te Dancer Kithra Morningdew. Kithra, after all, is not an authentic self-representation of who Sara is offline; nor is Kithra meant to be that one-to-one reflection. Here, the distance makes it harder to explain why Sara feels users who tell her that Kithra is ugly are doing more than telling her she has bad taste, that they are telling her *she* is ugly. The distance also makes it harder to explain why Belimare felt as if she was really, actually, physically groped when the user BigBro442 sexually assaulted her in the virtual reality game.

The other difficulty with experiences like Belimare's is that, while virtual identity platforms include the ideas of immersion and presence, users do not necessarily have to partake in those concepts. Users can play a game without ever immersing themselves in the game's world or avatar's identity. They do not have to participate in any "willing suspension of disbelief" (MacCallum-Stewart & Parslery, 2008 p. 226) or entering into the magic circle (Calleja, 2015). They do not have to be part of the virtual experience. What matters as far as the creation of authentic experiences, though, is that these possibilities *exist*. Users *can*

immerse themselves in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013). They *can* feel present within the game's world. They *can* connect with Lara's identity. The possibility of that shift to the avatar's identity is what makes Belamire's (2016) experience so important, and so tragic. She was part of that virtual experience, and it left its mark.

Epoché and Attending

For users who do choose to step onto the Cyberspace Gradient, phenomenology supplies several tools that help explain how they immerse themselves in their cyberspace experiences. The first two are epoché and attending. Epoché is the setting aside of metaphysical discussions about the existence of the world around. Imagine Sara is sitting at a desk. For Sara, it does not matter if she is a brain in a vat being manipulated into experiencing a world that does not exist. She will still have the experience of the desk, the keyboard, and the "world" around her. If she falls out of her chair, she will still feel the pain. Epoché focuses on the experience of all these different things rather than on questions of whether they exist. As Gallagher and Zahavi (2012) point out,

The purpose of the epoché is not to doubt, neglect, abandon, or exclude reality from consideration; rather the aim is to suspend or neutralize a certain dogmatic attitude towards reality, thereby allowing us to focus more narrowly and directly on reality just as it is given - how it makes its appearance to us an experience. (p. 25)

The metaphysical question of whether reality exists does not matter to Sara. She experiences it all the same, and those experiences are what matter. By embracing the epoché, users have a way to take seriously "cyberspace experiences" without having to argue whether those experiences actually happen. As Husserl (1970)

declares, "the world just as it essentially, always, obviously exists for us." (p. 154). Epoché provides users a starting point in understanding their cyberspace experience and a way to sit down at their computers and set aside questions of whether what they are about to experience is real.

Accepting that her cyberspace experiences are authentic, Sara next decides what she will attend to. Attending is the phenomenological concept that demonstrates how perceptions are focused. Sara sits at her computer, logs on to a role playing game (RPG), and decides she will attend to the character she created. By choosing to focus her character's virtual experiences, she begins to push the offline realm away. Prinzmetal, Nwachuku, Bodanski, Blumenfeld, and Shimizu (1997) state, "Thus, attending to an object will increase the contrast of that object with the background." (p. 373) For Sara, the background is everything she is not immediately attending to but may still be influenced by; it is in the "nearby" but not necessarily the "immediate." The action of reading a book illustrates attending and background well. When Sara is reading a book, she is not attending, specifically, to the words on the pages. Instead, she is attending to what those words signal, to what is happening within the narrative of the book (Gee, 2014, p. 38). All the physicality of the book falls away. In the same way, she is not attending to the chair she is sitting in or the room that chair is situated inside. She is *immersed* in the story within the pages. With Sara's choice to attend to the character she created, things such as her desk, her chair, and her computer move into the background.

How much a user attends to their cyberspace experience depends on whether the user is having a digital or a virtual cyberspace experience. With digital experiences, they are still attending - at least to some extent - to the offline world in that they are attending to the offline object the digital artifact is representing. If the artifact is a picture of their friend, they are attending to that friend's offline identity. If the artifact is a funny cat video, they are attending to that cat's offline existence. With the virtual, the point is to break the connection to the offline entirely. The goal is to attend solely - or at least as much as possible - to the virtual experience. If the user is playing *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), they are attending to Lara and Lara's story. With no connection to the offline - Lara having no offline existence - the user can attend more completely to the virtual experience.

Epoché and attending are important concepts as they lay the foundation for a strong separation between what a user is experiencing in cyberspace and what they are interacting with as they sit before their computer, phone, etc. Epoché establishes how they accept cyberspace experiences as real, setting aside all metaphysical skepticism. Attending extends epoché to show how they can focus completely on those cyberspace experiences. When the user sits down, they do not have to ask if the experience is real; nor do they have to attend to the desk or the chair. Through epoché and attending, they can focus on the cyberspace experience itself. With a digital experience, they may be thinking about something offline, but only in so much as the digital represents the offline. With a virtual experience, they attend solely to what is happening in that virtual realm.

Bracketing

After the user decides what to attend to, their next step is separating themselves from everything they pushed into the background. To do this, they have to “bracket off” the background. Traditionally, bracketing is part of *epoché* and is the act of placing “brackets” around the metaphysical questions and setting them aside to focus on the experience at hand (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012).

However, Bracketing is being used in a non-traditional way here, one that expands the concept to better function within the realm of cyberspace. Instead of simply setting aside questions about the existence of something (e.g., the desk the computer sits on), the user brackets off any part of their offline experiences, such as their personal history or anything else they choose not to attend to.

Bracketing, while similar to signaling, goes one step further. Signaling focuses on letting others know about certain parts of one's cyberspace identity. Bracketing, however, is about changing how one experiences cyberspace themselves. By bracketing off everything in the background, users are able to focus on their experience within cyberspace without influence from the offline. Once again, imagine Sara uses a wheelchair. The wheelchair impacts much of her day to day life, everything from which entrance of a building she can use to where she can sit in a movie theater. Others may see her as “the girl in the wheelchair,” whether she wants them to or not. Offline, Sara cannot bracket off the wheelchair. When she moves into cyberspace, however, she can. She can choose, not only whether she wants to signal the wheelchair to other users, but whether the wheelchair plays a prominent role in her cyberspace experiences. She can choose to exist entirely on a cyberspace platform without anyone ever

knowing she is in a wheelchair. She could bracket it off, keeping it from impacting her cyberspace experiences. Sara could also choose to bring in her wheelchair and make it part of those experiences. She could join forums about the latest wheelchair racing technology and support groups where she mentors those beginning their wheelchair journey. In cyberspace, Sara is free to choose how to interact with her background elements.

While bracketing gives users a choice in what to bring into their cyberspace experiences, the degree to which they are free to choose what is or is not bracketed is determined by what type of cyberspace experiences they participate in. If the user chooses to participate in digital experiences, they are limited to choices based on how they *represent* themselves as they transmit their offline identity via digital means. In this way, they are not bracketing their offline experiences entirely. Cover (2016) remarks, "By its very name, Facebook points to the interface between the corporeal and the digital..." (p. 1) The user still has some connection to the offline realm, and what is included in that connection is determined by the immediacy of that part of their offline experiences to the digital experience at hand. For example, if Sara is posting pictures to a photo-sharing site, she may be attending to things such as the lighting and what she is wearing. The other parts of her life, such as the 1970 Chevelle in her garage, are "not being attended to." As far as her dating profile and photo site are concerned, the Chevelle does not exist, at least not until she mentions it in a post or uploads a picture of it. Digitally, the car is bracketed off from that experience.

The extent to which a user can bracket their offline experience is tied directly to expectations of authenticity. For Sara to be considered "authentic," she must only bracket off what is not important at that moment. She cannot bracket something important to hide or replace it. For example, when Sara posts her profile picture, other users expect it to reflect her offline identity. They expect Sara to post a picture of herself, not to bracket off her physical body and post a picture of Emma Stone (Wang et al., 2010). After all, users expect to friend the person the digital experience reflects, not the digital identity itself (Back et al. 2010; Bessièrè, Kiesler, Kraut, & Boneva, 2008). That being said, Sara does have the freedom (as long as it does not violate any expectation of authenticity) to choose what to bracket, such as her knitting when she visits gearhead forums or her car when she visits knitting forums (Shafie, Nayan, & Osman, 2012).

As users move down the Cyberspace Gradient towards virtual experiences, they gain more freedom in what they can bracket off. With digital experiences, users necessarily attend to parts of their offline identities. When Sara posts a picture of her car, she attends to her car. When she fills out her dating profile, she attends to those aspects of her offline self. With virtual experiences, Sara is not limited to transmitting her offline identity or via digital means. Instead, virtual experiences give Sara the freedom to bracket off all her offline experiences. For example, she can immerse herself entirely in Lara Croft's experiences. She can bracket off all that is "Sara" and attend only to what is "Lara." As MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2008) state, "Immersion involves a loss of self by the player,

who then 'becomes' their character" (p. 228). In this way, Sara almost ceases to be Sara.

Sara's ability to become so deeply immersed that she ceases to be Sara and becomes Lara Croft relies on a form of "suspension of belief" similar to the concept of bracketing as it is used here. In the same way that scholars suspend their current beliefs to examine others, a user can suspend their belief that the world exists and bracket it off to delve entirely into a virtual world. King and Kryzwinska (2006) observe, "Players are generally very happy, and willing, to 'suspend disbelief,' however, to allow themselves to be taken in by the illusion that the worlds in which they play are more than just entirely arbitrary constructs" (p. 119). Many users want to immerse themselves fully in the virtual world, and bracketing gives them the ability to do so.

Bracketing, in its expanded form, is not perfect. One problem is that this type of bracketing does not come naturally. For a user to bracket off everything unnecessary, they must be completely comfortable with the medium they are using. For example, Sara must be comfortable enough with her keyboard, mouse, and monitor to bracket them off; and, with time, she can accomplish this. Just as Sara has become so used to talking that she does not have to think about forming words, she can become so used to using a keyboard that she can type without thinking. If she is not comfortable, however, she must attend to the keyboard, thinking about the location of the next key she wants to press. Having to attend to the keyboard prevents Sara from bracketing the offline experience of the

keyboard. While not as important to the digital aspect, bracketing the medium in use is necessary to achieve full immersion in a virtual world.

The second problem with expanded bracketing is that it may not be possible to bracket the offline world entirely and achieve complete immersion. Jurgenson (2012) suggests, "the online and offline are not separate spheres and thus are not zero-sum" (p. 85). Calleja (2015) echoes this idea when he points out how scholars such as Taylor (2006), Malaby (2007), Copier (2007), and Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) reject the idea of a magic circle as a distinction between play and non-play. Rather, as Pargman and Jakobsson (2008) state, "Reality is messier" (p. 227). Calleja (2015) goes on to argue, "Any attempt to create a clean demarcation between the game experience and the experience of the world (supposedly) external to it will find it difficult to explain how the players' personal and social histories can be excluded from the game activity." (p. 215)

While it may be true that certain aspects of the offline will necessarily enter into a user's virtual experiences, the inclusion does not take away from the benefits of bracketing. Language, for example, must bleed through. People need language – from words to body language - to communicate. Other elements such as gender roles (Walkerdine, 2007; Sundén & Sveningsson, 2012) and how users participate in cyberspace communities (Voohees, Call, & Whitlock, 2012) may also be influenced by beliefs that come from offline experiences. If Full Dive Virtual Reality⁴ is ever achieved, users will still need to log off to feed their very physical bodies. As MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2008) assert,

⁴ Full Dive Virtual Reality is theoretical technology that includes connecting Sara's every sense to a virtual world such that she interacts with it in the same way she interacts with the offline world.

Frequently ignored is the fact that role-playing is very rarely accompanied by [full] immersion, but is instead a creative attempt to get as close to this as possible. Being totally in character is to a role-player something of a Holy Grail, but it is rarely achieved. Indeed, it is more likely to be reconstructed retrospectively through role-played anecdote. (p. 228)

The potential inability to completely bracket the offline world is only problematic in that it may prevent users from ever being able to be completely immersed in the virtual. Even if users can never achieve the “Holy Grail” of full immersion, bracketing serves as an important tool for choosing what they want to attend to and what they want to bring with them as they enter cyberspace.

Duration Blocks

Duration-Blocks are a phenomenological tool used to describe how consciousness persists through time (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). They help connect the immediate past to the present to the immediate future through retention, primal focus, and protention. Duration blocks must be relied upon to maintain consciousness through time because memory cannot. Remembering is an active process that requires actively think about the past to recall it. If the temporal persistence of consciousness relied on memory, people would constantly have to be remembering the moment before the moment they are in to understand how the past moment relates to the present. Duration-blocks, because they do not incorporate memory, are freed from the problem of relying on any active process that could prevent someone from attending to the present.

With this technology, the famous “Brain in a Vat” thought experiment could be changed to “Brain in Full Dive VR” and have the same implications.]

Listening to music illustrates the concept of duration blocks (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). Imagine Sara sits down at her computer and turns on her favorite song. If memory maintained consciousness through time, she could only hear the immediate note being played. Every past note would have to be actively recalled through memory, preventing Sara from experiencing the song as a whole.

Duration-blocks enable Sara to experience the song as a whole. James (1950) explains,

In short, the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were – a rearward – and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this duration-block that the relation of succession of one end to the other is perceived. We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it. (p. 609–10)

The moment the song starts, Sara experiences the first note; and it enters her duration-block. Every successive note continues to fill up the duration-block. When she gets to the end of the song, she can experience the whole song because all the notes are part of the same duration-block, which is why Sara can make comments such as "that song moved me" while being able to point out particularly meaningful moments.

To explain Sara's experience of a song, Husserl, as Gallagher and Zahavi (2012) put it, "employs three technical terms to describe this temporal structure of consciousness" (p. 85). These three technical terms are primal impression, retention, and protention. Primal impression is the "knife-edge" James (1950) talks about. It is this very moment, this instance, as fine a "slice" of time as Sara

can come up with. Primal impression is what allows Sara to experience *this particular note* of the song that is being played *right now*. Retention is what connects those "just elapsed" slices to the present. It is, as Gallagher and Zahavi (2012) state, the "past-directed temporal context" that Sara keeps within her duration-block. Retention, though it may sound similar to short-term memory, is part of Sara's "temporal structure of consciousness," which is separate from memory (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 85). Protention is the "future-oriented temporal context for the primal impression" and can be understood as, more or less, "expectations" or "anticipation" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 85).

Gallagher and Zahavi (2012) claim,

It is protention which allows for the experience of surprise. If I am listening to a favourite melody and someone hits the wrong note, I am surprised or disappointed. If someone fails to complete a sentence, I experience a sense of incompleteness, in part because consciousness involves an anticipation of what the imminent course of experience will provide, and in these cases, what actually happens fails to match my anticipation. The content of protention, however, is not always completely determinate, and may approach the most general sense of 'something has to happen next.' (p. 85)

Protention sets Sara up for what is happening next. She comes to expect or anticipate a certain outcome. She expects sentences to be complete thoughts and jokes to have punchlines.

Cyberspace experiences differ from listening to music in that cyberspace experiences are often temporally fragmented experiences. Songs run from start to finish. Sara sits down, turns on a song, and listens to that song. If she steps away from the computer and returns later, she will often restart the song. Songs are not designed to be broken up into disparate chunks but carry their impact from being experienced as a singular whole. The very nature of cyberspace experiences, on

the other hand, lends itself to being broken up into chunks. When a user sits down to continue playing *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), the game resumes from the exact moment the user left. Lara Croft was not deleted, nor has she returned home in the user's absence. For Lara, her existence was "suspended." When the user resumes the game, Lara's existence resumes; and, from her perspective, no time has passed.

One potential problem with the temporally fragmented nature of cyberspace experiences is that a user's return means they need to start a new duration-block for Lara's actions, despite Lara experiencing those actions as part of a singular duration-block. To answer this problem, consider a tennis match. In a tennis match, every serve and volley is its own instance and can be thought of as consisting of its own duration-block. One player serves. The other returns the volley. They do this until one scores a point. The match is then reset, and the players seamlessly move into a new duration-block. The constant change in duration-blocks does not mean the tennis match is constantly changing. Instead, the duration-blocks are grouped to make up the singular match. The user's duration-block experience as Lara Croft functions the same way. Each moment in the game can be part of a different duration-block. Maybe in this moment, Lara is fighting off a pack of wolves. Maybe in the next, she is helping an old lady find her frying pan. The change in the duration-blocks does not change the game. The only difference between the game and the tennis match is that the duration-blocks are separated by time instead of occurring one right after the other.

The notion of epochs can help users group these disparate duration-blocks. Epochs, broadly speaking, are any period of time where some specific or memorable event has happened. Epochs are useful here because they are not tied to specific dates but, instead, are tied to specific features and experiences. Sara's childhood, for example, could be considered an epoch in her life. Specifically, her childhood is an epoch that does not necessarily carry exact dates; she could not point to a calendar and claim that her childhood ended on February 12th.

While epochs encapsulate too much time to be the exact same as duration-blocks - Sara could not keep her entire childhood in her mind through primal impression, retention, and protention - the two concepts do share the function of framing distinct periods of time. By applying the concept of epochs, users can frame their cyberspace experiences as parts of distinct periods of time, building a continuous experience regardless of temporal fragmentation. That is, when a user resumes their game, they can be said to be continuing their "Lara Croft" epoch. From an offline perspective, the user's adventures may have occurred during two separate periods of time, but those experiences are bracketing off that perspective. The user is not returning to the game. Rather, they never left. When they load up the game, they continue the story as if they never stopped. The game world, this virtual experience, was at an absolute temporal stand-still while they were away.

User experience is tied into duration-blocks. Whether the connection means the experience is tied into each individual duration-block or into all the duration-blocks that make up an epoch is unimportant. For both positions, the

result is the same: the user has all the same experiences. By bracketing off the offline realm and arranging all the duration-blocks into a single epoch, users are giving their cyberspace experiences a unified and continuous structure.

Narrative Theory

With the duration-blocks grouped within epochs, the next step is to connect them using narrative theory. Narrative theory is the idea that a person's life is their narrative; and "a narrative is, most simply put, a story" (Leavy, 2015, 41). While epochs delineate a period of time where a significant event happened, marking the period's beginning and end, a narrative turns that period of time into a story. Narrative theory argues that adding a story to a person's life helps them better make sense of their experiences.

The similarities between narrative theory and epochs are important because they add a synergy between the two. Epochs lay the foundation for understanding temporal delineation; narrative theory builds upon that understanding to create distinct chapters or stories. "Narrative," Ryan (2004) claims, "is thus a mental representation of causally connected states and events that captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members" (p. 337). By defining an epoch, users set the beginning and end of a chapter in their story. Phelan and Rabinowitz (2012) state, "As rhetorical narrative theorists... our default starting point is the following skeletal definition: *Narrative is somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purpose, that something happened to someone or something*" (p. 3, original emphasis). Epochs declare that this period of time – this collection of duration-blocks - is about this

“something.” Narrative theory goes on to say how each of those duration-blocks within that periods of time are connected to tell that “something’s” story. Being able to tell their story gives users the chance to tell both the epochal facts and the importance behind those facts. “The focus on narrative as *multileveled communication* means that we are interested not simply in the meaning of narrative but also in the experience of it” (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2012, p. 3). By using both epochs and narrative theory, users can combine their temporally fragmented duration-blocks into a single meaningful experience.

One way narrative theory builds meaning is by helping users construct their identities. McAdams and Mclean (2013) define narrative identity as “a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (p. 233). In other words, “our narrative identities are the stories we live by” (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006, p. 4). Being able to construct an identity is important. Cooper (2011) claims that it helps users find their place in the world, “Narrative is, as [Bruner] says, 'crucial to constructing our lives and a ‘place’ for ourselves in the possible world we encounter”” (p. 224, quoting Bruner, 1995). Cooper (2011) continues, “Understanding the self as an ongoing story accounts for what Flax (1990) calls 'the sense of continuity or going on being”” (p. 224). Adding a story to their duration-blocks not only gives meaning to those duration-blocks, but it also helps users develop their own identity by developing their own stories.

A user's story is not going to be the same as a story found in a book, however. A story found in a book has a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Stories in books have particular plots, with endpoints that do not necessarily match the end of the main character's life. Users' stories do not necessarily have those, nor do they necessarily need them. As Cooper (2011) remarks, "Becoming a self, like creating a history, is a narrative process that continually integrates past, present, and future but not teleologically: There is no final goal for nor a final form of the self" (p. 223). With or without a definitive plot structure, a user's narrative is still a story. Their narrative still helps them understand the world around themselves, their experiences in that world, and how they relate to it (Singer, 2004 p. 438).

The relationship between narrative theory and phenomenology goes beyond narrative theory's ability to supplementing epoch as a way to connect grouped duration-blocks and help users build meaningful stories. Within narrative theory is what Margolin (1999) proposes as the "Tense-Aspect-Modality" construct of temporality, which can be broken down into three parts. "*Retrospective narration* [is] when a narrated course of events is textually presented anterior, as having been completed prior to the moment of viewing" (Margolin, 1999, p. 146-7). "*Concurrent narration*" is when a narrated course of events occurs as the reader is reading about them (Margolin, 1999, p. 150). "*Prospective narration*... is a narrative of that which has not yet occurred at speech time: a prediction, prognosis, scenario, projection, conjecture, wish, plan,

and the like" (Margolin, 1999, p. 153). Like duration-blocks, "Tense-Aspect-Modality" focuses on how users interact with temporality.

Phenomenology also shares a relationship with narrative theory by supporting narrative identity theory. Phenomenology includes the belief that, for a user to be conscious, they must have some form of a "consciousness of a self" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 54). This consciousness goes beyond simply being able to "self-ascribe experiences on an individual basis" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 54). "Genuine self-consciousness requires that the creature is capable of being conscious of its own identity as the subject, bearer, or owner of different experiences" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 54). Some narrative theorists go so far as to suggest "self-consciousness is tied to our ability to develop self-narratives, to tell stories about ourselves, and to make sense out of our own life in a narrative way" (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012, p. 55). In cyberspace, a user must be able to declare, "I had this experience!" after the experience has passed for it to be part of their story; and, by claiming ownership of past experiences, they establish plot points for that very story and begin building their narrative identity.

Thinking about experiences - and the duration blocks that build those experiences - as plot points is important because plot points are not always temporally connected. As Sara narrates her life, she rarely includes her bathroom breaks as plot points. Instead, she focuses on major events, ones that leave an impression. For example, the epoch of her high school career and the story that results from that epoch will likely be made up of temporally disjointed events. Sara talks about the plot point in her story where she wins the high school Tennis

championship, followed by the plot point where she graduates two years later and has to leave her friends behind as she goes off to college. The fact that the Tennis match plot point and the graduation plot point occur two years apart does not change the fact that the plot points are narratively sequential. Embracing the inclusion of temporally disjointed plot points in the narrative of her life gives Sara the ability to leave out the mundane details, only "stitching together" the important parts.

Viewing narrative as a story users stitch together from various plot points fits with Ryan's (1999) narrative theory approach, "Another approach, better suited to deal with various media, consists of viewing narrativity as a cognitive frame into which readers process texts, authors shape materials, and the human mind categorizes experiential data" (p. 117). The use of the term "categorizes" is telling. Categorizing does not imply time or connection but implies taking disparate artifacts and placing them in a particular order, one that accomplishes the goal of the categorizer. Sara is taking her plot points and categorizing them, placing them next to each other, and choosing which she wants to include in her story.

A problem does arise when narrative theory is used as the basis for connecting her duration-blocks, though. When users participate in cyberspace experiences, they are writing a narrative; and "a narrative is *about something*" (Labov, 2006, p. 38, original emphasis). The problem is that it is not always clear who the narrative is about. With most digital experiences, the narrative is focused on the user. When they log on to a social media platform, they are posting and

uploading material about themselves. They are in control and can choose how to self-represent through their digital identity. With many virtual experiences, however, the narrative is different. For example, a game Sara is playing contains a narrative about the protagonist, not about her. The game wants to immerse Sara; but it wants to do this by having her embody the character, not by having her bring her own digital identity into the game.

As a cyberspace process, embodiment can be accomplished because of the phenomenological difference between the "lived body" and the "biological body." The biological body is easily intuited as the physical body. The lived body is what allows one to live, not in the biological sense, but in the experiential sense. When the user embodies the character, they shift from their "biological body" to the "lived body" of the character. Having to interface with this new "lived body" through a keyboard or controller does not prevent this embodiment, either. Gallagher and Zahavi (2012) explain, "It is also possible to extend the capacities of the lived body by means of artificial extensions. Or to put it differently and perhaps even more strikingly, the lived body extends beyond the limits of the biological body" (p. 158). Once again, imagine Sara in her wheelchair. She is comfortable with her wheelchair but is given the opportunity to try robotic prosthetics. The prosthetics are top-of-the-line and include haptic feedback, allowing Sara to feel the texture of the carpet she is walking on. Sara becomes so comfortable with the prosthetics that she goes down to the local park to play in a pick-up soccer game. When the prosthetic limb connects with the ball and drives it into the goal, she feels it. She directs the force through the haptic feedback in

her prosthetic legs. At the sight of the goal, Sara's teammates do not cheer the prosthetics; they cheer Sara. In all experiential ways, she scored the goal; and, just as her teammates do not have to think about every move they make with they run and kick the ball, Sara no longer has to think about every move she makes when she runs and scores goals. She has mastered the prosthetics so much so that they have become an extension of her body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 143). With enough mastery of the keyboard or controller, those can become extensions of Sara's body; and that mastering the interface can help Sara achieve a deeper level of immersion within the game.

When users embody their character, they establish an empathetic bond with that character. Through that bond, they share the character's experiences and be part of the character's story (Waggoner, 2009, p. 42). By sharing the story, it no longer matters whether the story is directly about the users. They have embodied the character and, for all experiential purposes, become the character. Their offline selves are bracketed off, and empathy pulls them in. When they become their character, they inherit those character's duration-blocks; and those duration-blocks, like the story, do not have the temporal breaks of the users' offline selves.

Finally, focusing on narration brings a deeper understanding to cyberspace experiences. Josselson (2006) states, "As the narrative research agenda has taken hold, we find ourselves with an array of fascinating, richly-detailed expositions of life as lived, well-interpreted studies full of nuance and insight that befit the complexity of human lives" (p. 4). Leavy (2015), paraphrasing Josselson,

continues, "Narrative researchers attempt to avoid the objectification of research participants and aim to preserve the complexity of human experience" (p. 42).

While both Leavy (2015) and Josselson (2006) focus on narrative-based research, the sentiment applies to narrative theory in general: by shifting the focus to a narrative understanding of the experience, users better understand how the experience, broken up into duration-blocks or not, impacts them. Leavy (2015) explains,

Fiction can, ironically, expose that which "factual representation" conceals by its very implication. In this regard fiction-based research, similarly to narrative inquiry, is about *truthfulness* more than "truth." Fiction needs to ring true, and when it does it can come closer to truthfulness than mere "facts" may. As Iser suggests, the act of fictionalizing can make "conceivable what would otherwise remain hidden" (1997, p. 4). Moreover, fiction opens up a multiplicity of meanings and allows readers to bring their own experiences and interpretations to the work. (p. 58)

When users add a narrative to their duration-block epochs, they add a story; and stories can teach them about life. Stories contain lessons about love, loss, triumphs, morals, and everything else. By turning their experiences into a story, users learn even more about who they are and why they chose what they chose and did what they did. As Leavy (2015) points out, stories are not necessarily about conveying facts but about "truthfulness." Cyberspace experiences, specifically virtual experiences where users bracket their offline identity, are not about the facts but about the experiences. Sara will never factually be Lara Croft. Nevertheless, by being able to experience those moments as Lara and frame them in a story, Sara can learn more "truthfulness" about herself.

Conclusion

When Sara sits down to play *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), her connecting with Lara does not come from any shared life experiences. Rather, Sara, whether she knows it or not, employs tools found within phenomenology and narrative theory to connect, on a deeper level, with Lara and make Lara's experiences her own. Sara uses the concepts of epoché and attending to set aside any doubts that Lara's experiences are not real. She uses bracketing to "bracket off" her offline self and focus on Lara. When she has to step away from the game, she uses duration-blocks to group all her cyberspaces experiences. Finally, she uses narrative theory to take these duration-block clustered experiences and create a continuous story she can use to frame her cyberspace experiences.

While Sara's example may show phenomenology's and narratology's usefulness in helping to explain how she establishes a meaningful connection with Lara, it is not a comprehensive one. Phenomenology and narrative theory are both incredibly broad fields. Here, they are only touched upon in an attempt to show how the application of concepts from within both fields helps Sara better understand how she participates in cyberspace experiences. There are still a multitude of tools either field can bring to bear on such a topic. Intentionality, for example, could be brought in to expand on how users interact with cyberspace objects. Even without providing that comprehensive examination of all that phenomenology and narrative theory have to offer, the concepts covered here provide a framework for users to better understand the authenticity of their cyberspace experiences.

Conclusion

When users move into cyberspace, they want to craft their own cyberspace identity. They want to be able to self-represent. They do not want any self-representation, though. They want an authentic self-representation. They want a self-representation that reflects them, personally.

Understanding how users achieving such a self-representation means understanding cyberspace identity. The difficulty is that cyberspace identity is not as simple as it first seems. It is not a "one size fits all" concept. Each platform has its own understanding of what it means to self-represent on *that particular platform*. The Cyberspace Gradient addresses the difficulty of cyberspace identity by presenting a unified theory of how cyberspace identity works across *every platform*.

The Cyberspace Gradient is made up of two main concepts: digital identity and virtual identity. Digital identity encompasses self-representation on platforms where the focus is on the user's offline identity as the foundation for their cyberspace identity, such as on social media platforms. Virtual identity encompasses self-representation on platforms where the focus is on the character's in-world identity as the foundation for the user's cyberspace identity, such as in video games. Between the two concepts lie platforms that do not cleanly fall into either category.

The unifying nature of the gradient comes from basing cyberspace self-representations on expectations of authenticity. Authenticity always requires the user to self-represent honestly based on the source of their cyberspace identity,

regardless of whether the source is their offline identity or in-world avatar. With authenticity providing a consistent foundation, users know how to represent regardless of where a platform falls on the gradient. As a result, every user knows both what is expected of them and what they can expect of others as they craft their cyberspace identities.

How users craft their cyberspace identities, and the performance of those crafted identities, depends on a platform's underlying identity theory. Each platform has a set of system structures and user paradigms that shape how users perform their crafted identities by pushing users into different forms of self-representation. Some platforms may require users to self-represent through images. Others may require users to self-represent through interests, hobbies, or memories. Each performance is shaped by the platform's underlying identity theory.

Focusing on authenticity as the foundation for understanding cyberspace identity also explains how users experience cyberspace. That is, a focus on authenticity explains how cyberspace experiences are authentic in and of themselves by providing a space to bring in concepts from phenomenology and narrative theory. Each concept from within these two fields can then be used to explain how and why the experiences that happen within the confines of cyberspace can impact the user in meaningful ways.

Understanding cyberspace identity is important, not just because of the way it helps explain how users experience in cyberspace in terms of self-representation, but because of how it can support future research into all the

different ways users function in cyberspace. For example, agency is typically understood as exercising the ability to act and can be broken down into intentional action or meaningful choice. The difficulty, when it comes to virtual identity, is that the ability to act intentionally or make meaningful choices is often limited and sometimes taken away entirely. If a user sits down to play *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), much of their agency, in the traditional sense, is taken away. They cannot define who Lara is, nor can they define how Lara behaves; the user has no control over their in-world identity nor over the narrative they experience. Many of their choices are, from an agency standpoint, meaningless.

Nevertheless, if the user's experience as Lara is approached from an authentic cyberspace identity perspective, the agency still matters. Here, agency can be broken down in terms of mechanics and narrative and on both micro- and macro- levels. In *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics, 2013), with so much of the identity and narrative agency out of their control, the user can still embrace the micro-level in terms of mechanics: which weapon to use and how to complete a certain task. By focusing on the micro-level, the user maintains some agency in-world; they simply have to express it as an authentic experience of Lara's in-world virtual identity rather than as a "User as themselves" form of agency.

Another future research direction authenticity-based cyberspace identity supports is the discussion of identity in terms of computers, robots, AIs, etc. With virtual identity, the entire basis of determining the authenticity of the cyberspace identity is focused on the in-platform self-representation, and a distinct separation between offline and cyberspace exists. The separation means that, when

considering virtual identity, there is no inherent need for an offline identity. Lara Croft exists as Lara Croft regardless of who sits with the controller in hand. If users switch mid-play, Lara's identity does not change. The focus on virtual identity - and lack of offline identity - presents a way to conceptualize AIs as possessing personal identities even as they exist solely in cyberspace.

One impact of considering AIs as possessing personal identities is a change in how ethics are approached when considering AI and games. Consider the game of Chess. When the first player captures the second player's pawn, the focus is not on the action of taking the pawn. Instead, the focus is on the ethics involved vis-à-vis player vs. player. With single-player video games, however, the ethical considerations are commonly viewed as vis-à-vis player vs. non-player character (NPC), not vis-à-vis player vs. AI. Providing a way to understand AIs as having an identity provides a way to consider ethics in reference to both individual NPCs and the AI as the "other" controlling the pieces within the game world.

Research into the structuring of cyberspace communities and user interaction also benefits from using authenticity as the basis for cyberspace identity. As mentioned, each platform - and community within the platform - possesses its own understanding of how users ought to self-represent. Approaching platform development from an authenticity perspective provides a way to focus user self-represent on what matters *to that community*. It provides a way for designers, developers, community managers, etc. to intentionally create system structures that promote a specific framework of self-representation that

can support their platform's purpose. For example, developers creating a self-help platform for those suffering from self-injurious behavior (SIB) may want to promote a type of positive, goal-oriented self-representation. Knowing this, they can create system structures focused on personal identity theories that define the self in the same way. They can include system structures that prohibit any type of body identity self-representation and, therefore, preclude any possible "showing off" of scars or any type of toxic "scar comparison" behavior, thus further promoting a positive, authentic self-representation.

More and more of life is moving into cyberspace, and establishing an understanding of cyberspace identity from an authenticity perspective provides a number of benefits. Users - and developers - gain an understanding of how self-representation works on a variety of platforms, from social media to video games to everything in between. They gain an understanding of how platforms and communities work together to shape how self-representation plays out on individual platforms. Users also gain a way to discuss their cyberspace experiences as real, meaningful, and authentic, without having to consider the metaphysical implications. Most important of all, establishing an understanding of cyberspace identity from an authenticity perspective provides a way for users to authentically *be* in cyberspace.

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