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The simulation of selfhood in cyberspace

Denise Michelle Dalaimo
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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The Simulation of Selfhood in Cyberspace

by

Denise M. Dalaimo

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

Department of Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 1995

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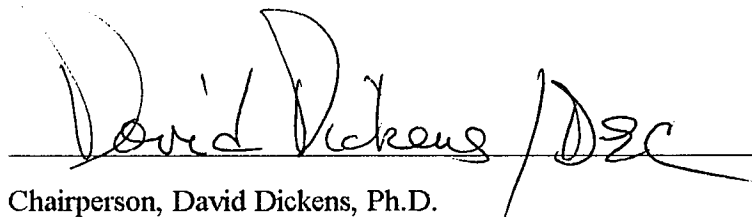
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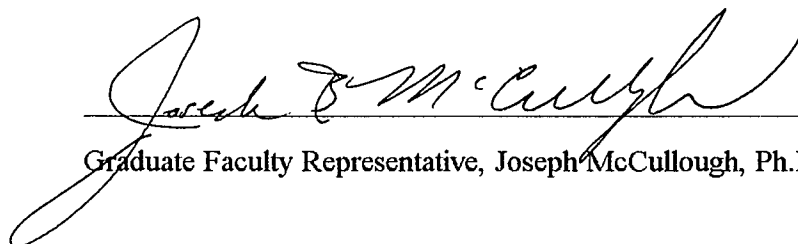
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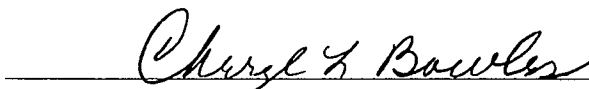
The Thesis of Denise M. Dalaimo for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology is approved.


Chairperson, David Dickens, Ph.D.


Examining Committee Member, Simon Gottschalk, Ph.D.


Examining Committee Member, Andrea Fontana, Ph.D.


Graduate Faculty Representative, Joseph McCullough, Ph.D.


Interim Dean of the Graduate College, Cheryl Bowles, Ed.D.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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ABSTRACT

The first part of this paper is a socio-historical inquiry into various conceptions of self and selfhood from ancient to postmodern times. Part two is the product of ethnographic research conducted on the Internet which examines the simulation and evocation of selfhood in Cyberspace. Specific "Cyburgs" examined include electronic mail, newsgroups, discussion lists, and multi-user realities. While "results" as such were not expected -- nor desired -- an evocation of this particular ethnographic experience reveals that Cyberspace is the ultimate environment for the nourishment of the fragmented, multi-phrenic, contradictory postmodern self. Visual anonymity and lack of social status cues allow the user to experiment with different aspects of selfhood, as well as to "disguise" him/herself completely. Consistent with previous research on the increase in uninhibited behavior in computer-mediated communication, there was a significant fascination with virtual act of Cyber-sex. Lastly, gender differences in communication do seem to carry over into Cyberspace, and although women can change log-ins to gender neutral names to avoid discrimination and/or harassment, this is not the norm, and usually occurs only in severe cases.

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PREFACE

I didn't choose this thesis topic, it chose me. As a graduate student I found myself using electronic mail and the Internet more and more. I began to lose touch with those friends who weren't "online," and became increasingly close with those friends who had e-mail accounts, as well as with new "electronic" friends. I began to have very different experiences with online relationships, and there seemed to be a huge difference between what people would say and do during face-to-face conversation, and what they would write while hiding behind their computer screen. As I progressed in my studies, it dawned on me that the interactions and relationships I was experiencing in Cyberspace seemed to epitomize what I was learning about the fluid, fragmented and contradictory postmodern self. The few times I've met online friends in person they've never been how I imagined them, and many people I knew in "real life" acted differently online -- and these *differences* appear to me to embrace a pattern of uninhibited behavior.

Specifically, an experience with sexual harassment over electronic mail by a good friend who was a "perfect gentleman" in "real-life" but quite different online, has led me to wonder how, and to what extent, Internet users simulate or evoke various aspects of their/our selfhood. We all present different "selves" to different people, but Cyberspace offers many and various opportunities for exploring these "selves" and seems to intensify the magnitude and extent to which it occurs. Ann Oakley coined the phrase "no authenticity without reciprocity" (Oakley 1981). While I don't presume to gather "authentic" data, it is my hope that my willingness to evoke my experiences over the Internet will help other Cyber-residents to "open-up" about theirs, and to convey to readers

the kinds of selfhood which are enabled in this most unusual field.

Perhaps my most important objective is to never lose sight of the fact that this ethnography is just one woman's interpretation: A political production given my personal biases and ideologies, and one unique set of results given who and what I am, how I approached the research, the questions I asked, and the ways in which I collected, organized, and interpreted what I experienced. I would like to emphasize the partiality and contextuality of my research, as well as my interpretation of what I see, feel and "hear." Cyberspace cannot be "understood," that is, not in the modernistic sense of the term. Perhaps, however, its residents can be encouraged to tell their stories, if there is someone there to listen ...

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Many people have helped me, directly and indirectly, in the preparation and completion of this project. First I would like to thank my committee chair David Dickens for years of mentoring, support and advocacy on my behalf. It is in a determined effort to live up to his academic standards that I endeavor to complete my Master's degree. I am also indebted to Simon Gottschalk for introducing me to the "postmodern world" and for spending countless hours discussing and evoking its intonations and contradictions. Thanks also to Andy Fontana, who was always there with a suggestion and friendly words of support. I am especially grateful to Joseph McCullough, who offered a divergent, yet entirely relevant perspective with his knowledge and treatment of American feminist literature which has encouraged me to take an intersubjective approach to my work. I would also like to thank Barb Brents, Donald Carns, Jim Frey, Maralee Mayberry, Bob Parker, and Dmitri Shalin for academic guidance and support, as well as Veona Hunsinger and Susie Lafrentz for assistance with the multifarious bureaucratic details involved in the completion of this project.

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My family has been constantly supportive, as well as a source of emotional fortification -- thanks to each and every one of you. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother and father who, in this day of dysfunctional families, have done a pretty great job of always being there and always showing their pride, unconditional love and enduring support.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The technological revolution unleashed by (post)modernity is unparalleled in human history, and among the most essential products of this high-tech movement is computer-mediated communication (CMC). Jessie Bernard asserts that electronic writing "changes the significance of space for human relationships" (1973:181). For Mark Poster, "electronic interconnectivity is a new form of writing, interaction and communication, one that further upsets the dominant configuration of the subject/language interface" (1990: 121). While Poster is dubious about the *extent to which* computer conferencing will "alter the world," he does believe that electronic mediation affects the way we perceive ourselves and our reality. He explains that

The process of the discussion [through computer conferencing] is alien and disorienting to those accustomed to synchronous meetings. In ordinary conferences, so much depends not on what is said but on who says it, how they make their intervention, what clothes they wear, their body language, facial and oral expressions (1990:122).

Without these visual status and behavioral cues and "routines of face-to-face speech to guide the conference, simple procedural issues may raise fundamental difficulties" (Poster 1990:122). How these "difficulties" will affect society and its members has been the topic of growing concern and controversy. In the words of Hiltz and Turoff:

We will become the Network Nation, exchanging vast amounts of both information and social-emotional communications with colleagues, friends, and "strangers" who share similar interests. ... we will become a "global village" ...An

individual will, literally, be able to work, shop, or be educated by or with persons anywhere in the nation or in the world (1978: xxix).

Through CMC, the world has become a smaller place. Sitting in the same chair one can access archives in Tel Aviv or documents at the University of Chicago library -- the implications for academia alone are endless. Teachers and students can all "meet" in a virtual classroom, or researchers can collaborate in real-time virtual labs and the Internet is the space where these and many other such activities occur.

The Internet is the world's largest computer network. It is actually a "network of networks," linking government, academic, corporate and scientific agencies all over the world. The "Net" can be accessed through government and corporate organizations or through any of the commercial computer-communication services such as America Online, Prodigy and Compuserve. This vast international network allows for shared services and direct communication (quite often by the use of electronic mail) among all users of the Net, or what many refer to as "Cyberspace."

Over 25 million people used the "information super-highway" in 1994, with twice as many users expected in 1995 (Elmer-Dewitt 1994). The rush to get online is profound, perhaps because the stakes are so high.

Access to the information highway may prove to be less a question of privilege or position than one of the basic ability to function in a democratic society. It may determine how well people are educated, the kind of job they eventually get, how they are retrained if they lose their job, how much access they have to their government and how they will learn about the critical issues affecting them and the country (Elmer-Dewitt 1995:25).

In this rapidly growing and, for some, often frustrating and alienating environment, questions regarding how individuals adapt to, interact in, and simulate/evoke their selves in the different levels of Cyberspace or "Cyburgs" are becoming increasingly significant sociological issues. The "self" I am referring to in this paper is not the "rational and

consistent self" as conceived by modern discourses, but "*selfhood*" as it exists in postmodernity. If selfhood is discourse, and is discursively created (Benhabib 1992; Gergen 1991; Lash & Friedman 1992), then the postmodern self is ephemeral, inconstant, contradictory, and chaotic (see Harvey 1989:9) -- not a "self" at all, but rather a changing bricolage of fragmented subjectivities.

There has been a tremendous amount of interest among postmodern and feminist thinkers exploring how media affect our thoughts and feelings, our morals and our beliefs, our politics and our sense of self, and our everyday life (Baudrillard 1983; Elmer-Dewitt 1994; Frissen 1992; Gottschalk 1994; Halberstam 1991; Haraway 1991; Lyotard 1984; Pfohl 1992; Poster 1990; Tannen 1990). Gottschalk has observed that "the exponential proliferation of [increasingly sophisticated] technologies substantially affect[s] macro- and micro-social dynamics in ways we do not yet fully comprehend, and that they will continue to do so in ways we cannot presently imagine" (1994:5). It is from somewhere within this statement that I embark on a journey to understand/experience how computer-mediated communication enables and limits the micro-social dynamics we use for the construction of our multiple selves in Cyberspace. I will do this by conducting ethnography which is informed by various feminist, postmodernist, and symbolic interactionist assumptions and orientations, which offer no steadfast rules, but rather some guiding principles or insights which I will try to synthesize in my evocations of the Internet as a virtual interactional space. This paper is thus not a "presentation" of reality, but an *evocation* for "it is [my] business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented " (Lyotard in Flax 1990: 28).

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL SOURCES OF THE SELF

Although some argue that the idea of self is a distinctly modern idea (see Foucault 1972), an argument can be made for the existence of pre-modern conceptions of self. These notions of self were quite diverse, and varied considerably across time and cultures.

A. Ancient and Medieval Conceptions

In times ruled by religion and dogma, the self was generally "seen as an integral part of a communal order (our word, individual, began in that sense; undividable) ... " (Young 1995:1). That is, self was indivisible from society and from others. Usually a god or gods were responsible for the creation of self, and one turned to the gods or to priests for help or understanding. In ancient times, the individual was connected in some mystical way to nature, or to some particular part of nature, and in this way, self was eternal.

Socrates, without actually

using the word *self*, ... exemplified and delineated the search for it through introspection and dialectic -- through the interpersonal pursuit of truth. Thus, Socrates' implicit notion of the self is relational; the self is discovered in the process of discourse and dialogue with others. ... Socrates defined the central task of the philosopher ... as self knowledge (Levin 1992:3).

The "process of discourse and dialogue" of which Socrates spoke, of course, later came to be known as "symbolic interaction."

The self of medieval times was more fixed than the ancient self, and the individual received his/her identity before he/she was born. Society was rigidly structured and inflexible, and as a result social structures and institutions became largely responsible for forming an individual's identity, requiring little personal struggle or commitment. "Society operated on the basis of lineage, gender, home, and social class -- all of which were fixed by birth" (Baumeister 1986:29). We see a gradual shift during these times from the *ascription* of social status through bloodlines -- later through social structures -- to the possibility of *achieving* status through hard work. This method of "self-definition" of the early modern self was quite different than the "passive assignment" of identity that occurred in earlier times. Baumeister writes:

The late medieval view retained its primary allegiance to general principles and universal truths, not individual experiences. But evidence suggests that individualistic thinking increasingly colored the way people understood and applied those universals (1986:32).

According to Baumeister, prior "to 1800 identity was not generally problematic, but several trends prepared the way for it to become so" (1986:29). These trends led further away from the medieval self and paved the way for the valuing of individuality which increased in modernity. These trends include: (1) a new concept of a hidden or inner self, symbolized by concern over sincerity and over discrepancies between appearance and underlying realities; (2) the idea of human individuality developed into a popular value; (3) the cultivation of privacy which symbolized the separation of social and personal life; (4) changes in attitudes toward death, suggesting a growing concern for individual fate; (5) the increase in a person's role in the selection of his/her own spouse, thereby putting a major component of adult identity on a basis of personal choice; and (6) the emergence of a heightened awareness of individual development and potentiality, symbolized by new attitudes toward children (1986:36).

The advent of modern science brought with it the changed conception of a new "modern self." Rene' Descartes (1596-1650), founder of modern "rationalist" thinking, emphasized a methodological approach of total doubt. He asserted that we must apply rational thinking in the study of all existing phenomena, and his now famous phrase *cogito ergo sum* -- I think therefore I am -- allowed for a new conception of the self. In 1610, Francis Bacon published *De Novum Organum*, which argued that truth emerged out of empirical observation of the behavior of people and things. This was in harsh contradiction to the premodern tradition of relying on supernatural and intuitive sources of knowledge that were largely traditional and cultural. In the latter part of the 17th century, Newton drafted his *Principia* and inaugurated the modern search for the natural laws of society and nature.

Alexis de Tocqueville argued that in the old aristocratic order our

social statuses were much more likely to be inherited than chosen, and our roles and identities were governed by very plain rules of behavior, speech, and dress. The new democratic regime, marked by greater mobility and the erosion of class boundaries, called our social identities into question (1969:145).

We were becoming the authors of our own fate, no longer with a predetermined "proper place" in the world. This trend has led to the rising importance of self-actualization and personal subjectivity for men and women. Howe (1968) and Bell (1971) write of a "new sensibility"; Marin (1975) and Lasch (1976; 1979) describe a "new narcissism"; and Clecak (1983) discusses a "democratization of personhood." These critics believe that individual identity has become separated from institutionalized roles, norms, and communities. Instead, they argue, contemporary men and women identify "only conditionally with specific social institutions, statuses, and norms, and are increasingly ready to consider the individual self and its subjective experience as the seat of both reality and value" (Benton 1993:146). It was not until the spread of religious dissent, the trend toward plurality of life models, and the rise in social mobility that individuality was valued or emphasized.

B. Modernity

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world -- and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are ... [Modernity] pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air' (Berman 1982:15).

By modern times it was widely postulated that the self emerges out of social relationships, inflected by race, class, age, gender, sexual and other group characteristics. Individuals were no longer living predetermined lives, but were playing an active role in constructing their own lives, and accordingly, their own selves. Anthony Giddens writes

The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications (1991:2).

The social self is the most basic unit of interactionist analysis, which highlights the self-reflexive ability of human beings to see themselves as objects of their own thought, to see themselves from the point of view of others, thus, to role-take. William James (1842-1910) was perhaps the first thinker to build a general theory of the self, and laid the foundation for scholars such as Cooley and Mead. His major contribution was to view the self as an object and to introduce the concept of a pluralism of selves (see Parsons 1968:59). Before Mead, it was James who made the distinction between the *I*, the self as knower, and the *Me*, the self as reflected upon and known. James wrote "a man (sic) has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (in Coser 1977:321).

Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) was one of the first generation of American sociologists. He spent much of his life analyzing the process of social interaction in which self develops. Perhaps his most important contribution was his concept of the "looking-glass self," that is, the way an individual's sense of self is "mirrored" and reflected through others. Cooley believed our concept of self emerges from our interpretations of how we perceive others perceiving us. Agreeing with James that the self emerges through social activity, Cooley (1902) wrote "[t]he social origin of [an individual's] life comes by the pathway of intercourse with other persons" (1964:5). To Cooley, the self "is not first individual and then social; it arises dialectically through communication. One's consciousness of himself (sic) is a reflection of the ideas about himself that he attributes to other minds; thus, there can be no isolated selves" (Coser 1977: 305).

The three elements of Cooley's looking-glass self are: (1) the imagination of our appearance to the other person; (2) the imagination of his/her judgment of that appearance and; (3) some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification (Cooley 1964:184). Cooley emphasized that the "imagination which people have of one another are the solid facts of society, and to observe and interpret these must be the chief aim of sociology" (1964:121). He saw the root problem of social science as the mutual interconnectedness between the individual and social order. In Cooley's view, the concepts of society and of the individual could only be explained in terms of each other and the dialectical relationship between the two.

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) spent a good portion of his career concentrating on the development of a theory of *Mind, Self, and Society* which became the title of his (1934) book, posthumously published by former students based on notes from his lectures. Mead believed that all three arise in the same moment through the process of symbolic interaction, and that it is the self that makes human society possible and vice-versa. Throughout his life, Mead emphasized the role of society in the creation of the individual. He maintained that both society and self emerge from the ability of individuals

to refer to themselves as objects and evaluate themselves accordingly. "It is axiomatic to Mead's thought ... that at birth an individual is not provided with any inborn self-concept or socially structured self-awareness" (Cuzzort and King 1989:131).

Mead asserted that human society was a society of "selves." To have a self, according to Mead, implied that individuals are *both* subject and object of their own acts. They are subjects of their own acts in that they imagine, plan, and choose their actions on the basis of desired goals. They are objects of their own acts in that they reflect on, and respond to, what they do, may do, will do and what they have done. Thus to have a self implies a degree of self-awareness or self-consciousness, an ability both to act and to step back mentally and observe one's actions as objects to which one can respond. "To be an object of one's own self involves taking the role of the other through which one can perceive, evaluate, and respond to one's own behavior" (Ashley and Orenstein 1990:462).

Mead's work refined the distinction between two alternating phases of the self process, drawn earlier by James. Mead asserted that the "I" -- the impulse to act -- is the creative, spontaneous, and imaginative part of the self. It is the "I" that realizes the need of subjects to adapt his/her behavior and invent or create new lines of action. The "I" is the knowing, conscious aspect of the self, and exists only in the present. The "I" can reflect, but cannot be reflected upon.

The "Me" -- the reflected self, and often called the "self-concept" -- is how an individual sees him or herself through the eyes of others, much like Cooley's "looking-glass self." It is the aspect of self-identity that subjects are conscious of and can therefore reflect upon. The "Me" is the organized attitudes of others. It connects the individual to the larger society, and is more social and determined than the "I." "In what Mead termed an 'internal conversation,' there is a movement back and forth between the novel proposals of the *I* and the judgmental reactions of the *me* until a line of action is formulated and emerges in external behavior" (Ashley and Orenstein 1990:463).

According to Mead, the self evolves through language, communication and symbols, i.e., symbolic interaction. We imaginatively assume other social roles and internalize the attitudes of "the generalized other" -- the attitudes of the social group. Mead maintained that during this evolution, the child acquires self-awareness while advancing through the "preparatory," "play," and "game" stages.

The preparatory stage is the period from infancy to the point when a child begins discovering him or herself from the perspective of others. The signal feature of this period is the imitation of others through gestures and conversation, in which the child learns to mimic those who are engaged in "real" role performances.

The play stage is synchronous with the child's acquisition and growing mastery of language and it is associated with "mind" and the development of self-awareness. During this stage a child experiments one at a time with a variety of different roles and learns how to relate one role to another. For example, in the course of one day a child could play a doctor in the morning, later a firefighter, and a mail carrier in the evening. During this stage children also encounter symbols which enable them to obtain a sense of the nature of these various roles.

In the game stage, the child acquires a sense of what Mead called the "generalized other": the organized attitudes and beliefs of society which allow an individual to incorporate a sense of community values into their conception of self. To Mead, games are "an integral part of the process of socialization...[and] are particularly significant for children as a device for locating their sense of self within a systematic ordering of roles" (Cuzzort and King 1989:136). Children gain an understanding of rules, and of themselves as points in a network of others. They must obey rules and take into account the roles of the others in his world. These roles become increasingly vague and contradictory as we enter what Mills (1959) calls the Fourth Epoch -- the postmodern era.

In the writings of Mead one can see the beginnings of the postmodern self. Mead asserted "[w]e divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our

acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social relations" (1962:142). Mead maintained that existence as a plurality of selves was a necessary condition of modern life. Although Mead admits to the existence of a plurality of selves, he treats these selves as if they were constant and stable. He exemplifies the modern state of mind by using a teleological view of the self, a self which slowly progresses through the preparatory, play and game stages while slowly developing its capacity to represent and construct itself through symbolic interaction. Herbert Blumer, however, points out that it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain this constancy in complex modern society.

Actually, in group life the relation is far more likely to be between complex, diversified and moving bodies of activity. The operation of one of these complexes on the other, or the interaction between them, is both concealed and misrepresented by the statement of the relation between the two [T]he chief means through which human group life operates and is formed is a vast, diversified process of definition (Blumer 1969:138).

Tamotsu Shibutani made a significant contribution to Mead's concept of the generalized other with his notion of a self affected by simultaneous multiple influences. In his article, "Reference Groups as Perspectives," Shibutani argued that "[s]hared perspectives arise through participation in common communication channels, and the cultural pluralism of modern mass societies arises from the easy accessibility of a multiplicity of channels" (1955:562). Behavior is not always consistent as an individual proceeds from one social context to another, and Shibutani accounts for this inconsistency in terms of a change in reference groups (a term coined by Robert Merton). Shibutani defines a reference group as "a standard or check point which an actor uses in forming his (sic) estimate of the situation, particularly his own position within it. Logically, then, *any* group with which an actor is familiar may become a reference group" (1955:563), even if this familiarity has only been constructed by "plugging in" to electronic media, i.e.,

simulations. The author distinguishes three types of reference groups: (1) groups which serve as comparisons; (2) groups to which an individual aspires; and (3) groups whose perspectives are assumed by the individual. Through participation in, or knowledge of one or more of these reference groups, an individual may perceive the world from its constantly changing standpoints. In postmodern times, however, given that these reference groups are nothing more than simulations, significant questions remain unanswered.

The idea of reference groups as perspectives was significant because it brought into question the concept of a consistent, knowable self. Shibutani argued that the self changed, depending upon the situation, and although those who share common experiences engage in common modes of action, their experiences are constantly changing.

It is impossible to pinpoint the exact time that the postmodern self emerged. However, Shibutani's analysis of reference groups provides a convenient vantage point from which to view this multifaceted self. The postmodern self is not a fixed entity, but rather a process of adaptation and interaction that continually evolves. The work of Erving Goffman refined this point.

Goffman (1922-1982) was a postwar microsociologist who studied the various ways in which individuals in society determine, perceive, distinguish and manipulate the effects of their behavior, interactions, and what he called "performances" on one another. In order to understand how activity and interaction become meaningful to the individual, Goffman stressed the importance of everyday activities for the maintenance and projection of self-identity. Goffman believed that we live by inference, and the more information we have about someone, the more secure we feel in making an inference about that person. When an individual presents him/herself, it is in his or her interests to control the perception others have of him/her and to control the conduct of the others, through their responsive treatment of him/her. This leads to what Goffman referred to as "impression management."

"Dramaturgy" is Goffman's metaphor of theatrical performance which he applied to everyday human interaction. In interaction, Goffman argued, people put on a "show" for each other, managing or manipulating the impressions that others receive of them. Social roles are analogous to roles in theatrical impersonations: performances are given "on stage" to convey images and information to an audience. Because such information helps to define situations and create appropriate expectations, people usually project images of themselves which best serve their own ends. "Frontstage" is the setting in which the performance is given. It is the place where an individual's performance regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for the audience. "Front" is the particular expressive equipment intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his or her performance (Goffman 1959: 22).

"Backstage" is the place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is commonly and knowingly contradicted. It is here that illusions and impressions are more openly constructed. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of actions and characters (1959:112). While backstage the audience is not allowed, and performers may behave out of character.

The expressiveness of individuals, that is, their ability to manage impressions, involves two different types of sign activity: expressions *given* and expressions *given off*. Expressions given include verbal symbols and their substitutes, i.e., communication in the traditional sense. Expressions given off involve a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information ultimately conveyed. Misinformation can be intentionally conveyed through both, the first involving deceit, the second feigning. Dramaturgy is mostly concerned with expressions *given off*, the more "theatrical, and contextual kind, the non-verbal, presumably unintentional kind, whether this communication be purposely engineered or not" (Goffman 1959:4).

C. The Early Feminist Self

There are no early theories of a feminist self, as such. We can, however, from early feminist literature, gain an understanding of the reception, perception, and self-conception of women in modern times, and perhaps grasp an awareness of how the early feminist self was constructed.

The self is both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told. The individual with a coherent sense of self-identity is the one who succeeds in integrating these tales and perspectives into a meaningful life history (Benhabib 1992:198).

The majority of women who led the early feminist movement had endured a history of domestic isolation and oppression, enjoyed little or no formal education, and experienced no public and little social life. Leading issues which united early feminists included suffrage, birth control, social and economic equality, sexual freedom, marriage as an institution, divorce rights, and property ownership. Early feminists *denied the social definitions of their selves* as wives and mothers by becoming politically and socially active. For Baumeister,

"Marriage is a major component of identity. Indeed, in view of the limited rights and opportunities available to women in past centuries, the choice of husband was probably the most momentous decision in the formation of many a woman's adult identity. Thus a basic change ... signifies a major shift in the construction of identity" (Baumeister 1986:44)

These women constructed their own identities by endeavoring to reform unjust laws relating to women and to break down the barriers to educational and vocational advancement. The following is a necessarily partial account (from Schneir 1972) of some

significant women in history who together evoked what I will refer to as the early feminist self.

Abigail Smith Adams (1744-1818) asserted her political self the only way she could at that time, through her husband, John Adams, the second president of the United States. During the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, this uneducated mother of six exchanged many letters with her husband concerning the rights of women. Meanwhile, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), a strong and independent woman who fought for the rights of women, both physically and philosophically, was living a "scandalous" lifestyle by helping both her sister and mother to escape from abusive relationships, and having "sinful" relationships. In her famous essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) -- quite possibly the most significant feminist work published in the 18th century -- Wollstonecraft described the state of ignorance and servility to which women were condemned by social custom and training.

Georg Sand (1804-1876) was a French woman who left her husband at age 25, took her two children to America, and assumed a masculine identity. Sand wrote novels which proved to be one of the first ways in which the female self could be evoked and explored.

In novels ... the thoughts, hopes and lives of women ... are displayed more intimately and fully than elsewhere. One might indeed say that were it not for the novels of the nineteenth century we should remain as ignorant as our ancestors of this section of the human race. It has been common knowledge for ages that women exist, bear children, have no beards, and seldom go bald; but save in these respects, and in others where they are said to be identical with men, we know little of them and have little sound evidence upon which to base our conclusions (Woolf 1979:65).

Sand's novels told romantic tales of women breaking out of bad marriages and servitude. She asserted that the only things society has not taken away from women were their free will and conscience. These works inspired women like Margaret Fuller (1810-

1850), the first female editor of a major American newspaper, *The New York Tribune*, to take on jobs and challenges previously only taken on by men. Fuller encouraged women to go into all fields and explore and reflect upon their self identity and their "true nature." She fought a lifelong battle to enhance the early feminist self, and suggested total independence from men, including sexual abstinence. Also inspired by her feminist contemporaries, Harriet Robinson (1825-1911) fought to organize women mill workers to strike and wrote essays on child labor and appalling working conditions which helped to bring government regulation to the mills. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) and Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) also fought for women's rights in legislation, constitution, and law, and were pivotal players in securing the vote for women.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was one of the first females in print to call herself a sociologist, and made a career out of re-defining the identity of women. Gilman spoke and wrote extensively on the emancipation of women, and in her essay "Women and Economics" (1898), Gilman emphasized the economic dependence of women on their husbands and the social/psychological implications of that dependence. Gilman encouraged women to hire professional house cleaners and work outside the home. She made some very progressive proposals for her time, including communal kitchens and dining rooms and day nurseries for children. "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1899) -- the portrayal of a woman's mental breakdown based on Gilman's own tragic "illness" -- shed new light on women, mental illness, medicine, and patriarchy in general. Gilman shocked millions in 1915 with "Herland," a utopian feminist novel of a mother-dominated, male-free society in which reproduction, rather than production, is the most important thing. Meanwhile, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was writing a series of critical essays, including "A Room of One's Own," which highlighted the constant discouragement women experience and must endure if they desire to be formally educated or to write, and "Three Guineas," an effort in support of women's colleges and a new kind of education that does not support or perpetuate patriarchy.

A review of some early feminists reveal a self that is reflexive -- gaining knowledge through experience. This self emerged as such due to a history of enduring domestic isolation and oppression, including very little formal education and a narrow social experience. These women broke away from traditional definitions of wife and mother and became active in constructing new interpretations and conceptions of their selves . Each of them in their own way contributed to a new feminist self. A key concept we see emerging in the early feminist self that is further developed in the postmodern is the issue of giving voice to excluded others. As I have shown, early feminists such as Wollstonecraft, Gilman, and Woolf gave voice to women who previously had none. I discuss this issue more in the chapter on methodology.

CHAPTER 3

THE SELF IN POSTMODERNITY

In modern theory, self was believed to provide the subject with a sense of consistency through reference to stable social norms, goals, emotions, beliefs and values, and it is "precisely this image of the self and its potential for development which is called into question by the advent of what has come to be termed 'postmodernism'" (Frosh 1991:21). The postmodern moment immerses the subject in a *consistently inconsistent environment* which is fluid, self-contradictory, and changing unpredictably.

A. Postmodern Selfhood

According to postmodern scholars, self

no longer simply references *an* entity, a presence or presences. It is possible to speak of the diversity of self in both modern and postmodern discourse, but modern diversity is substantial while postmodern is constitutive, insubstantial. Neither the old fashioned idea of a core self *nor* the more recent notion of a nonpathological, multiple, and performative self can represent its postmodern condition (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:687).

The symbolic interactionist self has traditionally centered around "an essentially present self, variously theorizing it as a solid, reflexive, labeled, performed, or situated entity" (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:686). This self could be both known and measured. However, postmodern accounts of the self have challenged this notion. The self is mutable and variable, contingent upon images, impressions, and emotions, its boundaries

are constantly negotiated and restipulated. "We are seen to live in webs of multiple representations of class, race, gender, language and social relations; meanings vary even within one individual" (Kvale 1992:101).

Lyotard (1984) describes the postmodern as a general social condition which brings into question everything we once thought was "real" and "true." He states that there are no guarantees as to the worth of our actions and activities or to the truthfulness of our statements -- there are only "language games." Although postmodernism has emerged as an important concept over the last decades, there exists no single definition of the postmodern condition, and therefore no single conception of the postmodern self. There does however, seem to be a consensus that the postmodern self is transient, fragmented and multiple (Baumeister 1986; Benhabib 1992; Frosh 1991; Gergen 1991; Giddens 1991; Gubrium and Holstein 1994; Lyotard 1984; Probyn 1993; Turner 1976; Zurcher 1977) . Similarly for McNay:

For the postmodern theorists, most notably Baudrillard, the notions of subject and object, reflexivity and autonomy which characterize the modern understanding of the subject, are obsolete. The stress on plurality ... rather than on the exploration of the interface between the actual and the potential, leads postmodern theorists to posit schizophrenia as the basic model of identity (1992:133).

This ephemeral, erratic, multi-phrenic self emerges out of interactional processes which exist in a world ruled by electronic mass media. Stephen Pfohl writes:

Nothing is lost, it seems, to the "I"/eye of the camera, the "I"/eye of the screen. More and more inFORMation, faster and denser, more and more facts, data, empiricities, batting averages, body counts, stock market reports, numbers of homeless, aids victims, tooth decay, car sales, foreign trade deficits, inches of snow, records of temperature. All clearly explained. More white than white. More real than real. More sexy than sex. More news than new (1992: 12-13).

Baudrillard (1983), Gitlin (1986,1990), Jameson (1983), Pfohl (1992), and others have argued that the proliferation of simulacra disturb the autonomy of the self. Simulations

displace the "real" and invade every aspect of our selves through signs, television, video games, radio and countless other types of electronic media -- often without our knowledge. We are bombarded by external images that simulate "reality." It is often difficult to separate ourselves from simulation.

Lyotard asserts that the postmodern self "does not amount to much" (1984:15). The self, as he describes it, is a condition of knowledge, and this knowledge can represent different things to different people, i.e., there is no "true" or "accurate" representation of reality or of any *one thing*. Many theorists have denied the self as a significant pivotal presence in experience, and assert that in contrast to the conception of self as a metanarrative (see Lyotard 1984), the self is simply one term among many others which inscribes experience. The "ostensibly floating postmodern self is polysemic, that is, attached to, and articulated with, multiple systems of signs" (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:691,685). In fact, "the idea of the self as a central presence dissolves and is replaced by the radicalization of what Derrida (1978) calls the 'play of difference,' whose objects are ontologically enlivened and deadened by floating signifiers [see Jacques Lacan], eclipsing substantiality" (Gubrium & Holstein 1994: 685). These authors suggest that rather than the death of the self "as a significant category of contemporary life," it is merely the "self's voicing that has noticeably changed" (1994:690).

B. Feminism in The Postmodern

We listened to many stories, we began to hear how a newly acquired subjectivism led the woman into a new world, which she insisted on shaping and directing on her own. As a result, her relationships and self-concept began to change (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule 1986: 76).

Like postmodernist thought, feminist thought emerged out of a criticism of institutionalized philosophy in an effort to change the relationship between social thought

and social criticism, as well as overcoming aculturalism. While many of the feminists in this section do refer to themselves as part of the postmodern movement, many of them do not, and their presence in this section should not be interpreted as such. Although some feminists, such as Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, follow the postmodern tradition of being suspicious of and deconstructive of all "essentialisms," including those expounded by feminists (Moi 1986), there is a large contingent of feminists who question the effect of the postmodern rejection of metanarratives on feminist theories and politics. "Feminist politics is ... posited on modernist metanarrative of personal emancipation...[and] feminist theory rests on general categories and abstractions such as gender, class, race, in order to produce a compelling analysis of social inequality (McNay 1992:123).

Nancy Harstock argues that "despite its anti-foundational claims, postmodernist theory rests on a desire for universality; the desire for totality is replaced with an equally totalizing desire for contextualism, pluralism and heterogeneity...[and] ...gives little guidance as to how systematic inequalities and oppression are perpetuated in society" (in McNay 1992:130). Although McNay criticizes Foucault's use of a desexualized body and degendered subject in his theories on power, gender and the self, she sees his later work as offering some potential for feminists by providing a basis for an ethics of self-actualization and an emancipatory politics that highlights difference. The debate between postmodernists, feminists, and postmodern feminists continues, but for the majority of feminists, the ideological, social and historical construction of gender difference remains a central task:

The women's question - women as objects of inquiry and as subjects carrying out such inquiry - upsets established paradigms. Women discover difference where previously sameness had prevailed; they sense dissonance and contradiction where formerly the signification of terms had been taken for granted; and they establish the persistence of injustice, inequality and regression in processes that were formerly characterized as just, egalitarian and progressive (Benhabib 1992:179).

The early feminist writings revealing patriarchy as key to the oppression of women and minorities emerged into a full scale attack by feminists in the postmodern era. These scholars believe that social formations pre-shape the minds and selves of women in ways that are negative and sometimes hostile to women. For example, Mary Daly believes that patriarchy does not acknowledge women's true identities. As she writes, a woman "who has chosen her Self, who defines her Self, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is Self-identified" (1990: 3-4) must disregard traditional ideas of ethics and morality. Daly questions the concepts of "good" and "evil" that have ruled society and calls on women to free themselves from socioeconomic, political, and linguistic repression.

McNay explains that throughout the history of Western thought traditional subject/object dualism has defined men as subjects and women as objects (1992:169). Many feminist thinkers (Daly 1990: Tong 1993) believe that in addition to the economic independence of which Gilman spoke and wrote, women must also gain their sexual and reproductive freedom if they are to develop moral and virtuous selves. Women must remove themselves from situations in which their natural tendency to care is exploited.

C. The Diverse Self

There are significant and understandable criticisms of feminist theories which assert that the feminist voice we hear and the self we read about are solely those of professional, heterosexual, white women. Over the last few decades, the previously silenced voices of the lower classes, minorities and lesbian women have made themselves heard. The life experiences and social interaction of these women differ significantly from those of the traditional feminist, and consequently their selves have been developed and are manifested in distinct ways. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins describes the everyday

experiences of black and lower-class women and presents a self that traditionally had been oppressed and submissive.

I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults designed to teach me that being an African-American, working-class woman made me lesser than those who were not. And as I felt smaller, I became quieter and eventually was virtually silenced (1990:xi).

Collins asserts that the contributions of Black women have been buried, discarded by Blacks and whites alike. She explains that Blacks who were not willing to collaborate in their own victimization have often hidden their work rather than contribute to the dominant ideology (1990:5).

However, Collins empowers herself and others by highlighting the voices of various African-American women thinkers, exhibiting the diversity and intelligence that has been a long-standing tradition in their community. One of these voices was Maria Stewart's, an African-American who wrote during the 1830's, when slavery was still firmly entrenched in the South. Stewart urged women of her race to forge self definitions of self-reliance and independence by emphasizing education for youth and political action for mothers. She asked, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?"

Sandra Harding (1991) and Mary Daly (1990) have promoted the lesbian self as knowledgeable and empowered. Harding lists seven contributions that lesbian standpoint theory has made to feminism: the lesbian standpoint sees women in relation to other women (or at least not only in relation to men and family); it can imagine communities that do not need or want men socially; it reveals that woman (heterosexual) is made not born; it centers on female sexuality as it is constructed by women; it reveals the link between the oppression of women and the oppression of deviant sexualities; it shows that gynophobia (the abnormal fear of women) supports racism; and suggests that the lesbian is a repressed

figure central to traditional male supremacist discourses (Harding 1991:253-264). Each of these contributions Harding lists are elements of what has become the lesbian self.

Mary Daly takes a firmer stance against patriarchy, she writes, "Women ... must indeed recognize the fact of possession by the structures of evil and by the controllers and legitimators of these structures" (1990:39). She describes a "knowing/acting/Self-centering Process" that creates a "new, woman-identified environment ... [--] Gyn/Ecology" (1990:315). Daly urges women to affirm their original birth, their original source, and that in this discovery of their original integrity they will find their Selves (1990:39).

The diverse selves of feminist, minority and lesbian women are often guided, sometimes driven by the need to empower or emancipate.

"Our selves are hemmed in by the constant need to speak up for issues that should be regarded as basic, curtailed by the exigencies that as feminists we speak in a certain way, that we embody the position of watchdog We need to keep moving and to keep speaking our selves in ways that will encourage other movements, that will recreate alternative positions" (Probyn 1993:172).

D. The Self Meets Cyberspace

Besides its institutional reflexivity, modern social life is characterised by profound processes of the reorganisation of time and space, coupled to the expansion of disembedding mechanisms -- mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganisation of time and space, plus the disembedding mechanisms, radicalise and globalise pre-established institutional traits of modernity; and they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life (Giddens 1991:2).

Mutations in the conception of the self stem from "moral uncertainty, inequality and domination, organizations and the technical rationalization of everyday life, and their related 'anonymizing' tendencies" (Gubrium & Holstein 1994: 685), all of which can now

be experienced on TV screens, through electronic media, and especially in Cyberspace. In fact, the "anonymizing tendencies" are what attract many people to Cyberspace: an *actual space* you "know" is out there, but can never really see. There are an infinite number of places to go and people to meet, yet you never have to leave your own home. Some users can even create their own computer-generated landscapes which allows for increased control over his/her environment. In Cyberspace, you can be whoever (or whatever) you want. It is the perfect home for the postmodern self -- inconstant, fluid, invariably in motion. Gubrium and Holstein note that the postmodern challenge -- the most recent and serious of challenges to the self -- "is less concerned with conditions of social organization, conveying instead the liquid, imaged 'self' of electronic media and consumerism" (1994: 685). As Baudrillard writes:

No more mirror of being and appearance, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: rather, genetic miniaturisation is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command model -- and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times (1983:3).

But the "reality" produced in Cyberspace is influenced by more than simulacra. Problems with coordination and feedback, as well as the absence of contextual cues also serve to alter our perceptions of our selves and others.

1. Coordination and Feedback

When individuals are unfamiliar with each other's opinions and statuses, a feeling-out process occurs whereby one individual admits his [sic] views or statuses to another a little at a time. After dropping his guard just a little he waits for the other to show reason why it is safe for him to do this, and after this reassurance he can safely drop his guard a little bit more (Goffman 1959:192).

In Cyberspace, time and space are asynchronous and largely unpredictable. An individual may send off an e-mail message and wait days for a response. There is usually no way of telling whether or not someone has checked his or her electronic mailbox, and this may lead to problems of co-ordination and feedback. As computer-mediated communication lacks the contextual and reflexive nature of face to face interaction, the "feeling-out" process described by Goffman occurs differently over electronic mail than in face-to-face situations. Over e-mail, information is communicated in monologues, with one person giving some information and then asking some questions. Then the other reciprocates, answering the former's questions and asking a few of his/her own. There can be no mid-stream interjections or requests for clarifications. The sender and the receiver do not share the same spatial or temporal milieu. Goffman writes that while "in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure" (1959:30). Since computer-mediated communication lacks the constant feedback that occurs in face to face interaction, images of message senders develop in a manner which differs considerably from face to face interaction. Cues necessitating image revision and adjustments are not as readily available electronically as they are in person and have to be specifically asked for. This may leave the audience with a simulated "virtual reality" that may or may not be an accurate image of the "physical reality" -- if there is such a thing. To many on the Internet, the difference between physical reality and virtual reality is often indiscernible. "Reality" in Cyberspace is almost entirely one's own creation, allowing the Cyber-self indefinite possibilities.

2. Absence of Contextual Cues

In addition to problems with co-ordination and feedback, communication over electronic mail lacks several important carriers of information, or what Goffman calls

"sign-vehicles." These sign-vehicles include voice tone and speech patterns, facial expressions, and body language, which can imply such things as mood, emotion, and attitude. Also lacking in computer-mediated communication are cues from a person's "conduct and appearance" which allow us to employ our previous experience with similar individuals, by applying "untested stereotypes to him (sic)" (Goffman 1959: 1). These missing "personal front" items of "expressive equipment" include: insignia of office or rank, clothing, gender, age, racial characteristics, size and posture (Goffman 1959: 24). Contextual cues help us to define situations and clarify mutual expectations.

Goffman believes when we "enter social interaction, we can identify one as having the lower general prestige and the other the higher" (1959:198). However, computer-mediated interaction inequalities are not so glaringly apparent. Electronic-mail, it has been speculated, elicits a more personal and informal type of communication, often resulting in the loosening of inhibitions due to lack of visual and physical reminders of status (Johnson 1994), as well as strategies of social control. Many have claimed they can communicate much easier over e-mail than in face-to-face interaction. As one e-mail user remarked, "I'd say things [over e-mail] that I wouldn't say face-to-face because I was hiding behind a computer screen -- most of these people would never know who I really was" (quoted in We 1994).

Because of the visual anonymity of communicating over e-mail, it is very easy to shift personas, to present yourself as someone you're not, or as Goffman would say, to use impression manipulation. For example, many women who use the Internet use log-in names that are male or are gender neutral. Reasons range from women wanting to be taken more seriously to avoiding harassing behaviors which are more often than not directed at women (We 1994).

3. Deindividuation

The social psychological concept of deindividuation is useful to discuss interaction in Cyberspace. This concept is employed often to explain the increase in uninhibited behavior demonstrated in computer-mediated communication (Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire 1984; Kiesler, Zubrow, Moses and Geller 1985; Orcutt and Anderson 1977). Defined classically, deindividuation is "the process whereby submergence in a group produces anonymity and a loss of identity, and a consequent weakening of social norms and constraints" (Lea and Spears 1991: 284). However, it may also occur when an individual's attention is, conversely, *removed from the self and social context* as it becomes consumed by the communication task itself. Individuals using e-mail might lose their sense of both public *and* private self-awareness which may lead them to act "more impulsive and assertive and less bound by precedents set by societal norms..." (Kiesler et. al 1984: 1130). Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, and McGuire suggest that not only can a user absorbed in computer-mediated communication become deindividuated, but that "submergence in a technology, technologically induced anonymity, and weak social feedback might also lead to ... a loss of identity and uninhibited behavior " (1986:183).

More recent studies, however, indicate that while CMC may lower public self-awareness, private self-awareness may actually be enhanced (Franzoi, Davis and Young 1985; Matheson and Zanna 1990; Spears, Lee and Lee 1990; Turkle 1984). There is evidence that the computer becomes an extension of the self, rather than a substitute for it, serving as individual expression, not as an oppressor of self-awareness. In the words of one e-mail user:

When you type mail into the computer you feel you can say anything ...sometimes it gets pretty personal ... I don't feel I am even typing ... I am thinking it, and there it is on the screen ... I feel totally telepathic with the computer (quoted in Turkle 1984:211).

Research addressing differential self-awareness has shown that individuals who demonstrate greater levels of self-focus tend to be less easily influenced by perceptions of others (Scheier 1980). In other words, e-mail users who demonstrate increased self-focus may write things they wouldn't ordinarily say in face-to-face conversation without worrying about reprisals or repercussions. An increased sense of self-awareness may lead e-mail users to reveal

their own positions, without a great need to support or explore them, as this would require an understanding that other people's perspectives are important and that they may be quite different from their own ... this could lead to an escalating cycle of conflict and disagreement, and it could increase the display of affect and uninhibited behavior characteristic of computer users (Matheson and Zanna 1990: 9).

Rather than the lowering of both public and private self-awareness, then, the combination of the lowering of public self-awareness and the *heightening of private awareness* leads to uninhibited behavior and an increase in experimenting with different aspects of our selves. In the words of one frequent e-mail user, as long as "you use an alias, you can say pretty much what you want without others pinning what you say to your real name. In 'real life,' you have to wear a mask, trying not to say the wrong thing ... under an alias, it doesn't matter" (quoted in Myers 1987: 256). As Sproull and Kiesler explain, when people

feel less empathy, less guilt, less concern over how they compare with others, and are less influenced by norms [and when] social definitions are weak or nonexistent, communication becomes unregulated. People are less bound by convention, less influenced by status, and unconcerned with making a good appearance. Their behavior becomes more extreme, impulsive, and self-centered (1986:48).

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

A. Theoretical Influences

Although the postmodern self is a much debated topic, any attempt at closure or synthesis would be limiting. While there is no single postmodern paradigm, position, or perspective, there does seem to be some consensus as to what positions postmodernists reject.

They all reject representational and objective or rational concepts of knowledge and truth; grand, synthetic theorizing meant to comprehend Reality as and in a unified whole; and any concept of self or subjectivity in which it is not understood as produced as an effect of discursive practices (Flax 1990:188).

Flax believes, however, that while postmodern theories are important, they are "both overtly and subtly gender bound and biased" (225). In a forthcoming essay "Whither Ethnography," David Dickens comments that some forms of postmodernism exclude feminist contributions and proclaims that it is "difficult to see what is so homogeneous about 'generic postmodernism' that a consideration of 'some' postmodern feminist literature would be too burdensome" (forthcoming). As he also asserts "general commentaries on postmodern ethnography seem to be reluctant to include feminist accounts in their discussions" (forthcoming).

For Flax, postmodern discourses lack any "extended discussion of gender relations as essential to and constitutive of contemporary Western culture" (1990: 209), and do not

engage in any serious discussion of feminist theories, even when these theories support or supplement the ideas of postmodern writers (1990:211). Therefore, while a postmodern perspective generally advocates giving voice to excluded Others, there seems to be a conspicuous oversight by many postmodernists with respect to the lives, and therefore the "selves," of women. Though the self in postmodern society has been described as protean (Lifton 1968) and multi-phrenic (Gergen 1991), any version of selfhood is nothing if not gendered. It is for this reason that I find it crucial to augment the postmodern view with that of feminist theory. Specifically, feminist postmodern ethnographers are particularly attentive to the researcher/subject relation.

"Feminist theorists...stress the central importance of sustained, intimate relations with other persons or the repression of such relations in the constitution, structure, and ongoing experiences of a self" (Flax 1990: 229). Selfhood, then, emerges from powerful and affective relationships with others. Flax comments that "...gender is a central constituting element in each person's sense of self and in a culture's idea of what it means to be a person. Thus, adequate accounts of subjectivity would have to include investigation of the effects of gender on its constitution and expression and on our concepts of 'selfhood,' " (1990:26). This conception of gender as the most important determinant of the self is reflected in my decision to focus my research primarily on gender rather than on the many other variables such as sexuality, race, class, and age which also encode the interactional process of selfhood.

B. Research Questions and Foci

There are several interesting normative differences which characterize Cyberspace, and while one could spend years doing ethnographic research on the Internet, my time is limited. Cyberspace is made up of different levels -- fascinating and diverse subcultures creating their own systems of values, attitudes, beliefs and norms of communication that

are both distinct from, yet deeply embedded in the dominant culture. These virtual subcultures "... reject conventionality and social restrictions" (Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, and McGuire 1986:183). Uninhibited communication becomes the rule rather than the exception. Flaming, self-righteous monologues, and argumentative speech are all inherent elements of the virtual environment. The rules may be unwritten but they do exist. These Cyber-norms have been set by computer hackers who typically, as Elmer-Dewitt put it, "subscribe to a sort of anarchistic ethic" and tend to practice anti-normative behavior (1994:53). While exploring various aspects of Cyber-culture I will concentrate mainly on interaction among the locals themselves (those persons who are known in and "belong to" a Cyber-community), and on the interaction between the locals and the "newbies" (the new immigrants to Cyberspace, still lost in the darkness on the edge of town). Specifically, I will be addressing: (1) the possible democratizing effects of CMC; (2) the increase in uninhibited behaviors, (3) gender differences in Cyberspace, and; (4) the means by which Cyber-surfers simulate, evoke, and/or "become" various "selves" along the way. I will be evoking the voices and interactions of both males and females for the purposes of better understanding how communication on the Internet and the simulation and manipulation of "selves" is effectuated. I realize that none of the questions I am asking here are resolvable in any final sense. In addition to my own subjectivity, truth, knowledge, and comprehension are socially constructed by the very situations in and by which they were obtained.

C. The Cyber-Field

Perhaps no research setting has ever been as vague and indistinct as Cyberspace. Not only can Cyberspace not be limited to one setting, it cannot even be limited to one country. Within Cyberspace, there are an abundance of different levels of Internet communities, or "Cyburgs." The "Usenet" is an international network of electronic bulletin

board systems linked to the Internet. It receives messages from hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of users worldwide. The messages are arranged topically in "newsgroups" and currently cover over 3,500 topic related fora to the Internet universe (Abbott 1994). A "discussion list" is an ongoing forum for communication and interaction related to a particular topic or group of topics. A "MUD" is a multi-user dungeon which is usually divided into three genres: combat-oriented MUDs; social-oriented MUDs; and chatlines. On combat MUDs, you can fight monsters and other players, and the goal is to become a Wizard, the highest scoring of all MUDers. On social MUDs, you talk to other players, get into group or private conversations, play multiuser games, create objects, travel from room to room, and even have "virtual sex." A chatline is a social MUD that is similar to a conference call. You can have group discussions, but can't create rooms or objects.

An individual can theoretically belong to a "newsgroup," a "discussion list," or a "MUD" where members are from a hundred different countries, and to a "bulletin board" with members who are all in the same physical space, like on a university campus or in a workplace setting. There are those Cyburgs which address many different subjects within a larger domain, for example, the Women's Studies list that is physically based in New Zealand discusses a multitude of topics related to women's issues. Then there are more specialized Cyburgs where you can read your horoscope or find out what happened last night on Melrose Place.

What, then, can be said about the location and constitution of the Internet? It constitutes a global, postmodern virtual environment. Cyberspace is the virtual social space constituted by Internet users and their interactions. There are no physical constraints. While conducting this research, the field is constituted through culture and interaction within these many virtual communities. For without culture and interaction, there is no Cyberspace. Each Cyburg changes across time, space, membership, and perhaps most importantly, with each and every interaction. Demographics have shown that users of the

Internet are, on the whole, more educated and earn more money than the average American (Monson and Dalaimo 1994).

Access to the Cyber-field is also quite different than access to more traditional research settings in that there are no "gatekeepers," and no "key informants." Given my two-year tenure as an Internet user, access is effortless and relatively uncomplicated. I can enter and exit the field 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including holidays. I can travel through Cyberspace, "lurk" on discussion lists and newsgroups, and participate in MUDs from the (relative) comfort of my own home. Each interaction I witness or am engaged in will be considered "contextual data." However, although access for a seasoned "Netter" can be easy, the trip through different "towns" can still be quite unpredictable. You can be a local in one Cyburg, but still a newbie in another. What is acceptable communicative behavior depends on the Burg you're in. While visiting a social MUD, virtual sex may be available on every "streetcorner." However, this type of sexual behavior on another MUD, in a different space, may get you virtually attacked, insulted and run out of town -- the Internet's version of tarring and feathering. Unwanted or inappropriate behavior can get you permanently removed from some Cyburgs, while others adhere strictly to the freedom of speech guaranteed in the U.S. Bill of Rights. Travelling through Cyberspace is erratic and unstable, and a new visitor should tread lightly until he/she learns the norms of whatever Cyburg he/she visits.

D. Methods

[Post-modern ethnography] is a meditative vehicle because we come to it neither as to a map of knowledge nor as a guide to action, nor even for entertainment. We come to it as the start of a different kind of journey (Tyler 1986: 140).

This "journey" through Cyberspace in the form of a postmodern ethnography will attempt to approach what Marcus (1994) calls the evocation and the enactment of the

condition of postmodernity. This "condition" includes, among other things: an incoherent, fragmented and unstable self; an absence of objective truth, knowledge, or power; and, the absolute impossibility of a privileged voice or discourse. Historically, ethnography has exhibited a "rich tradition of providing depth analyses of social worlds from the members' perspectives" and "represent a viable and important mode of social scientific inquiry" (Adler and Adler 1987: 17). The Adlers believe the way to improve ethnography is to "reap the pleasures" of the experience and to "use your self, reflect on your past, and continue to involve yourself in your present" (1987:18). In order to accommodate this self-reflexivity, Marcus (1994) encourages the production of "messy texts." He believes that the true nature of ethnography juxtaposes different selves, various concepts, other texts (including television, radio, and computer-mediated communication), the local, and the global simultaneously. Therefore, it would be inappropriate, if not impossible, to produce a neat and uncontaminated "write-up" or "representation" of "truth" or "reality" in postmodern ethnography.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assert the need to be self-reflexive and resourceful while conducting qualitative research in the "Fifth Moment." Once submerged in the act of doing fieldwork, a researcher may need to devise, improvise or create methods to meet the challenges of the task at hand. An ethnographer should be flexible and be prepared to embrace each new situation uniquely. The bricoleur, the authors tell us, "reads widely and is knowledgeable about the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism) that can be brought to any particular problem" (1994:2). The process of this labor is called a bricolage, "a complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:2).

Stephen Tyler (1986) asserts that the postmodern ethnographer does not explore, describe, explain, represent, or predict as is done in other types of research methodologies or more traditional ethnographies. An ethnographer writing in and about the postmodern

should evoke the points of view (among other phenomena) of the Other through his or her self. Give the Others voices and let them be heard. We can't describe the "real," for it does not exist.

Rather than attempting to convince the reader of the believability or reality of his/her account through the use of carefully constructed arguments or "proofs," the postmodern ethnographer seeks instead to evoke an understanding through recognition, identification, intuition, personal experience, emotion, insight, and other communicative forms which should reach the reader at other levels than the cognitive one alone (Gottschalk 1994:10).

Current issues in performing postmodern ethnography include, but are not limited to: (1) the extent to which a researcher uses and/or imposes his or her own voice on the voices of the Others; (2) the problem of authority and the distinction between author and subjects, and; (3) the type and quality of involvement and understanding the Others have in and of the research. While all of these issues will inform my research, there are no simple answers to any of these dilemmas. While all of these issues will inform my research, there are no simple answers to any of these dilemmas, as each situation is unique and should be addressed accordingly.

To avoid the danger of speaking "for" the Others of my research, I will focus on the researcher/subject relation and attempt to maintain a dialogue with members of the field so that they may comment on my inscriptions and interpretations. I will make a conscious effort to enable as many members of Cyberspace as possible to "speak." In this way they may contribute to the construction of knowledge, that is, after all, about our lives in Cyberspace. Consequently, the use of quotes, personal experiences, and autobiographical accounts will be put to liberal use. I will also try to avoid sociological jargon in an attempt to present the process and "results" of my research in such a way that allows for easy access to subjects and readers. Gottschalk emphasizes the need for a "dialogic validity," whether "non-sociologist Others recognize, understand and identify with our texts; whether

they are engaged in these texts and whether these texts engage them" (1994:14). In this research, I will attempt to allow for a broad number of coexisting discourses, voices, and realities. For me, this entails trying to empathize with, if not to understand, the Internet through the eyes, hearts and minds of a variety of Cyburg residents. As Pfohl writes, "Although this story passes through my body, it is not mine alone. Nor am I entirely by myself in the re(w)ritings that become this text. No parasite is. Repeatedly" (1992:6).

E. Where Am I Coming From?

Choosing a research method and conducting that research, writing up results, and teaching are all political acts, all informed by particular biased ideologies and pistemologies (Apple 1992; Harding 1991; Lather 1991). Given the political and social implications associated with research and writing, I'd like to address the appropriateness of my overall goals and choice of research methods. There are several issues I will examine and several decisions I must make before and during my research. I have taken into consideration a variety of goals and arguments proposed by scholars speaking from different perspectives. Shulamit Reinharz states that feminist ethnography is consistent with three goals: (1) to document the lives and activities of women, (2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and (3) to conceptualize women's behavior as an expression of social contexts (1992:51). There is however, some debate as to the process of achieving this goal. More specifically, the dispute between qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

While some scholars believe that aligning feminist research exclusively with qualitative methods simply perpetuates patriarchy, and the masculine perspective, and "does little more than reify dichotomies that have proven inadequate" (O'Leary in Reinharz 1992: 47), other feminist theorists perceive positivistic methods such as testing or large-scale surveys as skewing knowledge in an androcentric way (DiIorio 1989; Harding

1987; Reinharz 1992; Smith 1975). These scholars advocate using the "standpoint of women" and

reject positivism as an aspect of patriarchal thinking that separates the scientist from the phenomenon under study. ... In this context, feminist fieldwork has a special role in upholding a nonpositivist perspective, rebuilding the social sciences and producing new concepts concerning women (Reinharz 1992: 46).

John Van Maanen also believes women's lives and perspectives have been largely overlooked in fieldwork. Van Maanen maintains that "most ethnographic writing was created by male fieldworkers concerned mostly with the comings and goings of male natives... . One result of the growth of feminist scholarship is the realization that there are many tales of the field to be told" (1988:37). Storytellers are of every different ethnicity; men and women; young and old; gay, lesbian, and straight; the elite and the homeless. They include anyone who has an anecdote to share or a yarn to weave.

I do not reject quantitative approaches as valid and useful research methods, nor do I dispute their place in feminist research, though what that place is remains a matter of some controversy. However, by its very nature, this ethnography is entirely qualitative and will be multi-paradigmatic in approach, drawing on feminist, postmodern, and interpretive schools of thought. By employing multiple methods research, I hope to combine the strengths and weaknesses of several methods to obtain an understanding of the phenomena under study which is free from methodological, if not from personal biases. Methods will include: observation of postings and interactions that take place within various communities in Cyberspace; participation in several discussion lists and newsgroups, as well as MUDs; the posting of open-ended questions to various discussion lists; interviewing of various residents of the Internet through electronic writing; and content analyses of various online journals and list archives, as well as current daily postings to a variety of Cyber-bulletin boards.

F. Ethics and Politics

With any research, and especially when a researcher is as personally involved as an ethnographer must be, there are ethical dilemmas to ponder. The problem of revealing my research, or myself as researcher to all the research subjects in my ethnography is something I've thought long and hard about. There is a longstanding debate on the issue, in which different scholars have made conflicting, yet intelligent arguments. Ethics in fieldwork are as ambiguous as they are controversial. Sheryl Ruzek writes "[a]lthough many fieldworkers disagree, I object to participant observation without revealing one's role as a researcher in any but public settings, partly because it impedes asking simple questions outright... I also believe that it is important to explain one's role and specify what is to be investigated, as well as why and how. [P]resenting an identity other than one's own violates the ethos of many groups and individuals" (in Reinharz 1992: 69).

The Internet, however, in many forms is a public setting. And my position is one of participant and of observer, not one in which I will consciously manipulate respondent's feelings as happens in more experimental types of research. While I will be using both overt and covert methods of data collection in my ethnography, I feel justified in not revealing my role as a researcher or the purpose of my research to everyone I come in contact with. This would not only be impossible, but there are some Cyber-settings that are not conducive to having social researchers watching and taking notes. Particularly in the MUDs where "real-time talk" can become very private, personal, and often sexual. Sometimes just "lurking" on a list -- that is, to read postings but to not post myself or announce my presence -- is the best way to obtain information. If my presence as a researcher were known, residents in many Cyburgs are likely to alter their communicative behavior. So, while I will be actively participating in many of the Cyburgs I visit, and hopefully, as Reason put it, "blurring the lines between author and subject," I will at times be concealing my identity. Since I will not be collecting any sources of identification when

I transfer files from Cyberspace to hard-copy, and therefore cannot reveal those at any later date, I can assure the subjects of my research complete anonymity from the time the information is in my possession. It is on this basis that I will be conducting both overt and covert research in Cyberspace.

G. Self-Reflexivity

Feminist fieldwork is predicated upon the active involvement of the researcher in the production of social knowledge through direct participation in and experience of the social realities she is seeking to understand ... however, feminist field researchers add [another dimension] which is not included as a part of conventional field methods ... the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender as a basic feature of all social life and ... understanding the social realities of women as actors whom previous sociological research has rendered invisible (DiIorio in Reinharz 1992: 46).

Many feminist researchers speak of "the ethical and epistemological importance of integrating their selves into their work, and of eliminating the distinction between the subject and the object" (Reinharz 1992: 69). Self-reflexivity in ethnography allows for the evocation of more than one truth. The practice of feminist self-reflexivity is not to "replace the 'self' with the 'other' as the focal object of the ethnographic enterprise, but rather to show how knowledge is interactionally constructed" (Balsamo 1990:50). To be self-reflexive, the researcher must maintain sensitivity to the crisis of representation, as well as to what some feminist researchers see as an inherent unequal and manipulative relationship between the researcher and the subjects (McRobbie 1982; Walkerdine 1986). Balsamo (1990) writes "[t]he ethnographer disciplines -- lays down the law -- by virtue of the dynamics of interpretations in which she selects, represents, and re-orders the ethnographic talk to support her own reading of the encounter" (50-51). As researchers, we must constantly monitor ourselves be aware of our thought processes, and the origins from which they arise. We should be aware of the "dual nature of ethnographic

'interpretation' ", which "rely upon both the personal biography and cultural history of those who are traditionally positioned as ethnographers, and those who are positioned as subjects" (Balsamo 1990:49). This synthesis of biography and history is inevitable. As an ethnographer re-presents what she sees, feels, and hears she necessarily constructs her own interpretations. These interpretations will always be affected by personal experience, as well as the inevitable omission or transformation of some ethnographic data .

As Jane Flax observed, "thinking is both subtly and overtly gender-bound and biased" (1990:26). To this extent, a researcher should always ask him or herself what the relationship is between ethnography and autobiography (Clough 1990:36). What are the effects of my cultural, social , religious, socio-economic, and educational background? What about my life experiences? And what of unconscious desires and the often undetected power issue? (see Clough 1990; Foucault 1972). Each of these partially structures not only how I experience the interactions in Cyberspace, but also how I interpret them. Patricia Clough (1990) examined the connection between feminism and the "task of relating case study/ethnography and autobiography/psychosexuality in the context of 'writing culture'" (36). More intensive analyses can be found in Foucault (1972), Said (1978), and in Clifford's (1988) historical analysis of the relationship between ethnographic subjectivity and ethnographic authority (in Clough 1990: 37).

CHAPTER 5

SIMULATING THE CYBER-SELF

Part of the beauty of the many Internet subcultures is the variety of norms, behaviors, and languages one encounters. Whether it is over electronic mail, a discussion list, a newsgroup, or a MUD, when a tourists visit a Cyber-site they have never been to before they must be careful not to offend or insult the locals. This is a sure way to have repeated harsh, rude, and often vulgar insults "hurled at you" electronically, i.e. to get "flamed". Some sysops (systems operators) will even remove you from the site in a sort of electronic ostracism. To avoid committing any social *faux pas*, newbies should "read" an information file or FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) which fills them in on "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" (i.e., the norms) of that particular locale.

To get acquainted with the manner and style of Cyberspace, I will follow the practices of the locals and provide a FAQ for the reader/traveler. Though there's no universal Cyber-language, this list contains some oft-used Cyber-lingo and some frequently employed acronyms.

FAQ

Cyburg:	an Internet site, esp. a discussion list, newsgroup, or MUD (aka burg, Cyber-site)
Netter:	a person who uses the Internet
Cyber-surfer:	a netter who visits many Cyburgs (also: "surfing the Internet")
Newbie:	a user new to Cyberspace or to a particular Cyburg
IMHO	In my humble opinion

WRT	With respect to
BTW	By the way
SO	Significant other
TPTB	The Powers that Be
TIIC	The Idiots in Charge
:-)	Smiley Face [also Smiley Variables: winking ;-) or sad :-(or angry -< or wearing sunglasses 8-> or a hat <:-). The possibilities are endless!]

=====

WELCOME TO CYBERSPACE!

A. Level One: Electronic Mail

The visual anonymity of computer-mediated communication distorts what we perceive as "reality" for several reasons. One reason is the lack of visual cues which signify mood and status in face-to-face interaction. Social status cues like dress and appearance, and physical descriptors such as age, race and gender, are what Erving Goffman calls "sign vehicles" (1959). These "signs" carry information which allows us to assess and react to individuals we encounter based on our past experience of similar circumstances. The lack of these visual cues allow users to easily manipulate the impressions they give off and consequently how others perceive them (Goffman 1959). Some believe the lack of visual status cues allows for more equality in Cyberspace -- women may use gender neutral names and members of minority groups are virtually indistinguishable from members of dominant ones. Communication free of visual status cues holds the promise of more egalitarian discussion between individuals of different social positions. In fact, many have claimed they can communicate much easier over e-mail than in face-to-face interaction. As one e-mail user remarked, "I'd say things [over e-mail] that I wouldn't say face-to-face because I was hiding behind a computer screen -- most of these people would never know who I really was."

I asked another Cyber-surfer if she thought it was easier to communicate over e-mail. She responded:

I'm 'different' when on [e-mail], but it's because I'm more comfortable writing things in general than talking. I'm shy, have a hard time expressing myself or get talked over in real life, here, no one can interrupt you and you have their complete attention for as long as they continue to read what you've written. I tend to sound more outgoing on the net, probably, and I don't feel shy here.

However, e-mail elicits a more personal and informal type of communication and tends to be less inhibited and more aggressive than face-to-face interaction. Johnson (1994) argues that this loosening of inhibitions is due to lack of visual and physical reminders of status. One Cyberspace resident had this to say:

My suspicion is that people are more aggressive on the list ... kind of like driving. it's easy to flip someone off and honk and yell, but when someone is standing there, and you are talking to him and not his car you nicely tell them that you think their driving sucks. same thing here. it's easy to send someone else off in a tizzy when you don't have to deal with them personally. You just let them rant and rave and pound on their keyboard.

1. Handles, Log-ins and Signatures

Given the absence of visual and aural cues, one strategy members of Cyberspace use to construct their Cyber-selves is through the use of handles (nicknames), log-in names and .signature files. Many female Netters report using a male or a gender-neutral login name and/or handle to avoid unwelcome attention. A user's login name is part of his/her Internet address, and is therefore available to a potentially infinite number of people. Unless specific measures are taken, if one posts to discussion lists or newsgroups, their e-mail address is distributed to everyone on that list. Wary female users have the attitude of "better safe than sorry." They feel that a "female" handle or login name makes them

I would be on our university system, searching Gopher or running stats on the mainframe, and inevitably some guy would interrupt with the "talk" feature. It just got too annoying to deal with ... It's kind of like being stalked.

Much like a bumper sticker, using a ".signature" file (aka "dot sig"), is another strategy Netters use to exhibit their singularity and uniqueness. The signature file, which is like a footer attached to every e-mail message a user sends, can be customized to:

"Then sigh not so, But let them go, And be you blithe and bonny..." --- Shakespeare "Much Ado About Nothing"

e-mail: xxxxxxxx@xxxxxx.xxx.xxxx-xxxxx.edu
LOVE KNOWS NO GENDER!

a message brought to you by
wendy/wendell =)

[illegible]

B. Level Two: Newsgroups

Newsgroups are Cyburgs that a Netter can "call" and connect to via computer modem and "read" news on hundreds, maybe thousands, of specific topics from astronomy to zoology. As with electronic mail, visual anonymity plays a part in shaping communication styles and allows for manipulation of self. When this woman told her story, she felt that men:

show much less concern about the usual social constraints ... perhaps because online communication feels more anonymous. After the first time I posted to [a newsgroup] an individual e-mailed a 'welcome to the group'. After a short conversation about a political issue, I got, out of the blue, a request from him for an exchange of nude photos (quoted in We 1994).

A large portion of newsgroup topics are related to television programs. In my travels through this level, I dropped in on several of these newsgroups. What follows is only a tiny sampling.

1. Soapnews

First things first. We need the FAQ for this Soap Group.

=====

FAQ: Rec.Arts.TV.Soaps

BTW: By The Way
 CUL: See You Later
 FF: Fast Forward
 FWIW: For What It's Worth
 IDTS: I Don't Think So
 IOAS: It's Only A Soap...
 IOASOG: It's Only A Soap Opera Group
 JTYMLTK: Just thought you might like to know
 OTF: On The Floor
 OTFL: On The Floor Laughing
 RATS: Rec.Arts.TV.Soaps

ROTFL: Rolling On The Floor Laughing
 SOD: Soap Opera (Digest or Disease)
 SORAS: Soap Opera Rapid Aging Syndrome
 TTFN: Ta-Ta For Now
 TTYL: Talk To You Later

=====

Now we're ready. More than any other newsgroup I've visited, members of the soap opera groups engage in role-playing, perhaps expressing aspects of their different "selves." In fact, they've developed a quite rigorous system so that fellow soap "groupies" can "play along," thereby further blurring the distinction between "reality" and media-created "fantasy." Many members of the Soap groups speak in "the voice of" their favorite Soap character. Several of the soap subgroups have recently adopted abbreviations to denote when group members are talking "in character." For example, if a poster is "FAC Dixie" (Favorite *All My Children* Character Dixie), and he/she wants to post a message *as if they really were* Dixie, he/she would use the abbreviation "AMC: FAC" in the subject line, warning potential readers that this post is strictly role-playing. Each soap subgroup has its own abbreviations: FOC = Favorite *One Life To Live* Character; FGC = Favorite *General Hospital* Character, etc. Night-time "soaps" also have a huge following. You may sleep with your psychiatrist or carry your infertile sister's child if you take the role of your FSC, or Favorite *Sisters* Character! [F*C format originated from rec.arts.disney's FDC (Future Disney Cabinet), and was introduced on r.a.t.s. by Ashley Lambert-Maberly].

The soap groups are actually quite organized. They have specific people assigned to summarize the shows and post them online so list members can "watch" their favorite soaps on their computer terminals at their leisure. The following is part of a summary from an episode of *Days of Our Lives* on ABC daytime.

=====

KRISTEN & TONY'S HOUSE

As Tony and Kristen enter their home, Tony's vision clears again for a second. Just as he calls out to Kristen, he is again plunged into darkness. Tony isn't sure at all what is

going on. Tony decides to ignore it for the moment. He asks Kristen about his little fit of jealousy that he had about John earlier. He clearly still needs some re-assurance from Kristen and she sees that. She vows to him again that he is the only man in her life.

THE RECTORY

John welcomes the priest back to America and thanks him profusely for making the trip to Rome for him. Earnestly he asks the priest how long it will be until he is released from his vows.

FADE TO HOURGLASS

It's almost as good as the "real" thing. Actually, there is an interesting development on the soap net right now on the Days of Our Lives (DOOL) group, which exemplifies the further blurring of the "real" with fantasy. Ordinarily this group engages in a lot of bashing of the character "Billie" played by Lisa Rinna. At some point, the members of this newsgroup apparently confused reality and TV texts, and began projecting their feelings for the soap character onto the real-life character. The bashing thus transferred from "Billie" and focused on Lisa Rinna the actress. When another real-life character, Lisa Rinna's nephew, joined the DOOL newsgroup, some members suddenly confronting the fact that Lisa is "real" with "real" family, who have "real" feelings, have apologized to her nephew and there seems to be a general toning down on Lisa-bashing. Some, of course, don't care and go right on bashing the actress. Interestingly, her nephew seems to believe the flaming is all in good fun.

2. Melrose Place

Of all the newsgroups I visited in this journey, none entertained me as much as alt.news.tv.Melrose. Some of funniest lines, some of the best fights, some of the raunchiest language, and many cross-overs from fantasy to reality can be found in this Cyburg.

=====

>Allison is the worst drunk I've ever seen! She's not interestingly bitchy like Kimberly, Syd, or Amanda. She is just nasty. I just want to get her off of the screen.

>Oh come on Betsy, Allison FINALLY got us to pay attention to her on screen. I thought she was a total crack-up as a drunk, swaggering and slurring and ripping into Susan. I hope she STAYS drunk; if for nothing else then the sheer entertainment value of her blatant stupidity.

>Billy has no spine because Alison ripped it out to use for herself. Way to go Alison. Just get off the sauce.

>Allison and Susan's little fight was great, but WAY too short. It would have been better to have an all out brawl instead of just spilling some vodka and sauce on their shirts.

>Why was Kim (lizard woman...) so damn NICE to Matt when treating Jo? Didn't she recently threaten his life with an infected needle or something? Or is this just Kim being sweet and lovely, before she goes psycho? Any thoughts, Matt fans?

>My favorite line from this episode: "When they were handing out business sense, Jane was at the back of the line getting her nails done." Amanda

=====

Some remarks get downright personal.

=====

>Ok, everyone, when Jane smiles, her lipstick, makeup, and facial expression reminded me of The Joker (as in Batman!). Has anyone else noticed this? Maybe that's why no one can ever take her seriously!!

=====

This particular thread, started by a couple of gay men, got really nasty!

=====

Subject: Re: Matt's lost love

>I just read a posting with a summary on Monday's episode and it mentions that Matt is reunited with a lost love (Jason Beghe) Is this the gallery owner from last season that we all felt should be brought back?

>No Jeff, this is the ever-fabulous NAVY-GUY !!! Waaaaah. But I guess that means Art Gallery Guy is still available for ME!

>Robert (it just struck me how we refer to these guys like Ken dolls... "Art Gallery Guy", "Navy Guy", "Pool Guy"... buy the entire set!)

> I was heartbroken to hear that Matt's friend Jeffrey has the HIV virus. I cried along with Matt. OK, OK, so it was melodramatic and totally predictable, but still, poor Matt. He's finally got the love of his life back and now they'll probably show him die. =(

>Subject: Re: KILL ALL THE FAGS

JOSIE BISSET LOVER writes:

YOU ARE A FU**IN' BASTARD WHO NEEDS TO DIE FOR THINKING THIS WAY. THERE IS NO FINE ENTERTAINMENT IN SEEING FAGS ON T.V. THAT TYPE OF STORYLINE DOES NOT BELONG ON T.V. I CAN'T BELIEVE THERE ARE MORONS OUT THERE LIKE YOU WHO WOULD LIKE TO SEE SHIT LIKE THAT ON T.V. YOU HAVE MAJOR PROBLEMS!

> Here, let me help you with that caps lock key.

>Do you really think anybody on this newsgroup gives a damn what your small-minded opinions are? You've told us plenty of times; nobody cares. Find a new audience for your tirades.

GET A LIFE ALL OF YOU!!!!!!!!!!

Flame mode off...

=====

Had this exchange taken place in face-to-face interaction, it would likely have resulted in physical violence. Each individual in this interaction had the opportunity to say what he/she wanted -- regardless of how offensive -- because it was mediated by Cyberspace. Though one never knows for certain the gender of another Netter, the majority of attacks and tirades did originate from masculine logins. This next group, for example, had no "female" members when I was "present."

3. *Barney and Friends*

One particular newsgroup--The League to Destroy Barney the Dinosaur--is dedicated "ENTIRELY to intellectual and philosophical discourse against Barney." I must admit I thought this newsgroup was a joke, but I was mistaken. Many residents of "Barney.die.die.die" are very serious about their hatred of every small child's favorite purple dinosaur. They've even gone so far as to re-write Barney's themesong:

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=====
I hate you
you hate me
let's gang up
and kill Barney
w/a great big knife
we'll slit his purple throat
then toss his body in the moat
=====
```

Although a sense of reality seems to be created by the intertextuality of cyberspace, television, movies, and cartoons, individuals in newsgroups seem to continuously merge fantasy and reality, exhibiting the fluidity and contradiction which epitomizes the postmodern condition.

C. *Level Three: Discussion Lists*

Following the ascending hierarchy of disclosure and intimacy as one travels from Level One to Level Four, there is some sort of deeper bond among members of a particular discussion list than among those members of any particular newsgroup. Some list members really seem to open up, they explore and develop their selves .

I call it my 'net persona,' real chatty and talkative, very open, I can write my bf [boyfriend] things that I'd never have the nerve to bring up to him in person, and [on this list] I pour out my life story, here *I guess I am more real than in real life,*

particularly on [this list] lots of things you hold back telling people in real life, here, it's like a big open slumber party and you figure most of these people won't ever meet you anyway, so if I sound like a basket case, it doesn't matter!

A discussion list can function as a support group and a place to go for comfort.

The majority of list members on these types of lists used feminine login names. Although we can infer that most of these are women, it may be the case that men are using female log-in names when they want to explore a more relational, "feminine" side. One list member sent this message after another member revealed she had been diagnosed with diabetes.

=====

Dear Mary,

Many warm and encouraging thoughts. When health crises occur, it can be a real loss of faith between one and one's body. Having to change one's life in the way in which diabetes requires is a significant transition and don't let anybody tell you it's easy. It's a loss of innocence to have to think about your health every time you eat. I wish you courage and strength and if you need to bitch, feel free to write.

love and respect,

Cin

=====

Some users take advantage of the quasi-anonymous nature of the list to explore their sexual "selves." I discovered several "women" on a lesbian oriented list did not consider themselves lesbians. One list member explains:

I subscribed to this lesbian discussion list out of curiosity. I found myself lurking and getting very involved in their lives. Finally I began posting myself ... and everyone just assumed I was a lesbian. I wasn't hit on a lot like I expected to be ... like I would probably have been had it been a male-dominated discussion list. I just met a lot of really nice people and found a sanctuary.

In fact, many Netters employ Cyberspace to explore different aspects of their selves, aspects they might not be able to explore in physical reality. A question like this one may catch some people off guard at the office, but in virtual space it is relatively harmless.

=====

> How does a woman *know* she is bi/les?

>i decided that i was bi after i decided i wasn't a lesbian, but i wasn't straight...i decided i wasn't a lesbian because i LOVE the roughness of men. i love to be f**ked (sic). i also love my life with my husband - he's definitely my soul mate. i don't know how to express it except, we belong together. so, since i wasn't one or the other, i must be bi.

=====

This intimate behavior is even more surprising when you realize that the vast majority of these Cyber-relationships are between two or more people who have never, and will never, *physically meet* one another. Many of these messages exemplify the often very open and direct style of writing in discussion lists and also, as I'll show later in this chapter, in MUDs. Sometimes a series of messages reads like a Walt Whitman poem -- sort of self-reflexive and stream-of-consciousness combined with a little (sometimes deviant) sex. Throughout my journey through the Internet, from e-mail to MUDing, communication has become increasingly more familiar and less inhibited. The environment has become for me, a thirty-year-old woman socialized in postmodern America, increasingly sexual and intimidating.

Electronic mail seemed casual and fun, still exhibiting many traditional non-Cyber norms. Then newsgroups introduced the use of (sometimes) veiled profanity, hostile debates and rude flaming. Discussion lists have proven to be downright intimate at times, and MUDs are of course famous for virtual sex. Not all computer-mediated communication is intimate or sexual though. In fact, this note just came over the Net today:

=====

>Some guy has developed a computer program called "Online With Jesus." Apparently it asks you for your sins, you input them, and it totals them up and assigns you a penance. This was just too odd not to share. What I want to know is, is it ordained?

Sara Brown Heaven help us! 0:-)

=====

There is, however, something about a newsgroup or a discussion list that is still socially inhibitive to some netters. Maybe it's the presence of the unknown lurker -- that old professor or future publisher who may be "out there" listening in, but has never posted a message and consequently never revealed his/her identity. Electronic mail, newsgroups and discussion lists all store "reality" in tiny Cyber-files that can be retrieved at a later date. The environment changes entirely when no one can "lurk," and the pressure of real-time interaction is on.

D. Level Four: Welcome to MUDs, MUCKs, MOOs, and MUSHes!

Before we arrive at the first MUD of the tour, we'll quickly review some MUD-specific jargon and background knowledge. MUDs, or multi-user dungeons, are interactive multiuser realities: programs which allow users to interact in real-time in a text-based virtual environment. A "MUDer" is a person who spends time in a MUD. A "newbie" here is an inexperienced MUDer, a "Dino" is someone who has been mudding for several years. MUDs consist of many virtual rooms containing multiple characters and objects. MUCKs, MUSHes and MOOs are all descendants of MUDs. Some are game or combat-oriented, others, like TinyMUDs are social; centered around conversation, room building and other creative acts. TinyMUCK descended from TinyMUD, it restricted building commands to only designated "MUCKers" who could "MUCK" around with the environment ... hence the name. TinyMUSHI (Multiuser Shared Hallucination) allows for the use of triggered events and it also contains "puppets" that relay information to players. We're almost there. Now, TinyMOOs are like TinyMUCKs except that players may create objects. The "OO" in MOO stands for "object-oriented." MOOs utilize both text and graphics. Confused? That's part of the trip. And that's only a fraction of it. Oh! One thing to be alert for is a MUDer who is looking for TinySex (TS). This is virtual sex -- I hear it's

a lot like phone sex -- when another player might send "act" commands which imitate sexual acts, usually with another character. Although TinySex has quite a following, it is a big reason why more people do not go MUDing. Look, we're almost there!

=====

WELCOME TO AQUA-MUSH!

Please enter: <connect name password>

If you are a guest, enter: <connect guest guest>

=====

Words in *italics* are "spoken" by the computer, i.e., the written lines programmed to appear on your computer screen when you're MUDing. The symbol ">" indicates the prompt on the computer screen. Any text after ">" is typed in by the player. I've arranged for us to have a character by the name of Jennifer, with the password "seabreeze." This is my first time on this MUSH. Let's see what happens.

=====

> connect Jennifer seabreeze

Splash! You have landed in a churning whirlpool. You are not alone.

Inside the Whirlpool

Lots of water spinning around in a circle, there is total confusion. Water splashes everywhere, you can't see who's sitting next to you.

Nikko waves to Jennifer

Daphne greets Jennifer with a smile

Atlantis gives Jennifer a big hug

=====

The moment I log onto this MUSH, the other characters get a message that says "Jennifer has arrived." It feels very strange, they can "see" me, but I can't "see" them. It feels as if I have a blindfold on, under surveillance in a room full of strangers staring at me. Let's "look" at who and what else is in the room.

=====

> look here

Inside the Whirlpool

Lots of water spinning around...

contents:

a red seahorse

Atlantis

Daphne
a green submarine
a huge octopus
Nikko
Obvious exits:
down North SE out

=====

At this point, we can "look" at and get a description of any of these specific contents. This would be a good time to describe my character. Once I have created an identity I can act accordingly. At this point I feel like an actor without a script. By now, the other players will probably already have "looked" to see who or what Jennifer is. The way an individual creates, invents or simulates his/her character is a personal and complex issue -- it's basically choosing a "self for the session." Although, my experience is that many MUDers keep the same character for long stretches of time. Characters within any particular MUD get to know each other's virtual identities, and relationships form. Changing your character allows you to start fresh with a clean slate. Too bad you can't do that in "real life."

=====

> describe me = a dark haired, dark eyed mermaid who is far from home
Set
 > look me
Jennifer is a dark haired, dark eyed mermaid who is far from home

=====

After I described my character, I "look"ed at her to see what the other characters will see when they "look." Let's see who or what else is in the room. The self I described was disturbingly close to my real-life persona. It is harder than it seems, to choose a completely different personality, a different self.

=====

> look Atlantis
Atlantis is a young, strong half god, half man. He roams the waters of this MUSH saving damsels in distress and offering his services to those in need.
 > look Daphne

Daphne sees you looking at her. She is a shy, tiny blue seahorse.

> look Nikko

Nikko has lived in these waters for 300 years. He is a huge sperm whale.

=====

I wonder what these people are really like -- how close their descriptions are to their "real" selves. Is "Atlantis" really a young, strong man? Is Daphne really a shy woman? Is Nikko trying to say something by being a "sperm whale"? And a "huge" one at that. There's no telling how close these Cyber-roles are to their real-life personas, although they *feel more real than real.*

=====

Atlantis says "Oh, Jennifer, you're absolutely stunning

Daphne whispers "Careful, Atlantis is looking for TS!" to Jennifer

Atlantis snuggles up to Jennifer and kisses her long and lovely neck

Nikko says "Where did you travel from, Jennifer?"

Daphne swims down into a black abyss.

Poonbar has arrived

Atlantis waves at Poonbar

Nikko says "Hey, Poon"

=====

Immediately I have a potential problem with "Atlantis". As soon as he made his move, a (presumably) female character warned me about Atlantis' search for TinySex. When a character "says" or "acts" something, the message goes to all the characters in the room. When a character "whispers" something, that message goes only to that character who was whispered to. A private action is a "pose". What I can see on my screen is only part of what is going on. Each character could be "posing" or "whispering" to others without my knowledge. When Daphne sent Jennifer her warning, she did it privately, apparently not wanting anyone else to "hear." Here we see the norms of dominant culture emerge, somehow magnified or exaggerated. "Atlantis" is most likely being more aggressive than he'd be in "real life", and if we were all in one another's physical presence, "Daphne" would not have been able to warn Jennifer so easily, without alarming "Atlantis."

Ordinarily I would leave, i.e., "QUIT" the MUSH immediately after what I perceived to be inappropriate "advances" by "Atlantis." From personal experience, I know how quickly a computer-mediated conversation can go from innocent snuggling to TinySex. The warning from "Daphne" would have been the "icing on the cake." However, in the name of science (oh, goddess, I can't believe I actually said those words!), I'll stay for the sake of "data" (or is it my unconscious desire of Freudian fame?). I will exit the Whirlpool, which functions as the main meeting room, or the "core" of the MUSH. Let's go adventuring and see if the lecherous musher follows.

=====

> North

You make a few hapless attempts to get out of the whirlpool, but luckily for you a mysterious stranger lifted you out and placed you in The Great Sea, near the Whirlpool
A sea current, still stirred up by the whirlpool, a school of small fish zooms by. You feel dizzy from the whirlpool
Atlantis pages "Where are you Jennifer?"

=====

A "page" is like a "whisper" in that only Jennifer can "hear" it. Whereas you can only "whisper" or "say" things to characters in the same room as you, you can "page" a character who is anywhere in the MUSH. Atlantis is trying to follow. I will ignore his page and continue to explore the MUSH.

=====

Obvious Exits:

East down

> down

Mysterious abyss

A black abyss, steep-sided and stygian in atmosphere. Murky, black water surrounds you

Obvious exits:

Further down Out

> Further down

You swim still further down into the abyss.

Deep in the stygian depths of this abyss at the bottom of the ocean, you can see

Contents:

Atlantis

=====

We accidentally entered the "room" where Atlantis was. This is more likely to happen in the smaller MUDs which have a limited amount of rooms. Some MUDs have thousands of rooms. One TinyMUD called "Islandia" had more than 3,000 players and 14,000 rooms in 1990 (Poirer 1994:1121).

=====

Atlantis says "We meet again"
 > "Quite a coincidence
You say "Quite a coincidence"
Atlantis snuggles up to Jennifer
Obvious exits:
out
 > out

=====

It looks as if I won't be able to "safely" remain in this MUSH much longer. I'll take the long way out so we can see some other rooms.

=====

You Swim upwards, toward the surface far above.
Mysterious abyss
A black abyss, steep-sided and stygian in atmosphere
Obvious exits:
further down out
 > out
You swim toward the SeaStation
A stretch of open ocean, teeming with undersea life
Obvious exits:
down west
 > west
You swim west toward
The Great Sea, mid-ocean
There is nothing around you but water, teeming with undersea life
Contents: Poonbar; Militar; a bag of peanuts; bot; Sputnik; Beautiful Coral;
MS
Brittania; Hughmongous Starfish; SeaStation; a big hairy OCTOPUS.
Obvious exits: SeasStation Down West East South North Up

=====

I am curious to see what some of these things are. Some of them are other characters, some of them are objects created by characters.


```

=====
> look beautiful coral
Jacques Cousteau's obsession
> look Hughmangous Starfish
It is a very large Starfish. It seems to have a door at the end of one arm
Atlantis pages "Where are you, my lovely mermaid?" to Jennifer
> North
You go through the northward hatch
A SnnnOCTOPUS's (Beer) Garden
This spacious tubular chamber is furnished with myriad tables and chairs of ever.
Atlantis pages "I want to rub up against you and feel you're wet body" to
Jennifer.
Type "lhelp" to get help for this room.
Contents: Poonbar, ashley, Mr. Grim, READ ME if you're a PC kinda person
Obvious exits:
up out North
> home
There's no place like home...
There's no place like home...
There's no place like home...
> QUIT
Poonbar brings you a towel as you depart.
=====

```

When Atlantis came looking for Jennifer, my first impulse was to run, just as it would probably be in real-life. I used the command "home", which sent me to my "safe place." Many characters customize their "home" with particular objects, for example, a couch and a TV. I admit I do feel comforted by "home" and always go there when I'm lost or being latched upon. If you just "QUIT" without going home first, you leave your character unattended in that room and there is no telling what might happen to her! For example, if I were to log back on without having gone "home" before I quit the last session, there would be two of my character. It can get very confusing.

"Atlantis" behavior brings up a point of considerable controversy in Cyberspace. Most MUDs "tend toward liberalism. Staunch conservatives are usually shunned and argued against. Freedom of speech in MUDs is taken seriously" (Poirer 1994:1123). And, after all, TinySex is just words, isn't it? Perhaps not. For some, the visual imagery that even the term "MUDing with one hand on the keyboard" brings to mind is more than

just words. MUDers are generally uncomfortable with censorship of speech imposed by TIIC or TPTB. This, however, seems to be changing as time goes on. More and more newbies are becoming MUDers, and as the use of MUDs becomes more mainstream, so, it seems, do the norms regarding inappropriate behavior. Particularly obnoxious or offensive manner have in the past been ignored if not glorified. Increasingly, inappropriate behavior is negatively sanctioned by other MUDers who tell the offender to clean up his or her act. However, as an increasing amount of women use MUDs, "issues such as nondiscriminatory hitting on women for sexual reasons are becoming more widely discussed -- following trends in real life" (Poirer 1994: 1125).

This male MUDer tells of his experiences as a female character:

When I went on the mud as a female, I was "paged" immediately. I had guys soliciting "Netsex." I had some guys page me and ask me if I "needed help" getting around the particular mud. Basically I felt that I was being treated as if I had no brain. All the "chatter" that I received from men was of a very condescending nature. As for what it did for my own "self"... It made me more aware of sexism, or it made sexism more "real" in a sense to me. From my experience it seems to be like real life, except more exaggerated ... Sexism and perversion by males was everywhere. I guess that is much like real life since women get cat calls and whistles everyday.

I also "heard" stories about people getting addicted to TinySex and actually quit wanting the "real thing." This made me curious, so I asked a sister MUDer about it.

I have never had TS either, can't say that I am interested in it. I love real life, and I MU*d mainly for company at one point and my thesis after that. I have been propositioned many times, and I have engaged in some "foreplay," but not much. It just doesn't really do it for me because while I do care about the ppl I know on the net, I don't love them and couldn't do anything like that. I am one of those ppl who live on the net as I live off it.

Apparently she hasn't heard about this uninhibited behavior thing yet! ;-). I asked her if her MUD persona ever crept into her real life (RL). She responded:

It does somewhat. It depends on how different you make your character. It depends what your RL is like. If you want it there, it creeps in, when you don't, you keep it out.

After discussing my research for a while, this Cyber-pal eventually invited me to her MUCK.

We've evolved somewhat of a 'safe space' there, and I don't tolerate harassment on my MUCK, but that's mainly because it's fairly prevalent elsewhere ... You have to come Tuesday night, we have improvisational storytelling, you'll love it!

I accepted her invitation, and after some nervous anticipation, I made the trip. She's arranged for a character named Kitty with the password "hobbit." This time around I was able to invent a more creative character, one that was not so close to my "everyday self."

=====

WELCOME TO THE ENCHANTED FOREST FROLIC AND DETOUR AWAIT

Please Enter: <connect name password> to begin your adventure

> connect Kitty hobbit

Tisha waves and welcomes Kitty to the Enchanted Forest

> : waves her paw and purrs contentedly

You wave your paw and purr contentedly

=====

In my first interaction, I've presented myself as a feline of some sort, friendly and comfortable in her surroundings. At this point, before I've described my character -- my self -- I could be a proud lioness or a clumsy, frolicking kitten. In my experience, it's difficult not to associate a person's character with their "real-life" persona. After all, they had some reason for choosing the particular character they chose, and they describe their characters in very specific ways. I can present myself to the other MUCKers as anyone or anything. Not only do I get to roam and explore a magical, enchanted forest, I get to do it in any form I wish. Today I feel like a playful kitten. Tomorrow I may want to be a lizard

or a horse, a princess or a gorilla. I can express, create, or invent numerous different aspects of my personality, I can explore all of my diverse selves. That's why getting "hit on" in Cyberspace is so disappointing. For me it brings reality crashing down. It makes me "snap out" of whatever fantasy I was playing out, and in a way, forces me to play a part of someone else's (usually male-dominated) fantasy.

=====

Tisha says "I'm glad you could make it, Kitty"
 > look here
You are in a dark and mystical clearing in the woods. The forest floor is covered with damp leaves and branches. Small animals and birds scamper and flutter about.
You can see
contents:
Tisha
Beanie
Askee
a treehouse
three fallen trees
a campfire
 > "Tisha, thanks for inviting me to your world
You say "Tisha, thanks for inviting me to your world
Beanie says, "Let me know if you need any help, do you know how to page?"
Askee says, "Hi Kitty, beware of beasties in the forest ;-> "
 > "Thanks, Beanie. Yeah, I can page, not much else though
You say "Thanks, Beanie. Yeah, I can page, not much else though
Tisha grins, "You'll catch on. Good Luck!"
 > : chases her tail, then darts off into the forest after a fieldmouse
You chase your tail, then dart off into the forest after a fieldmouse
 > "Bye all, thanks!"
Tisha waves
Beanie picks a grub from a tree branch
Beanie says have fun
 > @describe me = a playful fluffy kitten who loves adventure
set
Creation
You feel a tug upon you from all directions, as the mists of timelessness drift from your newly born form.
Exits: North
 > North
North to soar upon verdant scented zephyrs, to dash into the very depths of a

tangled jungle, or to simply meander along the drifting pathways of Dreams

> look here

You are surrounded by the peaceful sounds of rushing water ... you see

lester

Dizzy

a frog

a waterfall

>look lester

A rabbit who always has a happy smile and a bag.

> look Dizzy

A diminutive gray-green dragon

> QUIT

The serenity of Dreams welcomes you...

=====

Although the MUCKing you just experienced seemed short, my actual exploits lasted three hours. I had a wonderful adventure, and I could have spent the whole night there. It was fascinating to be there--exciting, yet relaxing. I felt as if I were literally sucked into another world. I had this "high," some kind of buzz. I was excited, it was a whole new world with unlimited adventures.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Besides its institutional reflexivity, modern social life is characterised by profound processes of the reorganisation of time and space, coupled to the expansion of disembedding mechanisms -- mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganisation of time and space, plus the disembedding mechanisms, radicalise and globalise pre-established institutional traits of modernity; and they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life (Giddens 1991:2).

According to Shibutani (1955) a social world is a configuration of shared communication in industrial societies (see also Strauss 1978, 1982), and Kling and Gerson (1978) applied this concept to the world of computers, i.e., Cyberspace. Following in this tradition, I have adopted the "social world" perspective while exploring Cyberspace. Raz and Shapira believe "the discourse of social worlds arises exactly when social relationships can no longer rely on face-to-face interaction, when territorial boundaries collapse and time is fragmented by the involvement of participants in multiple and often contrasting life-worlds" (1994:416). Concretizing Shibutani's idea of a social world, Gergen suggests that:

the deterioration of the traditional community is hastened by the emergence of *symbolic community*. Symbolic communities are linked primarily by the capacity of their members for symbolic exchange -- of words, images, information -- mostly through electronic means. Physical immediacy and geographic closeness disappear as criteria of community. When loving support is squeezed from telephonic impulses, fascination is fired by "on-line" computer mates, ecstasy is procured for the price of an air ticket, and continuous entertainment is generated by the mere flick of a TV remote, who needs the tedious responsibility of a next-door neighbor? (1991:215).

Self, then, no longer a central presence in experience, is merely just another personal signifier in and of the social world. To solipsists, the self is the only reality, to postmodern scholars, the self is an unstable signifier which emerges out of constantly changing symbolic interaction.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche called the self "a little changeling," and this seems even more true today. It seems as though conceptions of self and selfhood have come full circle. The self in ancient times was an entity -- discovered in the process of discourse and dialogue -- that was indivisible from society and from others. Nature, gods or priests ascribed rank and status in ancient times, and in medieval times self was defined by lineage, gender, home, and social class. It was not until early modern times that society began thinking of and valuing the individual. It was also at this time, Baumeister argues, that the self became problematic (1984:29).

Trends including the emergence of an inner self, the idea of human individuality, the cultivation of privacy, changes in attitudes toward death, the value placed on personal choice, and a heightened awareness of individual development and potentiality ushered the modern self into the nineteenth century. Individuals no longer had a predetermined "place" in the world, and for the first time were becoming the authors of their own fate. Self-definition, self-actualization and personal subjectivity for men and women became increasingly important.

The claim by interactionists that the self emerges out of social relationships, inflected by race, class, age, gender, sexual and other group characteristics once again changed the way self was conceived. Self was now seen to be self-reflective, having two components, the "I" -- the knowing, conscious aspect of the self, which exists only in the present -- and the "Me" -- the reflected self and the organized attitudes of others. Shibutani modified Mead's concept of the generalized other with his notion of a self affected by simultaneous multiple influences or reference groups, anticipating the postmodern conception of the multiple, fragmented self.

In the postmodern, reference groups are simulations and the self is not a fixed entity, but rather a process of adaptation and interaction that continually evolves. While the self of modern times provided the subject with consistency through reference to stable social norms, goals, emotions, beliefs and values, the postmodern self is provide with a *consistently inconsistent environment* which is fluid, self-contradictory, and changing unpredictably. We no longer can define ourselves through family, religion, social structures, institutions, or even gender. Although selfhood is affected by each of these, there is much more. Each category has become fragmented and contingent upon images, impressions, and emotions -- boundaries are constantly being negotiated and redefined. Conceptions and perceptions vary even within one individual. A contributing factor to this ephemeral, erratic, multi-phrenic selfhood is the predominance of electronic mass media.

There has been a huge rise in the amount of research focused on different aspects of Cyberspace -- the topics are endless. Almost any aspect of "real-life" society can theoretically be studied in a "virtual" space. In the course of producing this ethnography, I have had the constant problem of switching back and forth from my "wordprocessor mode" to my "Cyber-mode," especially while MUDing. I began wanting to express myself as I would on the Net; to use emoticons, more punctuation, and to reveal more of myself in parenthetical asides. Consequently, written in the spirit of Cyberspace, the style of this ethnography has become increasingly casual and expressive of personal feelings and emotions that would not ordinarily enter into social science research.

Cyberspace is supposed to be more democratic, mainly due to the lack of status cues, but I didn't feel that at all. In fact, I found MUDs in particular to be very hierarchical. The currency here is knowledge. The more knowledge you have, the more you can do in a MUD (I wonder if Lyotard MUDs!). The better you get at MUDing, the more fun and fascinating things you can do. For those who play games it means the more points they can rack up and the closer they can get to attaining the status of Wizard, the ultimate goal of many MUDs, much like achieving "high score" on a video game. Every

time I log onto a MUD I acquire more knowledge -- I learn some new command, some new device which allows me to do something different.

There are various strategies Cyber-surfers employ to simulate their selfhood on the Internet. The use of handles, log-ins, and signatures allow users to present any countenance or guise they wish. Women and minorities have reported using gender neutral names and surnames that do not reveal their ethnicity. The exaggeration, manipulation and misrepresentation of selfhood in Cyberspace is difficult to discern, given the ease with which a Netter may conceal these machinations. The following example is a story about a MUDer who fell in real-life love with his TinyLover.

A friend of mine met a TinyGirlfriend in a MUD. They TinyDated and had TinySex for almost a year. Eventually, she had some crises, and he sent "her" \$1,000. Soon after he discovered "she" was really a "he"...and \$1,000 richer.

In fact, Cyberspace is the perfect stage for the fluid and unpredictable postmodern self to create/simulate its various aspects and roles. The postmodern environment of the Internet allows individuals to experience their selfhood as mutable and self-contradictory. Individuals can be their "real" selves, be someone or *something* totally different from that "reality," or they may experiment with any variation in between ... the possibilities are as infinite as the various images, impressions, and emotions found in Cyberspace. Just as the boundaries of the postmodern self are constantly changing and renegotiated, so are the aspects of one's selfhood as they travel from Cyburg to Cyburg. If the self is a condition of knowledge, as Lyotard (1984) argues, then it would follow that one's self would change from list to list, from group to group, and from MUD to MUD in Cyberspace. Each environment, each individual Cyburg, will highlight or arouse another self or aspect of selfhood. A "true" or "accurate" representation of reality or of any *one self* will never be revealed. No longer identified by their institutional roles, social status or physical appearance, Cyber-surfers can create, simulate and act out any self they want.

Gender differences in communication do exist in Cyberspace, just as they do in face-to-face interaction. Deborah Tannen (1990) identifies the typically feminine method of communication as more relational and co-operative, and less direct and confrontational than the traditionally masculine style of communicating. Linguists studying e-mail communication found that women tend to be less adversarial, less assertive, and more likely to use personal experiences for support. Men were less likely to take personal offense from the comments and to be more self-promotive (Herring Report in We 1994). The Herring Report, a review of computer-mediated communication, also found that: (1) Men wrote longer messages than women; (2) Men wrote more messages than women; (3) Messages by men received more responses than those of women, and; (4) Men threatened to leave the listserv if there was prolonged discussion where women contributed 50% of the comments. Tannen believes that, similar to co-ed classrooms and meetings, discussions on e-mail networks tend to be dominated by male voices, and I found this to be true in my research. Most of the interactions I have had in Cyberspace have been with males. However, unlike classes or meetings, "online, women don't have to worry about getting the floor (you just send a message when you feel like it)" (Tannen 1994:53). Linguists Susan Herring and Laurel Sutton, however, have reported that even though a woman may have the opportunity to send off a message, she still has the same problem of having their messages ignored or attacked (in Tannen 1994:53). The idea here is that the same inequalities and differences that are present in "real" life carry over to the Internet. These gender differences combined with the increase in uninhibited behaviors in Cyberspace result in an environment which is often more familiar and intimate than face-to-face interaction.

I've attempted as much as possible to evoke the voices and lives of distinct and various residents of Cyberspace. The Internet may very well provide opportunities for previously silenced voices to be heard. Although discrimination is still alive and well in Cyberspace, strategies exist which can be employed to hide one's identity as a woman,

minority or member of another oppressed group by manipulating the self one presents, thereby decreasing discriminatory behavior. I have encountered Cyber-surfers from several different countries and from various ethnic backgrounds. Whereas racial, cultural and religious backgrounds, as well as age and handicaps are concealed by the visual anonymity of computer-mediated communication, gender is still a determining factor in interaction in Cyberspace when Netters use gender-specific log-in names. Although women can avoid revealing their identity through a gender-neutral log-in, most don't know how, or don't go through the trouble, and although males presently make up the majority of Netters, the presence of females in Cyberspace is increasing, and consequently so is their influence.

What are the implications of computer-mediated realities for the future? Will electronic communication change or replace traditional interaction as we know it? Can we separate our online personas from our "real" selves? This habitual net-surfer had this to say:

personally, while the Cyberspace thing is fun, i don't think it would be the best idea to abandon our more traditional ways of dealing with each other ... we can communicate across indefinite distances and do so without encountering some of the problems that accompany face-to-face interaction; i.e. racism, shyness While it may be a good thing to be able to circumvent those problems on the Internet, we still have to go to the grocery store and the gas station, and those problems won't have gotten any closer to solutions just because we can deal with them in an escapist fashion [in Cyberspace].

The visually anonymous world of "the Net" has already changed the way in which people all over the world communicate, research and educate. Just as using a telephone or a fax machine, communication in Cyberspace is a simulation of "reality." Sometimes, as with electronic mail, Cyberspace simply masks, distorts, or at the very least postpones "reality." In other instances, as we experienced in the MUDs, Cyber-interaction often invents its own "realities."

> home

There's no place like home...

There's no place like home...

There's no place like home...

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