

Chapter Title: English adults

Book Title: Visualising Facebook

Book Subtitle: A Comparative Perspective

Book Author(s): Daniel Miller and Jolynna Sinanan

Published by: UCL Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1mtz51h.8>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



UCL Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Visualising Facebook*

JSTOR

4

English adults

In Chapter 2 it was suggested that by the ages of 16–18, various social distinctions are already starting to emerge in The Glades. By far the most important appears to be that of gender: for example, we were able to designate a group of ‘selfie girls’ but not one of ‘selfie boys’. Other than that, the most important category seems to be merely being a teenager. This chapter explores social distinctions further, examining the sharp break between being at school and being an adult, observed particularly among women. As an adult there seems to be more concern with what particular ‘sub-species’ of adult one is becoming. In this short chapter we start with perhaps the most profound example, when a woman becomes a mother, before going on to examine other social distinctions such as class and a further elaboration of gender contrasts.

We saw in the last chapter that in El Mirador there is considerable continuity between the Facebook posting of adolescents and adults. Things are very different in The Glades. At both sites, college and university-age students tend to be less present since they often live away from home, but the focus upon work that becomes of central importance within El Mirador is largely ignored in The Glades. In El Mirador 13 of 19 adult selfies are clearly taken in a work situation, but none in The Glades are taken in the workplace (Appendix Figure 4).

Instead the next major usage of Facebook is a flood of images associated with parenthood, largely motherhood. As other studies have argued,¹ at the time of childbirth two new people are born – the infant and the parent. This life change involves not just new responsibilities, but often an entirely new set of friends and usually the repudiation of a prior lifestyle: mothers typically give up not just on partying but also, for a period, on work. Facebook was designed to be, and initially was, exclusively a young person’s platform; the recent embracing of it by adults has been quite rapid. So it was not that the young Facebook users grew up.

It was rather people already in situ as adults who needed to find a way to create their own Facebook – one clearly differentiated from that of youth. Previously they had castigated teenage use of Facebook as a trivial waste of time. How could they then transform it to accommodate their own purposes? One of the key instruments used in *The Glades* to accomplish this task was the ‘no make-up selfie’.

How Facebook grew up

Facebook was not the only platform associated with young people; this has also been true of both Instagram and Snapchat. Rather different was Twitter, which was seen as appropriate for adult use, especially in relation to obtaining information. Indeed adults in *The Glades* seem entirely unaware of the very different use of Twitter for the kind of peer banter they associate with Facebook, unless they have school-age children.

Apart from Twitter the denigration of social media has become something of a national pastime. Criticism is sometimes aimed at Facebook, but at other times it is aimed at the general devotion of young people to screens; more recently it re-surfaced as a critique of the selfie. These criticisms were seen as evidence of the way social media has emphasised the most self-absorbed, superficial and narcissistic aspects of youth. Adults in general blithely ignore the evidence given in Chapter 2 that all three practices are in essence social, not individualistic. The problem for adults who now wanted to colonise Facebook is that they first needed to cleanse Facebook of these earlier connotations in order to make it a more respectable site for their own postings.

Ironically it was a selfie that proved the most effective means for this task of purification – more specifically the ‘no make-up selfie’. Looking across the profiles of the adult women in *The Glades* whom we followed, it was striking that many posted a ‘no make-up selfie’, even though most of them had never previously posted a selfie of any kind. When the ‘no make-up selfie’ appeared in March 2013 most of the journalistic attention focused on three components. The first was its sheer level of success, raising 8 million pounds for UK cancer charities in around a week; the second was the participation of various celebrities and the third was a critique of this phenomenon. One of the clearest examples of the last was by journalist Jenni Murray.² She pointed out that while no one can begrudge the successful fund raising, people suffering from cancer have grounds for viewing this as a kind of unfortunate pastiche/parody of the deterioration in their

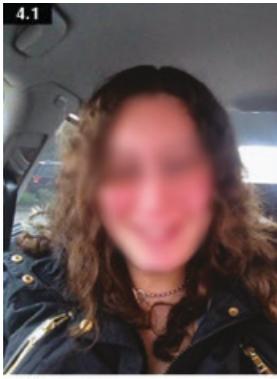
appearance that occurs with cancer, and especially with chemotherapy. As Danny, the ethnographer, was spending a day per week working with hospice patients at this time, he could attest to these patients' desperate need to retain their dignity during cancer. The grounds for this critique are thus very clear.

This was not, however, the intention of those who participated in this genre, who would most probably have been horrified to think that they had given offence. Our evidence was that the success of this campaign was only tangentially about cancer; the true purpose was directed at the more immediate concerns of those who took part. This campaign proved an excuse to do two contradictory things at the same time. One is that when a phenomenon becomes as huge as the selfie, and is also associated with the young, large numbers of people want to take part and to post at least one selfie. At the same time, adults in The Glades rather enjoy denigrating the young and were reluctant to let go of their critique of selfie culture.

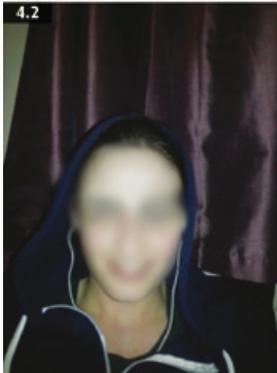
The 'no make-up selfie' provided a means both to post a selfie and at the same time actively to express a critique of prior selfie culture. It was distanced from individual vanity by being a social process, based on being nominated by others. It repudiated the aesthetics of the idealised selfie by showing people at their least glamorous. Unlike some celebrities, most of the people in The Glades didn't just decline to wear make-up. They clearly aimed for a kind of truth-telling 'warts and all' look. In short they used it to critique not just the selfie, but also the much wider social pressure to appear glamorous and made-up for social consumption. Three women noted that they don't actually wear make-up anyway, and so this was their normal face (Figs 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.)

Some went a stage further in trying to use this device to create something entirely opposed to the dominant image of the selfie. For instance one woman clearly felt that since she also never wears make-up, a 'no make-up selfie' seemed a bit of a cheat. Her solution to the problem was to post a picture of herself side on. Because, as she says in the accompanying comment, this is the perspective that she really doesn't like and generally feels quite self-conscious about (Fig. 4.4).

By creating a serious and unglamorous version these women felt able to appropriate the selfie for themselves, and to link it to what we will see are their own core projects of modesty and authenticity. The situation is very different in El Mirador. Here the selfie becomes a means for showing continuity between young people and adults, since no one is seen as 'too old' to pose for a glamorous selfie.



Although posing for 'no makeup selfies', it was important for these women to note that they don't usually wear make-up anyway



One woman showed what she considered to be her least attractive side

The infant

Anyone who has had a baby recently in England, or who knows someone who has, will be aware that many new parents seem continually engaged upon an anxious quest to determine whether their new infant is doing the same thing as all the other infants born at the same time, or ideally a little bit sooner. The development of ante-natal classes and toddler groups has created a new type of age-bonded peer group. Historically babies used to be contrasted more with other family members of disparate ages, but now they are related to a specific cohort all born around the same time, which is likely to have contributed to this anxiety and



As yet there is no consensus as to whether it is appropriate to post ultrasound foetal images on Facebook

desire for comparison. For many new mothers Facebook is becoming an increasingly integral part of this process.

For most mothers having a baby in The Glades meant first a period of time out of work and second a clear and explicit need to make new friends and to create a support network, thus easing the transition into becoming a parent. Incessant posting about one's new baby by new mothers has become a cliché; it is something everyone is now self-conscious, and frequently apologetic, about. Some decide not to post at all, but most do post frequently. This usually receives considerable numbers of positive responses from two audiences: existing family and the new set of friends that has developed around these ante-natal classes and post-natal toddler groups. The wider ethnography showed that this is the single most important period for making lifelong friendships.

As yet there is no clear consensus around the appropriateness of posting images taken from ultrasound, although in some countries, especially in South America,³ this is already an established genre. Based on the rather small sample of this field site, this practice seemed more common among lower-income families, but instances among higher-income families also occurred (Figs 4.5 and 4.6).

The ultrasound is a very direct way of letting people know that one is pregnant. But, as so often in The Glades, it is more common for messages to be delivered on Facebook in some form of indirect mode that could be considered amusing. One strategy was simply to show baby clothes, which also meant a declaration of the gender of the forthcoming infant, often with some kind of associated message. In this case it was 'My first "it's a boy". If anyone wants to get rid of any baby boy stuff let me know' (Fig. 4.7).



Displaying clothing is one way of hinting at the gender of the forthcoming baby



Very first images of newborn babies



As pregnancy develops some mothers may also post photos of their 'bump', though again there is no consensus on how appropriate this is. In the 1960s there seemed to be developing a genre around filming and recording births, but not only is this absent from Facebook, today it seemed as if all traces of the birthing process should be removed prior to posting.

Once the infant is delivered, however, we can start to identify certain clear genres of posting as being common or typical. These in turn suggest emerging standards for how infants should be visually presented to the social media public. For example, it seems almost obligatory to post pictures of the newborn baby very soon after birth. Often the baby is shown asleep or cradled in hands and arms. Most are clothed or in a nappy, but some remain naked (Figs 4.8 and 4.9).

The next most common genre seems to be a photograph of the baby either smiling or with an expression that could be interpreted as a smile (Figs 4.10 and 4.11).

As the babies become toddlers the range of photographs expand, but certain shots again seems characteristic and common. Three of these are illustrated here. The first is the photograph of the infant wearing sunglasses. For reasons that are not clear (no pun intended), this is a very common genre in The Glades (Figs 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14).

The second set of images that seem to correspond to a distinct genre are those of the infant whose face is smeared with food, revealing him or her to be a 'messy eater.' For the messy eater shot, chocolate usually plays an obliging role. Typical captions to such images would be

The first smile or something approximating to a smile is a very common genre for posting



We are not sure why toddlers in sunglasses have become quite such a popular subject for posting

'loved it mum', 'When friends mind your baby...' or 'The joy of chocolate cake!' (Figs 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17).

A generation earlier, the equivalent photo might well have been exactly the opposite: a scrubbed baby in a clean bib. The transformation



The messy eater is a favourite genre accompanied by some suitable comment



is characteristic of a more general shift from formal posing to informal expressions of authenticity as discussed in Chapter 2.

Other genres include an infant posed behind some kind of wheel, ranging from a toy to being placed in the driver's seat of a real car (Figs 4.18, 4.19 and 4.20).

Typical captions might be 'got a bit more nervous when C... took to the controls!'

It is perhaps surprising how much the individual baby shots dominate over those featuring family and parents. There are some more formal shots of the baby with proud parents, as well as usually some images of mothers looking adoringly at their infants, or just looking happy (Figs 4.21 and 4.22).

However, these are much less common than pictures of the infant alone. Such images are twice as common in *The Glades* as in *El Mirador*, seeming to echo our ethnographic sense of the stronger emphasis upon kinship and relationships in the latter site. If there is an older child in *The Glades*, however, parents may try and arrange them in a reassuringly caring pose in relation to the new infant (Fig. 4.23).



4.18 Infants are often photographed posed behind a wheel, belonging to either a toy or an actual vehicle



4.21 Mothers will often post images of themselves in the act of adoring their infants





In this reassuring image, the older child is placed in a caring position in relation to the baby

The situation is more complex than just whether kinship itself matters because there is also the question of what form this kinship takes. Again the images reflect our ethnographic findings. For Trinidad the focus is on the extended family, as will be discussed in the next chapter, while people in The Glades almost always focus on the nuclear family as the kin context for the child. Specific representations of the child in a nuclear family are therefore more common in The Glades, where 29 people contribute 136 posts that are probably showing such nuclear family relationships (it was not always clear if this was the case). In El Mirador, by contrast, we find 15 people posting 27 examples (Appendix Figure 4). Also in The Glades it is much more common to

include some form of more professional family photographs, or the family represented within a collage. These may simply reflect a conservative retention of the family portrait, once an important and popular genre of photography (Figs 4.24, 4.25 and 4.26).

Moving to the event

Posting babies and infants does not seem to require any justification other than the desire constantly to re-acknowledge their presence. As the toddler becomes a child, however, the convention shifts to something closer to the dominant form of adult posting. In this one posts largely to acknowledge some specific event or moment that warrants this public exposure, rather than merely posting on a whim. Most shots of older children are therefore accompanied by texts that explain the 'point' of the posting. In the case of children, the photo often documents the first time something happens, for example: 'First night in her new butterfly princess room for a "big girl"'; 'first potty'; 'first day at school' (Figs 4.27, 4.28 and 4.29). Other examples include playing football, acting in a school play or formally dressed for a wedding – as well as occasionally for other events such as Halloween



A professional photograph or similar image is often used to idealise the family as a whole



Posting pictures of older children needs the wider legitimacy of an event, for example the first day at school or the first night in a new room





Other subjects worthy of posting may include a school play, a sports competition or dressing-up games



(Figs 4.30, 4.31, 4.32 and 4.33). The point at which infants are portrayed in clearly gendered roles differs among parents, though girls are usually feminised from quite early on.

Another common genre is of photos that depict a child's birthday, frequently posted in both sites (Figs 4.34, 4.35 and 4.36). In El Mirador we find 10 people posting 18 examples of birthday pictures, while in The Glades we have 18 people posting 29 examples (Appendix Figure 4).

Adult posting

No excuse is needed to post an image of an infant. For adults, however, merely posting one's mood or trivia may be seen as relatively immature; it is a practice they often condemn. The two main justifications for adult posting are either humour or as the commemoration of an event. Some continuity with childhood posting exists, for example an event such as a birthday, with adults increasingly sent the kinds of birthday acknowledgements established some years ago between children. Adults tend to post more texts and fewer photos than children and adolescents, though they may also post humorous images such as cartoons (Fig. 4.37).



Older children are treated more like adults, with the birthday becoming the most common reason for posting on Facebook

In terms of annual events the one that clearly stands out is Christmas, a reflection of a more general trend in which the single festival has gained prominence at the expense of other annual or religious festivals.⁴ Christmas is most commonly represented on Facebook through its most visual icon, the Christmas tree (Figs 4.38, 4.39 and 4.40).

Sometimes more indirect ways are used to reference such celebrations. In these images food has been used, illustrating both a traditional Christmas dinner and a classic Shrove Tuesday ('Pancake Day') meal (Figs 4.41 and 4.42).

In the same way that Christmas dominated annual celebrations, weddings clearly dominate over all other life cycle events. This also reflects the huge importance of wedding photography as an established tradition (Figs 4.43, 4.44, 4.45 and 4.46).

Outside of birthdays, weddings and the associated stag/hen parties (see below), posting life events is not very common. Yet Facebook has become increasingly important in relation to death and its public



Older adults may prefer to post under the guise of a cartoon rather than a photograph

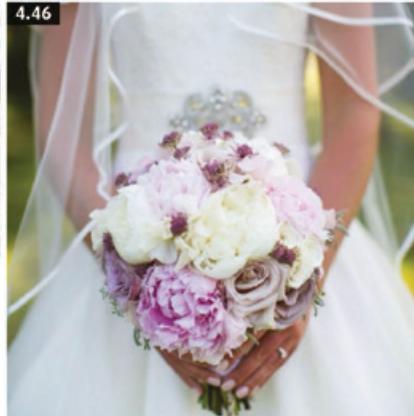


4.38 Almost the only annual event that necessitates Facebook posting, other than birthdays, is Christmas



4.41 4.42 Festival foods such as a Christmas dinner or Shrove Tuesday pancakes are also posted

acknowledgement. For example, one of the older males who passed away towards the end of this research period received a total of 75 messages acknowledging this event and expressing appreciation of the man. But this topic is not covered here since such posts tend to be textual rather than visual. Images are more common in postings around the anniversary of deaths, mostly of parents. The deceased may be represented as elderly, but photographs of them when young are quite often used. Memes are also possible features of such memorials (Fig. 4.47).



There are two major continuities with pre-social media photography genres, one of which is the wedding photo

Perhaps the single most common reason why families took photographs over the last few decades has been to record holidays.⁵ Classic holiday pictures might be taken at the seaside (Figs 4.48, 4.49 and 4.50). This genre remains hugely important for adult posting. Furthermore, the older the person is, the more likely that his or her Facebook postings will be largely dominated by albums of holiday photos, representing pretty much a direct migration from physical albums to social media.

One popular variant is showing oneself in winter clothing, even in summer (Fig. 4.51), while other typical holiday photos within England depict funfairs, castles, iconic London settings, the zoo and sunsets (Figs 4.52, 4.53, 4.54 and 4.55).



Facebook has become a key site for memorialisation of the dead



The other example of continuity in genres is the holiday snapshot



Unpredictable English weather is often the focus of ironic beach photos



Typical holiday snaps show a range of situations and photogenic moments from the trip.



Visiting gardens is a popular pastime in the English site

Photos of holidays abroad typically show people enjoying out of the ordinary activities



Photographs taken while visiting gardens are also common (Figs 4.56 and 4.57).

Holidays taken abroad are more likely to include skiing and sunbathing, iconic monuments and cruising (Figs 4.58, 4.59 and 4.60).

Holiday photos constitute a major genre within The Glades, with 1,199 such postings as compared to 243 in El Mirador (Appendix Figure 1). This may be partly because people in The Glades are more affluent and so have more holidays. But it also seems consistent with the general point that English posting may be more conservative in retaining prior genres of photography.

It was noted in Chapter 2 that the distinction between youth and adulthood is so important that it tends to mask other forms of differentiation, with the exception of gender. However, adulthood is the time

when people are more readily identified around a variety of distinctions. Gender remains the most important, but class, sexual orientation and politics may also become significant. For anthropologists each of these tends to be seen in relational terms. As such, the visual representation of adulthood is a good place to explore the way some of these categories are constructed as systematic oppositions.⁶

Masculinity

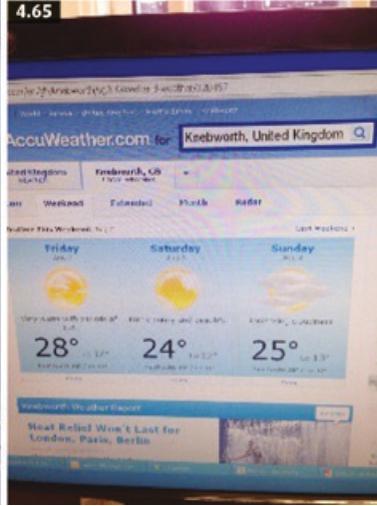
The selection is not intended to represent all men in The Glades. Elderly men, for example, would be less useful in characterising any overt masculinity. Instead, these images represent what could be considered the ‘core’ of Leeglade – that is, men in their twenties to forties working in the service industries or self-employed. These are the people whom one is most likely to meet at pubs and who retain genres of male socialising offline as well as online. For such men there seems to be more continuity between teenage posting than for females, which accords with stereotypes in England that characterise young men as ‘immature’ relative to young women. Some of these are simply continuities of genre, for example postings from music festivals, although we can see more focus on the event and performances and less on one’s companions than in young people’s postings (Figs 4.61, 4.62 and 4.63).

Men often post their festival photos with an emphasis on crowds and spectacles





The unpredictable English weather is a common subject for posting, as it is of everyday conversation

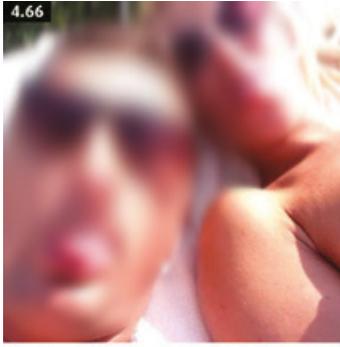


The population here being English, there are also frequent references to the weather (Figs 4.64 and 4.65).

There is limited continuity with some of the conventions of teenage poses. So occasionally we see tongues sticking out and other gestures, though these largely fade away as men get older (Figs 4.66, 4.67 and 4.68).

There are far fewer party pictures trying to demonstrate that the subjects have had a good time. The one such genre that seems to increase in importance is that based around wearing fancy dress (Figs 4.69, 4.70 and 4.71). Such postings are a good deal more common in The Glades than in El Mirador (Appendix Figure 1), with 178 examples compared to only 31.

The strongest elements of continuity for male postings are images related to football and drinking. Several of the 20- to 30-year-old males in The Glades play football, and practically all actively follow the Premier League and a local club. Major matches appear either as spectacles or images that testify to attendance (Figs 4.72 and 4.73).

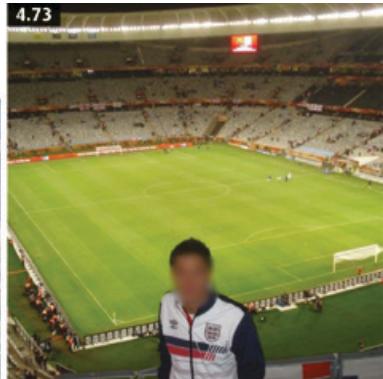


Occasionally we see 'teenage' genres retained, for example sticking out tongues, but these decline with age



A very popular genre in The Glades is posting people in fancy dress

Photos depicting attendance at football matches are a common theme for men





Photos of individuals playing football are also common



Memes about football remain common for older males

There may also be shots of the men playing football (Figs 4.74, 4.75 and 4.76) and, as with teenagers, there will also be memes or comments about football (Fig. 4.77).

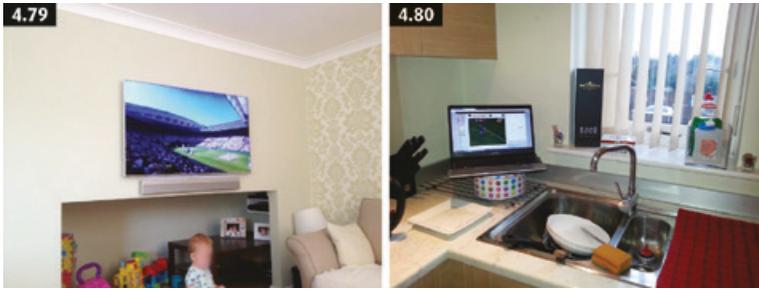
As with all the themes for male posting, if a post can be given a quirky or funny edge, or associated with toilets, then it probably will be – as in this picture of a urinal (Fig. 4.78).

A new genre of posts among men in The Glades are images showing how males manage to watch football notwithstanding the pressures to adapt to domestic life as parents and householders. This might include a posting explaining how one has installed 3D television in the living room, or how one has set things up so as to continue watching while doing the washing up (Figs 4.79 and 4.80).

This intense male orientation to football is the main reason why people in The Glades post 251 photographs of sports compared to 65 for El Mirador (Appendix Figure 1). The figures are closer in terms of sports images considered important enough to post on their walls shown



Men also like to post humorous images, such as this picture of a urinal



Males will post ingenious methods they have devised to ensure that they don't miss sporting action while occupied by domestic tasks

in Appendix Figure 4. However, the El Mirador images focused upon the World Cup, while those from The Glades tended to be broader and to include the personal involvement of the person posting.

Adults are generally less worried about being seen in association with alcohol on Facebook than teenagers who might be viewed as underage. At the same time there is less of a frisson of drink as an instrument in showing how good a time one is having than in teenagers' postings. Instead it is simply the expected accompaniment to life. So compared to the postings of teenagers in The Glades, adult postings are more likely to be simply photographs of drinks or of men drinking mostly beer (Figs 4.81, 4.82, 4.83 and 4.84). Men seem happy to replicate these genres whether at home or abroad. For example, one of these is a holiday shot from Bulgaria, but it could equally well have been taken in England.

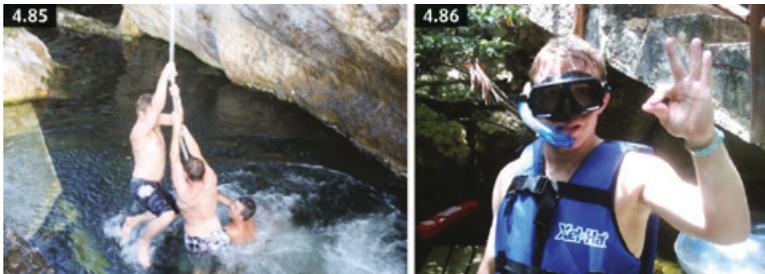
Young adults often include sporting activities among their holiday shots, though this may be found for both females and males (Figs 4.85 and 4.86).

Occasionally postings relate to more explicitly 'laddish' behaviour such as vomiting in a toilet, peeing in public, getting a black eye, falling asleep drunk in a street, taking a photo of a mate while they were sleeping or anything else that gives the connotation of having had a 'rough' – that is, a good – night out (Figs 4.87, 4.88, 4.89, 4.90 and 4.91).

What are missing in The Glades, which only becomes apparent when we compare these images to El Mirador, are photographs that simply focus upon a male trying to look good. This represents a major difference between the two field sites. Indeed males in The Glades are generally less inclined to post images of themselves alone, with 359 examples compared to the 696 examples of Trinidadian men (Appendix Figure 1). What the two sites have in common is that men are far more concerned

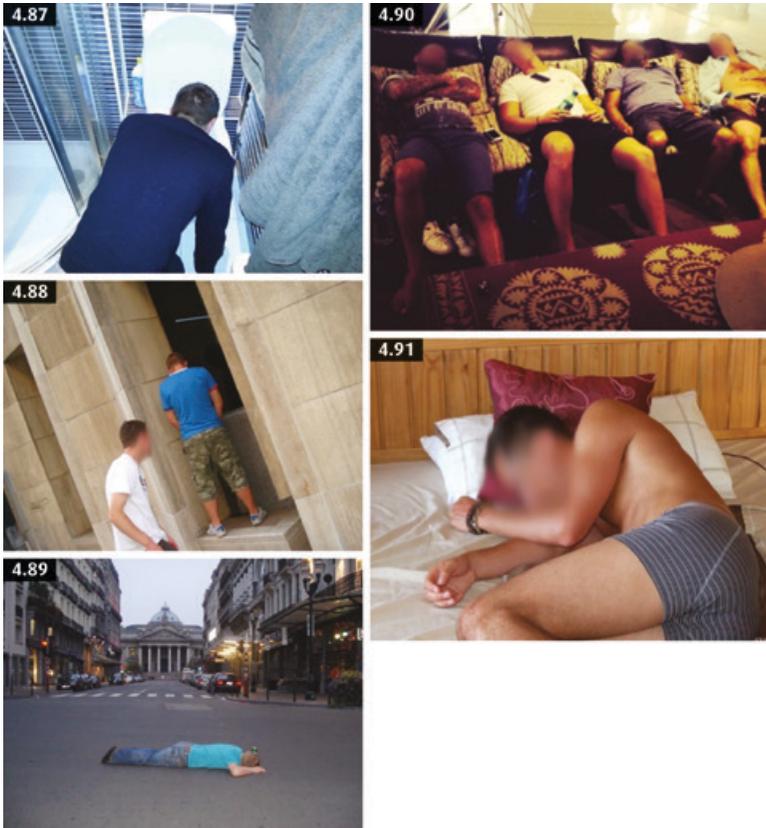


Beer is established as the expected accoutrement to adult male life



Young males often include sporty activities in their holiday postings

to show themselves in direct association with an individual female than females would be to associate themselves with an individual male. In The Glades the average male has 16 photos of himself with one other woman, while the average female has only seven images of herself with one other male (Appendix Figure 1). Men may not care about the clothes



Laddish behaviour on holiday signifies having had a good time

they wear, but they certainly care about which women they are associated with when being photographed.

Rather than posting images of themselves, men will often present themselves vicariously through association with objects. We have already seen this with football and drink. Another instructive genre was food. At least among the football-oriented group, food was not shown as examples of craft or skill, but rather directly to proclaim 'masculinity'. Types of food posted included burgers, chips, crisps, steak sandwich, an Indian tikka masala and pretty much anything that is generally considered unhealthy (Figs 4.92, 4.93 and 4.94).

Men in The Glades generally do not post in ways that suggest much by way of aspiration or materialism. This represents a quite remarkable



The only food worth posting for many males is that which is conspicuously unhealthy



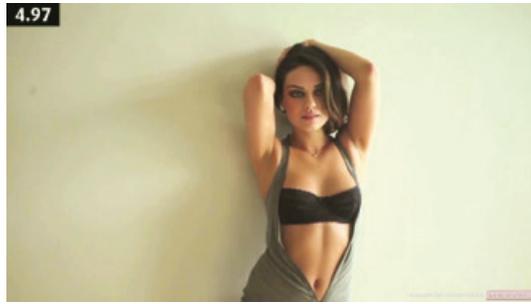
contrast to most of our other field sites.⁷ Just occasionally they will celebrate a purchase or post some item they would like to buy, but this is relatively rare (Figs 4.95 and 4.96).

Perhaps surprisingly, there were no images in this group connected to buying expensive gadgets such as a new phone. Nor were there many postings of cars and motorbikes, with one exception. A much older male had adopted this as his particular grounding for confirming his masculinity, through captions that he himself claimed were clearly intended



It is relatively rare for anyone to post objects that celebrate a new purchase

'Babe' shots are found,
but are not common



In strong contrast to El Mirador it is extremely rare for people in The Glades to post non-humorous references to sex

to deter any female interest: 'my 1st v8 p6 rover still miss the loopy old bus with its leaky rear axle which meant not much in the way of rear brakes slightly erratic borg warner 35 gear box and rotten rear inner arches so the interior smelt a bit compost heapy but with the twin weber 40dcoe kit it used to eat xj jags and 3 litre capris 4 breakfast.'

An equally strong contrast with El Mirador is that while sex is more common in male postings in the Trinidad site, it has only a very limited presence in The Glades. There are a few 'babe' shots (Fig. 4.97), but any direct reference to sex is extremely rare. Indeed the hashtag that went with this posting may summarise the prevailing attitude:

'so I get into to work to find a present on my desk #awkward' (Fig. 4.98).

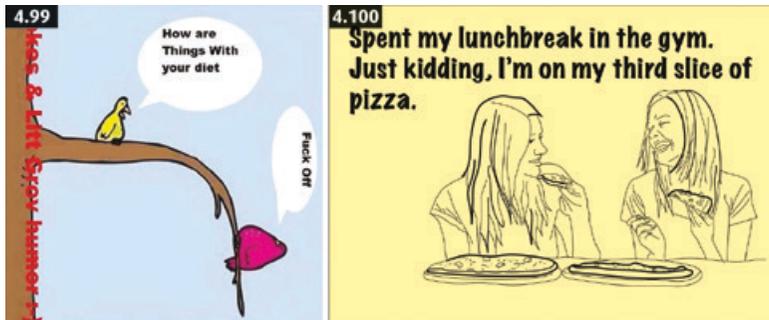
The adult female

There is a reason that the last section was given the title 'Masculinity' while this one is called 'The adult female', and also why it will be considerably shorter than the discussion of masculinity. This is because gender is not symmetrical, with women playing a different cultural role than men. In Chapter 6 the topic is 'the Englishness of posting', and the material presented there will be female-dominated. This is because

women in The Glades (as in many societies) have a greater responsibility to 'stand for' and objectify wider social values, including English traits such as domesticity and the typical conservative values associated with suburbia.⁸ This leaves men freer to use their postings to develop a more specific genre of masculinity. In addition this section is less concerned with older females, the core material being drawn from profiles of mothers in their twenties and thirties. In The Glades we find much less emphasis on anything that might be called femininity. Instead women appear more in terms of social roles and responsibilities, such as mothers and housewives. In Chapter 6 we will look in more detail at this subsumption of the female to their own children and other ways in which women demonstrate modesty and self-effacement. It is discussed there because it also provides such a striking contrast with the postings in El Mirador.

Nevertheless that leaves several contrasts that can be explored here. One of the clearest is that of food and its consequences, an issue of obvious concern to women. It was noted that young men seemed to post pretty much any food that was significantly fattening, presumably as an act of bravado. Women, however, instead of posting images of healthy food, tend to post direct references to their concerns with body size and images as in 'Finally joined the Gym... First session nice and early morning.. size 6/8... here I come baby... Let the new ME begin...!!' The relevant visual postings are dominated by those that make fun of their own constant obsessions with dieting (Fig. 4.99 and 4.100).

Where women post food photographs, these are almost all of food that they have made themselves. Perhaps because the period of this study coincided with the immensely popular television programme



References to dieting, or to being fat, are a very common theme of postings, but only for women



Images of baking were dominated by home baking for the family



The most common object of home baking is the cupcake

‘The Great British Bake Off’, it was baking that dominated. In addition, because most of the people being discussed here were mothers, the baking was dominated by things made for children and family (Figs 4.101 and 4.102). Within this genre, photos of cupcakes were clearly dominant (Figs 4.103 and 4.104).

Some images also featured cakes made for charitable purposes, alongside homemade jam (Figs 4.105 and 4.106). Other meals that came



It is common to post images of baking, jam-making or other home cooking done for charitable purposes



4.107
Good quality cooking or meals were seen as more suited to Instagram than Facebook



4.108
Similarly, it is rare to post food made by others on Facebook, though as here a birthday spread is appropriate

out especially well may merit a posting of Facebook, but generally this was seen as better suited to Instagram as a 'craft' picture (Fig. 4.107). It was rare to post food made by others. One example was this spread of pub food that represented a birthday party (Fig. 4.108).

There were no sporting images posted by women that compared in volume and intensity with male postings about football, though several had images from the 2012 London Olympic Games (Fig. 4.109).

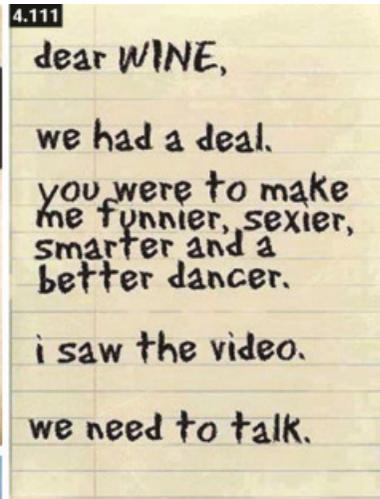


4.109
Women have no equivalent to football for males, but may occasionally post sports such as the Olympic Games

If men's relationship to alcohol is dominated by postings of beer, as noted above, women have a clear equivalent in wine. The posts generally showed no attempt to claim expertise and connoisseurship of wine varieties, but are rather about a generic category called 'wine'. While men tend to focus on the beer in and of itself, wine for women is in effect a relationship, and mostly a difficult and ambiguous one (Figs 4.110, 4.111, 4.112 and 4.113).

Sometimes, however, certain fickle women will betray this core relationship for another (Fig. 4.114).

The one 'breakout' genre that seems to have developed for young women are hen parties, more common as postings on Facebook than the male stag party. These also allow those who are somewhat older to



One of the most popular themes for female posting is wine as a generic category

revert back to teenage genres discussed in Chapter 2 where people can just look silly (Figs 4.115 and 4.116).

Women will also sometimes post a photo from the various versions of a girls' night out; these are now common and may take place at any time and in a wide variety of venues (Fig. 4.117).

Men rarely post about relationships per se, but relationships in and of themselves are frequently commented upon in women's profiles. Within these there are three fairly equal varieties. The first is posting about one's relationship to men in general (Fig. 4.118).



4.114 Women also occasionally focus on their relationship to other forms of alcohol



4.115
4.116 A 'breakout' genre for female posting has become hen parties



4.117 Women will also sometimes post versions of a 'girls' night out'



4.118 Women post about their relationship to men in general

The second is posting about one's relationship to children, either as expressions of affection or as the prosaic reality of chores (Fig. 4.119).



Women post frequently about their relationship to children



The third common relationship genre for women is female friendship

The third is a genre of posting about one's relationship to other women as close friends (Fig. 4.120).

The other key area of posting is one of general humour in relation to housework and breaking free of household chores. These are discussed within a more general focus upon humour in Chapter 6.

Homosexuality

We have included a short section on homosexuality for two reasons. First it does something to balance the inevitably crude generalisations around gender that arise when the topic is presented so briefly. The other reason is that it represents a stark contrast with Trinidad, where it is still extremely rare that a person would come out as gay on Facebook. Even in The Glades only two of the people we followed online were explicit about being gay within their Facebook profile, and they represent polar opposites in how this is portrayed. A young lesbian woman has almost no explicit references to this aspect of her life. It is not that she hides it. Simply that you would have to extrapolate this information from the scenes of holidays with another woman and very occasional references in support of gay marriage and so forth. This makes her quite similar to most heterosexuals in this study, who also are generally reticent about matters of sexuality once they are beyond a certain age.

By contrast, a middle-aged male has constant discussions in his status updates in which he vociferously argues about gay rights and other issues. Yet perhaps most explicit are his profile pictures



Some people who are gay almost never mention their sexuality on Facebook, while others make frequent references to it



Memes are often used to oppose anti-gay stereotypes

(Figs 4.121 and 4.122). Other genres include support for gay rights movements, as well as memes that he views as refuting stereotypes of masculinity, almost invariably through humour (Figs 4.123 and 4.124).

Social class

The other contrast that we will briefly explore within The Glades is class. The ethnography of The Glades suggested a rather different conclusion about class from the way it is generally understood in the UK,

as a distinction between relatively equal fractions of working class and middle class people. One of the most clear-cut pieces of evidence for something quite different came from these visual posts on social media. In surveys the majority of English people continue to describe themselves as working class, but the same surveys show that the salience of class has declined. As a result class affiliation is not a strong indicator for predicting attitudes to other issues.⁹

Within The Glades it was hard to see any clear distinctions that would correspond to this self-designation. Most people in The Glades seem to post images which would be quite difficult to see as class-specific. The conventional boundary between middle and working class is pretty much invisible, and would certainly not have emerged from the pattern of images posted. For example, every generalisation made in the previous section on gender would have been equally true for people who call themselves middle and working class. Indeed, one could go further and say that we see no evidence from the contents of our study that a class divide is any way apparent from what people post on Facebook.

Instead, there is a single, very clear contrast that pits around 90 per cent of the population in opposition to a specific fraction. The latter represents people who almost all live either within social housing or, in some cases, the cheapest private rental accommodation. Even within that group, however, which represents around 17 per cent of the population, there were those who rejected any association with that context and used education or other means to distance themselves from it. In short, their postings would be much like the rest of The Glades.

What remains then is a group that constitutes probably only around 10 per cent of the population of The Glades or less, though it would certainly be higher in more urban locations. This represents only a small section of those people who would call themselves working class, but this 10 per cent does have a clearly defined accent, language, demeanour and concerns that divide them from the rest of the population. This was clear during the ethnography generally, but becomes especially apparent when we examine their Facebook postings.

They provide an even stronger sense of overt masculinity than the rest of the population, but in their case women would also make a more strident claim to femininity – though this is a femininity that focuses more on being strong than being pretty. Partly this reflects the fact that the group we worked with included several who had become mothers at around 17.

Of the people we came to know well, masculinity was clearly associated with the military and associations with the army. This young



People living in social housing are more likely to post images affirming masculinity

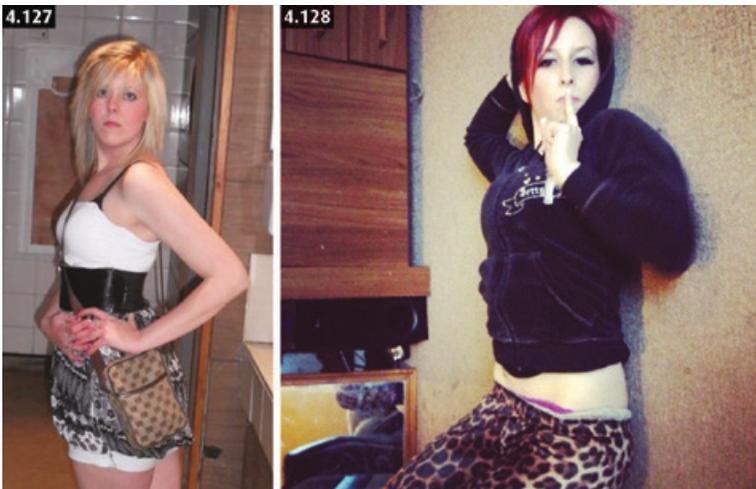


The army is an important route out of low-income areas

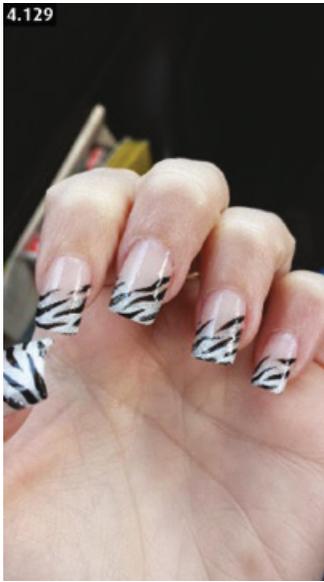
male creates his look through a montage of four photo images, including wearing a helmet and being substituted by a tiger (Fig. 4.125).

Meanwhile his friend, who actually is in the army, poses both formally in uniform and armed (Fig. 4.126).

More distinct still were some of the women. They are much more likely to post shots intended to show off sexy clothing or the sense of a strong female character that is more analogous with the machismo of the males (Figs 4.127 and 4.128).



Women in social housing often post as strong characters, complementing those of masculinity



The same women are more likely to refer overtly to a sexy or strong look

Similar sentiments can be expressed through shopping and objects such as these photos (Figs 4.129 and 4.130), with captions that refer to sexy new shoes or nails.

These same women are far more likely to be explicit both with regard to sex and to their own problems (Figs 4.131, 4.132 and 4.133). At the same time they were the group most likely to post strongly sentimental messages and images that relate to close family relationships, especially to their own children (Figs 4.134 and 4.135). They are also more likely to show tattoos of their children (Figs 4.136 and 4.137). Finally they are the group most likely to post more sentimental messages around gender relations. These may in certain cases reflect the sometimes troubled nature of those relationships (Fig. 4.138).

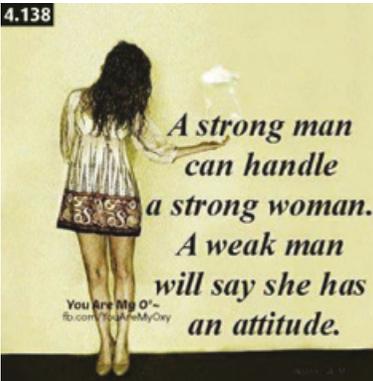
As is usually the case in such reportage, a chapter that tries to locate the normative is based on generalisation. It was important to include sections on posts both by those who identify with homosexuality and by those in this separated-out class fraction because such posts are anomalous with regards to wider trends in posting, which will be explored further in Chapter 6 as a generic 'Englishness' of posting. But we could then break up those categories further. The female and male gay examples were entirely different from each other in how they represented homosexuality on Facebook. Indeed, this is one of the few cases in this book where the exemplification of differences has come down

Women living in social housing are more likely to refer directly to sex and to their own financial circumstances



These women are also more likely to post sentimental memes about their core relationships

Posting tattoos referencing one's children was a genre found only in this community



There are also memes asserting clear gendered values

to the contrast between two individuals. Throughout this book, however, we try to recognise that our task is to explore normative and typical genres which hold for most people in the field sites, while continuing to acknowledge that no particular individual need accord with local or other stereotypes; there is always room for exceptions and atypical behaviour. This is especially important to bear in mind when we come to general issues of English and Trinidadian postings in Chapters 6 and 7.