

FACEWORK ON FACEBOOK: HOW IT LEGITIMIZES COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP AND ENABLES  
LINGUISTIC SOCIALIZATION THROUGH INTERTEXTUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study uses Facebook conversations as a new domain to explore the intersection of facework and intertextuality in computer-mediated social dialogue. Looking closely at how members of an older generation are being socialized to the norms of a younger generation-dominated space, there is evidence that members use local texts to create a shared repertoire of “prior texts” in order to narrate something about the self and create a sense of in-group, maintaining positive face and building a community online.

The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to  
Michael Moats, Ryan West, Julia West and my parents.  
I could not have done this without you.

Thank you,  
Laura E. West

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## Introduction

Facebook is an online social networking space in which members create and maintain an identity through relaying personal information via their profile and updates to their “wall” (Papacharissi, 2009; Westlake, 2008; Zhao, 2008). This identity, or personality, that a member presents I refer to as ‘positive face’ (Goffman, 1955; Brown & Levinson, 1987), and I argue that members are expected to pay homage to one another’s positive faces, fulfilling each other’s ‘positive face wants’ (their desire to be admired and respected) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 58).

Studies in online communication have found that face can be particularly vulnerable when dialogue lacks the vocal and body language cues that normally relay important social messages (See Computer-Mediated Discourse, p. 13), and different online communities have their own ways of addressing this vulnerability: some by ignoring face and aggressively policing the informal social rules of their online group and others by avoiding speech acts that might be “read wrong” and sticking to positive politeness – expressing a simple appreciation of each other’s face and sometimes even exaggerating interest (See Linguistic processes operating on Facebook, p.17). I find evidence of the latter occurring on Facebook and offer an analysis of how a new generation of members are receiving and performing this positive facework<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper limits its focus to personal profiles and wall spaces of non-political, non-commercial entities. Posts and replies to posts on political and commercial spaces are outside of the strictly social use of Facebook, and thus function by a different set of “norms.”

While the social network is still predominately based on Generation Y users, in recent years older generations have begun to create profiles and participate in the online community<sup>2</sup> of Facebook. This creates a very unique socialization process whereby parents are being linguistically socialized by their children on how to interact in the online network (an area not yet explored in studies of adult socialization, which in the past have focused on formal institutional settings such as the work place). Studying the socialization process of older joiners to Facebook reveals how potentially off-putting acts, such as children instructing their parents to the social norms of a group, are managed through positive politeness.

Crucial to this positive facework in non-face-to-face interaction is Facebook-oriented intertextuality: responding to and anticipating posts, texts and images situated within the Facebook community. One of the ways in which members use intertextuality to accomplish facework is by creating common ground through jokes (Norrick, 2006) and self-deprecating humor (Bury, 2005). Neal Norrick, in his writing on intertextuality and humor (2006), asserts that, “joke telling counts as *positive politeness* (Lakoff, 1973; Brown and Levinson, 1978), as an invitation to demonstrate membership and solidarity” (p. 118), and I offer evidence in section 7 of new members employing humor, and other intertextual moves, for this purpose.

Using wall posts as data, I explain how positive facework is being demonstrated for and then employed by a new generation of users and how vast amounts of positive politeness is successfully performed through acknowledging and drawing upon the texts and images that are available on Facebook.

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<sup>2</sup> It is not within the scope of this paper to argue for an exact definition of what type of community Facebook constitutes (See Gumperz, 2001; Anderson, 1991 [1983], etc. for more on speech communities/imagined communities).

## The Study

### An overview

I begin by laying out the medium and situation factors that may affect interactions on Facebook; I list and explain these factors based on the schema provided by Herring (2007). In the next section, I explain relevant background work in the areas of socialization, facework, computer mediated communication (CMC), and intertextuality before moving on to describe how these processes occur on Facebook. Finally, I offer a brief look at quantitative data from users' profiles and then perform an in-depth qualitative analysis of posts from the walls of four new users of Facebook: all of the Baby Boomer generation<sup>3</sup>.

The analysis of profile data (See Profile Data, p. 27) is dependent upon the data Zhao et al. (2008) and Westlake (2008) provide on college users' identity performance through their profiles. I use these 2008 studies to bolster my claim that Baby Boomers are showing a different 'face,' consistent with their offline selves, and that this is evident in how they choose not to tout their consumer tastes on their profiles, something the younger, original members of Facebook demonstrate a preference for (see the above-mentioned studies). Instead, I argue Baby Boomers focus on presenting a face that maintains their roles as older users and/or parent-types despite adopting certain linguistic practices of the young community.

Crucially, I argue that active membership consists of clear messages about positive face (basic desires, likes, "personality," etc.), paying tribute to the positive faces of other members and presenting one's own for commentary. The concept of what constitutes positive facework is

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously, given the size of the sample I will be unable to offer this data as proof of my argument that Facebook centers around positive facework. Instead of claiming these examples to be representative of the Facebook community, I offer them to provide insight into how I arrive at this as a possible description of what is occurring.



based on the definition and examples given by Brown and Levinson (1987). In addition, I assert that positive facework on Facebook is accomplished intertextually (by acknowledging a new photo posted, mirroring the language of younger users, agreeing with a post, commenting on a profile update, joking, etc.). When analyzing instances of intertextuality, I provide both its tie to the Brown and Levinson definition of positive facework and use the guidelines for intertextual analysis in discourse provided by Fairclough (1989): providing first a description of the text (both the post and what the post refers to), an “interpretation of the relationship” of the texts, and an “explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context” (p. 91).

While the word is applied to many things, for the purpose of this study I define intertextuality as the act of relating texts (words, images, message types, linguistic features) to each other across time and space. It is an obvious necessity on Facebook since texts remain visible for some time and subsequent responses are stacked. This intertextually-oriented environment allows members to communicate social ties and messages about “face” without face-to-face interaction.

## **The Data**

I examine thirteen profiles<sup>4</sup> of users age fifty and over, who I refer to collectively as Baby Boomers<sup>5</sup> and compare these to thirteen profiles of users thirty and under, who I refer to as Generation Y’ers<sup>6</sup> and to profiles of college students from previous studies (Zhao et al., 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> Not all thirteen users are able to be used in the qualitative portion of my analysis, since I was not granted permission by all thirteen to extract specific postings from their walls.

<sup>5</sup> I include users with birth years 1946-1964. Based on information found at <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2061.html> (last accessed March 21, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Generally thought to be those born from the mid-70’s to the 90’s.

This very limited look at quantitative-type data gives a glimpse into how the two generations differ in their self presentations.

Data for my qualitative analysis of Baby Boomer socialization to and participation in the Facebook community is possible with permission from four Baby Boomers to use their walls for data collection and permission from several of their Baby Boomer and Generation Y friends and family to use specific posts they had made to the wall(s).

Although one of four wall owners has been a member since April 2009, I collect posts only from September 1 (when the most recent member of the four joined) to March 14 (the date I chose to stop collecting data due to time constraints). I then count the number of posts out of the total during that period that employ positive politeness techniques and provide several examples with a detailed analysis of the language used. In addition, for purposes of providing evidence of explicit socialization processes, I include some of the very first posts on all four users' walls, including those started before September (though these are not included in the count of politeness moves).

I will refer to all wall owners by pseudonyms.

## **The Factors of Facebook**

### **Medium Factors**

Crucial to understanding the environment in which interaction is occurring is the classification of Facebook according to its medium and situation factors. I do this in Table 1, following a scheme proposed by Herring (2007). I categorize Facebook by the various medium

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Gardner, Stephanie F. (2006). *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 70(4): 87. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1636975/> (last accessed April 12, 2010)

factors Herring lists as necessary to identify in CMC research. Several medium factors have been found to be of particular relevance to facework and FTAs (See Simmons, 1994, below for an example of how quoting and public messaging affects facework). While I will not attempt to make conclusions as to the individual influence of any one type of medium factor, I include this table because it is important to recognize the context for conversations that take place there and will provide those not familiar to Facebook with a technical understanding of its structure.

**Table 1. Factors of Facebook wall interactions using schema for CMC**

Medium Categories	Facebook Medium Factors
Synchronicity	Asynchronous
Message Transmission	One-way (no overlap or interruptions are possible)
Persistence of Words	Months (posts are stored and accessible by ‘friends’)
Size of buffer	Infinite
Channels	Text
Identity	Nonymous (since only “friends” can post on walls)
Messaging	Semi-public (available to third parties)
Filtering	Viewers can choose to look only at posts by certain people
Quoting	Automatically stacks responses beneath the original post
Message Format	Topic at top and reverse chronological

The above table, while not explicitly referenced in my analysis, is critical in its documentation of the environment specific to Facebook, since, as Baym (2006) asserts based on his work with CMC: “The computer medium is only one of the many influences on on-line groups...future work on CMC must attend to the detailed contexts in which a given group’s

behavior is grounded” (Published online by *JCMC*<sup>7</sup>). So, researchers of CMC should specify the type of space they are collecting data from and realize that the design and the format of language posting have an effect on interaction. Medium factors usually remain relatively the same on Facebook across interactions (except for the private/public option, since conversations can take place via private messages on Facebook).

### **Situation Factors on Facebook**

There are eight particular factors, also emphasized by Herring (2007) for CMC work, though they are equally relevant in face-to-face interaction studies: participation structure, participant characteristics, purpose, topic, tone, activity, norms, and the code (which is English for the purposes of this study).

The Participation structure deals with the number of participants or potential participants, what Goffman refers to as ratified and unratified hearers (Goffman, 1981, p. 136 & 137). On Facebook, the participants may be anyone with access to another user’s wall (friends, and friends-of-friends), and the number of people involved in any conversation is potentially infinite. Participant characteristics are the demographic information, social relationships, and proficiency levels with CMC of the participants. The purpose of Facebook is social networking, and I claim that the goal of each interaction is to emphasize or fulfill positive face wants, regardless of the actual speech act occurring (i.e. flirting, complementing, updating, etc). The topic of the conversation also varies, though I assert posts and responses often follow a topic flow limited by the texts around them (i.e. photos, past posts, updates, etc.). The tone, as Herring refers to it, has to do with the framing of an interaction, which is how the conversation is to be interpreted,

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<sup>7</sup> No page or section numbers are available in the online format by which I accessed this article (See Bibliography for the link and date of last access).

whether as playful, serious, etc. (Tannen, 2005, p. 32). The activity of wall posts is either responding/commenting on a previous post or posting an original message. Finally, the norms of the setting refer to proper social etiquette, which usually includes, in the case of Facebook, responding to members' updates and creating posts for others to respond to. Again, while these tables and factors are not the focus of this paper, I include them to give readers an idea of how many factors contribute to an online community's linguistic practices.

In order for me to situate this study in the timeline of other studies in the relevant areas, I will first provide background information in the areas of socialization, facework, intertextuality and CMC research.

## **Background**

### **Socialization**

Socialization is the process of acquiring necessary social knowledge for active group participation. While much of the relevant research focuses on child language acquisition, socialization is a relevant process all through the life course and occurs throughout adulthood, as well. Studies done on adult socialization tend to focus on formal institutional situations like prison (Wheeler 1969), medical school (Fox 1957), and new job environments (Van Maanen 1977) (list from Mortimer & Simmons, 1978), and each institution has different socialization patterns.

Any group or institution requires that members possess an understanding of intra-group hierarchies, conventions, taboos, etc., and it is through language that an individual learns how to participate as a group member and form a meaningful social identity (Ochs, 1993, p. 288)/present a face. The knowledge of how to participate in social activities particular to a

community is wholly dependent on an individual's ability to interact with other members in that community.

The manner of participation expected and the active involvement in social identity construction vary with group and often with the age of participants. Children, for example, co-construct their identity with the parent (Ochs, 1993, p. 292) then move from the isolated family sphere to the new institution of school and peer groups, where they begin actively policing language and social positions and experimenting with roles and relationships outside the family through make-believe and games (Cook-Gumperz & Kyratzis, 2001, 591-2). Socialization in adolescence marks the learning stage when an individual changes from passive to active participation in their identity construction.

Later, linguistic changes such as phonetic shifts occur as people adapt their speech in preparation to enter the labor force (Sankoff, 2004), and jargon and specific forms of intra-office communication must be learned with every job change. Language is crucial for interpreting these changing social environments and carving out a place in it (Eckert, 2003, p. 113), a process necessary throughout all life phases as individuals continuously negotiate identity through social interaction.

### **Politeness Theory**

To understand how politeness works as part of interaction, it is crucial to understand the "participation framework" (Goffman, 1981, p. 137) of a particular conversation or statement, in other words, who is involved and how. The participation framework depends on the speakers and hearers in an interaction, and how they are oriented toward each other: as broadcaster and audience, as speaker and addressed recipient, as conversationalists and overhearers or unaddressed recipients, etc. Different participation frameworks "can be projected into

conversational talk... and with each such embedding a change of footing occurs” (Goffman, 1981, p. 154). Footing is the social act of adjusting the production format and manner of speech, such as tone of voice, bodily orientation, word choice, etc. (Goffman, 1981, p. 127), to that which is relevant and appropriate for the participation framework (Goffman 1981, p. 153).

Tannen and Wallat (1993) demonstrate one situation in which change of footing is prevalent in their study of a medical examination involving a doctor, patient and the patient’s mother. In addition, there is a camera in the room that is taping the examination for medical students. Due to the varied levels of medical knowledge and roles of the “audience members” in the participation framework, the doctor constantly shifts footing, changing her speaking style and vocabulary depending on who she intends to be the direct recipient of her speech at a given moment. A speaker anticipates the expectations of the hearer and then makes decisions about word choice, format, etc.

The speaker role, or production format, can be further deconstructed based on Goffman’s (1981) work. A speaker (or for the purposes of this paper, the poster), is the “animator,” the “individual active in the role of utterance production” (Goffman, 1981, 144). There can, however, also be the notion of “author” involved, “someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded,” and additionally, the idea of a “principal,” that individual whose position, assertions, beliefs, etc. are being expressed (Goffman, 1981, 144). On Facebook wall posts, it is usually the case that a post has the same animator, author and principal, though members can make use of texts created by the owners of Facebook to make a statement about their own personality (See Baby Boomer 4, p. 41), in which case the words are by a different author.

The reason that conversation involves changes in footing depending on the participation framework and production format is not only for optimum message transfer but also the need to perform facework. The concept of face is taken from Goffman's article (1955), *On Face-work*, which highlights the motivations and possible pitfalls in social interactions. What Goffman refers to as "face" is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself..." (213), and the social act of "face-work" is what conversationalists do to respect each other's faces.

Brown and Levinson (1987) further develop Goffman's notion of facework in their work on politeness theory. They focus on identifying 'face threatening acts' (FTAs) and distinguish between two types of face: positive face, which is the positive self-image a person has that they want to be approved and appreciated by others, and negative face, which is a person's right to freedom to act and be unimpeded (60 & 61). It is positive face which is most often addressed and foregrounded on Facebook.

### **Intertextuality**

Intertextuality is a socially constructed act that consists of using language and linguistic forms that belong to a network of texts (discourse, images, etc.), past and future (in the sense of *anticipating* audience assumptions, responses, etc.), in order to communicate meaning by complex relationships to those texts. Our utterances' connections to texts must be realized for us to successfully manage social interaction. Drawing from Norman Fairclough's work (1989) on discourse and ideology, I observe how new members of the Facebook community make use of other texts (posts, photographs, Facebook images and surveys) to create a shared reference with other members and to perform facework.

Perhaps, it is as A.L. Becker (2006) suggests, that "going into a new community - a new language/culture - in which few or no prior texts are shared can make us aware, maybe for the



first time, how every bit of our originality is only possible within our repeating” (165). It is much more difficult to communicate when common ground and experiences are sparse, such as with people in other states, jobs, social groups and of other ages, as is the situation on Facebook, than to communicate meaningfully with people in our daily social circles by referencing familiar names, places, etc.

The creators of Facebook, perhaps recognizing the extra burden in communicating to diverse audiences, provide users with a vast array of ways to be socially active in the community through games, activities, “quizzes,” etc. Since the entire community has access to these, they provide a sort of shared Text to which to refer. As members of the Facebook community, users are expected to interact with the space and other members by managing their profile, uploading pictures and posting updates to their walls. These pictures and postings (which can include activity and quiz results) then become potential social referents to reply to, comment on, etc.

Much like the example Tannen (2009) gives when a father represents another voice (the mother’s) to “deflect the impression of telling his daughter what to do, even as it is obvious that that is what he is doing” (7), it seems easier to instruct, talk about ourselves, make moral claims, and be silly when it looks like we are merely representing what is in keeping with the text.

Humor on Facebook is also intertextual, and Baym (2006) claims that, used in groups, humor “facilitates self presentations, common understandings, group solidarity and identity and discussion of problematic aspects of the social world” She finds, specifically, that humor is an attractive way to accomplish these goals “in computer-mediated communication, where mechanisms of framing performance, and creating self-presentation, group solidarity and group

identity are more problematic than they are in non-mediated situations” (published online in *JCMC*<sup>8</sup>).

### **Computer-Mediated Discourse**

Computer-mediated discourse or communication (CMD or CMC) refers to conversation that takes place via technology. Looking at CMC is a way to observe people “in a predominately linguistic medium” (Simmons, 1994, p. 26), thus it affords linguists the opportunities to cut out a lot of what is not actually language, and focus on their preferred medium. It resembles face-to-face conversation in many ways, and because it is communication, “FTAs are unavoidable in CMC no less than in FtF (face-to-face)” (Morand & Ocker, 2002, p. 4).

CMC also differs from face-to-face conversation in several obvious ways. Written CMC lacks the vocal and body language that are often necessary complements for relaying meaning. In her work on conversational style Tannen (2005) refers to Gumperz’ work as evidence that speakers signal the function of their discourse by “paralinguistic and prosodic features of speech, such as intonation, pitch, amplitude, rhythm, and so on...” (p. 33). Without these “contextualization cues” (Tannen, 2005, p. 33) it is more likely that comments in CMC may have the “worst possible reading,” (Morand & Ocker, 2002, p. 6). To borrow a quotation used by Deborah Schiffrin in her work on discourse markers: “Lyons (1977a: 638) states, that ‘there is much in the structure of languages that can only be explained on the assumption that they have developed for communication in face-to-face interaction.’” (1988, p. 6).

Simmons conducted a study in 1994 looking at postings to an online Bulletin Board System (BBS), to examine how politeness and FTAs were affected by this lack of verbal context.

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<sup>8</sup> No page or section numbers are available in the online format by which I accessed this article (See “references” section for the link and date of last access).

He explains that BBS users purposefully quoted (cut and pasted) a comment they were responding to in order to contextualize their points. However, the large amounts of quoting made the original words easily taken out of context. Simmons claims that the persistence of the messages (the BBS, like Facebook, saves posts indefinitely) left members of the bulletin board vulnerable since months later others could call their words into question, or challenge a view that was posted when the original author no longer holds that same belief. In short, people could point out the inconsistencies and mistakes in posts that the passage of time might reveal (Simmons, 1994, p. 12).

Simmons also discovered that the fact that replies and responses were occurring in a public space upped the ante for the degree of threat. Several participants in the study noted that a face threat, such as ridicule, that took place in a public setting tended to create much more impassioned responses than those made through private messaging (Simmons, 1994, p. 20). In his conclusion, Simmons asserts that there is evidence that, over time, CMC discourse will show a greater use of positive face strategies as people adjust to their “faceless voices” (p. 45), a prediction other researchers have also made (Morand & Ocker, 2002, p. 8). Given that a person’s words are stored and easily reused in other ways and that public challenges are a greater FTA, it seems important to “play nice” and keep to positive politeness.

In 2003, De Oliveira conducted a study of politeness in an online setting focusing on gender issues and discourse etiquette. She observed a sort of politeness policing, mostly by men of women, in a university’s anonymous webmail system, where messages could be directed to an individual, to an entire department, or to “all users.” The data revealed that “the members themselves set the boundaries for acceptable behavior,” and that the social norms of the relatively new medium were negotiated. In her analysis, she identifies the initiating and

terminating of sustained conversational threads, the FTAs and instances of subsequent “meting out (of) interactional ‘punishment’ (resulting in a loss of “face” for the transgressors)” (de Oliveira, 2003, published online by *JCMC*: 9(1)<sup>9</sup>).

De Oliveira highlights evidence of gender affecting politeness strategies in departmental webmail chains, and much of her data involves blatant face-threatening moves. In her data it is most often men who correct women, sometimes rather aggressively, regarding the women’s pragmatic failures. Some examples of behavior that prompted such corrections included omitting a title and posting information considered inappropriate for a University online group, such as personal requests or real estate information (De Oliveira, 2003, *JCMC*. See footnote 8). De Oliveira’s study, then, proves that positive politeness is not necessarily the center-piece rule for all online communities, but that there are ways that members are expected to “act” in online interactions.

A recent, relevant study looks at discourse management in an online classroom forum (Schallert et al., 2009). The aim was to investigate if students’ use of “politeness moves” corresponds to the specific discursive acts their messages perform. Specifically, they found that messages of strictly social function were “often accompanied by politeness indicators, including the politeness strategies of making a joke or small talk as a way of building in-group feelings” (3.3.1<sup>10</sup>). This enabled them to “reduce the social distance and establish a sense of community with other class members” (4.1), something that they believed to relate to the fact that the class interactions were being performed via CMC. This makes sense considering that most classroom

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<sup>9</sup> No page or section numbers are available in the online format by which I accessed this article (See “references” section for the link and date of last access).

<sup>10</sup> Access to Schallert et al. 2009 article was granted by ScienceDirect through Georgetown University student access online in a format without page numbers. Instead, I provide the section numbers.

communities and educational groups involve regular face-to-face meetings, and when the in-person socializing element is missing, there may exist a heightened need to emphasize closeness through increased positive politeness.

Overall, Schallert et al. found a great amount of facework being done (what they refer to as simply, “politeness”) and posit that this may be due to the fact that the students were “experienced enough with online CMD to realize the need to be polite in their postings” (2009, 4.1). Their proficiency in CMC meant they knew how to conduct facework non-verbally. This correlates to Simmons’ discovery more than a decade earlier, where he claimed that the need for compensation of missing aural cues “...is not readily apparent to many new participants” (Simmons, 1994, p. 21) and his subsequent prediction that as participants gained experience, they would add more positive politeness moves (see above).

## **The what and how of Facebook**

### **The structure**

All potential Facebook wall interactions begin with a post. That post may never be responded to or expanded upon, but if it is, Facebook stacks the replies and responses in reverse chronological order underneath the initial post, making a sort of heading which gives comments context and keeps the initial post in the consciousness of participants and future readers (Chafe, 1994). This means that months later someone can read the comments and look back at how the conversation progressed, what the starting topic was, etc. This format often prompts people to make use of explicit intertextuality, reusing and recycling wording and framing from previous statements and/or texts.

## **The “Rules”**

The social rules on Facebook that all active members are expected to honor are 1) present and maintain a ‘face’ or personality and 2) frequently pay tribute to other members’ positive faces, noticing updates and creating shared texts to stimulate social interaction. The importance of paying attention to other people’s faces is highlighted by the recent creation of the following group on Facebook: “If you don't write on my wall then WHY did you friend request me?” The mantra of the group clearly demonstrates the expectation members have of attention from others in the community:

This is for the people who get random friend request by others who apparently add them for the sole purpose of raising their "friend" quotient. They never write on your wall, comment on your post/pics," like" anything, message you OR respond to you when you do any of the above for them.

In addition, the creator of the group posts: “I just deleted 88 people and feel so much better after doing so! How many people can you find who need the FB boot?” Clearly, then, the rule is to engage with the community by noticing the faces members present and making one’s awareness and appreciation of them known, or suffer the social consequences, such as “the FB boot.”

## **Linguistic processes operating on Facebook**

### **Adult Socialization**

New members must learn to navigate this structure and play by “the rules.” I argue several points about socialization in this section. First, the socialization process of Baby Boomers on Facebook is highly self-motivated and peer-supported. Second, many Baby Boomers imitate the stereotypical linguistic practices of the young members of the Facebook

community<sup>11</sup> while emphasizing the other “older” roles they inhabit as parents, grandparents, etc. And finally, the potential socializers, Generation Y users, are slow to actively engage in the socialization process, which may be a result of a sort of reverse distribution of power, where the socializees (often the socializers’ older relatives) hold more authority, at least offline, than their potential socializers.

Like in any community, new members joining Facebook must learn the rules of interaction with other members and, with online communities, those rules of social communication are further complicated by the lack of face-to-face dialogue. This means that people over fifty must be socialized, not only to the rules of Facebook, but must perfect the process of performing facework (or politeness moves) and creating and sharing social stories and personal narratives through computer-mediated communication. Some researchers claim that socialization is a conservative phenomenon in that it perpetuates social hierarchies and maintains group practices through time and changing membership (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978, p. 429). On the opposite side of the spectrum in theories about socialization is the belief that it is a dynamic process in which both socializer and socializee are actively negotiating roles and membership and that both, as well as the institution itself, are affected by their participation in the process (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978, p. 431). A bit of both may be happening on Facebook.

Numerous studies claim that Generation Y users of Facebook utilize the space to perform an identity (Zhao et al., 2008; Westlake, 2008, etc). One recent study (Westlake, 2008) focuses on Generation Y using Facebook to define normative behavior through just such performances.

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<sup>11</sup> This study in no way means to make claims about the actual “language of Facebook,” since users can vary greatly in style, and it is not within the scope of this paper to look at linguistic variation among users. There is, however, plenty of language of the type I am referring to that is *stereotypical* of young people online. I will provide examples in the following sections.

The “Net Generation” that grew up networking online through their school years has used this anonymous space to perform young, witty, culture and consumer-savvy selves. (Zhao et al., 2008; Westlake, 2008). Young heterosexual relationships and college experiences are highlighted and broadcast through photos, quotes, conversations, etc. I suggest that several linguistic elements also do this performance, often exaggerating affection and closeness with others (I will go into these in more detail in the analyses that follow).

While Generation Y users experienced the creation of Facebook with most of their peers, and their membership was legitimized through their college institutions, Baby Boomers are forced to join individually and must actively pursue membership (find out how to “join,” learn how to navigate the site, what social meanings things have, etc.). Generation Y users sat in dorm rooms with other Facebook members and witnessed the growth of the site together, as original community members. In addition, since Facebook is a site initially dedicated to college students, the feeling of the space is still very much directed to its younger users. This may make older users feel a bit like fish out of water, and some are further made to feel unwelcome by their children. One woman responds to a blog about parents joining Facebook with the following: “My 17y.o. daughter told me that if I do sign up for a Facebook page, not to bother sending her a friend request as she would not accept it” ([www.switched.com](http://www.switched.com)). In this way an individual Baby Boomer’s first experience on Facebook slightly resembles the lonely, awkward process of gay adolescence, where socialization must be “self-initiated” and “self-managed” (Leap, 2007, p. 265).

Due to significant amounts of negativity about parents joining Facebook (The group “For the love of god -- don’t let parents join Facebook” has 8,223 members), many Baby Boomers find their peers to be a valuable socialization resource. While Facebook does have a “help”



section, and electronic messages from the CEO do explain important technical and formal changes, it is sometimes up to fellow Baby Boomers to welcome their friends and reassure them. This is a phenomenon of socialization not unique to Facebook, with the result that “new recruits become socialized,” and “those who become role models find their own values thereby reinforced (Rosow 1974).” (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978, p. 437).

Examples (1) and (2)<sup>12</sup> are the first two posts on a new Baby Boomer’s wall; they are both written by Baby Boomer “friends”:

- (1) Hi M\_\_\_\_\_, welcome to Facebook! Look forward to catching up with you and your beautiful family. Hugs to all...
- (2) Yippee! Glad you're on! Now I want to see LOTS of baby pictures!!

Both examples include a warm welcome to the Facebook community, an obvious use of positive politeness by flattering the new joiner (conveying that she is well-liked, and they are interested in news of her), and they both mention the new user’s family, highlighting their appreciation of her role as mother and grandmother (the owner of the wall is a new grandmother and does post pictures of the new baby grandson).

Another important aspect of socialization is the imitation of the language practices of long-time members by newer members (also demonstrated in (1) and (2) above). On Facebook, this means that Baby Boomers often use the stereotypical language used by many of the younger users. The language often being imitated is the result of a sort of bricolage process (Eckert 1996) that has resulted in a style of informal and youthful dialogue on par with what Herring, a forefront researcher in CMC, describes as “Internet Relay Chat.” (IRC) She claims it is used

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<sup>12</sup> All examples given in this paper are the actual. All spelling, punctuation, etc. is the original.

most often by people 18 to 25 years of age and is “social in function and non-serious in tone” and consisting of “phatic (perfunctory, social) exchanges” (Herring, 2007<sup>13</sup>). But these social exchanges are crucial to the goal of Facebook (to stay connected) especially since members have dozens of “friendships” to maintain. Example (3) is a message posted by a mom to her daughter’s friend’s page.

(3) Hey stranger, how r u? I miss u sooo much!!!

As demonstrated in (3), Facebook exchanges are often made to resemble excited speech by repeated letters and heavy use of punctuation marks to symbolize intonation and loud excited speech. In example (4), a daughter also demonstrates most of these linguistic elements while welcoming her mother to the community of Facebook via a wall post on her mother’s wall.

(4) Yesssssss...you made it! And on your own!!

Although she is the daughter, she takes on the voice-type of “I’m so proud of you” (typically that of a parent socializing their child). The repeated letter “s” does the work that would normally be accomplished orally, drawing out the end of the exclamatory word to signal excitement. Examples (5) and (6) are other examples of daughters giving mothers encouragement and the proud-of-you pep talk:

(5) you're doing good, mama.

(6) Mom, you wrote on facebook! Congrats!!

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<sup>13</sup> No page or section numbers are available in the online format by which I accessed this article (See “bibliography” section for the link and date of last access).

Crucial to the heartbeat of the Facebook community are these often emotionally exaggerated and excited “hey” messages posted to other people’s walls (basically, their profile page). The short and sweet messages are how people manage to keep up with so many “friends” and pay attention to all the new members. Because Facebook is about maintaining relationships, these short messages are important in the community for honoring the presence of other members, employing positive facework.

Despite the need for self-socialization by Baby Boomers, as evidenced in (4) - (6) above, there are some children of new users who actively partake in socializing the new (older) generation of users. Almost all of this socialization is done by positive reinforcement or friendly teasing, the socializer playing down the parent’s Facebook “incompetence.” Example (7) is an explicit situation of socializer-socializee interaction between a daughter and her mother.

(7)  
Daughter      This is just me doing a check-up on your profile... all looks good... you have now mastered commenting on comments... next is writing on other people's wall  
  
Mother        Thank you for checking up on my progress!!!

It is interesting to note that the daughter is just “checking-up” on her mother (role-reversal) and encouraging her mother to continue growing as a Facebook user. The mother responds enthusiastically, mimicking the daughter’s authoritative language, “checking up on” and using three exclamation points, perhaps to highlight her good humor in being educated by her daughter and to show she has mastered the excited young speech of the community.

Another aspect of socialization that is evident in Facebook adult socialization is the effort to make the new role, in this case that of Facebook user, compatible with other roles the individual previously occupied and currently maintains (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978, p. 434). I

found strong evidence for this as Baby Boomers continuously highlight their roles of “parent,” “grandparent” and for those who don’t have kids online, “older person.” Examples (8) and (9) are posts written by two Baby Boomers on their own walls.

- (8) Thinks I have the most beautiful grandchildren in the world ! just feel the LOVE!
- (9) Happy Thanksgiving to all my friends and family!! I will be enjoying my day with 17 members of my family. I am thankful for healthy family, friends, and being able to think about retirement!!!

So while the language may be that of a stereotypical young user (with excited language, exclamation points, shortened syntax, etc.) Baby Boomers purposefully highlight their other “older” roles of grandmother, retiree, etc. This allows them to establish, at times, a common ground and closeness with young users while maintaining things in common with fellow Baby Boomer members, since stressing in-group identity is critical to performing positive politeness.

### **Facework**

Evidence of positive politeness practices is widespread on Facebook, and some newer members are still in the process of learning how to be good members of the community. The way adequately-socialized members of the community interact is usually in non-serious, in-group banter and often sticking to “safe topics” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 64). Similarly to other CMC community members (see Simmons, 1994; Schallert, 2009 above), Facebook users employ a great deal of positive politeness.

Because of recent changes to Facebook, many wall posts are visible via the news feed application, meaning that other users often see conversations between friends that are posted to someone’s wall. Thus, conversations being carried out on a wall are often semi-public, capable of being read by friends and friends-of-friends, which affects the amount of potential

“overhearers” (Goffman, 1981). This has been shown to affect the level of threat in an FTA (See Simmons, 1994, above), which may be another reason that FTAs, in general, are avoided on Facebook and politeness is emphasized.

A recent addition, the “so-and-so likes this” button is often used as a ready-made sort of back channeling device (Goffman, 1981, p. 138). In fact, it is now one of the norms and the correct way to perform back channeling. Most posts that appear have at least one “so-and-so likes this,” or, as others add to it, “# people like this” response, which stays always directly underneath the original post, unlike the individual responses which are stacked in reverse chronological order. Some users have requested that the creators of Facebook add a “dislikes this” button. The fact that this change has not occurred may be further evidence that most of what is done is positive politeness moves, reinforcing the similarities of wants and the ‘anointing’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 70) of others’ faces by complementing and agreeing with their posts.

Because Facebook is about maintaining relationships, short messages, such as the “\_\_\_ likes this,” posted to other user’s walls are how the community functions. In this way, by keeping messages short and using the excited language demonstrated earlier, users avoid serious talk about potentially face-threatening topics. Often, these posts are done in a one-way production format as a quick hi and bye, thinking-of-you fashion, not expecting a reply, as in example (10).

(10) Hi M\_\_\_\_\_! I'm glad we are facebook friends! I love you!

In (10), a daughter is posting on her mother's wall, performing positive politeness toward her by bolstering her self-image<sup>14</sup>. This is accomplished immediately as it is "said to" the addressee, but also remains on a user's wall, creating a sort of positive wallpaper, lasting evidence that, in this case, M\_\_\_\_\_ is lovable, a valuable friend, etc.

However, because actual back-and-forth exchanges do occur, potential FTAs do happen on Facebook. One potential FTA that is becoming more common to Facebook is that of a younger member socializing a new member, who is older in age, to the functions of Facebook, (See example (7) above). Example (11) is both evidence of the social inappropriateness of failing to engage with the community and update your space, and a daughter weakening the FTA (a suggestion) (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 66) with humor:

(11) you need to post a pic. of h\_\_\_\_\_ on your page mom. come on....don't you know that is the thing to do on fb?

The daughter, who is in her late-twenties, is informing her mother, socializing her, to the norms of Facebook by telling her to post pictures of her new grandchild (who is the child of the poster's sister, her niece). She is able to convey humor by exaggerating and playing the part of annoyed teenager scolding her mother for not knowing "the thing to do on fb." This acknowledges the FTA of instructing one's parent and accomplishes closeness through humor.

Often new Baby Boomer users will perform a threatening act to their own face by admitting their lack of knowledge, this is useful for facework because it mirrors one of the techniques used in actual speech, where a person "may employ a joking manner" which provides

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, Brown and Levinson argue that compliments may fall under FTA toward the hearer's negative face, but I do not treat these as such, since Facebook compliments do not appear to be situations where the speaker "indicates that he likes or would like something of H's (the hearer's)" in a way that would put the hearer on the defensive (Brown & Levinson, p. 66).

an opportunity for the object of the threatening act to assume the role that “they are good sports, able to relax from their ordinary standards of pride and honor” (Goffman, 1955, p. 218). In example (12), a new Baby Boomer user posts this as a response to a post on his wall.

- (12) S\_\_\_\_\_ has been on me for a while to join. He sent me a message yesterday saying "About time." I asked him if he always makes fun of slow people. I'm on the Face Book leaning curve<sup>15</sup> (towards the bottom), so hopefully this gets to you.

By bringing up being teased about his late membership and by referring to himself as “slow,” and at the “bottom of the learning curve,” the user in (12) shows he is a good sport and relaxed about the learning process. Even though he threatens his own face by pointing out his shortcomings, because he does so humorously he is actually able to use the statement to present a positive face for himself, as someone who is laid back and not easily-offended.

### **Intertextuality on Facebook**

Of course, example (12) is also intertextual. The user refers to another Facebook conversation with a mutual friend both by direct and indirect quotations. The reason for making this reference is to create a topic that is easy to recognize and relate to by both members who have not interacted in 28 years (evident from a previous part of the post). Given this, the two no longer are aware of exactly what cultural and personal references they might share, so it is easiest to keep the topic intertextual within Facebook texts, experiences, etc. This playing to what is in common could be seen as a move to close the social gap, and thus a type of positive politeness.

Another example of intertextuality is example (13), the first post by a new Baby Boomer, who we will call Mary (in response to a post about her new membership to the community.)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Learning curve

- (13) I can't believe it either—J\_\_\_ helped me do it. I am learning but don't have any directions. Writing on walls was always a no no but not this time.

By choosing to respond to a posting on her wall, Mary's post is automatically stacked beneath that post as a sort of subtext to the main text. Notice, without the original post (or, in this case, a description of the text), a reader has no understanding of what "it" refers to, or what Mary is learning without directions. In addition, without the context of Facebook, a reader is clueless as to the relevance of Mary's reference to "writing on walls," (though, presumably, they would recognize "writing on wall" and "no no" as referencing, at some level, the situation of a kid scribbling on a wall). Given that this post was her first, it is evidence of how natural the space makes intertextual discourse: metalanguage about language on Facebook and references to other posts, etc. (Of course, face-to-face also consists of replies and responses, but the structure of Facebook allows time and other conversations to pass between a post and its reply, giving members of Facebook numerous opportunities to draw on vast linguistic resources that paper their walls and the walls of their friends).

### **Analyses of profiles and wall posts**

#### **Profiles**

The Baby Boomer profiles that I examine belong to nine women and four men, who were already my "friends" on Facebook. All thirteen Facebook users<sup>17</sup> vary in occupation, geographical location and political and religious affiliations. For comparative purposes, I also

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<sup>16</sup> Do to limited permission to use members' posts, I cannot include the original post to which (13) is responding.

<sup>17</sup> This number was determined by how many friends I had over the age of fifty.



look at thirteen randomly-selected<sup>18</sup> profiles of Generation Y users, also four male and nine female. In Table 2, I count the number of users in both generation categories who provide information about the categories on the left; I have bolded those categories which reveal a substantial difference in numbers between the two types of users (but, again, given the sample size further data is needed to determine if these differences are statistically-significant).

**Table 2: Counts from 13 Baby Boomer and 13 Generation Y Profiles**

	Baby Boomers	Generation Y
Networks	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
Birthday	12	13
Hometown	6	9
Relationship	8	8
Looking for	3	4
Political Views	2	5
Religious Views	2	5
Favorite Quotes	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
Activities	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>
Interests	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
Favorite Music	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
Favorite TV	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
Favorite Movies	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>
Favorite Books	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
About Me	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

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<sup>18</sup> Generation Y profiles were chosen based on the first four male and the first nine female Generation Y users that were listed when my “friends” were organized in alphabetical order.

Examining profiles reveals several obvious differences between the two generations<sup>19</sup>. First, none of the Baby Boomers present anything in the “about me” category. This is substantial because, while only five of the thirteen Generation Y profiles I use for comparison have something in this section, a Zhao et al. study (2008) looking at identity construction on Facebook found that 67% of college users filled in this section. Also unlike the younger users who emphasize their consumer and popular culture identities by listing favorite quotes, movies and music (Zhao et al.), the Baby Boomer profiles rarely list these (one woman and one man listed “activities” and “favorite music,” and two women listed their favorite TV shows; one of these women also listed “interests,” “favorite movies,” and “favorite books,”) compared to the Generation Y profiles I examine where every user, with the exception of one female, reveal their favorite something. I found that more than half of the Generation Y profiles list favorite quotes, and the 2008 Zhao et al. study records the number at 71% of college users listing quotes (not a single Baby Boomer had a quote on their profile).

These differences suggest that the Baby Boomers are not making the same “public ‘identity statements’ (Walker 2000)” (Zhao et al., 2008) or utilizing the same built-in narrative tactics that the younger generation does online.

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<sup>19</sup> There were also large differences between the two generations’ number of friends, photos and group memberships, but since the Baby Boomers have mostly been on Facebook for less than half the time as Generation Y users, there is a very good chance the numbers are due to this and the gap will close with more time.

## Four Walls

Although seven Baby Boomer members gave me permission<sup>20</sup> to collect data from their wall posts, three of them posted six times or less to their wall (including responses), in the six months that they were members. Since this could be averaged to less than once a month, and since the posts were not spread over the 6+ months but clustered at the beginning, I view this as a lack of active membership in the Facebook community and omit them from my data collection. This is based on the idea that socializers require interaction to learn and demonstrate the social rules of a new group. Thus, the following analysis is limited to four Baby Boomers.

I examine these four users' practices using Brown and Levinson's assumption about interaction, that it consists of both "the expression of social relationships" and "strategic message construction" (1987, p. 56). For Baby Boomers, this often means expressing common ground with fellow Baby Boomers through mention of age or age-related events, and for a Baby Boomer's interaction with a Generation Y user, it means expressing an appreciation for the space and its social expectations by using the format and word choice of their children to truly act as "friends" on Facebook.

For each user, I provide examples from their wall posts that demonstrate them responding to the socialization process by employing positive face moves and using intertextuality to connect with other members. I also include posts by some of their Baby Boomer "friends" and Generation Y family members, those whose permission I was able to obtain for this purpose, that display positive facework toward the Baby Boomer wall owner.

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<sup>20</sup> Although I have permission to use data from these members' walls, I was not granted permission to include demographic information about the participants (with the exception of Baby Boomer two, Jane, in section 7.2.2, who granted me permission to include limited demographic details in my analysis).

I identify two types of positive facework on Facebook, and I argue both are crucial to the functioning of the community. The first type is politeness toward a hearer's positive face, and the second is the presentation of a member's own positive face (that which she wants to be noticed and approved of) to the Facebook community. When discussing the first type of positive facework (which I also refer to as positive politeness), I count as relevant any question showing interest about a "hearer's" life, any compliments (in which I include "miss you", "love you"), and any positive reference to updates, photos or posts or attempts to create common ground. In short, I count any language that conveys a message that that member is somehow accepted, valued and liked. This is based on the following paragraph from Brown and Levinson (1987) describing positive politeness as language that is "oriented toward the positive face of H (hearer), the positive self-image that he claims for himself... (e.g. by treating him as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked)" (p. 70).

I look for evidence of this first type of positive politeness mostly through the intertextual responses to a specific post, which has a certain author, and thus "hearer," for the reply (since I am not looking at posts these four Baby Boomers have made on other people's walls, this is the more obvious place to look for positive politeness towards a specific hearer).

Original posts to a member's own wall tend to demonstrate the second type of positive facework: that of relaying a member's own "wants and personality traits" to the community. Two of the four Baby Boomers I examine have a large amount of original posts, which enables me to demonstrate how they present a positive face for approval, often through intertextual references to Facebook texts. The creators of Facebook, perhaps recognizing the social burden in coming up with original posts to do facework, provide a user with a vast array of ways to reveal "personality" through posting game results, horoscopes, and "questionnaire" findings. By

choosing which quizzes to take and which results to post, users can say something about how they prefer to see themselves and how they would like to be seen by others.

I underline instances of positive politeness to show what I count as such language. My interest lies not in defining the exact message content of every post since September, but to show the vast number of politeness moves paying tribute to other members' positive face and how members manage this through Facebook-oriented intertextuality (humor, IRC, message format, past-post references, etc.). My treatment of instances of intertextuality as it is used to create closeness and present a positive face is drawn from Fairclough's (1989) analysis, which consists of "*description* of the text, *interpretation* of the relationship between text and interaction, and *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context" (p. 91). I assume that vocabulary, topic choice, word choice, etc, depend on the member's social relationships with their perceived audience and what is assumed to be "common ground" for the speaker and other participants (Fairclough, 1989, p. 97).

**Baby Boomer 1: Jack.** (10 total posts: 2 original, 8 responses). Jack responded to eight posts on his wall between September 1 and March 14. In five of the eight he employs positive politeness towards the poster. One of his earliest replies<sup>21</sup> after joining Facebook is shown in example (14), where he flatters another member's *literal* face through reference to her photo (pictures are a major part of the Facebook world (Westlake, 2008; Zhao et al., 2008), and are often chosen to present a positive image/personality; thus they are often targets of positive politeness on Facebook). In (14), Jack shows interest in the other member's life, complementing her picture as well as performing an FTA to his own face for purposes of humor.

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<sup>21</sup> For reasons of ethics and research, I am unable to reveal all original posts to which the four Baby Boomers are replying, since I do not have permission from each individual poster.

- (14) What's been going on with you over the past 28 years or so? Also, from looking at your picture, I want to know why I aged and you didn't?

His question about the member's life "over the past 28 years..." and his reference to aging highlights their common ground as older generation members (most Generation Y users of Facebook haven't been alive 28 years!). Also, referring to the picture lets the other user know he has noticed some of the work she has done as far as presenting herself to the community, and he approves.

Example (15) is also in response to a fellow Baby Boomer who asks Jack about the "possum story" that he had referred to in a post on a mutual friend's wall. The "possum story," then, becomes a way for one Baby Boomer to express interest in Jack and becomes a local text as Jack retells the story on his wall as a reply:

- (15) One night after coming in really late (been out studying!) I heard some noise coming from my bathroom. Opened the door and everything was torn up and there was something moving around in the cabinet ... under the sink. Opened the cabinet and there was a huge possum hissing at me. Slammed the door shut and ran down to S\_\_\_\_'s room and grabbed his 22 pistol. Ran back, opened the cabinet door and emptied the gun. I think I put more holes in the bottom of S\_\_\_\_'s trailer than I did the possum. When I was throwing him out the front door you could hear S\_\_\_\_ and S\_\_\_\_ laughing so hard they were crying. At any rate, just another night at the trailer. I bet there was more than just Geritol flowing! Great to hear from you, D\_\_\_\_\_. Later, \_\_\_\_\_

Instead of needing to provide an "abstract" or opportunity for "initiating the story" (Schiffrin, 1988, p. 15), which has already been done for him by the person specifically requesting the story, Jack is able to jump into the "linear structure" that "seats the listener in the narrator's perspective...a vicarious participant in the narrator's experience (Goffman 1974: 504)" (Schiffrin, 1988, p. 16). It is important to notice that he does this rather than respond to the

request with a simple explanation of “the possum story” as referencing a time he killed a possum in his trailer. The fact that he replies by actually launching into the narrative, allowing the original poster to “participate” in the story, flatters his friend’s positive face by conveying that she is worth recreating events for and is welcomed as a to the actual narrative.

Jack opens with a fairly typical narrative orientation, setting the scene, and proceeds to build up to the event where he meets the possum. His line “I think I put more holes in the bottom of S\_\_\_’s trailer than I did in the possum” could be a line he has used before in telling the story (given it is the first complete sentence in a list of verb phrases and its formulaic comedic orientation). Finally, Jack’s ending of “just another night at the trailer” signals that there are many such funny stories about his trailer days (and again, this does not seem the first time this line has been said). As Becker writes in his essay on repetition (1994) “...very little of what I say or write is original. I have used these stories before and shall use then again” (p. 165). Jack obviously has told this story before (given that it was referenced in a different post as simply “the possum story”), so it can be assumed here that he is recycling pieces of past tellings of this narrative, which further extends the idea of inviting this new hearer into the social circle of people who know the possum story.

Jack honors the request for the story (the poster had mentioned she would enjoy hearing it) and presents himself as the “funny guy” (one poster to his wall refers to him as this, and humor regularly occurs on his wall). He ends the post by telling the original poster that it’s “great to here from” her, and uses her name, concluding a long post that has brought the other member into his in-group and now exists on his wall as more evidence of his fun, likeable personality. Thus, he accomplishes positive facework both to the other member’s face and by illustrating his own (he is a person who likes to be seen as fun/funny).

Other than responding to others, Jack made two original posts to his own wall during the period of data collection. The most recent is example (16), which consists of a picture of famous controversial film director, Michael Moore (viewed as a “liberal propagandist” by conservatives), and Jack “speaking” to the image.

(15) Sicko, Fahrenheit 9/11, The Awful Truth, Bowling for Columbine . . . What's next Michael?

When someone comments on this post, agreeing with his apparent dislike of the director, Jack responds with, “Now be nice!” a mock sort of scolding of the first responder, signaling a play frame and creating humor. As seen in other discourse settings, a “humorous reframing of the narrative serves as a locus of group solidarity...” (Baym, 2006), since the ability to “laugh about it” creates an informal friendly environment. Baym (2006) quotes a 1988 study on humor as claiming, “informal humor is frequently regarded by participants as a way of expressing serious intent and of conveying serious information without appearing to do so.” Since the original post and response were both fairly serious (politics), this a way of making a political statement and assuming shared politics with “friends” on Facebook. Thus, Jack can affirm social ties with other like-minded members and make a statement about his political ties without appearing to be doing something so ambitious.

**Baby Boomer 2: Jill.** (21 total posts: 2 original posts, and 18 replies). Jill created twenty-one posts and replies on her wall within the six months the data was collected. Only two of these posts were original posts/updates, one of which was about her family and the other, a link to a video she found interesting. Of her 18 replies, 12 of them embodied positive politeness. Jill has a daughter in college that is her Facebook friend and the two regularly communicate on Jill’s wall (the daughter posts a “hey/I miss you”-type message, and Jill responds). Example (17) is a



response to her daughter's Happy Birthday message. Jill refers specifically to the act of "writing on my wall" and highlights the lack of messages to emphasize the value of her daughter's post.

(17)

Daughter I get to see you and dad in 2 days!! Miss you! Can't wait to be home :)

Jill Thanks for writing on my wall...don't get many messages on fb. Can't WAIT to see you 2!!!

The language Jill uses in (17) is evidence she is aware of the excited youth speak of Facebook, and is attempting to close the social gap (that comes with age difference and social relationship) between her daughter and herself and act as Facebook "friend." Also, her reference to Facebook as "fb," is particularly revealing of her membership in the community, since young users refer to the space this way (both when writing about it and speaking about it). Her all-caps spelling of "wait," her shortened grammar (subject-deletion in "don't get many messages on fb," and "can't wait to see you"), using 2 for too, as well as her excited punctuation demonstrate Jill's ability to engage in quick casual conversation via CMC. This mimicking of her daughter's language and message content (which Jill also does with Baby Boomer "friends"), signals social closeness/equality, which is politeness towards her daughter's positive face, as is the more obvious stressing of looking forward to see her.

Example (18) is a response to a humorous birthday post by a Baby Boomer friend, who "sings" Happy Birthday to Jane.

(18)

Friend Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you! May God bless you and keep yooouuu, the who-le year through!!!! I hope you have a happy day!!! xoxo

Jill THanks for singing to me in cyberspace! You sang it with so much gusto. We just got back from our annual hunt with friends, a

little cold, but we bundled accordingly. Love being remembered by friends...best gift of all. Hope you have a very blessed and memorable Christmas.

Love to all,  
J\_\_\_\_\_

Jill responds to example (18) by acknowledging the uniqueness of the birthday message and also being silly. She refers to the previous post as “singing in cyberspace” and says it was sung with “much gusto” thanking her friend, keeping in the same playful frame. Jill later thanks her friend in a more tender tone by expressing her gratitude for the gift of being remembered by friends. The format Jill uses for her message is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, it responds to and is in keeping with the prior text (notice Jill also signs off, (“Love to all”) as does her friend (“xoxo”), which is usually not part of a Facebook message). Second, Jill’s message also resembles a traditional “Thank You” card or a mini-letter. She thanks her friend for the gift/post, telling her why it is special, tells her about how she spent her birthday, and ends wishing her friend a happy Christmas (Jill’s birthday is in December) and closing with a “love to all.”

I do want to mention here that Jill is from a small southern town where “Thank you” cards and “Christmas cards” are very important for maintaining friend and family relationships. It is a way of showing the other person that they are being thought of and are an appreciated member of that person’s social network. In responding in this “letter-type” manner to her Baby Boomer friends (notice she does not do this when communicating with her daughter), Jill is presenting herself as a thoughtful friend and her friend as a valued member of her circle.

Example (19) is similarly a response to a Happy Birthday message from a fellow Baby Boomer. The friend uses Jill’s photo as a text to refer to and a way to perform positive

politeness, and Jill does the same by referring to the friend's photo and adding further complement by showing interest in the pet in the picture, which clearly is something the friend wanted displayed on her profile.

(19)

Friend: Happy, happy birthday, J\_\_\_\_\_ - you look like you are 16 in that profile shot! Hugs to all!

Jill: Back atcha on the you-look-young picture (and by the way, love your little furry friend...how adorable.) Thanks for the birthday greetings. Happy holidays and a blessed Christmas to all the R\_\_\_\_s from the W\_\_\_\_s!

Jill also refers back to the birthday post, thanking the friend for the message and wishing her happy holidays. Finally, Jill ends the response by mirroring the friend's inclusive "hugs to all!" by extending her warm wishes to the friend's entire family ("the R\_\_\_\_s") from her own family ("the W\_\_\_\_s"). This is similar to example (18), in its intertextual reference to a greeting card message, which typically is sent out by mothers with a picture of their family wishing Merry Christmas to the families of friends. This message, like the typical "thank you" message in (18), could be argued to further present Jill's thoughtful-friend and fellow-mother "personality."

**Baby Boomer 3: Julia.** (24 total posts: 18 original posts, 6 responses). The next two wall owners, Julia and Jane, are the only ones to consistently *present* a positive 'face' by posting several original messages/updates to their own walls. Because of the large number of original posts in addition to responses, I am able to demonstrate with these two users, how they use posts to represent their personality, specifically, those aspects of themselves they most like and want others to see. For the sake of time and space, I will focus on this type of facework with these two

members, since I have already demonstrated how positive facework in responses functions through intertextuality.

Julia often uses Facebook to communicate about and with her kids. Of her 18 posts since September, 11 posts are about her kids or about being a mom, 2 posts are Facebook questionnaires of which she posted the results to her wall (one of which identifies motherly traits), and 2 posts reveal what she is doing/planning to do today (a message that younger users often show a preference for in their own posts). Finally, the posts also included one Merry Christmas, one Happy Thanksgiving, and one “Way to go Saints!!!”

Based on the data, the aspect of herself she seems most anxious to portray on Facebook is her role as mother. Example (20) demonstrates this desire, as she paints herself as a sort of mother to the Facebook community.

(21) Happy New Year everyone! Have fun and be safe tonight!( that is the mother coming out)I love each and every one of you!

By labeling the addressee, “everyone,” she is presenting an image of herself as a caring mother figure for anyone who might read the post. Actually making a statement about the “mother coming out” presents it as an inevitable part of her personality and putting parentheses around it in the middle of a message about New Years fun and love, further draws attention to that point. Of course, demonstrated by the underlined portion, Julia is also performing positive politeness towards readers with this post.

Julia also regularly refers to her actual children and family events. Example (22) is her sharing details about her life as a mother and also, again, performing positive politeness towards those she assumes will see the post (in this case, the family and friends who came to the party).

- (22) Had a lot of fun at S\_\_\_\_'s 25th b-day party last night. S\_\_\_\_\_ has great friends who showed her much love! Thanks to all who made it so special for our beautiful girl!!!

She also makes a positive politeness move toward her daughter, who is also her Facebook friend. Probably due to this, and the fact that most of the friends who attended the party were in their 20's, Julia adopts more of the language typical of that age group of Facebook (compared to in (21) above). Using this language is a type of intertextual move that automatically gives added meaning to her post: that she is speaking as a Facebook "friend." Her mention of birthday as "b-day" and use of the phrase "showed her much love" (which looks like the "show me some love" or "much love" saying which results in Google hits almost exclusively for hip-hop lyrics and is now frequently used or recognized, by Generation Y). She also ends the message with three exclamation points, a typical ending for friendly, chatty Facebook posts.

And while Julia does not necessarily make wide use of the Facebook ready-made texts, she does post some quiz and game results to her wall which speak to her personality. Example (23) is one of two such texts posted within the six-month period and it clearly adds to how Julia likes to be viewed, or how she presents herself in other posts.

- (23) Which Simpsons Character are you?  
I just took the quiz Which Simpsons Character are you?.  
My result was Marge. Marge keeps the family sane and together.  
She is the glue of the family and keeps order<sup>22</sup>.

The fact that Julia chooses a quiz based on the Simpsons characters highlights her fun, comedic side and her awareness of popular culture. These posted results are also a way for Julia

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<sup>22</sup> This is an exact copy of the automated text that is generated by Facebook and displayed on a member's wall if she elects to have the results displayed.

to make a statement about her role in the family without taking it too seriously (it's just a Facebook Simpsons quiz!) Since a member *chooses* when to post quiz results it is something she wants seen by other members. Again, the point of the message can be that she participates in Facebook and popular culture, or that she wants to share the quiz results that highlight her motherly attributes; my argument is it relays both messages about her personality.

**Baby Boomer 4: Jane.** (160 total posts: 132 Original Posts, 28 Responses). Obviously, judging from the sheer volume of Jane's posts and responses, she is a very active member of the Facebook community. Of her 132 original posts, almost 80 of them are daily messages, quizzes and survey results she chooses to have posted on her wall. Jane makes especially frequent use of this form of intertextuality to present a face on Facebook. I focus specifically on one type of text she uses frequently, "Messages from God" (MFGs), which are meant to be little instances of "words of wisdom," a sort of faith-based pep talk. (The types themselves carry a message, as well. "Messages from God," for instance, reveal she wants her spirituality to be noticed and highlighted.)

Jane regularly comments on these types of texts, her posting displayed right above the prior text she is responding to or playing off of. Of course, her heavy dependence on these texts is not something to be critiqued, since "appropriating prior text is a necessary, nonfaultable plagiarism...that we all practice every time we speak or write. It's an ordinary thing" (Becker, 1994, p. 164). Like I demonstrated in examples from Jack and Jill's intertextual facework via mirroring previous posts or referencing images on Facebook profiles, Jane mimics the message format and language of the MFGs to present a personality. She uses her comments posted with the MFGs to inform readers about herself in the same voice as the text is telling her about herself. The text says, "God wants you to know...", and she tells her readers "I want you to

know...” I format the example postings by bolding what Jane says, and capitalizing the words she repeats exactly from the text. With each example I also identify the other, less explicit ways her words relate to the text and to her positive face.

In her postings related to MFG texts Jane’s posts often includes the “buzz words,” which carry the main crux of the message, as well as taking on the “voice” (Tannen, 2009) of the text. Since MFGs are framed as motivational and upbeat, her accompanying posts are enthusiastic and optimistic as well, as in example (24). She takes the “do good” and “every day is important” message and adopts it as her own, reciting it as a sort of personal mantra. In this same voice, she is also commenting on values, that doing good is important and readers should follow the good advice provided like she plans to do. In example (24), she presents a face for herself as motivator.

(24) **GOOD advice everyday! I want to make a GOOD differance,let people know they are IMPORTANT!** [capitalization is my own]

On this day, God wants you to know...  
... that today is a whole day for you to do good. What you do today is important because you are exchanging a whole day of your life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever; and in its place will be something that you had left behind... let it be something good.

In one sense, these daily “messages from God” are similar to a daily horoscope reading in the newspaper (Jane also posts her horoscope to her wall frequently); people tend to recontextualize events in their day/life in relation to these types of texts. Jane often does this, and uses the MFG text, which tells both her and her readers something about herself, as a jumping board to reveal even more detail about her feelings and recent experiences (thus adopting the goal-orientation of the MFG text), as in example (25).

**(25) I hope God will help me with all the grandkids 4 a special V.Day sleepover!**

On this day, God wants you to know...

... that it's time you let go. Yes, of course, you want to control so everything happens in just the way you want it. But at the end of the day, we control nothing, - it's all in God's hands, - has always been, and will always be. So, do what you can, and then let go, and let God handle the rest.

In example (25), Jane ties the message in with her day, thereby affirming the relevance of the message to her life. While this MFG, like any, is directed to all readers and believers, Jane's related statement is the way she can "reshape" the more general MFG reading and "make it (her) own" (Becker, 1994, p. 165), relevant to her personal postings/stories. Like the other MFG texts posted to her wall, this affirms Jane's faith-based persona while revealing her also to be a fun grandmother (a personality she also regularly paints in her posts).

Sometimes, however, Jane breaks with the usual goal of just claiming the message and refers to the message directly, through a sort of "meta-level process" that reveals what is really going on, like Bauman's example of storyteller, Ed Bell, including "metanarrative comments" in his stories (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 69). In example (26), Jane addresses the "reader," anticipating (which is also intertextual in its awareness of and early response to potential future posts) their potential cynicism about her faith-based messages:

**(26) I know some of you out there thinks this is silly but....I can't believe how many times it hits right on!**

On this day, God wants you to know...

... that it is time to finally forgive yourself. You've carried the guilt, the shame for long enough. You've kept your wounds open for long enough. The time has to come to let go, to heal. Keep the lessons and let the pain heal. Yes, you know what we are talking about it.



It is particularly interesting to notice Jane's direct addressing of her readers and the way in which this MFG has done the same to its readers (including Jane). This message's format of reaching out to convey a feeling of "We know what you feel, and that you hurt/struggle, but...let go" is a message Jane then turns around to convey to her readers. She directly addresses their doubt and insists that these faith-based messages are "right on!" Again, she presents herself as a believer. Her positive face wants are to be viewed as a person of faith, even among doubters, and perhaps an inspiration to "friends."

Though other members may not know about or care about going to the MFG group page to receive the daily messages, they may be exposed to the messages by way of Jane's posts, and perhaps, they will also find the message "speaks" to them also. Jane, then, is able to be a sort of minister personality on Facebook, spreading hope to the community through her upbeat posts.

### **Conclusion**

This study adds to exploration of CMC by performing a sort of ethnographic study of Facebook and an analysis of how sociolinguistic processes function (differently and similarly as in face-to-face conversation) in the online setting. In addition, this paper has drawn on the situation of adult socialization to Facebook, adding to the understanding of later-life socialization processes, now in the new domain of a computer-mediated socialization network. However, the focus has been to demonstrate the process of positive politeness as the social fuel of Facebook and to explain how it is accomplished through intertextuality in an online community.

Unlike on some other social networking sites, everyone is a "friend" on Facebook (there are no alternate labels for teacher, acquaintance, parent, etc.) This means that a closeness is emphasized, and "the reflex of social closeness is, generally, the reciprocal giving and receiving

of positive face” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 77). This requires providing other members with something they can respond to, comment on, approve of, and being aware of the new posts and updates by others. As Brown and Levinson express more formulaically: “S (speaker) should take notice of aspects of H’s (hearer) condition (noticeable changes, remarkable possessions, anything which looks as though H would want S to notice and approve of it)” (1987, p. 103). And, of course, whenever someone posts something on their wall, it is precisely so that others will notice it.

Facebook conversations are a new domain to explore for further understanding of facework and intertextuality in dialogue and the dependence of the first on the latter in computer-mediated communication. Intertextuality is key for several reasons. Keeping up with posting and talking about ourselves to reveal the traits we want appreciated is not easy to do. The evidence: only two of the seven Baby Boomers examined make original posts (rather than responses to other members’ posts to their wall) with any regularity. Looking closely at how Facebook users use local texts to create a shared prior text in a loosely-associated community in order to narrate something about the self and create a sense of in-group provides a greater understanding of how creativity and intertextuality are crucial for maintaining positive face and building a community online. If, as Becker claims, “the most public prior texts—the most widespread in a community—can be seen as defining that community” (1994, p. 166), then the forms of language, utterances, discourse patterns that are most repeated, are those that will reveal the heart of the community. The data examined above suggests that the community of Facebook is largely based on superficial socializing, establishing common ground through positive facework.

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