Facebook and the Fun of Drinking Photos: Reproducing Gendered Regimes of Power

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Abstract
Young adults regularly engage in heavy drinking episodes with friends and share these practices via digital images and ongoing interactions on social media. This study explored the meanings and values that young adults attach to Facebook social media photo-sharing practices around drinking and socializing, and how these practices were gendered, in what ways, and with what effects. We conducted 24 friendship discussion groups (64 females, 41 males) and 15 individual interviews (10 females, 5 males) in which participants showed and discussed their (screen-recorded) Facebook pages. Analyses demonstrated that drinking photos facilitated valued forms of sociality, visibility, and popularity for all participants, but the labor involved in preparing for, taking, selecting, uploading, tagging, and untagging drinking photos was heavily gendered. The tensions inherent in performing femininity within the “culture of intoxication” meant that young women engaged more intensively with photographic activities related to online self-displays. Although young men have (and engage with) many drinking photos on their Facebook pages, they derided routine and excessive photo-taking and uploading activities, particularly practices around self-imaging/posing, as trivial, silly, and inherently feminine. Sharing drinking images online provides a site of pleasure, leisure, and self-display for both men and women, but was more complex and challenging for young women who are performing identities in a patriarchal, heteronormative, postfeminist, and commercially driven digital environment. The technological practices involved in producing online drinking photos reproduce regimes of gendered power.

Keywords
gender, Facebook, social networking, drinking culture, culture of intoxication

Social media are a ubiquitous part of young people’s everyday lives in Western societies. They are increasingly accessed on mobile technologies, providing intensified “ways for value to circulate within young people’s peer networks” (Harvey, Ringrose, & Gill, 2013, p. 7). One context in which young people use social media platforms widely and routinely is within their drinking cultures (Carah, Brodmerkel, & Hernandez, 2014). Many young adults regularly engage in heavy drinking episodes with friends and share these practices via digital images and ongoing interactions on social media. Online displays of drinking and having fun with friends are highly valued; they solidify friendship bonds (Lyons et al., 2014; Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, & Hutton, 2013; Ridout, Campbell, & Ellis, 2012) and emphasize the social pleasures of drinking (Niland, Lyons, Goodwin, & Hutton, 2014). Yet, we know relatively little about the practices that contribute to these online displays or their gendered nature. In this research, drinking cultures are used as a setting in which to explore gendered technological practices and consider their implications for gendered power relations.

Cultural understandings linking masculinity to technology have been central in organizing everyday social life (Pechtelidis, Kosma, & Chronaki, 2015), with people positioning themselves in relation to technology “based on certain gendered assumptions about technology in societies” (Kelan, 2007, p. 358). Discourses around digital technologies reinforce dominant cultural understandings that men make technology while women consume technology (Tebokke, 2013), although these simplistic alignments may not hold with the rise of social networking technologies (Light, 2013). Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are primarily utilized to “articulate and make visible” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211) users’ social networks. They are used by young people to...
enact social identities and maintain valued social relationships with friends and broader peer-groups (boyd, 2007; Livingstone, 2008). SNS technologies provide affordances that both enable and constrain opportunities for action (e.g., persistence, searchability) and that introduce new dynamics to users’ social life online. For example, users must contend with invisible audiences, the collapsing of contexts that are traditionally distinct, and the blurring of public and private boundaries (boyd, 2011). These technologies thus create a unique hybrid of private and public space (Papacharissi, 2010); users’ profile pages and intimate social connections are mapped out across complex “networked publics” (boyd, 2007). In this context, users share their tastes, histories, and preferences and display their practices, achievements, and social connections.

Research has highlighted gender differences in the ways women and men use and engage with SNSs. Early research with MySpace found that female users had more friends than male users and were more interested in friendship, while males were more interested in dating (Thelwall, 2008). Similarly, differences in women’s and men’s self-presentations on MySpace were found to parallel (and even intensify) offline stereotypical gender norms, with women portraying themselves as attractive and affiliative, and men as embodying strength and power (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008). Subsequent research also suggests that gender performances on SNSs reflect traditional notions of masculinity and femininity (e.g., Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012; Kapidzic & Herring, 2014). However, we know little about the gendered ways in which young men and women are using SNS photo-sharing affordances and their implications for gender relations. Photosharing is a key feature of many SNSs, enabling users to share photos with friends and/or wider audiences (Lobinger, 2016) and enabling “comments” on photos by other users. De Ridder and Van Bauwel (2013) demonstrated that “commenting” on a profile photo is a gendered practice among 13- to 18-year-olds, while Ringrose and Harvey (2015) found that sharing social media images of specific body parts generates gendered relative value among 13- to 15-year-olds; images are used as commodities that circulate through posting, tagging, sharing, and viewing practices on SNSs.

Within the context of drinking cultures, some research suggests that as drinking events and sociability have become routinely mediated through SNSs, the displaying, sharing, commenting, and interpreting of drinking practices have resulted in novel, evolving negotiations around “appropriateness” and “inappropriate” masculinities and femininities on social media (Brown & Gregg, 2012; Dobson, 2014a). The technological affordances of SNSs such as Facebook appear to offer ways to extend and enhance the pleasures of (heavy) drinking with friends, through features such as photo-sharing, tagging, and commenting. These practices generate ongoing social exchanges online within friendship groups (Goodwin, Griffin, Lyons, McCleanor, & Moewaka Barnes, 2016) through the sharing of visual stories (via the photos), prompting social interactions (about the photos), and providing ways of self-expression (through photos and interactions; Lobinger, 2016). “Commenting” on drinking photos provides opportunities for extended conversation among a friendship group, as well as enabling online dialogue with friends who were not present at the drinking event (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011). Furthermore, the availability of digital and mobile technologies has transformed young people’s relationship to socializing, the night-time economy, alcohol consumption, and especially engaging in drinking cultures (Lyons et al., 2014). Hand (2014) notes that as technological devices change, different practices emerge around social networking and routinely mediated social practices. The technological affordances of SNSs provide opportunities for producing and sharing drinking photos, although the extent to which the uptake of these affordances is gendered is currently unclear.

Young people’s engagement with alcohol in many Western countries is now characterized by a pervasive culture of intoxication that rests on drinking in order to get (very) drunk. This involves an increase in the extent and frequency with which young people drink heavily, a hedonistic culture in which the pursuit of pleasure through states of intoxication are prioritized (Measham, 2004), and drinking with the aim of getting drunk accepted as routine and normal by young people (Fry, 2010). The culture of intoxication is most prevalent in countries with relatively liberal alcohol policies and minimum regulation, in an environment that seeks to maximize profits through a number of avenues, including a night-time economy oriented to alcohol consumption. Together these features have meant that engagement with the culture of intoxication is constituted as “an all but compulsory aspect” of young people’s lives (Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral, & Szmidt, 2009, p. 226). Yet, drinking heavily is strongly marked by gender and class (Griffin et al., 2009; Lyons et al., 2014).

Drinking and drunkenness have traditionally been masculine practices (Rahav, Wilsnack, Bloomfield, Gmel, & Kuntsche, 2006) linked to masculine identities (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Lemle & Mishkind, 1989), and drinking heavily, drinking beer, and drinking in public are ways in which men actively demonstrate hegemonic masculinity (Peralta, 2007; Willott & Lyons, 2012). However, many young women also now consume alcohol on a regular basis, including drinking (and liking) beer, drinking excessively for enjoyment, and drinking in public with friends (Lyons & Willott, 2008). Young women who drink see themselves as empowered, independent, pleasure-seeking social beings (Lyons & Willott, 2008; Watts, Linke, Murray, & Barker, 2015). However, cultural discourses often portray drinking and drunkenness among young women as disreputable (Day, Gough, & McFadden, 2003; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012), and drunk female (especially working class) bodies are inscribed with “stigmatised identities” (Bailey, Griffin, &
Shankar, 2015; Ettorre, 2007). In negotiating gender and alcohol consumption, women have been found to control their drinking so as not to breach feminized gender boundaries (i.e., through losing control, looking messy, being vulnerable) and avoid being positioned as “bad,” “promiscuous,” or indeed “masculine” (Hutton, Griffin, Lyons, Niland, & McCreanor, 2016; Lyons & Willott, 2008; Peralta, 2007).

Research also highlights how drinking and drunkenness can provide young adults with a “release” from everyday gender norms. This is evident in both young men (e.g., Thurnell-Read, 2011) and women (Stepney, 2015; Watt, Jessop, & Gorman-Murray, 2011), although in distinctly different ways. Stepney (2015) highlighted how being drunk gave women a break from the dilemmas around appropriate and inappropriate femininities, and enabled them to suspend their attention to their appearance, and not care about “looking good.” Yet, young women are also called on to inhabit a hypersexual appearance while drinking, highlighting the conflictual spaces in which young women find themselves. As Griffin, Szmig, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, and Mistral (2013) neatly put it,

The juxtaposition of hyper-sexual femininity and the culture of intoxication produces a particularly difficult set of dilemmas for young women. They are exhorted to be sassy and independent—but not feminist; to be “up for it” and to drink and get drunk alongside young men—but not to “drink like men.” They are also called on to look and act as aagentically sexy within a pornified night-time economy, but to distance themselves from the troubling figure of the “drunken slut.” (p. 184)

Men’s drunken behavior does not attract the same level of attention nor condemnation; rather, they are expected to consume alcohol heavily and to “hold one’s drink” as a way of embodying stoical masculine values (Willott & Lyons, 2012). Drunkenness also has been found to allow men a pleasurable release from the ongoing, everyday hegemonically masculine imperative to control the male body (Thurnell-Read, 2011).

As drinking cultures have shifted into the online environment, the technological affordances offered by SNSs have become increasingly important, allowing for self-displays and representations of consumption practices. Here, gendered meanings around drinking may be significantly reconfigured by men and women. Young women are appropriating social media to create and maintain online drinking-related identities. Australian young women have been found to engage in intense forms of online self-display in their posting and sharing of drinking images, including sexy (Dobson, 2014b) and “laddish” images (Dobson, 2014a), and those of shameless bodily display (Dobson, 2014c). For these (mainly White) young women, publicly displaying such images on Facebook is a highly pleasurable part of drinking practices (Brown & Gregg, 2012). Similarly research shows that young New Zealand women derive pleasure from posting and sharing drinking photos on Facebook. However, they have to engage in online “work” to manage the tensions and dilemmas involved in creating displays of “drunken femininity,” ensuring images represent them at some level of intoxication, but simultaneously are respectable and not seen as “tragic” by online audiences (Hutton et al., 2016). As Dobson (2014b) has argued, different groups of young women manage their online presentations around drunkenness and respectability in different ways, and the “performative shamelessness” she found in her work may be a reaction to a “masculinised, patriarchal, sexualising and pathologising gaze” (p. 159), a way for young women to pre-emptively defend themselves from such scrutiny. Few researchers have explored how masculinities may be reconfigured through SNSs, although “many men seek to validate their masculinity in the public world” (Light, 2013, p. 250). Manago (2013) describes how some young men are portraying themselves in sexualized ways on SNSs, suggesting a cultural shift in ideals of masculinity; however, her case study showed that these “new masculine ideals employ irony to maintain power and superiority over homosexuality and femininity” (p. 493). We know little about online masculinities within the culture of intoxication.

Young women who breach traditional feminine codes of behavior through drinking and drunkenness experience particular effects that men do not. They are subject to much greater social and cultural scrutiny (Dobson, 2014a) and are positioned in highly negative, problematic, and pejorative ways. These transgressions and their consequences are revealing of the contemporary social order. They play out not only in the lived experiences of nights out consuming alcohol but also through their display on social media. Yet, the technological practices involved in creating, maintaining, and sustaining online drinking displays (and identities) may be modifying the meanings of such transgressions. Profile-based SNS technologies are key here because of their photo-sharing affordances. As Lobinger (2016) has argued, shared photo albums on SNSs are particularly important for maintaining personal network relationships and “for creating an authentic visual online and offline identity” (p. 481). It is not the photos per se that are most relevant here but how they exist within their SNS context: how they are produced, shared, “liked,” commented on, how individuals are “tagged” and “untagged” in them, and how they act as discursive resources among friendship groups (Goodwin et al., 2016). The multimodal environment on SNSs is crucial for enabling the symbolic meanings and identity work that photos provide young people (Lobinger, 2016).

Facebook is the dominant SNS globally with over 1.5 billion active monthly users, 934 million of whom used it daily in December 2015 (Facebook, 2016). It is also a dominant photo-sharing platform, with 300 million photos uploaded daily and 136,000 uploaded every 60 s (Zephoria, 2016). Facebook photo galleries are a contemporary way for young people to perform their identities, demonstrating bonds between friends, leisure activities, socializing, and partying.
 drinking culture in NZ is very similar to that in the United States (Gibson, Miller, Smith, Bell & Crothers, 2013). The significant differences in usage rates between men and women (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). In NZ, Māori (the indigenous population) and Pākehā (people of European descent) coexist in a multicultural society which has patterns of power relations established through the colonial history of the country (Spoonley, McPherson, & Pearson, 2004). Ethnic, gender, and class disparities exist in health, education, and socioeconomic status with a gap of 7.3 years in life expectancy between Māori (the indigenous population) and Pākehā (people of European descent; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). In NZ, 95% of those under the age of 30 use social media, with no significant differences in usage rates between men and women (Gibson, Miller, Smith, Bell & Crothers, 2013). The drinking culture in NZ is very similar to that in the United Kingdom and Australia, with liberalized alcohol laws, a purchase age of 18 years, and a pervasive culture of intoxication (Lyons et al., 2014; McEwan, Campbell, & Swain, 2010).

The data collection took place between 2011 and 2012, a time when Facebook was in what Brügger (2015) terms its “third phase” (from 2008 to 2013). During this time, the number of users increased rapidly, exceeding 1 billion in September 2012, and a number of changes occurred within the platform (Brügger, 2015). Forms of live streaming were introduced (2009), video chat and chat on mobile media became available early in 2010, and “timeline” (a chronological system that covered the entire Facebook activity of the profile owner) launched at the start of 2012 (Brügger, 2015) (after much of our data collection had taken place). In August 2010, “Facebook Places” was launched, enabling users to “check in,” so Facebook could connect them to their location using geolocation data on mobile technologies. This made it possible for users to “share information about where you were and who you were with—as well as finding out which of your friends were nearby” (Brügger, 2015). Prior to, during, and following data collection, numerous changes were also made to Facebook privacy settings.

**Data Collection and Participants**

Using snowballing techniques, we recruited 105 participants aged between 18 and 25 years, who identified as Māori and Pākehā. Researchers matched to these ethnicity groups undertook data collection. The research was approved by the university’s human ethics committee and involved two stages. In the first stage, 24 friendship group discussions were undertaken with 64 females and 41 males to elicit young people’s talk around their drinking practices and use of social media. In total, 12 groups consisted of predominantly Pākehā participants (4 all female, 4 all male, 4 mixed) and 12 of predominantly Māori participants (2 all female, 1 all male, 9 mixed). Participants were not asked to provide any information about their sexual identities, and we did not explicitly seek a range of sexualities. Two Pākehā females said they were bisexual in individual interviews. Discussions lasted between 1 and 2 hr, were videotaped, and transcribed verbatim. The discussions were undertaken across rural and urban localities in large cities and smaller provincial towns and included a diversity of participants in terms of socioeconomic status (from poor working class through to very wealthy) and occupations (including employed and unemployed young people, single parents, and students).

The second stage of the research involved 15 individual interviews with a subset of participants from Stage 1 (10 females, 5 males; 7 Pākehā and 8 Māori). Participants were asked to show and talk about their Facebook pages, photos, and discuss the ways in which they used social media and online environments. They were asked directly about material related to their drinking practices. The interviews were videotaped and screen capture software was used to provide a digital record of all activity on the laptop screen. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and Transana software (Mavrikis & Geraniou, 2011) collated three strands of data: video recording, transcript, and screen recording. These strands were time-synchronized and enabled the researchers to view what was being said (transcript), hear the talk (audio), and...
watch the participant (visual) and the screen activity record simultaneously.

**Analytic Approach**

We employed Foucauldian discourse analyses (Willig, 2008) on transcripts, examining how gender constructions were mobilized in participants’ talk within the group discussions and interviews. We identified patterns and variations across the transcripts and then focused on contradictions and variations to explore the dominant discourses being used in the talk. We were interested in the specific constructions and subject positions (Davies & Harré, 1990) that discourses provided, particularly around normative gender and drinking ideals. We focused on hierarchies in gender constructions, and gendered subject positioning within a specific field of power relations (Butler, 1993). Regular team meetings involved iterative analyses and ongoing discussions around analytic insights.

**Findings**

Participants used Facebook to organize drinking events, connect with others while they were drinking, and share drinking photos. These photos were often circulated among peers for days afterward through “likes,” comments, and “shares.” Many participants used their phones to take photos, although some used digital cameras, particularly to capture preloading activities (drinking at someone’s house prior to going into town to drink in bars and clubs). They usually uploaded, tagged, and untagged images to Facebook the following day.

The participants constructed the photo-sharing affordances offered by Facebook in gendered ways during their discussions of drinking with friends. Taking and uploading digital drinking photos was generally constructed as a feminine activity and something “guys” did not tend to engage with. All participants managed their online identities to some extent, but the strategies they used to do this, and the extent of it, were also highly gendered in participants’ talk. Facebook activity that involved the careful crafting of online displays was disparaged by many participants, and routine photo-taking and uploading was constructed by male participants as silly, time-wasting, and trivial. Simultaneously, however, individual interviews and screen captures showed that many men were concerned about their Facebook profiles and having many photos. These gendered constructions are explored in more detail below.

**Photo-taking and Posting Online: “That’s What Girls Do”**

The participants constructed photo-taking during a night of socializing and drinking, and subsequent uploading to Facebook, as primarily feminine practices. In the following excerpt, three females from a group of seven (18–20 years old, Pākehā) discuss the gendered nature of photo-taking:

**Leah:** Boys don’t like taking photos of themselves. Like they. No boy I know would take a camera to town. [Jane laughs] Girls take cameras to town.

**Bell:** Guys just get in the pictures. [laughs]

**Jane:** Yeah. They just jump in.

**Leah:** And usually it’s a girl like [waves hands towards her] come and have a photo! [girly voice and laughs] And then tag them in it. [laughs]

Here, Leah discusses the general process involved in taking a photo by using exaggerated feminine gestures and tone (waving, using a girly voice), and her laughter suggests some self-consciousness around this. These young women are single mothers from lower working-class backgrounds and use cameras to take photos (their phones did not take good quality photos). They explain how “boys” want to be in the photos but not take them, suggesting that they want the value of the amenity but not the work involved. They particularly “don’t like taking photos of themselves,” highlighting that males remain actors in the images rather than the creators of them (whereas women are both). In this way, young women become the custodians of the memories that pictures encode. Their agency over creating images and choosing which ones to post also extends to tagging (naming individuals in the uploaded images) as Leah mentions at the end of this excerpt. In his individual interview, while showing the researcher drinking photos on his Facebook page, Alex (20 years old, Pākehā) also constructs photo-taking and uploading as a feminine activity:

**Alex:** Heaps of my friends have LIKED it [drinking photo]. Look. [cursor points to LIKES] Cause it’s just so funny [. . .] here’s another 21st we were at. So the majority of the photos are just parties at the end of the day eh.

**Int**: So how do they get—did someone upload them for you, or did you get tagged in them?

**Alex:** I got tagged in them, so someone who’d have taken them all, the chicks just add up the photos cause they’re always taking photos. So they always load them up you know. They’re all about their photos being online and all that mumbo jumbo. I couldn’t really be bothered. I wouldn’t take the time out to put any up myself.

**Int**: Do you take any yourself?

**Alex:** No.

(*Int=interviewer*)

Alex has many drinking photos and demonstrates that photos that are “liked” by many friends are highly valued. When asked specifically whether he uploaded these photos,
Alex quickly notes that he was “tagged” in them, so did not upload them, and explains that this is what “the chicks” do. Being tagged in photos is valued by young men, although the work involved in this process is one they devalue as feminine. Alex frames such activities as ones that young women are constantly involved in, using “always” twice in his description, thus constructing them as both excessive and mundane and as essential to who the “chicks” are. In aligning Facebook photo uploading as feminine and constructing it as “mumbo jumbo,” Alex’s talk functions to construct young women as ritualistic, superstitious, and confused, as opposed to scientific and rational. Alex’s own view (“I couldn’t be bothered, I wouldn’t take the time to put any up myself”) functions to construct the affordance of photo uploading as inherently feminine, time-wasting, and somewhat silly, trivializing and minimizing this activity and reinforcing the notion that women are concerned with image and appearance. Alex emphasizes this construction by stating that photo-taking and uploading to Facebook is “just not really a guy thing to do.” Yet, the images remain on his Facebook page as a means for self-display, and he values the attention they garner. Such tensions may suggest Alex is engaging in discursive work in his interview to maintain his masculinity while a female researcher views his Facebook photos. A little later in his interview, Alex is asked why he never takes drinking photos, to which he responds as follows:

I don’t know. It’s just kind of a wasteful thing to do when you’re drinking. You wanna do other stuff rather than just sit around and start taking photos I believe. [laughs] (Alex)

Photos uploaded onto Facebook enable social interactions to be shared and ongoing, making photo-taking an essential practice for this to occur (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011). However, in constructing photo-taking as a “wasteful” thing to do when you’re drinking, Alex not only dismisses this practice as unmeaningful but also puts forward “other stuff” as more important. The emphasis is on “action” rather than “recording” the action. The vagueness of the term “other stuff” encourages a view that almost anything other than taking photos is meaningful in this context. Yet, paradoxically Alex uses these photos on his Facebook pages for online self-displays of masculinity, encoded through “action” and autonomous subjectivity. Similar gendered constructions were evident in the account of a group of five Pākehā males (all 18 years old):

Sam: I never post photos.
Mark: We don’t post them, we just get photos taken of us and we get tagged in them.
Paul: Oh yeah we get tagged in them.
Sam: I’ve never posted a single photo in Facebook.
Int: So you don’t upload them yourselves?
Mark: We don’t upload the photos.
Des: That’s what girls do

This excerpt also demonstrates how taking and uploading photos for Facebook is firmly located as “always” “what girls do.” The men construct themselves as reasonably passive around photo-taking, yet their use of the word “just” (“we just get photos taken of us”) reinforces a kind of celebrity status where they are so popular that “girls” are interested enough to take photos of them doing “other stuff.” In this way, the young men position themselves as not needing to try to “be seen” or take photos. Together they construct a successful masculine performance that is not about posing or even being particularly aware that photo-taking is occurring. Constructing their passiveness around photo-taking activities requires a fair amount of work here, perhaps because they value the online photos and being tagged in them. They also construct these activities as something they can choose to opt in to or not (positioning themselves out of shot). Photo-taking, uploading, and sharing are invitations by the platform to exercise agency in particular ways. These invitations are gendered and dependent on context. The men construct taking up photo-sharing affordances as relevant only when it relates to work and study, and then it becomes a legitimate and important activity. Together their talk discursively constructs drinking-related photo-taking and uploading as feminine and “loser” practices, linked to online sociality and devalued in relation to masculine photographic activities that involve work and professionalism. One exception to this occurred in a group of four Pākehā males (all 20 years old) who described taking many (50–60) photos and immediately posting them on Facebook as shown below:

Alex: Like what shall we do? Do a webcam. Alright good idea. We took like videos and like fifty photos and I was drunk I was loading them all up to Facebook, like all sixty of them, and we were moving like [moves hands in sharp movements] this much in each photo and if you like click through real quickly.
Chris: They were like shutter speed ones.
Alex: Honestly if you go like this it was like we were moving back and forwards.
Chris: There’s one of them where you can see me like [hand moves in jerks to mouth] drinking my beer.
Alex: The beer was [hand like holding glass and jerking movements] slowing going down as- [laughter].
Int: So when did you load them up? Was it that night or the next day?
Alex: Ah that night, or, with, with the webcam thing. It’s just a bundle, you just drag all the photos into a little Facebook symbol and then whomp they’re in Facebook. But yeah.

These participants construct their photo-taking and uploading as unique and humorous because they use a webcam. Here, the agency is shifted to the webcam leaving them only the task of “drag and drop” uploading, which allows them to avoid time-consuming practices around taking, selecting, and uploading photos so that they can get on with hegemonically masculine activities of drinking and bonding. Thus, the video technology (webcam, “bundle,” “drag”) enables these young men to take up Facebook photo-sharing affordances in a way that is not feminized. Furthermore, in posting a sequence of drinking images online, these young men are providing a dynamic record of their (drinking) action, where, for example, the levels of beer in their glasses decrease over time, rather than a more static and “posed” representation of themselves in a carefully composed image where display of the self (as opposed to action undertaken) is central.

Managing Online Identities: “Guys” Don’t Give a Crap

Male participants made sense of females being more involved and heavily invested in social media practices because of their greater concern for online self-identity performances, which were seen to require constant attention. The following group of five male participants (18 years old, Pākehā) recount how “girls love their photos,” invest in self-imaging, and engage in editing work before they go online:

Sam: Girls.
Tom: They love it.
Paul: They love their photos.
Int: Why?
Des: You’d have to ask them to be honest.
Paul: It’s just like girls’ stuff.
Sam: Memories.
Tom: It’s like, it’s like being able to pretty themselves up online. They get to pretty up their profile
Sam: Yeah. Cause one profile picture isn’t enough, they’ve got to have-

Tom: Put nice picture online.
Paul: Pretty sure it’s a true fact that they all edit their photos as well before they put it online

These young males work together to construct photos and “girls” as intimately linked, associated with memories, being attractive to online audiences, and being able to display lots of (edited) images. When questioned directly about why “girls” love their photos, they resort to the default explanation of gendered practice and dismiss this as “just girls’ stuff.” However, they then speculate about motivations, citing the female role in recording social memories and the desire to appear “nice” and acceptably feminine online. This excerpt highlights the central importance of the profile picture on SNSs; it is the one picture that represents the user. Within this context, Sam points out that “one profile picture isn’t enough” for “girls,” implying that they need to represent themselves more thoroughly by having additional such photos in their albums. This positions young women as so overly concerned with their self-image (in a way that young men are not) that they need more profile pictures than the system is set up for. Sam singles out this certain kind of “posed”/self-representational picture for specific critique here. In his interview, Adam (24 years old, Pākehā) also discussed the work involved for females in managing their online identities through photo uploading and untagging activities:

Adam: Girls tend to um untag themselves in ones they don’t think they look good in. Um I don’t think guys give too much of a, don’t care too much at all unless it’s something that looks really stupid.
Int: Do you think there’s a difference between taking photos between males and females?
Adam: Yeah. Probably.
Int: Do you think girls take more photos?
Adam: [pause] More? Not necessarily but prettier ones yes. You know ones when they’re looking their best. Not looking their worst. Guys might not care so much at all. Um. Yeah I don’t think guys give too, too much crap about how it looks like. As long as it’s a photo [laughs] whereas girls might care oh you know if their hair was out of place in that one so untag. You know I look too white in that one. Untag. Um and so on and so on.

In contrast to the findings in the group discussions, in this interview Adam does not construct photo-taking as a straightforwardly feminine practice. Rather, he constructs the appropriation of affordances involving selecting, tagging, and untagging photos as gendered such that “girls” ensure they have “prettier,” posed, and more carefully selected photos online. Adam constructs males as not giving
“too much crap about” untagging oneself from a photo, while still acknowledging that they value having the images. In this way, it is the tagging practices that are constructed as feminine and concerned primarily with appearance. Thus, young men’s talk recognized that young women are called on to represent themselves as “pretty” and “nice,” but such practices were dismissed as “girls’ stuff” and a product of inherently female and heteronormative feminine concerns. However, the young women’s constant interest in their online appearances and displays were essential to ensure that they do not appear “tragic” and that they maintain an appropriately “pretty” femininity online, as the following group of female participants (18–20 years old, Pākehā) recount:

Int: And do you upload them right there? To Facebook? Or do you wait?
Hays: No cause I’ve gotta go through them to see which ones are alright. [laughter]
Jane: Only the good ones.
Leah: I don’t look good in this one. I’m not having that one. [laughs]
Int: What’s a good one?
Hays: When you’re not looking as tragic, tragic
Jane: Sometimes you’ve got photos where your eyes are half closed or you’re like [arm reaching down]
Hays: Not even ready to pose [laughing]

Here, the co-construction highlights that what gets posted on Facebook is a selection of the available photos. This may be viewed as potentially empowering: the young women have control over these practices, although their talk here highlights that they are acutely aware of both double standards and gendered gazes. Images of intoxication (eyes closed, awkward pose) are proscribed and those that “look good” or “alright” are chosen for uploading. This resonates strongly with the contradictions women face in engaging with the culture of intoxication, where they are required to drink heavily but maintain a respectable, attractive appearance (Griffin et al., 2013). Young women managed this primarily through carefully selecting photos to upload and untagging themselves in other people’s drinking photos. Taking agency here may be a defensive tactic that allows self-management in the face of gendered power relations. Some used the Facebook alerting system to notify them when they were tagged in photos, as Pam (22 years old, Pākehā) explains in her interview:

Pam: Um I wouldn’t. Don’t think I’d respond to it at two in the morning unless, no I wouldn’t respond to someone’s message in the morning. If it was. If I was tagged in a photo though that I didn’t like I’d untag myself immediately.

Pam employs Facebook photo notifications to provide her with round-the-clock self-surveillance that she can respond to immediately, even if it is 2 a.m. and she is asleep. In this way, she can check, monitor, and untag herself from any photo she deems undesirable or unattractive. Male participants never mentioned appropriating Facebook’s affordances for this kind of work. The intensity of the extra online work that women engaged in to manage their online identities following nights out drinking perhaps explains why it was so important for them to “pre-emptively” document their nights themselves and have some control over the drinking photos that are posted online in the first instance.

Documenting and Controlling a Feminized Public Display: “We Usually Suss Out Our Pose”

Many female participants talked about drinking while getting ready with friends before they went out, and this involved selecting clothes, shoes, and doing hair and make-up (McCreanor et al., 2015) as well as routinely photographing and uploading photos of these pleasurable activities, similar to earlier research (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011). Once out in the night-time economy, photos were also taken by others including professional photographers working for pubs, bars, clubs, or Snapstar (a commercial photography company) and uploaded to websites and Facebook pages. Young people’s own photography on Facebook is often seamlessly supplemented with commercially produced images (Lyons et al., 2014). In the excerpt below, Hine and her friends (19–20 years old, Māori) describe how they “have to find Snapstar to get a photo to put on Facebook” and while preloading they “practise and suss out our pose” for such Snapstar photos:

Hine: Oh and we always try and find SnapStar, every time
Jo: Ooooh yesss!
Hine: We have to find SnapStar to get a photo, to put on Facebook
Jo: It’s just so you’re like “yes” cos’ that’s a cool photo, it looks cool you just need to do a cool pose and then you’re sorted
Hine: Yep, yep, yep, and we usually suss out our pose
Jo: We practise our pose [laughter]
Int: Practise your pose?
Jo: YEP!
Hine: So we find our outfit for our hair and our make-up when we’re drinking
This excerpt demonstrates the complex strategies and processes involved in this particular group’s online representations. It shows the preparations required to elicit successful photos via Snapstar which are subsequently managed into their online profiles. Specifically posing for photos that would later be uploaded to Facebook, including taking “selfies,” was a heavily gendered practice. Males did not describe posing for Facebook photos prior to going out drinking (with the exception of the group of young men who used the web-cam). There is a difference here between these young women’s agentic performances and online display of glamorous, (hetero)sexual femininity with their more mundane constant monitoring, tagging, and untagging practices to ensure their online gendered self is appropriately “pretty” rather than “tragic.” If this mundane work reflects the work involved in “doing” online femininity in the culture of intoxication, then perhaps posing for Snapstar represents a more leisureed, fun, and sociable practice around producing a “cool pose” as part of a culture of celebrity and processes of micro-celebritization on SNSs (Senft, 2008).

As mentioned earlier, specific practices around taking (and selecting/tagging) “posed” photos were derided by many male participants. In the excerpt below, Beth and Cathy (in a group of two females and one male, 22–24 years old, Pākehā and Māori) construct practices around taking and posting posed photos negatively and distance themselves from such practices. Andy (a Māori truck driver) escalates this positioning:

Beth: And it’s like two hundred photos from one night out drinking.
Cathy: Or even like they’re posing before they’re ready to go out? As well? And things like that.
Beth: Yeah. No I don’t do any like that.
Andy: Ah you see that eh? All the time. It’s like getting ready to go to town [arm back in photo pose] [laughing] Oh my god.
Cathy: Yeah. [. . .] yeah, like yeah, those are the more posers of Facebook
(a bit later . . .)
Andy: And some people even say, they’d be like, “oh yeah get in Facebook photo, Facebook photo.” People say that.

While Cathy negatively constructs people employing practices around taking posed photos as “posers of Facebook,” Andy criticizes this behavior by branding such photographers “fags” and labeling the photos “gay.” Andy uses these terms to distance himself from such practices, a device that marks hegemonic masculinity as heterosexual (i.e., not “gay”; Butler, 1993; De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013). This talk is both gendered and classed, with the term “posers” linked to femininities and being “posh” (middle/upper class) by these participants who are both working (Andy) and middle class (Beth and Cathy). Andy’s strong reaction may be related to his position within this group discussion, as male, Maori, and working class, policing acceptable versions of masculinity and appropriate classed, gendered, and heteronormative boundaries. The discourses drawn on across the groups were constantly and repetitively heteronormative, and the heteronormativity of photo-sharing activities was unquestioned. Previous researchers have shown how gender and sexuality are reproduced on SNSs, with young people needing to navigate social norms that privilege heterosexuality (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2013; Rubin & McClelland, 2015). Although SNSs have potential to reconfigure and transgress normative gender and sexual identities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) youth face particular challenges when they transgress heteronormativity on popular SNSs (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2015).

Posed photos taken by the objects of the image themselves (selfies) were also highly derided by many male participants. In the excerpt below, four young Pākehā male participants (20 years old) construct the number of self-representational photos young women put up as excessive and their posing as illegitimate (unless they are doing it with a friend or are considered to be highly attractive in heteronormative terms):

Int: So is it the girls then who decide on what photos get put up?
Alex: Yeah. [laughs]
Dave: And it’s mainly good looking ones of them. And they don’t really care about how we look.
Chris: They sit there with their friend like this [mimes taking a selfie].
Ben: They’ll probably take about twenty photos of the exact same pose and just put, the thing is they put all of them on. [laughs] It’s just like you don’t need to post that many photos. Like some girls have like about six hundred photos and it’s all just the same pose. Like it’s just.
Alex: Choose the best pose.
(interviewer notes a pause)
Chris: Like it’s kind of legitimate when they’re doing it with a friend but when they do it on their own [pause] it’s just asking for trouble. Are you a ho? [laughs].
Alex: Are you sitting at home by yourself? [laughs]
Ben: Like it could be acceptable if they took like maybe two, two, three photos but twenty on the same thing it’s just

Chris: It’s alright if they’re attractive.

Dave: And then they get their mates posting oh you’re beautiful. [soft mocking voice]

This excerpt demonstrates the policing of female excess in their online displays. Together the young men deride women taking many photos of the same pose, particularly “when they do it on their own,” identifying the latter as marking the boundary of acceptable practices. Young women moving beyond this boundary risked being castigated as a “ho,” a despised form of female sexuality implying heterosexual promiscuity. Further on in the excerpt, Chris notes that these practices can be acceptable if the women are attractive, reinforcing women’s position as the object of the (heterosexual male) gaze while creating a sense of pornography in this context—despite the paradox that women are taking these photos. Chris notes that this practice is “just asking for trouble,” echoing ideas that women who dress in certain ways are “just asking” for sexually aggressive male responses for which men cannot be blamed, in the process constructing female selfies as inherently oriented toward a heterosexual male audience.

In terms of the values attached to gendered technological practices, this excerpt demonstrates most strongly the absolute contempt the young men have for female selfie practices. Selfies are often dismissed as frivolous and self-absorbed (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015), but have also been called “a powerful means for self-expression” (Murray, 2015). In the current context, taking and uploading selfies on Facebook provide women with agency to define their online selves, which is important because they know their bodies will be subject to gendered regulatory scrutiny in ways that men’s are not. Perhaps some self-defense is also occurring; if women are going to be scrutinized anyway, they might as well attempt some of it on their own terms. Furthermore, creating multiple (selfie) images may also be a self-defense tactic to “dilute” the critique. Dispersing one’s image across multiple texts creates a meta-text that evades being tied down by male-centric techniques of surveillance and viewing. Multiple images provide many versions of the self and no one image can be singled out as representative of that self. In this way, the verisimilitude of the photo becomes questioned.

**Conclusion**

Our findings demonstrate that both males and females valued and engaged with drinking photos and photo-sharing on Facebook. However, the uptake of Facebook photo-sharing affordances was constructed as gendered, particularly in the group discussions. The practices involved in producing and sharing drinking photos (taking, uploading, tagging, untagging) were constructed as feminine in a highly heteronormative context. Many male participants tended to represent these practices as being excessive and about (frivolous) appearance concerns while they themselves got on with the important acts involved in drinking and getting drunk with friends. Such constructions reinforce traditional gender dichotomies (e.g., men do/women are, men as active/women as passive, man as subject/woman as object). However, young women’s meaning-making around these practices disrupt such dichotomies; they construct their take up of Facebook photo-sharing affordances as active (they produce the image), themselves as both subject and object, and as being in control of their own identity performances. Women may be more invested in appropriating photo-sharing affordances and engage in photo-sharing practices in more intense ways than men because of the difficult space they occupy within the culture of intoxication (Griffin et al., 2013). They have a lot more to lose if their online identity performances are “tragic.”

These performances are occurring within a contemporary society where femininity is tied to a contested postfeminist culture defined increasingly around visible displays of “sexy” bodily characteristics as opposed to more traditional feminine traits such as passiveness (Gill, 2007). In actively taking and posting attractive and sexualized images of themselves during preloading and in the night-time economy, young women garner attention and recognition. Yet, these practices, especially taking selfies, are utterly denigrated in some of the participants’ talk. Here, women have attained an element of self-representational empowerment via social media: they are in control of the “text,” and this has become their domain. This level of control and self-representation disrupts the gender order, and maybe this explains why it is so harshly judged by their male peers. Participants did not engage in the same level of critique toward men or male photo-sharing practices, and men distanced themselves from the notion that they may become an image to be consumed. Yet, men were also in a precarious position because there was value in having drinking photos on their Facebook profiles. In individual interviews, male participants spoke somewhat more freely about their drinking photos, and their own Facebook uploading and tagging/untagging practices. Although gendered meanings were still apparent in interviews, the males in discussion groups appeared to use Facebook photo-sharing affordances to create a discursive distance between males and females engaging in the culture of intoxication. As Manago and colleagues (2008) suggested, the widely shared view that men are less concerned about their online identities, and put less effort into them, may be more a myth than a reality. It may be a way of discursively shoring up hegemonic (i.e., heterosexual) masculine power within social contexts. Discussion groups may also silence non-heterosexual participants given the dominance of heteronormative discourses observed. Future research could examine intersecting constructions of gender and sexuality in photo-sharing practices within the culture of intoxication.
Visual material that attracts a high volume of comments and online social interactions from one’s peers has become a key mechanism for maintaining a “visible” presence on Facebook (Bucher, 2012), with images of “the self” and the body paramount (Berriman & Thomson, 2015). Young women’s photo practices around drinking and socializing can be viewed as producing successful identity performances. Yet, young men designate such activities as trivial, silly—and inherently feminine. Similarly, male technology journalists have constructed Pinterest pejoratively as a feminized online space and not a valid use of SNSs, suggesting that determining the appropriate use of online networked technologies is “bound up in masculine narratives that grant men the right of arbitrator over the adequacy of women’s performances and the value of women’s contributions” (Tebokke, 2013, p. 358).

As a commercial platform, Facebook profits heavily from all of the social media practices described in this article (Fuchs, 2012). However, as noted, these practices are gendered (and strictly heteronormative) and suggest it is women who are adding the most value for Facebook. Young women’s disproportionate “work,” time, and effort in creating and sustaining photo-sharing online can be viewed as free immaterial labor for Facebook (and alcohol marketers) within drinking cultures. Young women also perform most of the affective labor of (re)producing the positive drinking image and maintaining friendship groups and online sociality, reproducing social norms in which women maintain social relationships, social cohesion, and generating material to be shared by all users in their networks. This “women’s work” is freely given labor to produce “social relationships that reproduce the social order” (Jarrett, 2014, p. 21). Drinking photos carry symbolic meanings; they demonstrate important involvement in the culture of intoxication for all young people (Goodwin et al., 2016). However, how they are created, shared, and valued is unevenly distributed, with women’s digital practices marginalized, reinforcing traditional hierarchical gendered meanings. These findings demonstrate the “male privilege that grants males the right to assess the competencies and contributions of females” (Tebokke, 2013, p. 394) around technological practices, where women’s expertise, mastery, and power are reframed negatively (Pechtelidis et al., 2015). Thus, in many ways, technological practices around drinking and socializing reproduce older gendered and heteronormative regimes of power.

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