

2014

“Chicks Be Like”: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gendered Double Standards in Youth Peer Cultures on Social Media

Brooke Dinsmore

Connecticut College, bdinsmor@conncoll.edu

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“Chicks Be Like”: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gendered Double Standards in Youth Peer
Cultures on Social Media

A thesis presented by

Brooke Dinsmore

to the Department of Sociology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

Connecticut College

New London, CT

May 2014

Faculty Adviser:

Assistant Professor Ana Campos-Holland, PhD, Department of Sociology, Connecticut College

ABSTRACT

In the midst of a social panic over youth's social media use, little attention has been given to youth's voices and perspectives. Adult perspectives on gendered issues of cyberbullying and sexualized performance have completely ignored youth's agency in constructing and performing gender on social media. While a body of literature on how youth construct femininity on social media has emerged, little qualitative work has been done addressing masculinity, looking at the comparatively at the construction of both masculinity and femininity or looking at how youth critically evaluate gendered performances. This study explores how youth both construct and evaluate gendered performances within peer cultures on social media. More specifically, taking the sociology of childhood approach, it explores how youth construct masculine and feminine social media performances, and how these performances are reinforced through negative and positive feedback. To capture the complexity of youth's social worlds from multiple angles, this study uses an innovative youth-driven social media tour to enhance the traditional semi-structured interview (N=22; 11 girls & 11 boys). Across performance of the consumer, romantic relationship and friendship roles, gendered patterns of social media usage emerge. Feminine usage on social media is constructed as *relational performance*, where youth actively perform relationships in pursuit of social capital. Masculine usage is constructed as *instrumental usage*, where social media is used as a tool to achieve specific outcomes. As youth evaluate each other's social media performances, a *gendered double standard* emerges, with critiques of feminine social media performance being directed at girls as a whole, whereas critiques of masculine social media performance are directed at individual boys. Youth construct and reinforce gendered performances within vibrant and complex peer cultures on social media.

Children's actions are not preparation for life; they are life itself.

Barrie Thorne (1993)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It takes a village to raise a child and in my experience, the same is true for writing an honors thesis. It might be my name on the front but there are a number of people without whom I never would have made it this far.

Thank you first and foremost to my incredible adviser, Professor Ana Campos-Holland. Both your generosity and your commitment to bettering the minds of students truly have no limits. I will be forever grateful for the opportunities you have given me over the past year and working with you has truly been a pleasure and an honor.

Thank you to the entirety of our research team. To Molly, Kevin, Gina, Allie, Elena, Luis and Max, your dedication, intellectual curiosity and every one of your unique viewpoints have inspired me and kept me going in more ways than you know. Thank you especially to Gina and Allie for your hard work transcribing social media interviews!

Our research project would not have been possible at all without the generosity of our funders. Thank you to the Career Enhancing Life Skills (CELS) Internship Program, the Individual Research Grant for Faculty Research from the R.F. Johnson Fund and the Research Matters Program, the Judith Tindal Opatrny '72 Junior Faculty Fund, the Holleran Center's Margaret Sheridan '67 Community-Research Initiative Grant, and the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE) for their support over the past year.

Thank you to the entirety of the Connecticut College sociology department. Every one of you has contributed to my intellectual development and this thesis is truly a testament to your skill and generosity as educators. Thank you especially to Professor Afshan Jafar and Professor Ron Flores for serving as readers for this thesis, and to Professor Robert Gay for his unwavering support through the entirety of this research project.

Thank you to both of my families. To my Connecticut College family, and especially to Sarah Pincus and Susan Cunningham, for being there for me throughout this entire process, for all the times you smiled while I rambled and supported me while I cried. To my family at home, Dad, Mom, Tim, and Madi, thank you for supporting me no matter what, and for encouraging me to pursue my passions.

Most importantly, thank you to the incredible youth who participated in this research project, for letting us into their lives, and for sharing their hopes, dreams, fears, experiences and voices with us. There is no way I will ever be able to repay them for everything they have given me and for how much they have inspired me. My greatest hope is that I have ensured that their voices are heard.

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INTRODUCTION

“When I see stuff like this, it just makes me mad like—, I’m like, ‘Why?’ Like, ‘Oh my gosh!’” exclaims 17-year-old Barbie, reacting to a picture on her Facebook newsfeed of one teenage boy and several teenage girls lying on a bed. “Like females really just degrade themselves,” she says and keeps scrolling down.¹ For Barbie and her peers, social media sites are a social space where they are continuously performing and evaluating gender.

Youth’s use of social media has been the subject of a great amount of societal attention. Much of the mainstream media has sensationalized social media as a risk to youth. Focusing on cases of cyberbullying and stranger danger, this media coverage has evaluated youth’s social media use from an adult perspective of risk and safety where youth are positioned as helpless and naïve consumers who need to be protected and educated (Cassel and Cramer 2008; Valentine and Holloway 2001). The media has sensationalized girls’ social media usage in particular, questioning the moral character of today’s generation of girls, citing risqué profile pictures and sexting as evidence of a youth femininity gone wrong (Thiel-Stern 2009; Gannon 2008). Absent entirely from this social panic are youth’s voices and perspectives. Youth are present as ideological characters and never as social actors.

This study centers youth’s voices and experiences, drawing upon sociology of childhood to explore how youth are social actors within their own peer cultures on social media. Academic research has at times continued the trend of decentering youth when doing research about social media, evaluating youth’s risk or deconstructing youth’s gender difference without serious consideration of youth perspectives or experiences. Sociology of childhood theorists reject adult-centered approaches to studying youth’s lives and social worlds, arguing childhood should

¹ To protect their identity, youth selected their own pseudo name.

be understood as a permanent part of the social structure that youth have agency in navigating (Corsaro 2014). While researchers have used a sociology of childhood approach to study youth's social media use and to study how youth construct gender (Ito et al 2010; Goodwin 2003), this study moves the research further by bridging the two literatures. Specifically, this qualitative study captures the social processes involved in youth's construction and evaluation of gender within peer cultures on social media.

This study develops an innovative new methodology to capture the complexity of youth's social worlds (N=22). Researchers have struggled to capture the ever-changing virtual world and the interactive online and offline realities of youth, while also reducing the power differentials between the adult researcher and youth participant (Back, 2012; Campos-Holland, Dinsmore and Kelekay, forthcoming; Hine 2005; Mallan et al 2008). Addressing these methodological challenges, this study enhances the traditional semi-structured interview with a youth-driven virtual social media tour. Shifting control of the interview into youth's hands, the interviewer asked youth to guide them on a tour of their social media profiles. This methodology centers youth perspectives, captures live social media use and records an extensive amount of social media content.

From the sociology of childhood approach and using an innovative new youth-centered methodology, this study presents a deep exploration of how youth construct gender within social media. Social media usage becomes gendered through the association of certain types of usage with masculinity or femininity. Critically, while masculine ways of using social media are primarily practiced by boys and feminine ways of using social media are primarily practiced by girls, these types of usage are also gendered independently of the social media user's gender.

Feminine usage may be recognized as feminine even when practiced by boys, while masculine usage may be recognized as masculine even when practiced by girls.

Using a grounded approach to the analysis, this study will first look at how gender is constructed across the youth performance of the consumer, romantic relationship, and friendship roles.² Feminine usage on social media is constructed as *relational performance*, where youth actively perform relationships in pursuit of social capital. Masculine usage is constructed as *instrumental usage*, where social media is used as a tool to achieve specific outcomes. Youth actively construct and perform these gendered usages on social media across different *genres of content*. The analysis then explores how youth evaluate gendered social media performances through *critique* and *positive feedback*. Girls are praised for performance of *material femininity*, but critiqued as being too personal, inappropriate and inauthentic. Individual boys are critiqued for the posting of drug and alcohol content, while certain boys receive large amounts of peer acclaim for performance of a non-dominant masculine social media performance. A *gendered double standard* emerges, with critiques of feminine social media performance being directed at girls as a whole, whereas critiques of masculine social media performance are directed at individual boys.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have explored a wide variety of social phenomena on social media, including but not limited to social identity, peer relationships, family life, grief and dying, religion, politics, and surveillance (Al-Deen and Hendricks 2011; Gleason 2013; Lingel 2013; Marwick 2012; Matthews-Juarez, Juarez, and Faulkner 2013; Mosemghvdlshvili and Jansz 2013; Sumiala, and

² The grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is where codes are generated during the coding process, allowing patterns and themes to rise up out of the data.

Tikka 2011; Van Dijck 2013). This study emerges from a focus on the social worlds of youth on social media, where researchers have explored online risks, youth peer dynamics, social identities, cyberbullying, consumerism, and virtual-public spaces for youth expression (Allen 2012; boyd 2007; Brown, Keller, and Stern 2009; De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2013; Mazzarella 2010; Reich 2010; Wohn, Ellison, Khan, Fewins-Bliss, and Gray 2013). More specifically, researchers have explored how gender is performed on social media both within adult and youth's social worlds.

Researchers' understandings of gender performance on social media build off established perspectives on identity and gender performance offline. According to Goffman (1959), self-presentation involves a social performance on the world stage for all those involved in the social interaction. Building on social performance, West and Zimmerman (1987) conceptualize *doing gender*, and define gender as "a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (126). Social media emerges as a new space in which the self, and more specifically gender, is performed. Characteristics of the social media environment as a virtual space may affect how self-presentation and gender are performed, but do not fundamentally change the necessity for social performance (boyd 2007; Hogan 2010).

Gender Differences on Social Media.

Researchers have found patterns of gender difference in performance on social media across adult and youth populations (Thelwall 2010; Haferkamp et al 2012; Magnuson and Dundes 2008; Kimbrough et al 2013). Drawing on the availability of large amounts of accessible profile data on some social media sites, researchers have used quantitative content analysis to uncover patterns of gender performance on social media sites. While some

researchers have found clear patterns of gender difference in performance on social media, other researchers argue that gender difference in the social media context is more complicated.

Researchers looking at gender differences in social media performance using adult samples have argued both for and against patterns of gender difference in performance. Some researchers have argued that there are clear patterns of gender difference in performance which suggest online performance mirrors offline gender differences (Haferkamp et al 2012; Magnuson and Dundes 2008; Thelwall 2010). Magnuson and Dundes (2008) argue that traditional gender roles are manifested online based on their findings of a significant gendered difference in mentions of significant others. Women on average mentioned their significant others more in their *About Me* section on Myspace (Magnuson and Dundes 2008). Additionally, Thelwall (2010) argues women may be more successful users of social media based on their ability to harness positive emotions in comments. Women sent and received significantly more comments with positive emotion than men did (Thelwall 2010).

However, other researchers using adult samples have also found contradictory results and argued that gender differences online are more complicated (Hum et al 2011; Wolf 2000). Hum and colleagues (2011) found no significant differences at all in gender performance within Facebook profile pictures. Interestingly, Wolf (2000) argues that gender differences in performance may vary based on context. For example, men used significantly more emoticons when they were in mixed gender spaces than when they were in majority male spaces (Wolf 2000). The contradictions in findings within literature using adult samples suggest that while gender differences in social media performance may echo traditional gender differences, the extent to which they do so is not fixed.

Similar contradictions appear in the literature on patterns of gender difference in youth's social media performance (Huffaker and Calvart 2005; Kapidzic and Herring 2011; Siibak 2009). Researchers have looked for gender patterns of difference in youth's expression of emotion, and activity versus passivity on social media sites. There were no significant differences in youth emoticon use but there was a significant difference in emotion expressed on chat rooms, with more girls on average showing emotion (Huffaker and Calvart 2005; Kapidzic and Herring 2011). While there was a significant gendered difference in youth behavior in chat rooms, with more boys on average being active in conversations, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in the use of active and passive tone on blogs (Huffaker and Calvart 2005; Kapidzic and Herring 2011).

Researchers have also looked at gendered patterns of difference in youth's profile picture performance. There was a significant difference in profile picture posing, with more girls on average looking straight into the camera or gazing into space away from the camera (Tortajada, Arauna and Martinez 2013). However this finding has not been replicated; instead, other researchers find the opposite to be true, with boys being more likely to be looking away from the camera (Kapidzic and Herring 2014; Kapidzic and Herring 2011). While there are significant gendered difference in youth's state of dress in their profile pictures, some researchers have found more girls on average posting profile pictures where they are partially dressed, while others have found the opposite (Kapidzic and Herring 2014; Kapidzic and Herring 2011; Tortajada, Arauna and Martinez 2013). Despite contradictions in findings, researchers argue that for the most part that youth's social media performances echoed traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity with girls being more emotional, passive and displaying a sexualized femininity, while boys were less emotional, and more active (Huffaker and Calvart 2005;

Kapidzic and Herring 2014; Kapidzic and Herring 2011; Tortajada, Arauna and Martinez 2013; Siibak 2009).

Researchers have used access to large amounts of public social media data to uncover patterns of gender difference in both adults' and youths' social media performance. While some researchers have argued there are clear patterns of gender difference in performance, contradictions in findings suggest a more complicated reality. While quantitative content analysis is able to identify patterns across populations, this methodology does not capture the offline social context within social media use takes place and thus cannot reveal the social processes which bring about these patterns of difference. Researchers have used qualitative methods to move the literature forward by addressing how gendered social media performances are constructed and reinforced.

Femininity and Masculinity on Social Media

Qualitative work on performance of femininity and masculinity on social media has helped illuminate the social processes constructing masculinity and femininity behind gendered patterns of difference on social media (Dobson 2014; Harvey, Ringrose and Gill 2013; Manago 2013; Ringrose and Barajas 2011). A body of qualitative literature has developed on the performance of femininity on social media sites, in particular the construction and performance of post-feminist femininity (Dobson 2013; Hasmath and Cook 2014). Women face gendered expectations on social media, with young women in particular receiving social success and popularity for a sexualized public performance of femininity, incorporating the display of a partying lifestyle, the posting of sexualized pictures and the posting of sexual content (Bailey et al 2013; Cook and Hasmath 2014; Dobson 2011). However, young women performing this form of femininity on social media also receive negative reactions from their audience, who

critique them for over-exposure and accuse them of sexual promiscuity (Bailey et al 2013; Dobson 2013). Young women incorporate a performance of shamelessness and emphasize their boldness, self-esteem and autonomy in order to navigate these negative reactions (Dobson 2013; Dobson 2013). Researchers have framed both the expectations for a sexualized feminine performance and young women's strategies for counteracting negative reactions as elements of post-feminist femininity (Cook and Hasmath 2014; Dobson 2014; Dobson 2013; Dobson 2012).

Qualitative researchers have found similar patterns of feminine performance in youth's social media worlds. Like women, girls also face pressure to participate in a sexualized social media performance, connected to post-feminist changes in femininity increasing the sexualization of not just women but girls as well (Ringrose and Barajas 2011; Ringrose 2009; Willem et al 2010). Girls engage in a sexualized performance of femininity through taking sexualized pictures, posing in ways echoing advertising or soft pornography (Ringrose 2009; Willem et al 2010). Girls also use sexualized symbols from pop culture, such as the Playboy bunny, and partially naked pictures of Paris Hilton and Marilyn Monroe, as well as including textual references to sex acts and their sexual identity (Ringrose and Barajas 2011; Ringrose 2009). Girls indicated that use of sexualized posing, references and cultural references were a part of their larger on and offline peer culture, and that this type of social media performance was considered the norm (Ringrose and Barajas 2011; Ringrose 2009).

However, girls do not only perform on social media in sexualized ways, but also try out different non-sexualized styles of femininity and perform romantic relationships and friendships (Elm 2009; Kelly, Powerantz and Curry 2006). Girls emphasize their use of social media to express their fashion and style and to communicate with friends (Elm 2009). Girls may also feel empowered in online spaces to fight back against sexualized teasing by boys, taking advantage

of technological features of social media sites to do so (Kelly, Powerantz and Currie 2006). The girls in Kelly and colleagues' sample expressed that they felt a confidence in confronting boys within the online setting of the chat room that they did not feel face-to-face (2006).

The same depth of literature is not present in qualitative work on how masculinity is performed on social media (Light 2013). A recent and small body of literature explores how men construct a non-dominant masculinity on social media, performing a sexualized physical appearance but also undertaking action to inoculate themselves against accusations of being gay (Hall, Gough and Seymour-Smith 2012; Manago 2013; Siibak 2010). Men within these communities often identified themselves as metrosexual to communicate their interest in clothes, make-up and their personal appearance, while also making sure to strongly communicate that they were not gay through performance of a heterosexual role (Hall, Gough and Seymour-Smith 2012; Siibak 2010).

There is very little research on youth's performance of masculinity, with one major work looking at how dominant masculinity is constructed both online and offline in youth peer culture in London (Harvey, Ringrose and Gill 2013). In their youth peer culture, boys use consumer objects as part of online and offline performance to gain cultural capital, expressed online in the form of likes and comments (Harvey, Ringrose and Gill 2013). Boys used designer shoes, clothing and sunglasses to gain what they called "swag" and "rates" (Harvey, Ringrose and Gill 2013). This cultural capital allows them to navigate their offline world as boys with less swag were more vulnerable to harassment and even physical confrontation (Harvey, Ringrose and Gill 2013). However, more qualitative work on youth's masculine social media performances is needed.

In addition to more work on masculinity, there is a need for qualitative work looking at both femininity and masculinity within the same social context. Researchers have begun to do this kind of comparative work on youth's gender performance on social media (De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2013; Van Doorn, Van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007; Van Doorn 2009). However, this work has relied on qualitative content analysis as a methodology and thus has primarily analyzed youth's social media performances from an adult perspective, not incorporating youth's opinions and experiences (De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2013; Van Doorn, Van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007; Van Doorn 2009). This trend is echoed throughout the larger literature as overall scholars have understood youth's gender performance in relation to adult influences, such as traditional media and advertising. Scholars have conducted research on youth's gender performance as an extension of the adult literature without considering the unique structural positioning of youth's lives. To improve the literature on youth's gender performance on social media, researchers should draw upon sociology of childhood perspectives.

Sociology of Childhood, Social Media, and Gender

Sociology of childhood theorists reject adult-centered approaches to studying youth's lives and social worlds, arguing childhood should be understood as a permanent part of the social structure that youth have agency in navigating (Corsaro 2014). Researchers using a sociology of childhood approach to study gender in youth's social worlds have emphasized how youth actively construct gender in their peer cultures (Eder, Evans and Parker 1995; Thorne 1993). While scholars have begun to use sociology of childhood approaches to study social media, sociology of childhood influenced ways of looking at gender in children's social worlds have not yet been applied to the study of gender in youth peer cultures on social media.

Sociology of childhood, youth peer cultures, and interpretive reproduction. The sociology of childhood approach offers two main insights to the study of childhood: childhood as a structural form and interpretive reproduction in youth peer cultures (Corsaro 2014). Sociology of childhood emerged from critiques of the socialization approach where childhood is viewed primarily as the period of time when children are socialized into the culture and structure of adult society through institutions such as the family and education (Corsaro 2014). Sociology of childhood theorists argue that instead of viewing children's lives primarily in relation to adulthood, childhood should be understood as a permanent part of the social structure that youth have agency in navigating (Corsaro 2014). While individual children move in and out of childhood, childhood remains a structural form that changes over time in relation to the permanent social structure of the society it is located within (Corsaro 2014). Societal level economic, political and social changes all affect how childhood is constructed and experienced within a particular time and culture (Corsaro 2014). Within this structural form, groups of children produce peer cultures, a "stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro 2014: 122). Adult culture is integrated into these peer cultures through the process of interpretive reproduction; children do not passively internalize adult culture but rather actively interpret and then reproduce elements of adult culture in order to meet the needs of the youth peer culture (Corsaro 2014).

Sociology of childhood approaches to gender. Sociology of childhood researchers studying gender challenged previously held views of boys' and girls' peer cultures as being fundamentally different from one another in developing frameworks for studying gender (Thorne 1993; Goodwin 2003). Researchers using a sociology of childhood approach argued against the previously developed separate-worlds hypothesis that proposed gender segregation results in

boys and girls having fundamentally different social worlds, with boys' peer cultures being characterized by competition and aggression while girls' peer cultures are characterized by nurturing and affection (Thorne 1993; Goodwin 2003). Sociology of childhood theorists argued that this perspective applied an adult-generated frame to children's social worlds, erasing the important role of cross-gender interaction in youth peer cultures and erasing similarities across gender (Thorne 1993; Eder, Evans and Parker 1995; Adler and Adler 1998; Goodwin 2003). Instead of asking whether boys and girls different, Thorne (1993) argues that researchers should ask how youth actively create - and sometimes challenge - gender structures and meanings.

Using ethnographic work in youth's peer cultures, Thorne (1993) and Eder, Evans and Parker (1995) both identify elements of youth's peer cultures used to construct and reproduce gender. Youth construction of gender is an active and ongoing process, produced through performances, or scripted actions, in the peer culture (Thorne 1993). Gender can have multiple and contradictory meanings in youth's peer cultures, is cross cut by lines of difference and inequality and is of fluctuating significance in youth's peer cultures (Thorne 1993). Like Thorne, Eder and colleagues (1995) argue gender is produced through an ongoing process but also find that youth construct gender inequality, creating social hierarchies and positioning boys and masculinity in relation to and above girls and femininity. Both formal and informal practices construct gender inequality, with speech routines in youth's informal talk playing an important role (Eder, Evans and Parker 1995). Thorne's and Eder and colleagues' sociology of childhood approaches to gender emphasize how gender is actively produced through elements of youth peer cultures, namely performances and speech routines.

Based on their ethnographic work, both Alder and Adler (1998) and Goodwin (2003) argue that conflict and social stratification are important parts of both boys' and girls' social

worlds; contesting the focus within the separate-worlds hypothesis on girls being cooperative while boys are competitive. Adler and Adler (1998) argued that in youth's highly stratified peer cultures, there was often more in common across gender than across high-ranked and low-ranked peer groups. Stratification structures both boys' and girls' social worlds, as youth vie for positions on top of the social hierarchy of youth peer cultures (Adler and Adler 1998). However, different features contribute to popularity in boys' and girls' social circles; with boys valuing athletic ability, being tough, emotional detachment and success with girls, while girls valued family background, physical appearance, precocity or adult-like concerns, style and good academic performance (Adler and Adler 1998). Goodwin (2003) argued that while conflict was a common feature of both boys' and girls' peer cultures, the extent to which conflict is a feature in girls' peer cultures varies considerably based upon the race and class composition of youth's peer cultures. Conflict serves to establish social hierarchy but is also used to construct social identities and friendships for both boys and girls (Goodwin 2003).

Sociology of childhood approaches to social media. The few researchers using a sociology of childhood approach to study youth's use of social media have attempted to understand how youth's use of social media is related to childhood as a social structure and to youth's involvement in peer cultures (boyd 2007; Ito et al 2010; Livingstone 2008; Poyntz and Hoeschman 2011; Valentine and Holloway 2001). Youth's use of social media has been connected to larger changes in childhood as a social structure. In western societies, childhood is becoming longer, as individuals are increasingly supported by their families past adolescence into adulthood, while paradoxically, at the same time adult realities such as sexuality and substance abuse increasingly become a part of childhood earlier (Poyntz and Hoeschman 2011). The increase in length of childhood in Western societies has been accompanied by increased

societal tensions about youth and childhood (Poyntz and Hoeschmann 2011). Youth are increasingly viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection, or as delinquent and in need of control and discipline, resulting in increased adult surveillance and control over youth's lives (Gannon 2008; Valentine and Holloway 2001). Youth's actions in public space are increasingly regulated and surveilled by parents and public officials, and they are increasingly denied access to public spaces altogether (boyd 2007; Valentine and Holloway 2001). As youth's access to public spaces becomes increasingly limited and subject to adult surveillance, youth can escape adult control within the space of social media (boyd 2007).

From this perspective, social media is a new public space where youth can construct identities, maintain friendships, and participate in local peer cultures. Ito and colleagues (2010) identify social media sites such as MySpace and Facebook as "friendship-driven" media, where youth engage in shared practices with both their friends and the larger local peer networks they look to for "affiliation, [and] competition, as well as disaffiliation and distancing" (16). Individual youth's social media use thus takes place within the context of both friendships and local peer cultures. As Livingstone (2008) states, while youth make individual choices about their social media use, those choices are geared towards others "through the choice of site (one must select that already used by one's friends), mode of address (most say that they put on their profile the content that they consider their friends would enjoy) and...[in] setting up a profile (commonly achieved with the help of a friend who already uses the site)" (407). Youth's practices on social media sites are not dictated by the technological features of the sites alone, but are driven by the norms and practices of their peer group (Livingstone 2008).

This study will address several key gaps within the gender on social media literature. First and foremost, this work will further expand the body of literature using qualitative methodology to study gender performance on social media, exploring construction of gendered performances within a

specific social context. As this study focuses on both masculinity and femininity, it will significantly expand the limited qualitative literature on masculinity on social media, while also addressing the need for qualitative research exploring how masculinity and femininity are constructed in relation to each other on social media. By using a sociology of childhood approach, this study will address the need for research on youth's construction of gender on social media that takes into account the structural position of youth's worlds and addresses youth's agency as cultural actors. Additionally, this study will integrate work using the sociology of childhood approach on gender with work done using the sociology of childhood approach on social media. More specifically, this study will explore how youth construct gender in peer cultures on social media.

METHODS

This study expands upon previous qualitative methodologies used to study youth's social media use and enhances the traditional semi-structured interview with the *youth-driven virtual tour*. Participating youth led researchers on a virtual tour of their social media sites as part of a *semi-structured interview*. This innovative methodology places control of the interview into the youth participant's hands, reducing power differentials between adult researchers and youth participants, and capturing the complexity of youth's social worlds by collecting multiple angles of youth's social media use. The research design takes the *doing research with children* approach to further address issues of agency and ethics. A grounded theory approach was used during data analysis to further situate youth's perspectives, experiences, and voices at the center of the research process.

Research Site

The data for this study is part of a larger project lead by Ana Campos-Holland³. During the summer of 2013, the research team of four completed one hundred and eighty five interviews with eighty three participants and conducted ethnographic observations at four youth centers in Greenville Cities, a metropolitan area in the Northeast⁴. In December 2012, access to the research sites was negotiated with a senior administrator of the organization, which offers youth year-round programming. The proposed study was subjected to a strenuous review by the Connecticut College Institutional Review Board and approved in the spring of 2013.⁵ All interviewers underwent an extensive training process on interviewing children and youth before beginning data collection. Interviews and observations were conducted during the organization's summer program in 2013, a semi-structured camp with youth broken into groups by age. Pre-adolescent youth participate in the camp (9- to 12-year-olds) and adolescent youth serve as youth counselors and junior staff members (13- to 17- year-olds).

Greenville Cities, the metropolitan area where all four youth centers are located, is made up of three separate cities: Downtown Greenville, East Greenville and West Greenville. Three of the youth centers were located in Downtown Greenville and one was located in West Greenville. However, youth lived in and moved throughout all three cities in their day-to-day lives. Downtown Greenville has a population of 124,775; the median household income is \$28,931 and 33.9% of the population lives below the poverty line (US Census Bureau 2010). East Greenville has a population of 51,252; the median household income is \$58,438 and 15.3% of the population lives below the poverty line (US Census Bureau 2010). West Greenville has a

³ Ana Campos-Holland, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Connecticut College.

⁴ Name of the metropolitan area was changed to protect the research site.

⁵ Connecticut College IRB case number 2012-2013.42

population of 63,268; the median household income is \$81,588 and 6.6% of the population lives below the poverty level (US Census Bureau 2010).

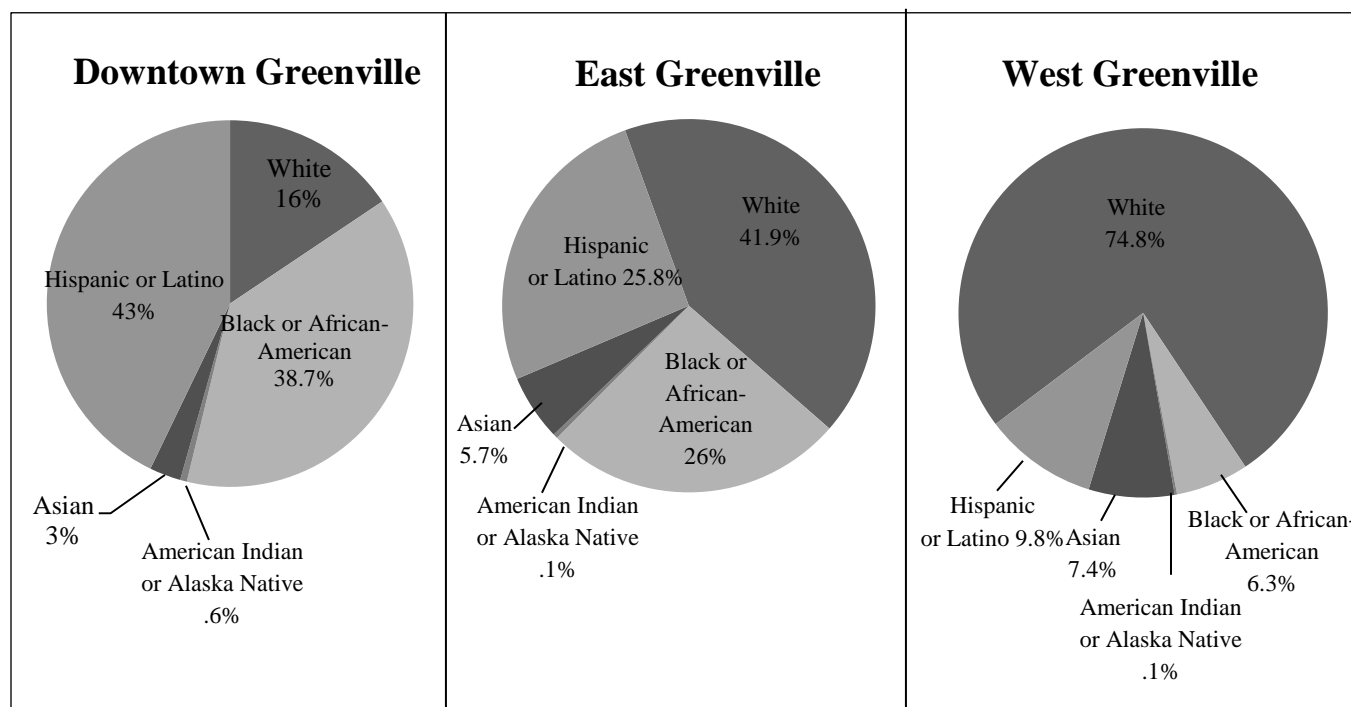


Figure 1. *Racial Demographics in Greenville Cities (U.S. Census Bureau 2010)*

The four cities varied considerably in racial/ethnic composition, with both Downtown and East Greenville being predominantly black or African-American and Hispanic or Latino, while West Greenville is predominantly white (see figure 1).

Recruitment and Sample

After several rapport-building weeks at the research sites, recruitment entailed members of the research team approaching youth at the youth centers and describing the study. Interested youth who met the study parameters were given a parental consent packet to bring home. Although we had IRB approval for 9- to 17-year-old youth, in recognition of the age limit on Facebook and other major social media sites, the original plan was to recruit youth ages 13 to 17 for the social media interview. However, once it became clear in the field that many youth under

13 years of age were active users of social media, the minimum age was lowered to 10 years old. Regardless of age, informed consent required that youth's parents or guardian have prior knowledge of their child's social media profiles. Thus, participation was limited to youth whose guardians knew about their social media use.

During recruitment, four groups of youth emerged: youth whose parents knew about their social media profiles and were active and involved in their usage, youth whose parents knew about their social media profiles and did not really care about their social media use, youth whose parents did not know about their social media profiles but who did not really care about them using social media, and youth whose parents had prohibited them using social media, but who may or may not have social media profiles anyways which their parents did not know about. One limitation of this study is that the sample is not drawn evenly from each group, as youth whose parents did not know about their social media use were barred from participating.

The full social media sample consists of fifty one participants between 10 and 17 years of age. This paper in particular is based on a gender-stratified subsample of twenty two participants (N=22) between 11 and 17 years of age, including eleven girls and eleven boys. As the early plan for data analysis was to separately code youth's social media profile pages to conduct an interpretive content analysis, the fifteen participants whose social media pages the research team had the most complete records of were included in the subsample first.⁶ Five participants, three boys and two girls, were then randomly selected from the remaining pool to ensure that the subsample was evenly stratified by gender. Two more youth, one boy and one girl, were added

⁶ During data collection, PDFs were made of youth's social media profiles for later content analysis, provided that both the youth and their parents consented to this. We accessed youth's Facebook pages by having them friend a study account during the interview. However, the same step was not added for Twitter and Instagram, and as a result, we had to go back later on, collect youth's profile names from video of their social media tour and then find those pages online. Some of the youth's Twitter and Instagram profiles were set to private and some had changed their names. As a result, we had full PDFs of most of the youth's Facebook pages but did not have as many PDFs of Twitter and Instagram pages.

to the subsample later on in the data analysis process when it became clearer that the data produced during the social media tour was in-depth enough to not require content analysis of the previously collected social media profiles.

Age/Gender	Black/African American		Hispanic/Latino		Mixed		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
11 year-olds	1	--	--	--	--	--	1
12 year-olds	2	1	--	--	--	--	3
13 year-olds	--	1	2	--	--	2	5
14 year-olds	1	--	2	--	--	--	3
15 year-olds	--	2	2	1	--	--	5
16 year-olds	--	1	--	--	--	--	1
17 year-olds	--	2	--	--	2	--	4
Total	4	7	6	1	2	2	N=22

Table 1 *Subsample Demographics*

Although gender stratified, the subsample was not stratified by race/ethnicity or age. Reflecting the racial composition of the youth center and overall sample, participants were mostly black/African American or Hispanic/Latino. The majority of mixed race youth identified themselves as black/African American and Hispanic/Latino, with one youth being black and Filipino and another youth being black and Native American. Most of the youth in the subsample were over the age of thirteen, with the two largest age groups being 13-year-olds and 15-year-olds.

Reducing Power Differentials during Data Collection

Throughout data collection, the research team undertook strategies both inside and outside of the interview room to reduce the power differentials present between the adult researchers and the youth participants. When doing qualitative *research with children*, researchers must be aware of how their structural position as adults makes them not just

outsiders but figures of authority in youth's worlds and must actively take strategies to reduce this power differential (Corsaro and Molinary 2000; Mayall 2000; Roberts 2000; Engel 2006; Greig, Taylor and MacKay 2007). Similarly, the social location of the individual researcher, in terms of race, gender and class positioning, also can have an effect on the power dynamics within the space of the interview (Miller 2008). To navigate these power differentials, the research team undertook strategies to minimize differentials both inside the interview room and in day-to-day interactions with youth, and placed a priority on building rapport and relationships with prospective participants outside of the interview room.

Power differentials related to social location were an active concern during research design and the data collection process. The principal investigator (PI) made an active choice to recruit undergraduates as members of the research team, who would be closer in age to the youth participants. The first two individuals to join the team were both 21-year-old females (including the author). As a team, we made the conscious decision to add an 18-year-old male to the team in order to address the role gender can play in the data collection process. In regards to race and ethnicity, the data collection team included a 33-year-old Latina (PI), an 18-year-old Latino, and two 21-year-old white females. Aware of our social locations, we were constantly engaging in active reflection and conversation with each other about issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and age that arose throughout the data collection process.

Attempting to reduce the effect of power differentials, the research team undertook active steps to build rapport and genuine relationships with the youth and staff at the four youth centers. To the extent to which it was possible, we attempted to become embedded members of the camp community for the summer. We were present at the youth center where the majority of interviews were conducted from the first day of the summer session until the very last day,

arriving when the youth arrived and leaving only after they had left for the day. We actively prioritized the building of rapport with youth outside of the interview room, taking the first two weeks of the summer to spend extended amounts of time with each of the age-divided groups as they went about their daily activities. We continued to spend time with youth throughout the summer, with at any moment only two researchers interviewing, while the other two were building rapport with youth.

While spending time at the youth center, the research team actively tried at all times to reduce power differentials between themselves and youth participants by both clarifying to youth the research team's reasons for being at the center and by acting outside of the traditional adult role. Throughout data collection, the research team explained to youth that we were there to write a book about youth's lives and that for the summer we wanted to be their "students" while they would be our "teachers" about their worlds. The example of "teachers" and "students" was purposefully chosen as a relationship with a clear power dynamic that youth already understood, and which through role reversal would give youth a sense of the relationship we wished to build with them. We backed up our verbal explanation of our roles through action, carefully negotiating social dynamics with staff and youth to avoid ever taking the adult and by default authoritative role over youth. Ways this was accomplished include clarifying to staff that we were never to be put in charge of youth, attempting to let youth take the lead in conversations, and avoiding correcting youth's actions or speech. We also attempted to use body language and physical positioning to reduce our perceived power or authority in situations, by minimizing height differences whenever possible to have conversation face-to-face with children and through walking, standing or sitting with the youth rather than walking, sitting or standing with staff.

The Youth-Driven Virtual Tour during the Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview in this study reduces the effect of the power differential between the adult-researcher and youth-participant by introducing the innovative methodology of a *youth-driven virtual tour*. The addition of a youth-driven tour to the semi-structured interview shifts the focus on social media content from being primarily interviewer-directed to primarily participant-directed. Furthermore, it empowers participants and captures multiple angles of youth peer cultures on social media.

At the beginning of each interview, the participant took the interviewer on a tour of their social media profiles. To respect youth's agency, the interviewer first obtained informed youth assent, going over a form clearly explaining the study's purpose, protocols in regards to confidentiality, and risks and benefits of participation to the youth participant. Youth were then asked by the interviewer to open their social media sites, log-in, and then to friend study accounts on each of the sites.⁷ The interviewer would then hand over control of the interview's direction to the youth by asking them to take her on a tour of their social media sites. When it became apparent to the research team during the data collection process that the presence of *sensitive social media content* reminded youth of the adult status of the researcher and often led to them attempting to censor the tour, a disclaimer was added to the beginning of the interview.⁸ Prior to the beginning of the social media tour, the interviewer would explain to the youth that they were there to be the youth's student and wanted to know everything about youth's experiences on social media, and that as the interviewer was not there to judge, the youth shouldn't worry about showing the interviewer content they wouldn't normally talk about or

⁷ In the parental informed consent form and youth informed assent form, parents and prospective youth participants decided whether to grant the research team access to the youth's social media profiles for future content analysis. All twenty two of the youth in the subsample provided access to their pages.

⁸ Sensitive content was primarily content the youth perceived as inappropriate, namely drug and alcohol use related content, sexual references and pictures perceived as inappropriate, especially sexualized pictures of girls.

show an adult. As youth moved from site to site, the interviewer would ask questions about content and offer occasional suggestions as to where to go on the site if the participant requested directions, but the mouse and computer screen remained in the control of the participant at all times. After the social media tour, the interviewer asked a series of open-ended questions, encouraging the participant to illustrate their answers with examples from their own and others' profiles. During this data collection process, the entire semi-structured interview was recorded using Camtasia, a screen-capturing software, allowing for the collection of not just the participant's reactions, but the content the participant was reacting to.⁹

Previous researchers adopting the sociology of childhood approach have developed methods spanning both online and offline to gain a fuller picture of youth's social media worlds. Researchers have conducted online ethnography in addition to offline interviews (boyd 2007; Ito et al 2010) and discussed researcher-selected examples of social media content with youth during interviews (Livingstone 2008; Ringrose and Barajas 2011). The interview used in this study shifts the focus on social media content from being primarily interviewer-directed to being primarily participant-directed. In asking youth to take researchers on a tour of their social media sites, control of the interview is shifted from the adult-interviewer to the youth-participant. By placing the control of the interview in the hands of the participant, the focus is shifted from social media features and content the interviewer thinks are important to content and features the participant thinks are important.

Placing control of the interview into the participant's hands also helps to empower youth-participants, reducing the power differential between interviewer and participant. During the tour, youth took on the active role of tour guide rather than the passive role of answering questions. Additionally, the tour produced a *driver effect*, as both interviewee and interviewer

⁹ Camtasia 8 is TechSmith software.

were looking at the computer screen and not at each other, reducing the pressure on the interviewee and allowing conversation to flow more naturally. The youth-driven tour also empowered participants by echoing youth's daily use of social media, helping the interview feel less artificial.

By capturing multiple angles on social media use, the inclusion of the youth-driven social media tour allows for rich data to be collected during the semi-structured interview. Each interview produced three different types of data: youth's reactions and commentary to their own and others' social media content, youth's answers to the interviewer's questions with examples from their own pages or pages belonging to others, and social media content youth had scrolled past during their tour but had not reacted to. Each type of data provides a different angle on youth peer cultures on social media. The youth-driven social media tour elicits youth's perspective on social media, generating themes youth consider important, while the semi-structured interview elicits youth's responses to the research team's pre-selected themes. Lastly, the visually recorded social media content provides a view into aspects of the social media peer culture not mentioned by either the youth or the interviewer. The multiple angles produced through the inclusion of the youth-driven virtual tour allowed for the triangulation of data. Given the sensitive nature of social media content, and the adult-researcher and child-interviewee power dynamics, this triangulation increases the validity of the findings.¹⁰

Data Preparation and Analysis

To ensure accuracy and thoroughness, the interviews were prepared for analysis through a transcription process involving three separate transcribers. The first transcriber focused on the accuracy of the participant's and interviewer's words and on conveying the tone and flow of the

¹⁰ For a more in-depth discussion of this innovative methodological approach, see Campos-Holland, Dinsmore and Kelekay, forthcoming .

interview in as much detail as possible. The second transcriber reviewed the transcript for accuracy. The third transcriber went through the screen-captured video of the social media tour and transcribed all social media content captured during the tour, including both content that was discussed in the interview and content that was not discussed during the interview. The social media content was then woven back into the transcription of the interview so that each transcript captured both what the interviewer and participant were talking about and what they were looking at. Researchers referred to the PDFs made of each participant's social media profiles during data collection to ensure the accuracy of the social media content transcription.

Data was then coded using a grounded approach, allowing codes to emerge from the patterns and themes that rose up from the data (Babbie 2010; Glaser and Strauss 1967). To do so, the analysis involved the use of qualitative coding software.¹¹ Codes were not pre-determined by the researcher but generated through a thematic coding of the interviews. At the conclusion of this first thematic coding, the researcher went through the transcripts a second time, applying the same thematic codes to each interview. Connections and patterns were then drawn between the thematic codes.¹²

FINDINGS

Youth engage in a gendered social media performance that is continuously reinforced by the positive and negative reactions of their peers. This section will explore how social media performances are gendered by looking at three different *genres of content* in youth peer culture

¹¹ Specifically, Atlas.ti.4 was used.

¹² A certain tension arises within data analysis when using a youth-centered methodology, as the adult-researcher seeks to foreground youth's voices and experiences but at the same time seeks to analyze the social dynamics underlying those voices and experiences. Grounded theory can help address this tension. As codes are not pre-determined by the researcher but allowed to *rise up* from the interviews through thematic coding, youth's perspectives come to inform the coding schema, even as the researcher moves beyond straightforward acceptance of youth's voices at face value.

on social media: consumerism and material displays, romantic relationship pursuit and performance, and friendship interactions and performance. Within these genres of content, two ways of using social media emerge, one gendered masculine and one gendered feminine.

Instrumental use, where social media is used as a tool to achieve specific outcomes and content is directed to a specific audience, is gendered masculine. *Relational performance*, where social media is used to perform a relationship role in pursuit of social capital and content is directed to the peer audience as a whole, is gendered feminine.

These social processes are reinforced through youth's negative and positive reactions to the feminine and masculine performances on social media. *Youth critiques of peer social media performances* reveal the lines and boundaries that define what masculine and feminine performance is on social media. Within youth critiques of social media performance, a *gendered double standard* emerges. Critiques of the feminine social media performance as too personal, inappropriate, and inauthentic are directed at girls as a whole, while critiques of masculine social media performance are leveled at individuals rather than boys as a group. *Youth positive feedback* reveals which types of social media performances are most valued in the youth peer culture. Girls receive positive feedback for successfully performing *material femininity*, while boys can receive positive feedback for accomplishing a *non-dominant masculine social media performance*.

Gendered Performances on Social Media and Genres of Content

Within youth peer cultures on social media, youth participate in *genres of content* across the lines of gender. Each genre is driven by youth's performance of a social role, such as the role of consumer, of girlfriend or boyfriend, or of friend. In performing that social role, youth create content. Youth's choices during the content creation process occur within the context of peer

culture. Using the features of each social media site in peer-driven ways, youth follow stylistic formats and norms for content generated within the peer culture. The masculine *instrumental usage* and feminine *relational performance* emerge from gendered patterns across genres of content.

Consumerism and material displays. One key genre in youth's social media performances is consumerism. In performing the consumer role, youth post content displaying their consumption of material goods. The posting of *material displays* becomes a part of the poster's presentation of self.¹³ Zack, a 12-year-old boy, uses Twitter and Instagram. During his interview, he explains:

Interviewer: So what keeps you like hooked on Twitter then?

Zach: Looking at shoes on Footlocker.

Interviewer: And then it's not enough though just to look at them on Footlocker 'cuz then you wanna post stuff about it to your friends?

Zach: Mh-mm [yes].

Interviewer: So why do you, why do you wanna post it to your friends?

Zach: 'cuz I like to show them shoes.

As the point is to share those shoes with your friends, the posting of a material display is part of a social performance. The material display becomes a performance of the youth's consumer role, an illustration of the posters' selves, their tastes, and preferences.

Material displays are a part of both feminine and masculine performances on social media. However, different types of material objects are gendered feminine and masculine. Zach explains how different types of material consumption are associated with boys and girls:

Interviewer: How do girls use Twitter?

Zach: They just put on makeup, all that type of stuff.

Interviewer: How do boys use Twitter?

Zach: Sneakers.

¹³ The "poster" refers to the youth who has created and posted the social media content

While Zach defines material displays as part of both boys' and girls' social media performances, he associates different types of consumer objects with girls and boys. Alexis, a 15-year-old girl, uses Twitter and Instagram, where she has both a personal account and a fan account for Cher Lloyd. During her interview, she genders material displays in a similar way to Zack:

Interviewer: When you think about how guys use social media versus how girls use social media, is there a difference?

Alexis: Girls are more, fashion and themselves. The guys are just like, I don't know. Like the guys I follow, like my friends, they just put a picture, like one of themselves, or some shoes.

As Alexis recounts, material displays for both boys and girls are associated with the performance of self on social media. The difference in material displays delineated by both Alexis and Zach is between sneakers and shoes for boys, and fashion and make-up for girls. Material displays for boys are exhibitions of objects they own or desire, while material displays for girls are demonstrations of their ability to use those objects to embody a material performance of femininity.

The focus in boys' material displays was placed on consumer objects, primarily brand name athletic sneakers in different colors and styles. Ashley is a 14-year-old girl who only uses Instagram. While scrolling through her Instagram feed, she shares the following material display by a boy at her school:

Bkahnhad: image of grey sneakers with pink and purple detailing, captioned “@trippysilver happy now lol.” The image has two likes and 13 comments, three of which are visible:

Bkahnhad: Damn I'm getting the fire red 5s @trippysilver @largepepi

Trippysilver: me too @Bkahnhad

Bkahnhad: ight¹⁴

As in most material displays by boys, the focus of the picture is placed on the shoe itself, rather than on the poster's body, here entirely absent from the picture. Both commenter and poster

¹⁴ As previously mentioned, all names appearing in examples of social media content were strategically changed to protect anonymity while maintaining as close as possible to the original structure and meaning.

exhibit familiarity with the different types of shoes and express the coveted nature of the shoes.¹⁵

The shoe itself is what is reflected on and evaluated as part of the poster's performance of the consumer role. The shoes' brand and desirability become reflections of the status of the youth.

Even when the poster's body was visible in a material display, the focus and evaluation is still placed on the shoe. Pablo, a 13-year-old boy, has a Facebook account he barely uses and an Instagram account he uses every day. During his interview, he shares with the interviewer a material display by a boy on his Instagram feed. "And then shoes," he says while sharing an image posted by killjack:

A close up picture of black, white, and red shoes on someone's feet, only the poster's ankles are visible, captioned "#Kotd." The image has 12 likes and 1 comment:

Thegodkimmieeee: [three emojis] my new favorites [two emojis]¹⁶

The angle most often used in pictures of shoes is a close up shot of the shoes, with the poster's ankles at most being visible. The focus is thus placed on the shoes with the poster's body being minimized. As the commenter's response shows, the shoes are what are being evaluated in the masculine material display. The "#kotd" or kick of the day shows the emphasis on sharing material displays with an audience.¹⁷ The audience's evaluation of the shoe becomes an evaluation of the poster's social media performance of the role of consumer.

An additional aspect of boys' performance of the consumer role was the use of social media to buy and sell shoes. This usage was never mentioned by any of the girls who participated in the study. Harvey, a 15-year-old boy, barely uses his Facebook or Twitter but is

¹⁵ The "commenter" refers to the youth who commented on the content.

¹⁶ When looking at Instagram and Twitter on a computer, not all emojis (stylized smile faces, figures and symbols) are visible as they would appear on a phone. A blank square instead appears, indicating an emoji has been used but not which one. Whenever the presence of emojis is indicated but not described, this is due to these technical limitations.

¹⁷ The use of a hash tag on Instagram, and Twitter tags that content so that if a user were to search "#kotd", the post would come up in the feed even if the person searching for the hash tag was not following that person.

on Instagram all the time. During the interview, he talks about his friend who sells sneakers on Instagram:

Yeah, this is my friend, John. That has a bunch of sneakers. He sells 'em so he can get money so he can buy like the newest sneakers and stuff. Like these:

Referring to a picture of black and rainbow colored sneakers, with an effect to make it seem like there are many of them, in the form of a collage¹⁸, caption “KD V Premium ‘What the KD’ Size 10, 10.5 & 13 Condition: Deadstock Price: \$899 eMail Chrispi2@me.com Follow @Chrispi_ for any kicks you need. I also buy sneakers for quick cash. If you need a quick sale on your kicks send me eMail.”

The buying and selling of shoes on social media sites is one example of the masculine instrumental use. Social media becomes a tool to facilitate active consumption of goods, providing boys with access to both goods and a possible way to make money.

Girls’ material displays emphasize the poster’s entire body and performance, rather than just the material objects. Fashion and makeup are both material displays where the product is the entire body rather than a singular part. Ashley explains why she liked a friend’s picture on

Instagram:

Ashley: So, okay I would like stuff like, like this. I liked it:

Image posted by **love_lorenx3**, collage of three full body shots of her posing in a black and white printed dress, taken by someone else, captioned “Can’t explain [two emojis].” The image has 46 likes, including 1 by Ashley.

Interviewer: That is a cute outfit.

Ashley: Yeah. ‘cuz she has like kind of fashion like me. We have a lot in common.

In contrast to boys’ material displays of sneakers, what is being evaluated here is Ashley’s friend’s embodied performance, with her dress being just one element. Rather than responding to any material item in particular, Ashley compliments her friend’s fashion. Fashion becomes a performance of material femininity where what is evaluated is the ability to use material objects as part of a larger embodied performance.

¹⁸ Youth use editing apps such as Picstitch to extensively edit photos, applying filters, changing the color or brightness, and creating collages where multiple images are combined so that they can be posted as one image.

While girls may also feature shoes as part of their material displays, they are displayed as part of the entire performance of material femininity:

Post by **dayshe_samantha**, a full-body shot of a teenage girl wearing shorts, a shirt, and fancy sneakers, captioned “My #ootd #jordans #smile #smile.” The image has 12 likes and 1 comment:

Nnuggets_fan_4_ever: Cute

In contrast to the above use of the “#kold”, user **dayshe_samantha** here uses “#ootd” or outfit of the day. While her shoes are also tagged, the emphasis is placed on the larger performance the shoes are a part of. **Dayshe_samantha** is evaluated by her peer, who comments “Cute.” Unlike the examples of the boys where the evaluation was placed on the shoes, the evaluation here is of **Dayshe_samantha**’s entire embodied performance. Whereas for boys, the shoes themselves become a display of status to peers, shoes here become part of a larger performance of material femininity where the evaluation is of the embodied performance of the poster rather than the material object of the shoe.

The embodied nature of the material femininity performance can also be seen in the posting by girls of pictures displaying their nails. During Ashley’s social media tour, she shares with the interviewer the following post on her Instagram feed:

The post is by **yeah_im_me3**, close up image of a hand with elaborately done pink and glitter nails, captioned “Had to go get my nails done.”

The posting of professionally done nails is a display of the poster’s ability to access that particular commodity. As when an individual gets their nails done they are temporarily altering their body, nail art is part of an embodied performance. The posting is an exhibition of Ashley’s friend’s performance of material femininity, where consumer luxury is used as a part of the larger embodied feminine performance.

Romantic relationship pursuit and performance. Romantic relationships are a major genre of content in youth peer culture on social media. Private messaging features on social media are used to interact with potential romantic partners as well as to maintain existing romantic relationships. Youth also use social media to publicly perform their romantic relationships, posting pictures, statuses and tweets about their current or potential significant others. While both boys and girls use social media for pursuit and performance, there is a gendered pattern where boys primarily use social media to pursue romantic relationships while girls primarily use social media to perform their romantic relationships.

Actively pursuing relationships with girls is defined as one of the main masculine uses of social media. Uncle Drew, a 17-year-old boy, uses Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. During his interview, he answers the following question:

Interviewer: In general what do guys use social media to do?

Uncle Drew: Get at girls.

Social media is defined as a tool used for a specific purpose: to pursue romantic relationships with girls. Masculine romantic relationship use is thus defined as instrumental rather than performative.

During their interviews, boys offered examples of how they used social media to engage in flirtation with girls. Superman, a 17-year-old boy, uses Facebook and Instagram. During his interview, he describes how he comments on girls' pictures:

Like I'll comment on some people's picture... Like, if it's a picture of a girl and I think she's beautiful, I'll comment "beautiful" with a heart. Like, like this one. The picture's not coming up but I know that I commented "beautiful" and she liked it.

The public space of the comment is used to initiate contact with girls; however, the intended audience is the girl who Superman thinks is beautiful rather than the peer audience as a whole.

The singular comment becomes an exchange with the girl liking his comment. The exchange could then be used to transition into the private space of messaging.

Moving the conversation from public into a private messaging function was perceived as the goal of interactions with a girl. King, a 16-year-old boy, only uses Instagram. He explains how youth use Kik, a private messaging mobile phone app:

Interviewer: So like a Kik, Kik is a way to flirt?

King: Yeah.

Interviewer: Off of Instagram?

King: Yup. 'cuz most of the time on Instagram like, if you're just talking to one person or one photo, like, it's gonna seem weird.

Interviewer: Why?

King: Because like, a whole bunch of comments just by you and this one person, on one photo. It'll be, it will just be easier, if like you text them. So that way, everybody won't have to see what you wrote.

Interviewer: Is there also some kind of secrecy about that? Like you don't want people to see your conversation?

King: You could block all your photos. But the people that are following you, like once they follow you and you follow back, they're gonna see your photos and all the comments that you did.

Interviewer: Okay.

King: But on Kik like, you able to sign out of it. And send back one without people seeing it.

Kik is designated as the place for flirtation on social media because of its private nature, unlike the public space of Instagram. Moving the conversation to Kik reduces the audience for the flirtation performance down to the girl in question rather than the entire peer audience. The focus in the masculine romantic relationship performance becomes minimizing rather than maximizing the audience; instrumental usage, rather than performative use.

The invitation to move to a private social media space can itself become the entirety of the public flirtatious exchange. During Ashley's social media tour, she shows the interviewer the following picture and comment exchange on one of her friend's Instagram pictures:

love_lorenx3 posted collage of two full body shots of herself in the same outfit, one smiling, one making a funny face, captioned "[three emojis]." The image has 50 likes and the following comment

anthonyvalmond: Add me to Kik tony7740 so we could get to know each other more

Kik is positioned as the place to get to know each other rather than in public. User anthonyvalmond's intended audience for his post is only love_lorenx3 rather than the entire peer audience. His use of social media became instrumental, to be used for specific contact, rather than performance.

Like boys, romantic relationships are also considered one of girls' main uses of social media; however, their use is defined as being primarily performative. Superman explains during his interview:

But for girls like, mostly on Facebook though it's all about relationship. You know, "I love bae."¹⁹ You know, "he took me out today." Like for girls it's mostly relationship things.

While relationships are defined as one of main reasons both boys and girls use social media, girls' usage is defined as being all about the relationship rather than the pursuit. Specifically, girls' usage is defined as being about the performance of the relationship. Notably, the comments Superman attributes to girls are addressed to the social media audience as a whole rather than to their significant others. Girls use social media to perform romantic relationships.

While the most apparent example of relationship performance on social media is the setting of relationship status on Facebook, girls' performance of romantic relationship goes beyond the bare bones of specifying they are in a relationship and often makes use of peer culture-driven types of content. During Pablo's social media tour, he scrolled by the following post by a girl he followed on Instagram:

liladyx_xmontez posted an image of a teenage girl and teenage guy posing together. She is smiling and he is pursing his lips, like blowing a kiss, captioned "Me & my baby my everything; he been [there] 4 me N now he going 2 my school he gonna stay by my

¹⁹ "Bae" is an affectionate term used in youth online peer culture to refer to significant others, similar to babe or sweetie. It is an acronym for "before anything else".

side I got his back 2 ♥♥♥ follow him he a dime [three emojis] @john_minaj @john_minaj @john_minaj.” The image received 9 likes.

Here Instagram user liladyx_xmontez uses the format of the shout-out, a post where the user tells their followers to go follow another Instagram user, to create an emotive performance of her romantic relationship. While her boyfriend is tagged in the post, he is not her audience; rather her audience is her followers and peers. As Liladyx_xmontez’s romantic relationship performance shows her peers the depth and quality of her romantic relationship, her post becomes a display for the peer audience of the social capital she possesses.

Romantic relationship performance may involve the posting of romantic or sexually themed content. Maria, a 14-year-old girl, uses Facebook and Instagram. During her social media tour, she shows and explains the following post:

Post: Image of a guy lying down on the floor with a girl doing a handstand over him and kissing him, captioned “One day I want to do this with David [participant’s ex-boyfriend].” The image has 2 likes.

Maria: Yeah. This is, I, unfortunately did this. Pretty sad.

Interviewer: It is sad because—

Maria: But I don’t wanna take it down because people like it so I’m like [trails off into silence].

Interviewer: But it gets sad because now that—, it’s just over and now you look back—

Maria: What like, I get, like I go through all my photos, be like, “Yeah, I posted that one.” [Pointing to image of two necklaces, one says “His” and the other “Hers”]. Like, I posted a lot of stuff about me and him.

As Maria recounts, during her relationship she posted content that her boyfriend was explicitly mentioned in as well as content she posted with him in mind. Maria’s comments also capture a problem that can arise in the performance of romantic relationships; the lasting nature of social media romantic relationship displays even after the relationship has ended. Maria’s reluctance to delete the content because of the positive reception it received illustrates how both the romantic

relationship content and the likes it received from peers are a form of social capital. To delete the post would be to erase the gained social capital.

Friendship interactions and performance. Friendship is a priority in youth's use of social media. Like romantic relationships, youth use social media to both directly communicate and interact with new and existing friends and to publicly perform their friend role. There is a gendered difference in how youth used social media for the purposes of friendship. Unlike in the case of romantic relationships, youth did not vocalize the gendered pattern in friendship performance; rather this performance came through in their social media interactions with friends and discussions of friendship. Boys used social media instrumentally to facilitate in-person interactions and to talk with each other about sports, while girls' use involved a more emotive performance of the friend role.

On each of the sites, boys used public means to contact each other and facilitate in-person meetings with friends. Social media becomes an instrumental tool to communicate when not in the same place. Uncle Drew (Twitter user *ThaTweak_IsHeavy*) shows the interviewer the following exchange he had with his friend on his twitter:

ThaTweak_IsHeavy: @johnnysofrito yo where u at
ThaTweak_IsHeavy: @johnnysofrito yo u still going to [green street]²⁰
Jashuasofrito: @ThaTweak_IsHeavy nah not today
ThaTweak_IsHeavy: @johnnyofrito scrub
Johnnysofrito: @ThaTweak_IsHeavy talkin reck
ThaTweak_IsHeavy: @johnnysofrito cause I was supposed to fry yo today
Johnnysofrito: @ThaTweak_IsHeavy neverr

Uncle Drew uses Twitter as a way to communicate with his friend; both his original tweet and his friend's reply are directed to each other, not the wider peer audience. The goal here is to facilitate an in-person *meet-up* rather than to communicate anything about their friendship to the

²⁰ Street name changed to maintain confidentiality.

wider peer audience. Green Street here refers to the location of a park in Downtown Greenville with a number of basketball courts, suggesting the two had plans to meet up and play basketball. Sports, whether consuming as a fan or playing as an athlete, play an important role in boys' friendships with each other.

When real life interactions are not possible, social media itself can function as a space to socialize and talk about sports. Zack talks about his interactions with his friends on Twitter.

Zack: But like, I usually like talk about um, like with my friends, like—, I'm tryna find it [the post]. We talk about basketball. How the game, see like all these right here? Referring to conversation between participant [**Cashman0331**] and friend [**Dope_puertorican3**]:

Dope_Puertorican3: @**Cashman0331** link

Cashman0331: @**Dope_Puertorican3** you saw that 3 [two emojis].

Dope_Puertorican3: @**Cashman0331** Chalmers to the King.

Cashman0331: @**Dope_Puertorican3** [emoji].

Zack: That's some, just some basketball.

Interviewer: You saw that 3-pointer shot?

Zack: Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool cool, so is this like live? Like you tweeted during the game?

Zack: Uh-huh [Yes].

Interviewer: And your friends are also tweeting, watching the same game?

Zack: Mh-mm [yes]. And we're talking about it.

Twitter becomes a space where Zack can *hang out* and talk with his friend about the game as if they were together in person. Their friendship interaction is directed towards each other, rather than the larger peer audience, with social media serving as an instrument allowing for them to interact. Zack's further comments illustrate the importance of sports in boys' friendships:

Interviewer: Do you ever like interact with your friends on Twitter besides basketball?

Zack: Nm-mm [no; laughs].

Interviewer: [interviewer laughs] No?

Zack: No, that's the craziest thing about —, like, I haven't talked to nobody on Twitter. Because I don't, because the game is over, so you don't talk about it.

Sports allow boys to interact with each other on social media in a way they would not otherwise do. Basketball becomes an important part of friendship as it creates a space for boys to communicate and enjoy each other's company. In boys' friendships, social media is used instrumentally as a tool to facilitate in-person *meet-ups* between friends and as a space to *hang out*.

Taking a different approach, girls actively perform their friendships on social media, creating pictures, posts, tweets and comments to share with the peer audience that demonstrate both friendship status and the value of those friendships. Ashley shares the following about one of her friend's posts:

That's my best friend. Let me show you, see:

Opening image of participant and another girl wearing fancy dresses, posted by user **babydoll54** and captioned "Bestfriend && I @prettii_x33 [Ashley's Instagram name]." The image has 82 likes and 4 comments:

lilypaddytate: You look soo gorgeous Mayy [smiley face emoji] @babydoll54

hayleee4: my lord my cousin is gawgesss

prepingtown: #blay²¹

babydoll54: @hayleee4 @lilypaddytate @prepingtown thanks dolls

Performing friendship can be as simple as the use of the labels of *friend* and *best friend*.

Ashley's friend's post actively announces to the peer audience that Ashley is her best friend and provides a visual representation of their relationship. Notably, while Ashley is tagged, the post is directed to the peer audience as a whole, rather than just to her.

Girls' friendship performance goes beyond the use of the labels of *friend* and *best friend* to include the posting of emotional content publicly displaying the depth and quality of friendships. Chassidy, a 15-year-old girl, is an avid user of Facebook and Instagram but does not use her Twitter as much because she thinks it is boring. She states the following about one of her retweets:

²¹ "Blay" is a combination of the words blazing and fly, meaning that someone is looking good.

Interviewer: Like what are you retweeting?

Chassidy: Like if people, retweet me, like this was Christina, she's like, "I swear I fucking love her bruh, the only one that understands me and know what I'm going through and been through, thick and thin." And then she @-ed me and I retweeted it.

[The actual tweet reads "I swear I fucking love her bruh only one that understands me n know what im going through been there thick n thin @immaboss_bitch <3"]].

Chassidy's friend Christina created an emotive display of her friendship with Chassidy, written in third person to the peer audience as a whole. Instead of actively using the label of friend or best friend, Christina's tweet creates a definition of how Chassidy has been a friend to her. Through sharing what Christina feels about her by retweeting, Chassidy is also publicly performing their relationship and advertising to the peer audience her social capital.

Sharing a friend's emotive declaration of friendship is another way to perform friendship. During Chassidy's tour, she shows the interviewer the following post made by someone on her Facebook newsfeed:

Sara posted: what my bestfriend sent me, lij ♥

"good morning/afternoon to my sara. i love your funny, crazy, sometimes embarrassing ass. We have our ups and downs most of the time because we say whats on our mind & we dgaf minds.²² but anywho, my point is that, we will always end up being one again, and talking. talking as if nothing happened, as we don't feel any different. your ugly but i miss your ugly ass 😊 lol girllllll you know im just playing. where I see ugly at? NO WHERE. ♥ well your my best friend and im yours. its gonna be like that till the day we die. when your ass is buried right next to me 😊 lol whoah crazy but it's the truth. lmao me?²³ you? separate? Since when? lol well your ass is obviously sleeping cause you don't know how to go to sleep early and get that beauty sleep. but your adorable & don't need no man in your life if it comes down to it, all you need is me shoot, i can make you feel beautiful. Lol fuck a nigga. ♥ well bye and wake tf up!"²⁴

[Within 13 minutes, the post received 3 likes].

²² "Dgaf" is an acronym for "Don't give a fuck".

²³ "Lmao" is an acronym for "Laughing my ass off".

²⁴ "Tf" is an acronym for "the fuck".

By publicly sharing her friend's private and emotional declaration of their friendship, Facebook user Sara creates a performance of their friendship for the peer audience showing both what a good friend Sara is and what a good friend she has. Through emotive, declarative posts, girls perform friendship for the peer audience, publicly displaying their social capital.

Evaluating Gendered Performances

Youth continually evaluate each other's social media performances. As members of the peer audience on social media, youth critique others' social media performances and provide positive feedback. Critiques of social media performance are negative evaluations made of both individuals and groups, expressed through negative actions on social media such as unfollowing, unfriending, blocking, and negative comments. Negative evaluations are also expressed more passively, with the absence of acknowledgement through likes or comments serving as a form of negative feedback. Youth also provide positive feedback on social media performances through likes, comments, following and friending on social media.

Both critiques and positive feedback reveal what types of performances are valued and devalued on social media and where boundaries are established within the peer culture to delineate between acceptable and unacceptable types of performance. Social media critiques are gendered on two levels. Most apparently, critiques are gendered on the individual level, as a critique of an individual's social media performance may also a critique of that individual's gender performance. However, social media critiques are also directed at ways of using social media performances in general, not just at the actions of individual users. Social media critiques thus come to be critiques of gendered social media usages. By looking at critiques of boys and girls social media use, the value peer culture assigns to both masculinity and femininity becomes

illuminated as well as how reactions to masculine and feminine performances can differ based on who is performing them.

Critiques of girls' social media performance. Critiques are made both of gendered feminine social media performances and against girls as a generalized group. The *personal*, *inappropriate*, and *inauthentic* critiques establish lines girls must remain inside to avoid negative reactions from the peer audience. As critiques are leveled against social media performances that are gendered feminine, girls are both expected to and critiqued for performing in these ways. The result of these gendered critiques is a characterization of the performance of femininity on social media as being too personal, inappropriate, and inauthentic.

The personal critique. One main critique made by youth of other's social media performances is that they are too personal, sharing information that youth think should be kept private. Kyre, a 12-year-old girl, uses Instagram and Twitter. During her interview, she discusses what she dislikes about social media:

Interviewer: What do you not like about social media?

Kyre: [Pause thinking], I don't like, that, like some people tweet like stuff that shouldn't be on twitter. Like, let's see like [navigating her account]. Yeah, I don't like when people tweet about other people, saying things you wouldn't want to see on Twitter, or something like that shouldn't be on Twitter, its personal, stuff like that.

The personal critique creates a boundary between what is acceptable to be shared with the public peer audience on social media, and what is considered unacceptable to share and should be kept private. Certain types of content are perceived as being too personal for social media and thus should not be shared. When youth cross this boundary, their social media performances are perceived negatively by their peers.

Youth consider the sharing of certain kinds of information about romantic relationships to be crossing the line of what is too personal to share on social media. Superman identifies what annoys him on social media:

Superman: Relationship statuses, like I don't care.

Interviewer: Relation, what do you mean by relationship statuses?

Superman: Like, "Oh, um, I met this girl today." I don't care.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Superman: Um like, "bae took me out today." I don't care either.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Superman: This letter to their boyfriend or girlfriend. They'll tag them in it like, but I don't read 'em. Like really?!

Interviewer: Yeah.

Superman: Really?! On Facebook?! No one wants to read your sorry ass letter.

The line between what is personal and should not be shared and what is okay to share is established in the distinction made between content the peer audience cares about and content the peer audience does not care about and does not want to read or see. While Superman does not specify the gender of individuals posting romantic relationship information, he describes the gendered feminine relational performance in particular as what should not be posted. The posts Superman describes are public performances of romantic relationship status and the poster's affection for that person. Chassidy also critiques romantic relationship performance:

Interviewer: You know how your friends are in relationships, and you are in a romantic relationship, how does that show up on Facebook?

Chassidy: I don't put none of my business on Facebook like everybody else. Other people will sit here and write like, "Oh, been, I was with my baby today and we went here, we did this, we did that." Or when they're arguing, they put it on their status so everybody knows. I think that's the worst thing to ever do.

Chassidy and Superman's posts both critique a form of romantic relationship performance gendered feminine and primarily practiced by girls, revealing a gendered component to the personal critique.

The gendered component of the personal critique is made explicit when youth identify and critique relational performance as something girls do. Vanessa, a 14-year-old girl, uses

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr. Here she talks about her peer's social media performances:

Vanessa: Some girls be out depressed on Facebook, talk about some lovey-dovey stuff. And then boys are just like f that, f this.

Interviewer: What do you think about the girls who express, like, about their relationships or—?

Vanessa: I think they should just keep it off Facebook.

Interviewer: Really?

Vanessa: Yes. You better go in a diary or something, write it in a diary or something, or find someone to talk to. 'cuz it's not necessary on Facebook. Like they, they put they whole life on Facebook, honestly. Like, it's not necessary. Like you're just telling people in your business. And it's tellin' people your business that they don't want to know.

Vanessa's identification of girls as being primarily concerned with relationships in comparison with boys is immediately followed by a condemnation of relational performance on social media. Relational performance is viewed as crossing the personal line on social media, sharing information with the peer audience that is not desired or needed. The personal critique is notably a critique of performance, not of content. Superman, Chassidy, and Vanessa all critique the posters of romantic relationship content for not being responsive to the interest of the peer audience, thus failing to perform on social media in the right way. Girls' social media performance is thus negatively constructed as being too personal.

The inappropriate critique. Youth heavily critiqued content on social media that is perceived as being inappropriate for the peer audience. Occasionally made about the usage of inappropriate language, the inappropriate critique was primarily made in response to youth who posted pictures that were judged to be inappropriate. Kyre discusses what makes a picture inappropriate:

Interviewer: Is there anything that people post that like irritates you, that you're like, "Oh my gosh why are you posting that?"

Kyre: Yeah. When people post pictures of like inappropriate stuff, I hate that. When I see that I just unfollow them.

Interviewer: Like what kind of stuff would you like categorize as inappropriate?

Kyre: Pictures of people's bodies, images, just like something you wouldn't want to see when you scroll down on Instagram.

Much like the personal critique, the inappropriate critique is made against users who post content youth do not want to see on social media. Pictures of people's bodies are identified as the broad category of what inappropriate is. The question then becomes what kind of bodies in what kind of pictures are read as inappropriate.

Girls are disproportionately critiqued for posting inappropriate pictures because their bodies are read as more sexualized than boys. ZStar, a 13-year-old boy, uses Instagram and Facebook. During his social media tour, he reacts to content on his Instagram feed:

ZStar: That's inappropriate, I'm saying. [Referring to a picture collage of a girl in a bikini].

Interviewer: Mh-mm [yes]. So where is that line where the inappropriateness comes in?

ZStar: Bikini or like showing anything.

Interviewer: Uh-huh [yes]. What about for guys?

ZStar: Hm, I don't know. 'Cuz like so they need to wear swimming trunks or what, like um, like a bikini's like inappropriate 'cuz like it could sometimes be like very short or something.

ZStar provides a gendered definition of inappropriate as he identifies an article of girls' clothing as one of the main indications of a picture being inappropriate. When pushed to include boys as well in his definition of inappropriateness, ZStar identifies boys wearing swim trunks as not being inappropriate even though they expose similar amounts of skin in comparison with a bikini. The definition of what is inappropriate is specifically defined as girls' exposed bodies.

As their bodies are defined as more inappropriate than boys, girls face a higher risk of being critiqued for posting inappropriate pictures and facing social consequences. Kyre talks about unfollowing people on social media:

Interviewer: Could you think of a specific time you unfollowed someone for posting something you didn't like?

Kyre: Mm—, I followed, let me see [scrolls down her social media account]. Like, if I see something like, someone with like not a lot of clothes, like not a lot of clothes on, like somebody took a picture in their bra, or something, I'll unfollow them. Like, "Why, why are you posting all those pictures?" Nobody wants to see that up.

Like ZStar, Kyre's definition of inappropriate content is gendered, identifying an article of girls' clothing in her description. Kyre's comments illustrate the social consequences tied to the inappropriate critique, as youth may unfollow or unfriend girls who post pictures read as crossing the inappropriate line. The inappropriate critique, like the personal critique, is a critique of performance, not just of content. As Kyre does here, girls who post inappropriate pictures are critiqued for failing to post content meeting the standards of the peer audience, instead posting content the peer audience does not want to see.

Critique of girls' social media performance as being inappropriate extended to pictures containing neither nudity nor undergarments. During her social media tour, Maria stopped twice to critique a friend's pictures:

Maria: That's Shannon. She goes to school with me. But I can't deal with her sometimes on Facebook.

Interviewer: What would she do?

Maria: Like.

Interviewer: That?

Maria: Stuff like that.

[Post is of two pictures of a girl, pursing her lips, with a focus on her cleavage, captioned, "Incredibly incredible <3"]

Maria: See, she posts stuff like that. I just can't deal with that.

[Shannon posts a collage of two images of her taking a selfie in the mirror, sitting down with her leg pulled up into her chest, wearing short shorts and a camisole, captioned, "You can look at me and say I ain't myself, if y'all what I created then I hate myself."]

Maria reacts harshly to Shannon's pictures even though they do not reveal undergarments or nudity. The common factor between the two photos is instead Shannon's framing of the shots and posing in the pictures, both of which highlight different features of her body, as well as her

assertive framing of herself. Girls' performances were additionally critiqued as being inappropriate based on readings of their body language, framing of the picture and captioning on social media.

Unlike the personal critique, there was a moral component attached to the inappropriate critique with assumptions made about the character and offline behavior of girls who posted content youth read as inappropriate. Maria further discusses Shannon, whose pictures she considers inappropriate:

Interviewer: Is there anything anyone posts on Instagram or Facebook that really annoys you or bothers you?

Maria: Shannon's posts on Instagram and Facebook. I always, I tell her, I'm like "You, no. What you post on Instagram and Facebook just makes me mad."

Interviewer: What is it about that that makes you so mad?

Maria: That she just posts this, these very vulgar photos of her. And then she expects people not to be, guys around the school to be not expect, expect the guys in our school to treat her like she didn't post that photo. Like, stuff like that. Like, like, "Don't act like you don't. You posted it. We know you posted it, you said you posted it. And you write like, 'I know I'm looking fine da-da-da-dada [rambling sound]. Like if you'll tap this.' How do you expect them not, how do you expect to go to school and not expect all these kids who follow you from or are friends with you on Facebook from school not to try to holler at you."

Maria critiques Shannon for both her social media performance and for her offline character, accusing her of soliciting attention from boys on social media and failing to anticipate the consequences. Notably while Shannon is held to a high standard, the boys involved in Maria's scenario are not; the posting of pictures read as inappropriate is here constructed as an active solicitation of attention from boys. Girls face a gendered definition of their bodies as inappropriate, which can result in social consequences online and offline.

The inauthentic critique. Youth critique peers not just for what they post but for why they are perceived as posting that content. Youth consistently critiqued peers who were perceived as catering to the peer audience's likes or dislikes. Within youth peer culture, being

“real” or authentic on social media was defined as using social media *just for you*, without caring about the positive or negative reactions of the peer audience. This youth construction of authenticity on social media is visible in youth’s careful and continuous clarifications that they do not post content for comments or attention but rather for themselves, as seen in Superman’s comments on his social media goals:

Interviewer: When you like share like photos or information, like on social media, what’s like your main goal?

Superman: Um, I just like post it just like, just to post it. Not to get like, all the likes or anything. I don’t really care about that. But, it’s just. That’s for you, you know people notice you. But I just post it just, just for fun.

Superman clearly constructs his social media activity as being just for himself and not directed at the peer audience. Positive attention from peers in the form of likes is constructed as being irrelevant to decisions made about social media performance. Priscilla, a 13-year-old girl, uses Instagram and Facebook. During her interview, she discusses her peers’ lack of influence on her social media decisions:

Interviewer: When you put pictures, comments, whatever you do on Facebook, like how does that reflect who you are?

Priscilla: Things I put, it’s me. I don’t change me...So, what I put, is sometimes what I feel, things. And, it’s me. I don’t, I don’t change my, the things I put, I don’t change me. I put what I want to put. If they don’t like it, I don’t care. It’s me. I could put what I want.

Authenticity is constructed as the posting of your authentic self, of who you are, without consideration of positive or negative attention from peers.

Within peer culture, considering the reactions of the peer audience when posting content is constructed as inauthentic and the wrong way to perform on social media. While talking about the posting of romantic relationship content on social media, Uncle Drew explains:

Interviewer: What do you think about people, like posting things?

Uncle Drew: What’s the point of posting it? You don’t need to, like what is there, what is there to do? You’re just going to get likes. That’s why people really post stuff, to get

likes. And what's the point of likes. It's not like you get money for it. Somebody's just liking something you do.

Posting content for likes is here constructed as using social media in the wrong way. Likes are constructed as having no real value that youth should consider. Seeking likes and thus attention is negative because engaging in this behavior implies that one is purposefully thinking about the audience and taking the audience into consideration. As youth engage on social media, there is a strong imperative within the peer culture to engage authentically in the right way; to post content because of one's opinions and not because of the opinions or attention of the peer audience.

In the face of this peer expectation of authenticity, girls are viewed as caring more about the peer audience's reaction to their social media activity than boys do. Uncle Drew describes girls' behavior in saying:

Interviewer: Do you think boys and girls use social media in different ways?

Uncle Drew: Yeah. Girls use it to post pictures, to post statuses, to post likes and stuff. They use this, as if it was their life. They really do. They take it serious. So, yeah. That's a big difference. I wouldn't really get mad if somebody didn't like my status. A girl might throw another status up saying, "Why didn't nobody like my status?"

Interviewer: Yeah, so girls like care about it more?

Uncle Drew: Yeah, they care about it.

Girls are here constructed as violating the peer expectation of authenticity by intensely caring about the negative reactions of the peer audience. Girls are also constructed as caring about receiving positive attention. Superman reacts to a comment on one of his photos:

Superman: See, see. And it's crazy because, like on Instagram like, some people, like they don't even know you. [Referring to selfie image of the participant lying down in bed with caption, "Sleep !!!" The image has received 468 likes and 1 comment:

Brianbolden1: Shout me out!].

Especially the girls. But, you know, they, want more followers. They want, the big numbers. And everyone sees it. Like, that's really stupid. If you're gonna put it up, why don't you delete it after?

Superman here critiques a commenter for requesting a shout-out in pursuit of more followers, violating the peer definition of authenticity. Even though the commenter in question has a

masculine Instagram name, girls are identified as the ones who are in pursuit of positive attention on social media. Girls are thus viewed overall as caring more about negative and positive attention from the peer audience on social media, violating the peer definition of what authenticity on social media is.

Girls were further critiqued for being inauthentic by seeking attention in the wrong way.

Barbie says the following about her peers on social media:

Interviewer: [Do] guys and girls use like social media and stuff in different ways?

Barbie: Girls use it for attention, and um, and to be nosey. Boys use it to be nosey and to, to get attention also. But, the difference between, it's the same reasons. But it's different. Like the difference is a female, a female seeks attention in the wrong way.

Interviewer: What do you mean girls seek it in a wrong way? So like what is that?

Barbie: Like, just like I said, like, "Oh I just had sex." Sorta, whatever the things maybe, "I just got some good dick or whatever." Blah blah blah, like all that is for attention. "You probably saying that to make somebody mad. Or to have, or to get likes."

Unlike her peers, in Barbie's construction both boys and girls use social media to get attention; however, girls are still constructed as performing on social media in the wrong way. Barbie accuses her girl peers of posting sexual content for positive attention in the form of likes and critiques them for violating two peer expectations on social media, being both inappropriate and being inauthentic.

The feminine social media performances is further constructed as inauthentic through the labeling of girls as using social media to misrepresent themselves to the peer audience for positive attention. Maria explains one thing that annoys her on social media is "...pretty girls that call themselves ugly on the internet. I'm like, just so people can say that they're pretty." Girls are accused of manipulating the peer audience's perception of them in order to receive positive attention. This categorization of girls as inauthentic and attention seeking can be seen in peer-created and disseminated humor content that positions girls as lying or faking things about their lives:

Image posted by Instagram user **naughtyascanbe_** is of the discount store Rainbow. The text on the image reads, “CHICKS BE LIKE BAE BE SPOLING ME!”²⁵ The image is captioned, “LMFAO trueeee.”²⁶

Girls as a group are constructed as using social media to create a false performance of their romantic relationship in order to display and receive social capital. Another example of this humor was seen during a social media tour:

Facebook user Christian posted, “But I hate Bitches That Take Showers On Saturdays Only and Be Like “Lms if You Take Showers Everyday?” -_____-. . .♥.”²⁷ The post received 42 likes and 3 comments:

Male comments: LOL 😊

Girl 1 comments: preachhhhh !

Girl 2 comments: #AMEN

The derogatory language of “bitches” reinforces the negative construction of girls as misrepresenting themselves to the peer audience in pursuit of positive attention. As seen in the enthusiastic reactions of Christian’s commenters, this category of humor is eagerly consumed by both boys and girls and is considered *funny because it is true*. Girls are overall constructed as being doubly inauthentic; letting the desire for attention inform how they perform on social media to the extent that they will lie and misrepresent themselves.

Critiques of boys’ social media performances. Aspects of the masculine performance on social media are also critiqued by the peer audience. However, there is a marked difference between critiques of girls’ and boys’ performances on social media. Whereas the critique of feminine performance was leveled against girls as a whole, critique of the masculine social media performance was leveled against individual boys’ performances and decisions and not applied to the entire group. As the critique is leveled against the individual and not the group, the same moral assumptions about boys in general are not made. One place where this

²⁵ This image is in the format of a “meme” image, where an image has text superimposed on top of it. These images are commonly humorous in nature and are widely shared.

²⁶ “Lmfao” is an acronym for “Laughing my fucking ass off”.

²⁷ “Lms” is an acronym for “like my status”.

difference between the two forms of critique is visible is in critiques of drug and alcohol use related social media content.

Critiques of drug and alcohol use content. Drug and alcohol use related content is a genre of content on social media that is primarily associated with masculine performance. When asked to compare a boy's social media page to a girl's, Vanessa states, "Well, let me say something. A guy, he would just talk about, smokin', um, drinkin.'" Talking about drug and alcohol use is constructed here as one of the primary subjects that boys talk about on their social media pages. Superman went into depth, explaining:

Or, uh, they [boys], like on Instagram, you see some pictures of like, "Oh I had weed today." They have, um, a roll. They have a bag of weed money, write about money. You know, girls, family; guys, weed, drinking, partying, all of that stuff.

As Superman describes it, drug and alcohol use related content can include pictures and statuses about personal use of drugs and alcohol, personal use in the context of partying and also content about the buying and selling of illegal drugs. A variety of drug and alcohol related content is described as being part of the masculine social media performance.

Drug and alcohol related content was one of the most critiqued aspects of the masculine performance. One place where this critique emerged was in youth's reactions to finding this content as they scrolled through their friends' and followers' posts during the social media tour. Carly, a 12-year-old girl, uses Facebook and Instagram. During her social media tour, she plays a video of her older male cousin posted on Facebook where he is drinking a cup of alcohol and singing a rap song into the camera.²⁸ He is sitting with another male who is smoking something

²⁸ A weakness of this particular example is that as this is the participant's cousin, the familial relation could be accounting for part of her reaction. Time limitations did not allow for the selection of a different quote but other similar reactions were recorded. Youth not generalizing critique of drug and alcohol content to the group level was a strong pattern.

in the car and producing a lot of smoke. There is a girl sitting in the back seat. Carly reacts negatively, saying:

Carly: Oh look at that. No I don't like it. I don't like when he do that.

Interviewer: What'd he do?

Carly: I don't like that. When he go on road trips and he just smoke, smoke, smoke, smoke, smoke, smoke. I don't like that.

Interviewer: Mm-hm [yes]. Why?

Carly: Well, I have to tell him I don't like that because, it just, when you young it hurts your lungs. You can die by that.

Carly's critique is made of her cousin's individual decisions, both the decision to smoke and the decision to post the smoking content on social media. Notably, Carly does not make generalized statements about people who post drug and alcohol content, gendered or otherwise. She also does not make her critique on the grounds of the morality of the poster's actions or on the desires of the peer audience to see or not see the content but rather on the grounds of the poster's health. While the individual's use and posting of the drug and alcohol use related content is critiqued, the critique is not generalized to boys as a whole.

Critiques of boys' posting of drug and alcohol use are leveled against the individual's social media performance rather than the masculine social media performance as a whole. When asked to show an example of a boy's social media page, Vanessa shows the interviewer a boy's Facebook page containing a number of drug and alcohol use related images, including an image of marijuana, an image of powder and syringes, and four images with alcohol bottles visible. She provided the following commentary on his page:

Interviewer: What do you think about it?

Vanessa: It's not cute.

Interviewer: He's not cute or what he's putting up is not cute?

Vanessa: What he's doing and putting up is not cute.

Interviewer: Okay, so that would be what you say is not necessary [referring to her previous statement]? Is that one of those things?

Vanessa: "If you're gonna do it, just do it. Don't tell anybody else you're doing it."

Notably, even as Vanessa is asked to share this content as part of a larger conversation about gendered patterns of usage, her critique remains directed at the social media performance of the individual rather than the social media performance boys as a group. Absent from Vanessa's critique is any sort of moral argument of the individual's decision; what she critiques is his decision to post the content, not his decision to use drugs and alcohol in the first place. In contrast to generalized and moral critiques made against girls' social media performances, critiques of the masculine performance on social media are made at the individual level, not generalized to the group as a whole and do not contain moral judgment.

Although not a dominant theme, boys were occasionally critiqued for performing on social media in ways gendered feminine. Priscilla talks about a peer on social media:

Priscilla: This guy talked about his emotions! [astounded]. He was like, "I'mma love you forever. I don't know what you're talking about that I don't love you. Blah blah blah." I was like, "What is this thing? What?" I was so confused.

Interviewer: He was talking to some girl or what?

Priscilla: He, he was like, he was like, "You know who you are." I was like, "These people are crazy."

Priscilla's surprise clearly illustrates how her male peer on social media has performed in a non-dominant way. Her use of "crazy" to describe her peer's emotional relational performance shows how his performing in a way gendered feminine is viewed negatively, not neutrally.

Boys who perform in ways constructed as feminine may face even stronger critiques of their social media performance. Carly reacts to a boy's picture that comes up on her Instagram feed during her social media tour:

Carly: [long pause while interviewee continues to scroll through news feed and stops at a photo of a boy]. That dude, kay. No, I'm so serious, you wanna see? Would you like to see his profile?!

Interviewer: Yes! I would!

Carly: [clicks on profile of person and sighs]

Interviewer: What about it?

Carly: I can't even, do, I'm gonna show you a picture. Where is he? What boy does that? [Referring to a mirror picture of the boy posing in a model-like stance]. And that's a boy. Who goes like this? When you're a boy—, that's nasty.

Interviewer: That's nasty?

Carly: Yeah, yuck.

Interviewer: Why?

Carly: Because who does that [referring to another picture of the boy making a puckered, kissing face]? When you're posing, you're not supposed to do that. Girls are supposed to do that, not boys. It's just, they don't go together. It's just, ugh [sounds of disgust and disapproval].

Interviewer: Does he go to your school?

Carly: I think he like butt.

Interviewer: He like butt?

Carly: Mm-hm [yes], yup, mm-hm [yes]. He like butt. Mm-hm [Yes].

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Carly: Look at him, he's gay so.

Carly's strong negative reaction clearly shows how the masculine and feminine social media performances are viewed as distinctly different from each other. Consequently, there is a risk for boys in using social media in a way gendered feminine. Carly's strong critique includes an assumption about her peer's sexuality for his performing in a way gendered feminine, suggesting a linkage of gender and sexuality. While not a frequent occurrence, youth critiques of boys who perform in ways perceived as feminine show how the two gendered performances are clearly delineated from each other and that crossing the gender line, for boys at least, can be risky.

Positive feedback on girls' social media performances. While girls' social media use was frequently critiqued by the peer audience, they received large amounts of positive feedback from peers for one aspect of the feminine social media performance in particular, material femininity. However, receiving this positive feedback was contingent on girls' performance of material femininity not being perceived as crossing the inappropriate line. During her social media tour, Ashley shows the interviewer one of her friend's pictures, a collage of two full-body shots of her friend in a blue dress, one from the back and one from the front, captioned "After Work." The image had received 53 likes, including one from Ashley who explains, "I would like stuff like

this ‘cuz she looks classy.’ As Ashley labels both her friend and others’ similar performances of material femininity *classy* and provides positive feedback in the form of liking the photo, she defines performances of material femininity which fall within the boundaries of appropriate as a valued aspect of the feminine social media performance.

Appropriate performances of material femininity shared certain qualities, and their posters were rewarded with positive feedback from the peer audience. During Ashley’s social media tour, she showed us the following picture:

Image posted by **coolstorybro57**, full-body selfie image in mirror at what looks like a party in a hotel of herself wearing a white dress with fancy hair, captioned, “At Anna’s sweet 16 [two emojis].” The image received 15 likes and 2 comments:

Xochelsea4evaxo55: Beautiful [two emojis]

Coolstorybro57: @Xochelsea4evaxo55 Thank you gorgeous ! [two emojis]

Full body shoots displaying the poster’s outfits, hair and accessories received positive feedback in the form of likes and comments. Posters of material femininity performances were labeled pretty, beautiful, or gorgeous by the peer audience. Selfie shots received positive feedback so long as they contained the features of the material femininity performance and were not designated as inappropriate. During her social media tour, Vanessa showed the interviewer one of her selfies on Facebook:

Selfie of Vanessa with curly hair, hoop earrings, a green t-shirt, and a smile; captioned, “no glasses, real smile, & eye make-up.” The image received 52 , 1 share, and 2 comments:

Katrina: beautiful ♥

Greg: Looking good sis

Vanessa receives positive feedback in the form of likes and comments from her peers for her performance of material femininity through her selfie. Notably, she is smiling rather than pouting and highlights her use of makeup, performing material femininity. Performance of material femininity is thus positively valued within the youth peer culture.

Positive feedback on boys' social media performances. One pattern of positive feedback on boys' social media performances was the positive peer audience response to boys who accomplished a non-dominant masculine social media performance incorporating aspects of feminine relational performance. Boys who successfully performed this non-dominant masculinity received large amounts of positive feedback from peers in the form of likes, comments, friends, and followers. Non-dominant masculinity was successfully performed by Coffee, a 15-year-old, and Superman, a 17-year-old, two boys in the subsample who received an extremely high amount of positive feedback from peers for their social media performance. Coffee, who states he is "Facebook famous," has 3,474 Facebook friends, and regularly receives between 50 and 100 likes on his pictures and statuses. Superman only follows 459 peers on Instagram but has 1,355 followers and regularly receives between 100 and 200 plus likes on his pictures.

Both boys incorporated relational and emotional aspects, gendered feminine, into their social media performance. One example of Superman's relational performance was a picture he posted of himself with a girl his age where they are both making funny faces, captioned "Me and my negro ♥ [okay hand emoji] @brittanylis_ love this girl to death dawwg." Superman's post fits within the conventions of the feminine relational performance as it is an emotive declaration of friendship, directed towards the peer audience as a whole. Superman also posted content that fell into the category of romantic relationship performance, such as one image of a white background with black text reading "Once I get you, I don't plan on losing you", he then captioned it, "-don't plan on it- [line of emojis]." The image received 164 likes, with Superman receiving positive feedback from the peer audience for his emotional relational performance.

Coffee also posted emotional and relational content. He explains emotional expression is one of the driving factors behind his social media use:

Interviewer: So how do you use Facebook? What do you do? What do you use it for?

Coffee: Um, when I'm on Facebook, I usually, I write things that I wouldn't normally say in person because it's just, I kinda like express emotions that I don't want to talk about.

This confessional, performative usage to communicate emotions to friends and peers was normally performed by girls and associated with the feminine social media performance. Both Superman and Coffee performed in ways that fell outside of the masculine instrumental use and were overwhelmingly rewarded on social media.

The positive feedback both boys received had a gendered pattern of response; while both boys and girls responded positively, girls often responded in a flirtatious way while boys responded with admiration at the boys' internet fame. Coffee explains the following post during his social media tour:

Coffee: Yeah. But um, I take pictures based on how I'm feeling sometimes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh [Yes], like how were you feeling?

Coffee: That day I was feeling like mad excited. [Referring to first profile picture, a selfie photo of participant, shirtless, color altered. The image has 56 likes and 3 comments, all from girls:

Comment 1: I love ur eyes

Comment 2: Cute

Comment 3: Your eyes ;o <3<3].

Girls responded to Coffee's emotional performance via selfie photo in a flirtatious manner, complimenting his physical appearance and using emojis and hearts to strike a flirtatious tone.

An example of the male peer response can be seen on one of Superman's emotional and relational images:

Referring to post of selfie picture of the participant on a school bus with text, "It's crazy how one person can affect you." With caption, "Really crazy!! [line of emojis]." The image received 505 likes and 2 comments:

Bobby175bobby: Yo text me @participant

chrisbombski: How are you getting so many likes?

Instagram user chrisbombski responds to Superman's post with obvious admiration as Superman's social media performance receives a positive response from the peer audience.

While they included aspects of the feminine social media performance, both boys also included masculine aspects and occasionally had to defend themselves from peer critique of their performance. Superman explains his posting of drug-related content on his Instagram:

Superman: Bob Marley, I love Bob Marley. Add that, as my lock screen. [Screen capture of phone lock screen with image of Bob Marley and a pot leaf in red, yellow, and green on a black background, captioned, "My lock screen! This ones for you @laura_jade ♥♥ [smiley face, okay hand emojis]." The image received 72 likes and 3 comments:

laura_jade: Yeew. [two okay hand emojis, smiley face].

Supermann57: Lol my idol @laura_jade

laura_jade: [unhappy face emoji].

Superman: It's pretty awesome. You know like his Rastafian, like.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Superman: There's always the weed plant. Because they feel that the weed plant is a plant given by God. So it's their religion to smoke it.

While Superman's reason for posting drug-related content is a spiritual reference related to singer Bob Marley, his posting of drug-related content is an inclusion of one aspect of the masculine social media performance, serving to balance out the more feminine aspects of his performance. Coffee explains his response to a peer critique of one of his images:

Coffee: Alright. See on one of my pictures, I wrote a quote, "Sometimes I have to stop, I have to remind myself, stop trying to fit in when I was born to stand out." [Reading off of post with the above quote and a selfie picture of the participant].

Interviewer: [Interviewer laughs in enjoyment]. That's a good one. What did your friends say?

Coffee: Uh. [Scrolls down, post has 24 likes and 4 comments:

Commenter 1: TRUE !!!

Commenter 2: nigga what are you showing lol ?

Participant: Shut up nigga I'm getting there lol

Commenter 2: lmaoooooo].

Coffee: Yeah, see like they comment like things like true and then some of the ones, this guy, the funny guy—Donny, he's more of like, the sarcastic one. So he was like, "what are you showing?" As in like a motion, I was like, "I'm getting there."

When Coffee's performance is challenged by a male peer, he must actively respond and push back against the critique of his social media performance. The youth critiques of boys whose social media performances were interpreted as feminine illustrate the risk of negative peer reactions both boys had to navigate. Both the inclusion of aspects of the masculine social media performance and the need to actively respond to critiques of their performance suggest that boys who perform non-dominant masculinities on social media must carefully negotiate and balance their performances to continue receiving positive feedback from peers.

DISCUSSION

Showing how youth construct and evaluate gender within peer cultures on social media, this study makes a strong contribution to the existing literature. Although there are limitations which need to be acknowledged, the study contributes an innovative methodology, furthers the body of knowledge on youth performance of gender on social media and both challenges and supports existing frameworks.

Gender Performance in Youth Peer Cultures on Social Media

Strong patterns of gendered performance reinforced through positive feedback and critique emerge in youth peer cultures on social media. Instrumental use emerges as the dominant masculine usage of social media, where social media is used as a tool and the audience is limited. Performing their consumer role, boys use social media as a tool to buy and sell shoes. Boys use social media in the pursuit of romantic relationships, "getting at girls" through moving from public flirting to more private messaging exchanges. Moreover, boys use social media to facilitate friendships by arranging in-person meetings and using social media as a space to engage in immediate exchanges with each other. However, masculine performance also involves

more performative aspects, such as material displays, where boys post material objects that become reflections of the posters' statuses.

Relational performance emerges as the dominant feminine usage of social media. Girls create emotional displays of their romantic relationships and friendships through use of peer-driven stylistic formats. These displays illustrate both status and depth of relationships, displaying the posters' social capital. Girls also participate in a performance of material femininity, displaying their use of material objects as part of a larger embodied performance of femininity. Girls frequently received positive feedback for this material femininity performance.

A strong gendered double standard emerges in youth critiques of social media performance. Critique of the feminine performance is generalized to all girls. Girls as a whole are constructed as sharing content which is too personal and the peer audience does not care about, posting inappropriate content reflecting poor moral character and as being inauthentic, caring too much about the reactions of the peer audience and falsely portraying their lives on social media in pursuit of more attention from the peer audience. However, critiques of masculine social media performance are directed at individual boys rather than boys as a group. While the posting of drug and alcohol content is gendered masculine, critiques of users who post this content remain at the individual level, and are not extended to generalizations of boys as a whole.

A pattern of non-dominant masculine performance also emerges on social media. Boys who can successfully incorporate aspects of the feminine performance, namely emotional and relational displays, into their social media performance while also performing dominant masculinity, can receive large amounts of peer attention and acclaim. Boys who are unable to balance out inclusion of feminine aspects with inclusion of masculine elements may be subject to

peer critique. This non-dominant masculine performance further illustrates the gendered double standard as a select group of boys are praised for performing the same feminine performance girls are critiqued for.

Limitations and Contributions

While this study makes a significant contribution to the literature, there are a few limitations that need to be acknowledged. Due to youth's legal inability to consent and the research design's prioritization of protecting youth participants, the study does not include youth whose parents do not know about their social media accounts. This population could have different characteristics to their social media use. Additionally, while other researchers have noted that social media use differs between preadolescents and adolescents, the small size of the subsample and close range of participants' age did not allow for a comparison between these two age groups (Livingstone 2008).²⁹ Lastly, the subsample does not allow for a comparison in gender construction on social media between youth of different races or classes. Similar to the full sample, this subsample is fairly homogeneous in terms of class and does not allow for a comparison. While neither the sample nor the subsample allows for a comparison between youth of color and white youth, the subsample is not stratified in a way that would allow for comparison between African-American and Latino/Hispanic youth.³⁰ Research has found offline differences in gender construction based on the racial and class composition of peer cultures, suggesting there could also be differences in online gender construction as well (Goodwin 2003).

²⁹ When this thesis is adapted for publication with Professor Campos-Holland, both of these limitations will be addressed. Analysis of the entire sample (N=51) will allow for comparison across age groups. Also, through use of a social media section added in the Peer interview (N=85, including the 51 youth who completed the social media interview), data from youth whose parents do not know about their social media use will be included for analysis.

³⁰ During the full analysis, the size of the full sample (N=51) will allow us to explore various intersectionalities: African American, Latino & Jamaican, males & females, and pre-adolescents and adolescents.

While acknowledging these limitations, this study makes significant contributions to the literature.

Methodological contribution. This study makes a strong methodological contribution to the study of youth's social media use. The rise of new media has required researchers to develop innovative methodological approaches to capture the complexity of the ever-changing virtual environment (Back, 2012; Campos-Holland, Dinsmore and Kelekay, forthcoming; Hine 2005). Researchers studying youth's social media use face a particularly high hurdle, as they must account for power differentials between adult researchers and youth participants in addition to other issues that arise in doing research online (Mallan et al 2008). Addressing several methodological challenges in doing research with youth about their social media usage, this study introduces the youth-driven virtual tour within the semi-structured interview. The youth-driven tour empowers participants by placing them in control of the mouse and thus the interview, lessening the power differential between youth participant and adult researcher. As youth drive the interview, the focus is shifted from content the researcher thinks is important to content youth think is important, revealing new themes and content within the social media peer culture. Lastly, the youth-driven tour captures multiple angles on youth's social media usage, allowing for triangulation and increasing the validity of the findings.

Contributions to the literature. Revealing the complexity of gender construction on social media, the findings of this study challenge the strong focus on determining gender differences in social media usage and performance using quantitative content analysis (Huffaker and Calvart 2005; Kapidzic and Herring 2011; Siibak 2009). This study found strong commonalities between boys' and girls' social media usage. Girls and boys perform common social roles on social media, including those of consumer, friend and romantic partner. More than commonalities, this

qualitative study found layers of depth to gender on social media that could not have been revealed using quantitative content analysis of social media alone. While quantitative content analysis can produce patterns of girls and boys social media usage, this study found that types of social media usage and performance were gendered independently of the gender of the youth using and performing. For instance, relational performance was gendered feminine, whether a girl or a boy was performing this usage. Youth's response to social media performance differs based not just on the gender of the performer but how the performance itself is gendered.

Providing an in-depth analysis of both dominant and non-dominant masculine performance, this study fills a major gap in the gender on social media literature (Light 2013). The study shows how youth construct both dominant and non-dominant masculine performances. While dominantly, boys use social media instrumentally as a tool, boys also engage in a non-dominant masculine performance incorporating emotional and relational performance. This study supports Harvey, Ringrose and Gill's (2013) findings on the role of consumer objects in the youth masculine performance both online and offline. Boys in this sample used material displays, mainly of athletic shoes, as part of their masculine performance, with the coveted nature of the shoe becoming a reflection of the poster's self. Interestingly, Harvey, Ringrose and Gill's sample was of a similar demographic composition in terms of age, class and racial background, only in London instead of the United States (2013). More comparative research should be conducted to explore this similarity.

Challenging the focus on girls' sexualized performance, this study makes an important contribution to the literature on youth feminine performance as well (Ringrose and Barajas 2011; Ringrose 2009; Willem et al 2010). While sexualized performance was present, girls social media performance placed a strong emphasis on the performance of friends and romantic

relationships, supporting previously findings (Elm 2009; Kelly, Powerantz and Curry 2006). Additionally, sexualized performance was not the most highly praised form of feminine performance in pictures; rather, girls received high amounts of positive feedback on performances of material femininity that made use of consumer objects as part of a feminine performance. While the study's findings suggest that there is a strong emphasis placed on girls' appearance and performance in photos, girls did not face sexualized pressures alone.

Bridging work on gender with work on social media, this study makes a strong contribution to the sociology of childhood literature. This study's findings on gender echo earlier findings on youth gender construction offline (Alder and Adler 1998; Eder, Evans and Parker 1995; Thorne 1993). Youth construction of gender through language, performance and routines offline is mirrored online in the construction of gender through online performance across different genres of content (Eder, Evans and Parker 1995; Thorne 1993). Similarly to offline, gender inequality also exists in online youth peer cultures, as the masculine and feminine performances are not valued equally (Eder, Evans and Parker 1995). The offline masculine value of coolness and detachment in offline peer cultures is echoed online in the masculine barebones non-emotional instrumental usage, emphasizing communication in friendship rather than performance (Adler and Adler 1998). Similarly, physical appearance and style continues to be important for girls in achieving popularity online as well as offline (Adler and Adler 1998). The mirroring of gender patterns online challenges work suggesting the online context is different or detached from the offline context.

The findings similarly support the sociology of childhood-driven challenge to the separate-worlds hypothesis (Thorne 1993; Goodwin 2003). Sociology of childhood theorists have argued that gender segregation in childhood is never so complete that boys and girls have

completely different peer cultures; rather gender is constructed in both gender-segregated spaces and spaces where boys and girls integrate (Thorne 1993; Goodwin 2003). Thorne (1993) further argues that interactions between boys and girls are the sites of borderwork, where boundaries between the masculine and the feminine are determined through cultural routines. As seen throughout the findings, social media represents a space of significant interaction between boys and girls. As the peer audience on social media is comprised of both boys and girls, both genders inform the other's performances through positive feedback and critique. Social media emerges as a new space where borderwork is conducted, as critiques and positive feedback serve to establish boundaries between masculinity and femininity in youth peer cultures.

Most broadly, this study further supports the importance of studying youth's online worlds using methodologies bridging the online and offline contexts and centering youth's voices. Sociology of childhood researchers have made a convincing argument for the growing importance of social media and the internet in youth's lives and peer cultures, especially when it comes to understanding youth friendships and identity performance (boyd 2007, 2012; Ito et al 2010). This study supports this argument by showing the complexity of youth gender construction online and how this online gender construction is related to offline patterns. Further this study supports the methodological argument for using methods bridging youth's online and offline worlds, and capturing multiple angles on youth's social media use (boyd, forthcoming). The complexity of the findings here would not have been fully captured using online ethnographic work or quantitative content analysis alone, but neither would it have been captured without bringing the online into the space of the interview room via the use of the youth-driven virtual tour. Researchers should continue to explore the complexity of youth's social worlds

online by using methodologies bridging the offline and online contexts and centering youth's voices.

Future Research

As seen in this discussion, there is a clear need for more comparative work in the area of youth construction of gender on social media. Researchers have shown that gender construction in offline youth peer cultures varies based on racial and class composition (Goodwin 2003). Future research should draw samples from multiple social locations to explore how whether these variations are echoed online. Furthermore, comparative research is needed across national lines. As seen here in the similarity of the findings to Harvey, Gill and Ringrose (2013), much of the youth literature on social media use is in conversation across national boundaries. Both qualitative and quantitative work is needed comparing peer cultures on social media across nations.

Feminist researchers in particular have suggested a connection between youth-created social media content and adult-created mass media content (Ringrose 2009; Willem et al 2010). Work is needed exploring how youth perceive and incorporate adult-created mass media conceptions of gender and sexuality within their online peer cultures. Additionally, as is argued here, there are both dominant and non-dominant gender performances on social media. More research is needed exploring how youth resist dominant gender constructions to practice alternate gender performances on social media. Relatedly, given the heterosexual focus of gender performance within the youth peer culture, research is needed on how non-heterosexual youth experience peer culture online and how they construct gendered performances.

CONCLUSION

On March 4th 2014, British teenager Jenni Herd wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times*. Responding to an article entitled, “Moods and Meltdowns: What’s Inside the Teenage Brain?”, Herd wrote, “I would like adults to treat us not as strange creatures from another world but as human beings with intelligent thoughts...Stop teaching adults how to behave around us, and instead teach them how to respect us.” Her strong reprimand quickly went viral on social media. Herd’s comments demonstrate the argument of sociology of childhood scholars: that youth are aware social actors, who perceive and react to their structural position. When asked what adults think about social media, 13-year-old John responded, “I think they could think differently about it...they might think like it’s really, really bad. And sometimes it is, but sometimes it’s not.” While the media, researchers, and policy makers evaluate risk and draft legislation to protect youth from sex offenders and sexting, youth perceive and respond to adults framing their social media worlds in black and white terms and denying youth their agency.

As the findings of this study show, youth construct vibrant and complex peer cultures on social media. Youth are not uncritical consumers of adult technologies or social constructs like gender. Rather they use adult material and symbolic culture to address the issues that matter to them. Gender is not something youth uncritically absorb from adult advertising or media but rather something they actively construct, perform, and struggle with. As the gendered double standard shows us, participation in the youth peer culture is not without risk. Similar to other aspects of social life, the unequal valuation of masculinity and femininity makes social media a risky place for girls and youth whose gender performance does not fit within the boundaries of the youth peer culture. But the answer to youth’s struggle is not to deny their agency or to surveill and control in the name of protection. Rather, society must come to respect youth as

social actors in their own right and work with them to develop tools for recognizing and solving social problems and inequality within their own peer cultures. As the youth in this study show, they are more than capable of doing so.

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