Nostalgic Identities: A Study in the Interactive Process of Mexican/Mexican American Users in Facebook

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NOSTALGIC IDENTITIES: A STUDY IN THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS OF MEXICAN / MEXICAN AMERICAN USERS IN FACEBOOK

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NOSTALGIC IDENTITIES: A STUDY IN THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS OF MEXICAN / MEXICAN AMERICAN USERS IN FACEBOOK

by

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Abstract

Online social networking is a growing phenomenon. All over the globe people engage in disembodied interactions with one another taking for granted a compression of time and space. Most social analysis of online settings has been studied from a symbolic interactionist perspective in which the concept of multiple/pluralized identity helps explain how users identify themselves in disembodied contexts.

This paper intends to discover how the Mexican / Mexican American identity is presented, managed and produced by users in the Social Networking Site Facebook using the concept of nostalgia in how identity is presented in a disembodied context.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Using as inspiration Vila’s (1997) concept of the narrative identity, the following analysis examines how Mexican communities originally from, or having once resided in the El Paso/ Ciudad Juarez border region, tend to engage in nostalgic discussions and self presentations in Facebook regarding their identities which they associate with El Paso and/or Juarez. This phenomenon takes place when either Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users are living elsewhere than the El Paso / Ciudad Juarez border region or when Mexican/Mexican American users switch residence from Juarez to El Paso or vice versa. Employing nostalgia as a theoretical concept, both physical distance and cultural displacement will be key elements in defining the nostalgic identity. It accentuates past experience in the form of looking back at a state of being that no longer is (Davis, 1979; Holbrook, 1991).

Further described in chapter two, the literature review, this research will employ symbolic interactionism and narrativity as frameworks to examine several examples of online content. Although some visual items will be incorporated in this research, such as the analysis of personal profile photos/ group photos, online content will mostly consist of text drawn from publicly available postings from Facebook.

To determine the extent to which nostalgic constructions of identity exist in online interaction, this study will look at how constructions of identity are being managed in largely disembodied environments. This research will therefore include samples of conversations, comments and expressions that illustrate how Mexican identity is
symbolically understood and structured in the Social Networking Site (SNS) Facebook and what aspects of the Mexican identity continue to appear, explicitly or implicitly, in the production of an online self as well as how might these be enacted and performed differently in online reality. As will be evident in chapter three, the methodology section, this will be a largely content-analysis/theoretical paper, using an interpretative approach of publicly available online posts and photos to look at how identity is being perceived as well as performed by Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans.

Although predominantly focusing on the concept of identity, this study is also an attempt to seize the intricacy of the El Paso / Ciudad Juárez border area as both a place of cultural hybridity and socioeconomic interdependency. With a population of well over two million residents the Paso del Norte region, which comprises Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, is an example of a global manufacturing region in which job opportunities have attracted migrants from central parts of Mexico as well as immigrants seeking access into the United States (Staudt, Fuentes & Monarrez, 2010)

Juarez alone contains approximately 1.3 million residents having the second largest number of maquiladoras in Mexico according to the Center for Interdisciplinary Health Research and Evaluation of the University of Texas at El Paso

A highly unique area, the Paso del Norte region has been characterized by deep commercial exchange and continuous movement of goods and people, allowing the region to be comparable to what Castells (1989) envisioned as a space of flows: in this case a locality where the constant flux of resources and information shapes the life trajectory of its inhabitants in a way that daily life rarely feels fixed.
Finally, the ongoing violence that has assailed Ciudad Juarez since the year 2008 is also relevant to the present study. As Monarrez (2011) maintains, the most common expression of this violence has been homicide considering that in 2008 alone 1,607 people were murdered in the city of Juarez. Much of this violence has been the result of the continuous war between Mexico’s leading drug cartels, a struggle that has placed the population of Juarez at constant risk of the violence (Monarrez, 2011). Yet, paradoxically, El Paso has managed to win acclaim as one of the safest cities in the United States (McKinley, 2009). Being a study of identity and society, the background of the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border region along with the violent social conditions in Ciudad Juarez is critical to consider amidst the various theories of selfhood.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction to Literature Review

In this chapter I describe several theoretical orientations in the study of both online activity in SNSs, such as Facebook, and the concept of identity. I will thus introduce various perspectives on personality theory, this additionally having an impact on how online interaction has been studied. Terms like online productions of self and nostalgic presentations of self will also be clarified as theoretical concepts. Being the most extensive part of the paper, I have decided to divide this chapter into two main parts. The first part will deal exclusively with what has been said of internet sociology and identity theory and not so much with the actual research and case study of this paper.

The second part’s theory will serve to analyze the specific case study at hand while still within the confines of identity theory as explained in the first part. The theoretical models of part two of the literature, namely nostalgia and narrativity, will remain above all explanatory of a particular aspect of identity that was selected to demonstrate how Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users are dealing with specific ways of interacting. Furthermore, the first sections of part one will treat the concept of identity without social structure, very much in the same pragmatic vein of social frameworks like symbolic interaction. The second part will describe a critical alternative to the identity strategies and the roles of social actors. Put differently, the critiques of
small scale theory like symbolic interaction will be included in this paper precisely because they would also apply to Internet sociology.

**Brief Overview of Literature Review, Part 1**

Firstly, a discussion of micro-sociology as a favorable model for studying a new interactive environment will allow differentiating online from offline styles of communication. Secondly, a summary of the foundations of symbolic interaction, which is used extensively in this paper, will be laid out to readers. This includes the idea of social actors, in this specific case users, possessing various personas and selves that they may manifest or hide from the public.

Since SNSs like other internet platforms and settings are disembodied, meaning that participants within the interactive process do not see each other physically or face to face, a brief discussion of the body as a facilitator for monitoring appropriate social behavior and conduct will help clarify later concepts like gating features or physical impediments that are usually absent in online relations.

From here, I will mention how symbolic interactionism entered the World Wide Web, studying SNSs and other similar online spaces through the production and enactment of various selves or personas.

The second portion of part 1 will approach identity through a more critical perspective that incorporates social structure and constraints on individual expression. It will look at symbolic interactionism’s own critique as too pragmatic ignoring in this the more subtle, often hidden mechanisms, by which online participation is regulated. It will then look at how modern media has also complicated theories of selfhood through more fleeting and evocative performances of identity. Although terminology pertaining to
symbolic interactionism as well as concepts of social psychology will be used to discuss the results chapter, the critical model of identity will be the aspect that will least appear in the case study of this paper. It will re-appear in the limitations chapter precisely because of the very difficulties of tapping into this area in any substantial or satisfying manner.

**Brief Overview of Literature Review, Part 2**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the second part of the literature will deal with the concepts of narrativity and nostalgia to understand how the self is presented through the topic of memory. The analysis pertaining to this study will thus employ theories of nostalgia to understand a kind of performance and the meaning it carries within this interactive background.

It will study constructions of identity rooted in place and time and their various manifestations, what forms of nostalgia are able to impact future behavior, strengthen the self’s re-incorporation to the social ties of yesterday and trace through continual remembrance the formation of the self-concept, its national identification and its demographics of self-understanding. Finally I have given particular attention to music and food’s value in reconstructing the past in social platforms. This was in part due to the high presence of such topics in Facebook.
Literature Review, Part 1

Microsociology

Up until recently social research of online communities has remained above all, minuscule and individually-oriented in its scope. Romantic relations in online personals (Gibbs, Ellison and Heino, 2006; Mckenna, Green and Gleason, 2002; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan and McCabe, 2005) as well as the management of identity in various online settings (Suler, 2002; Bargh, McKenna, Fitzsimons 2002) are usually themes that have interested social scientists studying the Internet. Among other topics of online research is an increasing fascination with online gaming communities and virtual life. Numerous studies have indeed followed with interest the way networking processes take place in virtual games. Williams and Caplan’s (2007) research, which looks at the role of voice in online games, is a good example.

Studies of online interaction, despite being from a social and therefore group scale collective standpoint, have appeared very similar to psychology studies where theories of individual personality obtain immediate interest. The idea of social actors possessing various personas (Goffman, 1959), further examined in this section, has been a regular aspect in analytic psychology. Motivational theorists (Jung, 1951; Rogers, 1951) have discussed the self or self-concept in terms of a holism integrated by various relational parts or selves. Markus and Nurius (1986) have similarly theorized in possible selves: an outgrowth of the actual self which has yet to be made visible to the public.
Given the different manner in which actors behave within technology-mediated environments, such as online sites, it comes as no surprise that small group oriented theory like symbolic interactionism has been insightful in depicting the dynamics of online social networking. Following I provide a brief history and description of the approach.

A Brief Overview of Symbolic Interactionism

Fundamental in the development of symbolic interaction (SI) is the capacity of individual actors to see themselves as legible social objects. A concept that social theorist George Herbert Mead (1934) had referred to earlier as the generalized other. While engaging in any interactive process the social actor, in need to discover the other person’s impression of him or her, is invited to imagine how that person might be at that very moment, before or after it, perceiving her or him. So doing, such an individual has created another self since the conscious effort to step away from one’s own shoes and into the other’s has made a separation of self necessary. Mead (1934), echoing Cooley’s concept of a Looking Glass Self (1902), saw individuals as socially conscious, incorporating the social in self definition and construction.

Formulated by Blummer (1969) as a strand within the social sciences, SI further elaborated on Mead’s various selves while explaining social behavior through the group construction of meaning. Important to its development was also Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical model in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Symbolic interactionists sought to understand social reality as arising exclusively from the interactive process.
The Body

Another aspect that makes online interaction unique is its mostly disembodied nature, I say mostly since circumstances where webcams are used dilute this. Ford (2001), reviewing a popular book of gay relationship sites sees the webcam as neither subject nor an object, sign or body but something entirely unique. On a different study (Brunet and Schmidt, 2007) the use of web cams is able to recreate a context where an emotion like shyness is experienced very similar to face-to-face encounters. Though certain scenarios might challenge the meaning of the physically present, the Internet is still predominantly a disembodied experience where users don't see each other physically. Zhao et al. (2008), notice how the ability of actors/users to remain relatively anonymous is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the internet. He also maintains that depending on the Web site, external accountability or control may vary in accordance to how actions inside the Internet are retraced to social reality outside of it.

Borrowing from Claire’s (2001) concept of the body as the final site of human experience, wherein pain is no longer metaphoric, it is possible to think of the physical body as a facilitator of social order. Turner (1992) notes how, throughout history, social practices have aimed at regulating the body through various interventions. As the ascribed part of the self, the physical body facilitates both its own discernment and violence. Foucault (1981) specifically locates the body and its discipline where modern systems of power operate.

A vague body status can be discussed in the online world where ambivalent or suggestive presence/absence of the body mystifies the body concept. Hardey (2002)
similarly notes that in the process of constructing the virtual self one is leaving behind
the actual physical body.

Since this study includes a selection of photos from SNSs, the bodies of people
will gain some importance. Photography in SNSs has often been discussed as an
instrument of desirable self presentation (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). Scholars
in this vein (Boyd, 2004; Dominick, 1999; Donath, 2007) have therefore integrated the
strategic manipulation of visuals in staging a kind of technology-mediated performance.
The body that appears in such photos, however, is a different one than the actual
physical body. As Chalfen (1987) and Barthes (1981) theorized on the meaning of
personal photography way before the internet, photography allows reconstructing past
experience by rediscovery. Like the context, the body inside the photo is a narrational
tool, its incorporation part of a visual story-making process. Chalfen (1987) uses the
term “visual symbolic form” to refer to a type of mediated performance.

The various features of SNSs and other online environments only complicate this
further; The impression kit available to actors (Goffman 1961), no longer under the
constraints and pressures of the physically present, expands to include options not
possible in non-mediated/ physical settings. Gating features (McKenna & Green,
2002) are associated with the body’s stubbornness in realizing and convincing others of
certain identity claims. As the following section demonstrates, it is through the
disembodiment of social actors in online settings, that constructions of self are realized
differently than in face-to-face scenarios.
The Enactment of Selfhood in SNSs

We retain from symbolic interaction the precept of a pluralized identity to describe the unique nature of technology-mediated relations. Understanding discursive actions to be interceded by various technologies when communicating through the Web, we find the temporal invisibility of the body to have an effect on the self-concept and its portrayal. This enactment of the self in the online world has been described through two fundamental characterizations.

First, there is an extension of available personas from which actors may pick according to online situations. Users may select from various self-presentations made possible by the anonymity that many online spaces provide to users (Zhao et al, 2008).

Moreover, the online world, which Turkle (1996) envisioned as an environment for tinkering with identity, allows the elaboration of various selves not possible in embodied physical settings. One such self has been theorized by Suler (2002) as the hidden self, an extension of the self that is not public. The hidden self, however, may surface in various online environments (Suler, 2002). In a similar fashion, earlier readings of identity such as Higgins’s (1987) formulation of the concepts of “ideal self,” “ought self,” and “actual self,” and Markus and Nurius’s (1986) “possible selves” have acquired renewed interest as online interaction has made other versions of selfhood more visible.

In remaining anonymous, the performer has little to lose in disclosing other selves. Social constraints have been significantly reduced as the notion of boundary has not been crystallized in any definite or concrete way in online settings. Early studies of Internet identity demonstrated how individuals engaged in a “play-act of being someone
else” (Rheingold, 1995; Surrat, 1998; Turkle, 1995). The nature of these environments did facilitate, however, an experimentation with self-construction, as well as bringing into being aspects of a socially-repressed personality. As playgrounds allow children to develop their personalities, chat rooms, blogs and online dungeons become, as Zhao et al. (2008) put it, safe environments for training self-expression.

More nonimous settings like dating personals or SNSs, on the other hand, have had a different impact in how identity is produced and handled. As an example, various studies have shown dating sites and online personals to facilitate more honest and genuine presentations of the self than totally anonymous settings (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Walker, 2000; Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005). Zhao (2006) emphasizes how the online world is made of many environments that are not entirely anonymous.

Able to retrace individuals physically, the concept of anchored relationships explains how certain online activities can be used to locate individuals offline. One, after all, does not know only strangers in online reality (Zhao, 2006).

In the case of dating sites, Ellison et al. (2006) argue how the relative nonimity of such an environment, a context that entertains the possibility of future offline encounters, forces actors to be more honest about their identity claims. Yurchisin et al (2005) additionally mention that these honest announcements of self are carried out with some exaggeration and manipulation while remaining essentially true.

The second characterization involves, more specifically, that disembodiment of the social actor in online reality, that within disembodied interactions, certain impediments associated with the body “gating features” are no longer present
(McKenna et al., 2002). Given the bodies visibility in face-to-face interaction, the physical encounter is able to frustrate many of what Stone (1981) recognizes as identity announcements: personal attributes that individuals want to convince others of having in a public process. What is more, this can apply whether such claims are true or false. To further illustrate this, in actual life, individuals have a hard time undoing first impressions of others, not knowing that underneath the occasionally stubborn skin, is the more complete and assertive person.

This second characterization of course explains the first characterization. The easily discernible “bodily” features of physique and shyness, temporarily brushed aside inside the Internet, now allow for a concentration of other aspects of the self concept such as more intimate and personal ones (McKenna & Green, 2002).

The third and final characterization considers the actor’s ability to re-invent identity continuously. Drawing from the concept of recreated biographies (Zhao, et al., 2008), presentations of self in online environments are also trial and error, accommodating constructs until they finally adjust to the “perceived” online context. Profile features in SNSs I would compare to Goffmanesque props (1959) which the internet performer might employ for desirable self-presentations.

The ability of users in Facebook to change self descriptions “About me” in their profiles illustrates this reinvention of self. I give here my own account as a Facebook user of how I have changed self descriptions a couple of times. This has mostly involved articulating the presentation of hobbies and things that interest me. Thus in initiating a kind of perception of myself I am subtly led to be consistent with such an image. The self which Altheide (2000) has referred to a strategy for social purposes, is
important in SNSs. If I click “like” on certain items, brands, television shows linking them to my personality type, I am announcing to be a type of person. Those who know me better offline and also belong to my network might, like in a poker game, speculate on the possibility that I am bluffing or exaggerating a bit. In a way, I have to reassemble Daniel online since my immediate social circle expects a certain degree of coherence between my online self and my offline self. As mentioned earlier SNSs like google + and Facebook try to act as social life itself or a hyperreality of such. adapting faithfully an online template of the embodied social network existing outside the internet.

Though more limited, identity can hide well enough in SNSs like Facebook. Indeed, in certain instances an experimentation with all that one can be might even feel encouraged. In effect, there are less liberties to totally anonymous online settings, yet self-presentation in SNSs is still very lenient when compared to embodied settings, a manipulation of the self concept is still well-accommodated. The average Facebook user might not even pay the slightest attention to a change of information from a contact. This of course would be outrageous in actual life: one cannot simply disappear, hide, manipulate and rearrange performances on the spot.

A Critique of An Entirely Micro-Social Approach

Remaining at the small-group level, models of individual action and response have made sense in depicting online behavior whose consequences are not well known at other levels. Due to this uncertainty, the application of social theory in online relations has been difficult. This study, which intends to find how a construct of identity based in physical space is transmitted into an environment where space and distance become abstract, is asking not only that a comparison between two different contexts be made
but additionally is inquiring how particular systems of meaning are being transmitted from one context to another and in what forms.

Early critics of symbolic interaction (Huber, 1973;) pointed out its largely pragmatic orientation as a source for bias while more recently Stryker and Vryan (2003) find interactionism less a theory than a theoretical framework. Others (Khun, 1964; Meltzer et al., 1975) have accused interactionists of paying little attention to social structure. Structure, for purpose of this paper, I will operationalize as all the ‘outside” formal interventions that would impose norms and constraints to online behavior and content.

While Stryker (1980) has made significant breakthroughs in locating where structure and identity intersect, it has been difficult to determine developments of symbolic interaction in the online world where identity, as has been evidenced in this study, is less a stable concept.

There is an assumption of online investigation, I believe, that has placed actors as mere interpreters of online content, measuring their goals in congruence with online resources and appropriating the internet to meet their own agendas. The model does not consider how online communication might also be structured through the set-up of situations orchestrated outside internet. Altheide's (2000) re-formulation of a symbolic interactionism for modern media may not address the Internet directly, but it is in his analysis of information technology where online dynamics might best be portrayed.

Most symbolic interactionists have studied the time, place and manner of action that situates performance while very few have inquired on the origins of the definitions themselves (Foote, 1951). As Mchugh (1968) had noticed earlier, the group standpoint
is able to appear commonplace when its origin can go unquestioned. In this manner discourse is rarely independent of prior discourse: having an effect on how definitions of the situation are always made in reference to some notion of prior interpretation. As mentioned earlier, one cannot simply create an identity of one’s fancy. Identity and its presentation is limited instead to collectively-understood enactments of self while in evocative scenarios (Altheide, 2000). These I would theorize as online prescriptions of behavior, self-constructions similar to contained self-expressions. If much, it is one’s personal enactments of these available recipes for behavior that others recognize as his or her unique online personality. As Grossberg (1992) has pointed out, audiences produce their own cultural environment from the available cultural resources they can manipulate. Moreover the very styles of communication through which Facebook users interact with one another might be more policed than what they usually seem. Facebook, for instance, in which concise writing along with its grammatical rules is frequently ignored in favor of more efficient and quick communication, can hide the fact that certain norms for expression do exist. This is comparable, albeit in the context of contemporary journalism and not so much online syntax, to when philosopher Slavoj Zizek told WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange that he had broken rules about how to break the rules regarding journalism. As in the actual physical world, being original has its limits. The online version only enlarges the plethora of available groups to which one’s enactments might hopefully coincide.

Identity in such a sense would be more along the lines of a social production than an individual reaction to group dynamics. Though subjective in themselves, categories of identity are situated in their origin, tracing people socially through fleeting
symbols and attitudes from different time periods and places (Altheide, 2000). Stone and Farberman (1970) had commented earlier on how Goffman’s (1959) definitions of the situation were processes that, having been defined earlier by certain individuals, would impose norms, guidelines and constraints on the new participants’ social behavior. Power, or its lack thereof, becomes synonymous to the ability or inability of actors to define situations for themselves and others (Altheide 2000).

In technology mediated practices, online communication being an example, there is a similar scenario, but there is no fixed environment. Tracing the sources of meaning and precise constraints on conduct have been replaced by sudden insinuations of how things are and should be outside of online reality. It would take a larger effort to detect specific definitions of the situation since the very transient nature of online life, produces a kind of context more temporally-imagined than real. Altheide (2000) then finds the “Goffmanesque” precept meaningless in understanding information technology, and instead focuses on the identity of actors through the formats that contain it. In the case of the present study, formats of nostalgic regional affiliation will contain conducts and presentations that correspond with such.

Another effort to connect the micro-dimensions of self construction with larger processes has been defining identity as a resource (Zimmerman and Poliner, 1970), insinuating a self in reference to more collective agendas. Within SNSs this might include constructing a self based on what is novel or trendy at the moment. One might, for example, be opinionated on a popular issue that is being discussed on Facebook without experiencing any serious sanctions. If anything, another user might make explicit her or his disagreement to one’s comment and perhaps with insults. The
specified posture towards the issue, by itself, would offer very little “social” significance. Instead, the more important sanction would be reactions to somebody not knowing the topic of discussion or contradicting her or himself in such a way that, being outside of Altheide’s (2000) format, is evident to “almost everybody”. I would go further by saying, that within online environments, violations of behavior would more precisely entail presentations falling outside the performances understood to be commonsensical to different group categories.

Another case could simply involve users whose comments and self-descriptions get ignored, occasionally illustrating the more subtle mechanisms through which online personality is shaped. I would include here the presence of a type of virtual ostracism that molds online conduct to indirectly serve certain interests. This way, users of SNSs are forced to discuss over and over the same topics, topics that certain outlets of information reproduce online. Within this framework one must in some way fashion the presentation of self according to how interactions are being interpreted in specific moments and frames of reference, not so much definite situations.

Suffice it to say that a temporal/evocative, rather than essentialist, form of identity has become important in the dissemination of mass media and information technology since such media have complicated the definition of the situation in which older concepts of identity rested (Altheide, 2000).

Identity today belongs, in other words, to formulas of sociality-addressed popular culture and mass media, forms that Altheide (2000) like Hall (1997) and Denzin (1997) have envisioned as rubrics containing identity. Modern social behavior therefore rarely corresponds to a definite “Now” that organizes human conduct spatially.
As Cerulo (1997) noted, many studies of identity before the 1970’s explored the formation of self through the definition of the situation. Publications thereafter shifted to group agency and political action as well as long-distance interaction via a virtual generalized other.

Another significant change entails a postmodern inclination that attempts to capture the role of media imagery in the creation of strategic but less substantive identities (Shalin, 1993). Such a postmodern self therefore is better understood relationally instead of individualistically (Karp & Yoels, 1993).

The huge influence of media in shaping individual experience has been discussed by Altheide (2000) as the entertainment format has taken precedence in adjusting personas to evocative “free floating” rather than context based styles of presentation. These characterizations that produce a common ground for a wide array of acting styles to flourish, are ultimately owned by the entertainment industry which coordinates their logic in reference to mostly consumer practices. As Snow’s (1983) research on media culture indicates, the entertainment formats of contemporary life stress a break from routine behavior into the adventurous world outside one’s boundaries. Guided by the principles of basic advertisement however, popular culture becomes ordinary as it assumes the model for all normal and proper forms of social behavior (Altheide, 2000).
Literature Review, Part 2

Narrativity and Nostalgia

In this specific analysis I focus on nostalgia as a framework for interacting and thus presenting the self. There are numerous manners in which Internet identity is managed. The online situations, topics or groups are numerous and I have chosen to concentrate on nostalgia, or being nostalgic, as a way of performance.

Whether online or offline, a person’s identity is made of many differentiated parts adding to a totality (Goffman, 1959; Jung, 1951; Rogers 1951). We recognize then that the most solid foundations of any identity arise from embodied participations where one has a guideline to then perform their online “disembodied” alterations in a manner that can be in any way meaningful. Thus relationships of this nature can only occur outside cyberspace space where behavior, culture and ritual have definite forms are not merely suggestive. The task of linking self identification to certain stories and narratives is made much easier through this clarification.

Narrativity has been essential in theories of self-identity. Ricoeur (1980) and Ezzy (2005) emphasize the temporality of narrative to distinguish it from other socio-relational elements within the self concept. A regional-nostalgic identity like narrativity is also temporal, knowing that any account originates in a particular time and place (Ricoeur, 1980). Mexicans are from Mexico and so there is a Mexican self within the self concept relating exclusively to fixed territory and specific time. In this case, evidence of online nostalgia in Facebook wall posts turns into evidence of attempts to revive virtually certain kinds of embodied sociality that have existed in some place and time.
Since I am discussing the presence of a nostalgic identity used in Facebook, a nostalgic style of performing, communicating and recognizing, it is necessary to bracket an often elusive concept and what it might mean where there is a reference to it. Davis (1979) has defined nostalgia as a yearning for the past along with the possessions and activities of an earlier time. Others (Havlena 1991; Holbrook 1991) have found nostalgia's vital role in sustaining and reproducing certain activities and behaviors deemed memorable by the individuals that engage in them. Though nostalgia contains narrative, the former refers more specifically to a narrativity of romancing with select past occurrences.

In order to more completely grasp nostalgia, it is not only necessary to identify nostalgia as a state of being but also as an effect of the distance and remoteness from the object, place or activity of desire. This quality of nostalgia is discussed by Havlena (1991) when he mentions nostalgia as a longing to return home and when McCann (1941) asserts that homesickness increases as one gets farther away from home. Some form of displacement, in other words, is necessary for producing the symptoms of the nostalgic individual. Tilburg and Vingerhoets (2007) emphasize the association of negative emotions like excessive rumination, separation anxiety and depression to nostalgic symptoms. Bowlby (1980) similarly recognizes yearning, an aspect of nostalgia, as a necessary phase in grieving over the loss of a loved one.

Boyn (2001) identifies three crucial points in nostalgia. First, nostalgia is not an anti-modern phenomenon or one against modernity as it is normally associated, but rather modernity and nostalgia work together as different sides of the same coin. Nostalgia results from a new appreciation of time and space which in turn modernity
made possible. It is in fusion with progress and its resulting dislocations that nostalgia finds the specificities about which to fixate.

In a more literal illustration, using social networking to express longings of certain places and good old times, might evoke a kind of paradox where modern technology allows re-imagining, though not necessarily reproducing, past experience.

Secondly, nostalgia evidences a rebellion against the very irreversibility of time. Unable to accept the present conditions as they are, humans turn to an idealized past that is neither the actual past or future but whose functionality can deal with the frustration of not controlling time; a property of nostalgia that is more a defense-mechanism of present difficulties.

When Facebook users are away from their motherland, they express virtually through wall posts, their desire to return home precisely because at that very moment they cannot be there. This land of origin, is perfumed with almost mystical attributes in a manner that would not make sense without the present realities that make a yearning for yesterday necessary.

Additionally, I could try imagining everything else not contained within the wall post but still a part of its production. Is the user writing this post bored in her office? lonely? feeling culturally out of place,...? One can only speculate on the precise physical context and yet, the very essence of romanticizing over past memories might say something of the current “offline” condition. While there is no direct access to the offline reality of any user, nostalgia is highly linked to displacement as it can be an attempt to cope with it.
Lastly, nostalgia is not merely a retrospective but also prospective, anticipatory phenomenon. In this sense, nostalgia has an effect on the future. In considering tomorrow, we turn to nostalgic mythology for guidance on specific future actions. Individuals move to how they ought to be according to how they apparently were. The utopian qualities of nostalgia make nostalgia dynamic, able to shape the trajectory of both individual and social life. Nostalgia can indeed be powerful as it channels behavior specifically and justifies it.

To exhibit some form of nostalgia in Facebook, the first effect of nostalgia is usually to write the nostalgic wall post. The effects from the wall posts, on the other hand, would be reflected in the reactions of others to the original message. As will be explained later, nostalgia is a largely collective process and not merely an individual phenomenon.

With prospective nostalgia, this would consider all the possible behaviors that a particular Facebook user could take as a response to the nostalgic state of mind; These behaviors, however, would only be predicted as far as the wall posts’s content is able to describe. Actions such as traveling to the motherland after having expressed a desire to be in it or buying the nostalgic item that reminds the user of good old times in Juarez would be illustrations of a type of nostalgia with subsequent actions. Another reaction, and this one not from the user, would entail that after seeing the wall post an advertisement agency might place ads of items that are relevant to that user’s nostalgia.

As mentioned above, Holbrook’s (1991) identification of nostalgia in both consumer practices and marketing strategies explores the consequential dimension of this space/time sensuality.
Lyrical nostalgia (Batcho, Darin, Nave & Yaworski, 2008), prevalent in this study where music is a popular topic in many nostalgic wall posts, examines social connectedness through the lyrical content of songs. Musical lyrics however, under these unique circumstances are more closely associated with the past’s irreversibility than with emotional states of sadness and happiness. Furthermore, the present study found that participants who were exploring their identities were more inclined to discuss lyrical content in a predominantly nostalgic manner (Batcho, DaRin, Nave & Yaworski, 2008). When much discourse in Facebook refers to pop culture, music being a large aspect of it, it should come as no surprise that nostalgia in Facebook may often involve the identification with lyrics that remind users of having previously been in other contexts.

Another prevalent form of nostalgia in the Internet is what authors like Swislocky (2009) have recognized as culinary nostalgia or food nostalgia. Bessiere (1998) notices how gastronomy and culinary heritage act as markers of identity in wanting to return to culinary roots. As the saying goes, “you are what you eat”, food becomes part of self-definition and fundamental in its development.

**We Yearn Together: Collective Nostalgia**

Boyn (2001) stresses the collective dimension of nostalgia as a shared phenomenon wherein individual biography intersects with the biography of others. It is group biography and not just an internalized personal narrative that evokes the nostalgia of a nation or an explanation over how space and time might be shared precepts. Why, then, would Facebook users even need to express themselves nostalgically if not without knowing that other users would also recognize the things and behaviors that are being longed for. Birnie and Horvath (2002) have looked at how on
SNSs like Facebook solidify traditional social ties. Nostalgic identity is reinforced in group life when nostalgic items, like the many examples offered in the present study, have to do specifically with Mexican culture.

Just like nostalgia organizes social life, much discourse that goes on within Facebook and other SNSs is also structured by heritage and collective memory. Kopf and Wolf (2007) have paid attention to how social connectedness and nostalgia collaborate in modern societies for different purposes.

Gomez (1998), in a study of computer-mediated communications in Colombian NGOs, notices the nostalgia of community and not so much a virtual community. The tangible benefits of community are substituted by emotions and perceptions regarding old interests that users share and not necessarily collaborative efforts (Gomez, 1998).

A more personal dimension might stand out in the psychological emotions of Facebook users and each one’s imagination of how a shared past or heritage actually is. I would see nostalgia more as an effort to sustain a community through largely malleable thoughts about itself. There is remembrance of shared history even if the community is not entirely articulated or defined. Anderson’s (1983) acclaimed concept of an imagined community would serve us well here. In part because it would inform that identities such as national identities or regional ones, pertain to imaginary efforts of smaller groups within larger and often invisible ones. Here, individuals as Internet users reflect on the broader and more extensive narratives associated with one’s cultural group seeking a coincidence of positive memories that more or less resonate with bigger stories of national-ethnic character. These however can only be imagined or believed through an indirect access where nostalgia comes into being.
SNSs like Facebook may also extend as well as challenge notions of community. For one, it is important to ask if whether of not a network is a community and if it is, what kind of community? As Bauman (2001) had commented, a community in the more general sense, though providing less freedoms to individuals, tends to be more stable and secure than just a network of people. Online networks therefore we could conceive as less predictable and yet their variety and level of participation may provide different degrees of agency to the individual members that form them. One could also look at the presence or absence of nostalgic dialogue in different online networks for measuring how strongly members are linked through embodied participations.

Ultimately, nostalgia under these contexts would fulfill a more individual psychological purpose for many displaced users seeking refuge in positive memories where symbols of nation and other sociocultural elements have intersected with these. But to say that the romance of the past is the past itself or that different types of identities are always consistent would also be misleading. In effect, a large part of the present research shows various users discussing cultural items that would be more an amalgamation of American and Mexican customs than the strictly Mexican or American elements of culture. Campbell (2005) has paid attention to the way Mexican Americans creatively adapt mainstream consumer products to meet their own needs.

Many of the wall posts of the present study will for example display neither an entirely American nor an entirely Mexican way of communication but a more Mexican American/ “Chicano” style of communicating that involves a very specific set of socio-cultural practices and symbols.
It is necessary therefore to understand this culture apart the usual binary categories of either Mexican or American. The chicano, and more specifically Hispanic youth, must be approached as a separate entity neither assimilating entirely to the essentialist anglo culture of North Americans or the Mexican culture of Mexican nationals who might also be in the border region, but instead a hybridity in which resistance, assimilation and perplexity operate; where blind imitation is replaced by creative transformation (Campbell, 2005; Ramamurthy, 2003). Several manifestations of online nostalgia in the present study must be framed in this complex reality.

The Materials of Nostalgia

In SNSs like Facebook nostalgia is evidenced in the guise of text and images. Personal photography within these sites, for instance, provides an effective illustration of an activity that can be nostalgic. As we had seen earlier the snapshot indicates an effort to freeze time for its later revisitation. One might say that SNSs abundant of photography are largely impregnated with all kinds of nostalgia.

Sturken (1999), for instance, recognizes the photo as both a contemplative and nostalgic artifact. In this way, photos are used to remember good times with friends. Nostalgia might also relate to profile pictures of when one was young (Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2010).

As with personalized photography, nostalgia will appear in the streaming of videos that allow users to commemorate “good old times.” A wide variety of groups will immediately recognize old television references or certain cultural signs in the images and music of such videos.
Moreover, Facebook users can join groups over the history of places, encouraging group members to recreate via comments, stories, photos and videos the memories tied to a particular region. The Rember el chuco and Juarez de mis Recuerdos (Juarez of my memories) are examples of groups explicitly about nostalgia and connecting with the past.

**Hypothesis**

Facebook users, in building an ideal self (Higgins, 1987) that also integrates either their places of origin or a cultural space in which they no longer live, I hypothesize that the further are from this sociocultural context the greater likelihood that they will display nostalgic forms of communication and self-presentations in their Facebook wall posts and photos.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The data collected for the present study was from available user postings in the SNS Facebook. It reflects content, in other words, that individuals have made public. Research will be limited to the SNS Facebook, using the examples of the site, to understand how identity performance through nostalgia and narrative are enacted is SNSs. This study has examined two types of content: Text in the form of user postings and visual expressions in the form of photos. Thus, someone posting an image with comments will contain the two forms of content simultaneously.

The study collected a total of 50 wall posts from public profiles in Facebook. From these 50 examples 28 are analyzed and discussed in the results chapter to show how Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users display nostalgic forms of communication and presentations of the self.

These 28 examples were chosen according to how strongly each signaled nostalgia over a place, a behavior or an attitude. Although those users who were reacting to these posts through responses were also included as a criterion for the initial selection.

Additionally, I have incorporated 10 images/photos displaying some of the visual manifestations of nostalgia. As in the case of the various wall posts these images will also be analyzed as to why they are being incorporated into the study and how they signal a longing for an activity, thing or idea that is not being experienced in the environment where the Facebook user is claiming to now live or is currently located.
Regarding both wall posts and photos in the study, knowing the actual, or current geographic position “when available” of the user, will be important in order to determine if the post is addressing nostalgia. Since being away from the desired context results with discussing it, basic demographics regarding current residence or geographic position will be included along with the wall post.

The wall posts will appear exactly as they were written by the Facebook users. The profile names, from the originators of the wall posts and photos, as well as the names of the respondents, will not be mentioned in this paper to safeguard the identity of users. As an alternative to mentioning names, each wall post will be preceded by the name Profile 1, Profile 2, Profile 3, etc. This will also apply to examples of wall posts where showing the responses to the wall post or image are necessary. Hence, respondents will be designated as Respondent 1(1), Respondent 2(1) The number inside the parenthesis indicates the profile to which they are responding.

In order to obtain the data, I used the Facebook profile search engine Openbook which browses profiles and their respective posting activity, according to specific words or phrases. Since we are showing the presence of a nostalgic identity in Facebook, much of the words and phrases will pertain to themes that are believed to relate or to arouse in some way, nostalgic discourse or ways of communication.

Words and phrases relating to communal activities like diet, sports, traditions, consumption patterns, and more specific customs was the basis of the terminology in the search for profiles and their wall posts. To further facilitate this, each wall post was classified using Ferraro and Andreatta’s (2009) three main components of culture: Material (what people have); Beliefs, Values and Attitudes (What people think and
believe); Behavioral Patterns (What people do). This classificatory criteria were also applied to the photos and images, identifying what component of culture is being represented visually.

Through analysis of data obtained, a determination was made on the extent to which being away from the country of origin or from a place where one lived through a long period of time, relates to the formation and pronunciation of a regional-nostalgic form of self-identification and of communicating.

In selecting the actual data, certain words were important in the identification of nostalgic forms of expression such as “missing” something, “old times,” and so forth. Furthermore, since this study looks at the identity of Mexican/ Mexican American users away from their place of origin, a switching to the native language will also indicate a way of identifying with the culture of origin.

As an example to portray the methodology used, the following wall post shows a self identification through past activities as well as a longing to be in a specific cultural space with similar others, family, and friends, who feel at home with the same set of activities, symbols, language and experiences. The wall post is from a male who currently lives in Austin, Texas:

I miss my Chuco Town like crazy!! Jammin 2 da oldies, bout 2 light up da grill and cook out in this windy ass weather! Not very nice cookout weather but its ok bcuz we crazy like dat!! Ha!! QUE VIVA MI QUERIDA Y RESPETADA TIERRA DE EL PASO!!! CHICO'S TACOS # 1, ESE!!
Although El Paso is not located in Mexico, this Facebook user is expressing nostalgia over certain cultural experiences that are particular of Juarez/El Paso border area. The strong interdependency and cultural exchange in these proximate regions allow for Mexican ways of living to exist in areas within the United States that are also a few miles from Mexico. This Facebook user is acknowledging that life is not the same where he currently lives and wishes to be part of a context he can now only partake in a disembodied fashion.
Chapter 4

Results

Introduction to Results Section

In this chapter I provide a detailed analysis of all the collected data. As specified in the methodology chapter, the selected content of this chapter will consist of examples of text drawn from publicly available Facebook wall posts and photos. Following are 20 examples of wall posts and 10 images that demonstrate how Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users resort continually to nostalgic forms of communication and presentations of the self when not physically present in the context they desire to be in. These wall posts will show some longing for a prior time and location through how users are expressing themselves, the things they care about and what they desire to possess or re-experience.

General Findings

The analysis of the data for this research leads to the conclusion that nostalgic styles of communicating and self-presentation from Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users are in effect present in Facebook. Different levels or criteria for nostalgic discourse exist, and in general the content of wall posts and descriptions of photos indicate some kind of longing for a past or context that no longer is. The more obvious wall posts of longing, for instance, will literally contain words like “missing” or extaño (to miss in Spanish), “old times” or “good old days,” which are associated with being in a nostalgic mood. Following are some examples of wall posts in which I have highlighted (in bold type) words that convey missing the past.
Profile 1 (Female) /Current Residence or Location: Dumas, Texas

*miss* my el paso peeps!!! hope i can make sum good friends out here!! :) have a good day everyones!

Profile 2 (Male) /Current Residence or Location: Unknown

Oh how I *miss* the green scenery. Ponds are lakes are nowhere to be found. Staring at Juarez across the border. Anxious to get overseas and back.

Profile 3 (Male) /Current Residence or Location: El Paso, Texas

Fuckit amonos a juaritoz! Just like *old times* ... — with *(Profile(1)3) Male: tagged*¹

-amonos a Juaritoz- (English translation: Lets go to Juarez).

Profile 4 (Female) /Current Residence or location: El Paso, Texas

Neta,Que el paso me aburre!:Extraño Juaritoz!,

¹Tagged in this instance indicates that this user has included in his post the profile of another with whom he is hoping to undertake the proposed action.
As the wall posts of these users demonstrate, there is a strong desire to re-experience something tied to a particular place and location. These users are being nostalgic about life in another area, indirectly stating that in this very moment, the moment of writing and posting the wall post, they would prefer to be there. What is more they are being nostalgic out-loud, wanting others to know about their nostalgia and what this nostalgia is all about. One user (Profile 3) even includes his friend in the post, clarifying that not one but two are nostalgic and therefore planning their journey to Juarez together. These posts are public and their users are probably aware that someone will identify specifically with what is being yearned, or be sympathetic of their nostalgia in the more general sense.

A nostalgic form of presenting the self then is simply adopting the persona of the nostalgic individual: the time/place romantic. Some will present the self in a more mournful “I hope” or “I am sharing my longing to be somewhere with you” kind of tone (Profiles 1, 2 and 4) while others (Profile 3) will be more decisive, “I am going to do something about this desire to go back.” The self is enacted differently depending on the situation, and the type of nostalgia that is being expressed.

Approached through symbolic interaction the definition of the situation (Goffman, 1959) would be found in the wall post itself, the producer of the wall post setting up an interactive drama that would be known to other users. The post’s content would give cues on a specific context of communication. A setting that is typical of people who are
mourning over the past. Stone and Faberman (1970) maintain that situations are set into motion by certain actors who place guidelines for the newcomers to follow. Respondents to a wall post will either identify with the situation or not and be invited to play along.

**Different Manifestations of Nostalgia**

Further elaborating the concept of nostalgia I decided to employ Ferraro and Andreatta’s (2009) three main components of culture: Material (what people have); Beliefs, Values and Attitudes (What people think and believe); Behavioral Patterns (What people do) to classify the various wall posts and photos in this study. From the obtained data, wallposts differ on what users exactly miss.

The following wallpost, also included in the methodology chapter, illustrates the three components of culture appearing simultaneously. It contains cultural beliefs, behavioral patterns and Material culture or an artifact that is very specific.

**Profile 5(Male)/ Current Residence or Location:**

**Austin, Texas.**

I miss my Chuco Town like crazy!! Jammin 2 da oldies, bout 2 light up da grill and cook out in this windy ass weather! Not very nice cookout weather but its ok bcuz we crazy like dat!! Ha!! QUE VIVA MI QUERIDA Y RESPETADA TIERRA DE EL PASO!!! CHICO'S TACOS # 1, ESE!!
Analyzing this wall post, and there is at the outset a reference to the location “Chuco town” that is missed by the user. Following the nostalgic area, there is both a behavioral component (“jammin 2”) in listening to the music and material component in the music itself (“da oldies”). Cooking (“light up the grill and cook out”) as an activity and indirectly the implication of food (culinary nostalgia) also demonstrates the presence of both behavioral and material components of culture expressed simultaneously.

Finally there is a sense of admiration for the place of origin and/or where one used to live in “MI QUERIDA Y RESPETADA TIERRA DE EL PASO/ My loving and respected land of El Paso” depicting the more attitudinal components of culture. Here there is an allusion to the material but also to the attitudinal and the behavioral in the comparison being made of El Paso to the Chicos Tacos, a famous restaurant. As a symbol directly linked to El Pasoan/ Chuco town culture, Chicos Tacos is able to stand by itself, conjuring the different main components of culture all at once.

Although this wall post is illustrative of the three components of culture, other wall posts presented in the present study are more specific, having only one, or paying greater attention to, a single aspect of culture. Wanting to be precise of what is being yearned I have grouped various wall posts according to Andreattas and Ferraro’s(2009) main components of culture. I commence with attitudes, values and beliefs.

**Attitudes, Values and Beliefs**

Perhaps the most difficult component of culture to identify in this study was precisely the least tangible. While behavioral patterns can be boiled down to specific activities, and material (cultural possessions) entails tangible and reducible items,
values and ideas are more difficult to map-out in text. In effect, attitudes, values and beliefs have a tendency to be elusive, their nebuluous quality making one either miss them entirely, as they may reside between the lines of a text, or pay too much attention to them when their apparent presence has less meaning than what is being attributed.

Due to the fluidity of “what people think” it might be stated correctly that every single item in this study would contain within it some form of ideology or value system and yet the need to separate it as a special category, requires that the content of these wall posts address explicitly this main component of culture. As the more abstract of the three, a shared idea (value, attitude and belief) plays a central role in the construction of the user’s collective identity, a component that might be further broken down to precise activities and symbols but is still capable of escaping such determinism about it.

While many wall posts describe behavior and activities which users miss, the following examples are of users who revisit their past with certain analogy, metaphor and wit. I found these two examples the most significant in expressing what is a more abstract idea. Although containing values, ideas and attitudes, other wall posts do not necessarily make explicit identity claims where users clearly state “I am this” or “I am that and proud of it” or express nostalgia without addressing anything in particular.

PROFILE 6 (Male) Current Residence or Location: Las Vegas, Nevada.

I was born in the Northside Of Juarez & Raised On Da Eastside Of LV for 11 years now :D im proud of my self
PROFILE 7 (Female) Current Residence or Location: El Paso, Nevada.

cuando pienso en los recuerdos ke deje en mi casa aya en juarez me duele mucho por ke komo kisiera ke todo megorara para poder estar en mi casa en la ke kresi en la ke ise travesuras en la ke todos esos hermosos revuerdo estan pero no todo es komo deveser siempre tiene ke kambiar :(( pero yo ya no puedo.

If we translate the beginning of the second wall post from Spanish to English it basically says “when I think about all the memories I left back home it hurts, I wish that things got better” (Perhaps in reference to the current violence in Juarez). Memories in this sense are in the domain of what people think. It is not therefore in reference to anything definite though the geographical context of memory is mentioned.

Behavioral Patterns

Behavioral patterns consist of external or, manifest conduct. Specific actions and activities that Mexican/ Mexican American Facebook users used to do while living in a prior place and time would describe this version of nostalgia. Hence a main component of culture that could be observed directly would be a behavioral pattern. All that people do or in this case all that people used to do and now miss doing.
From the gathered wall posts, behavioral patterns seemed to be the most regular manifestations of nostalgia. When users mention “good old times” they are for the most part saying they miss hanging out with friends and/or family in either the area they no longer live in, or an area they more or less frequently visit but are not there at the moment of the wall post’s writing. Many of the wall posts specifically mention going out to drink with friends while fewer but still a significant amount include “hanging out” with relatives the user has probably not seen for a while. The next wall posts show behavioral patterns that users long to re-experience. They yearn for a dynamic environment in which the various activities and pastimes contained within it, become almost synonymous with the place.

**PROFILE 8 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:**

**El Paso, Texas.**

Having a lovely time together with family @Juarez :)

**PROFILE 9 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:**

**Kigsville, Texas.**

can wait to see my love and to be in el paso for two weeks to see my mom and sis am going to miss you love but i know i see u wen i com back from el paso and no more saying bye no more love finally we are going to see each other for the rest of our life cant wait my love hope u feel the same.
PROFILE 10 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:

El Paso, Texas.

Back to Juarez again:../..!!! To see a soccer game

PROFILE 11 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:

El Paso, Texas.

Gettin ready to go to juarez a pistairss....listos (Ready) or wat – with Luz Montoya and 3 others.

As the various examples illustrate, the longed for environment users miss, is a place of engagement and group activity and not so much a space of personal narrative and reflection. With less frequency is the expressiveness of the introspective romantic fixating on highly individualized details that peers would not relate to, than someone reminding others of times they would also find worth remembering.

Boyn (2001) notices the social dimension in remembrance. Not one, but many, are peaking through the vignette of yesterday, especially the lively, colorful yesterday, that any nostalgic Facebook user would care to share in a public manner. When people desire to return to a place and time that is different from where they find themselves during their longing, they may in many instances and as social beings, desire to reunite with others and experience together the mutually agreed qualities of shared space.
Suffice it to say that though the manner of recollecting the past remains an intersubjective, what individuals tend to recollect and cherish are not episodes of isolation but when they are with others engaging in activities that are mutually enjoyed. The longed for world is a shared world along with the embodied group, participations giving meaning to it. A lot of what I like to call party nostalgia is common in this study. There are many posts that emphasize re-living an experience by virtue of something done collectively. Through the descriptions of these activities they are seen to be recreational, suggesting leisure and perhaps a desire to get away from daily routines and obligations.

A nostalgia aroused by the environment of work which the user could very well link to the present location could represent the outside conditions that favor posting in this manner, the adaptive nostalgia able to cope with present difficulties described by Boyn (2001). Though it would be almost impossible to verify this context through the content of the wall post alone, one can entertain the possibility that expressing a longing for the past is to a large extent a reaction to some present displacement.

**Material Culture**

Because music and food were regular topics in wall posts, dividing the component of material culture into two main types, namely musical and culinary culture, resulted in discussing two nostalgic artifacts of great significance. While the gathered wall posts may have included other objects Facebook users are nostalgic about, the pervasiveness of food and music as concrete symbols of identification earned these two items an analysis in their own right.
Also important is the prevalence of music in Facebook as both marker of online identity and a large aspect of popular culture in general. Like the SNS Myspace before, Facebook, while promoting musical artists and the genres they affiliate with, brings music to the foreground of online interaction. Many online communities thus become affiliated with certain musical styles, performers and their lyrics.

Food, on the other hand appears greatly in photography, an aspect that will be included in a subsequent section of this chapter (Photography Visual renditions of yearning for idealized time and Space). In wall posts, when discussing a desire to eat certain kind of food, what people desire to taste, already guarantees a somewhat nostalgic discussion of dietary behavior.

I examine first the musical and lyrical manifestations of nostalgia.

Musical Nostalgia

Music consumption--where its bought, how its listened to, the environment of its creation and the way listeners identify with music lyrics as they find parallels between these and there own lives--demonstrates various aspects of its socio-cultural value. Many wall posts, in fact, indicate an identification with the music heard in a priorly-lived context or area: music that takes users back to somewhere else where things were usually better.

As shown by the nostalgic wall posts of this study, that mention music, much research shows the relevance of music in both space and identity. Bennett (2000) notices how music informs the self while constructing the social world in which the identity of the listener develops. Similarly, in a study of youth culture in Bangalore, Saldanha (2002) finds the production of both real and imagined space resulting from the
dissemination of westernized soundscapes. Other recent investigation (Krims, 2000; Kubrin, 2005) focuses on rap music and identity while North and Hargreaves (1999) find music as a badge for adolescents to generate new self concepts of themselves and perceptions of others.

Of the various items of material culture, the mention of songs and music styles was the most prevalent form of material nostalgia. Six out of the nine postings falling under material culture addressed music specifically.

The word “oldies”, a nostalgic cliché itself, was also common in Facebook wall posts. Users mentioning fairly recent music even referred to the songs of a not so distant yesterday as oldies or “las oldies” (the word “las” being an article in Spanish)

According to Runowicz (2006), the oldie, appears in American slang in the late 1960’s indicating the vocal music of Do-Wop of the early 1950’s. The term is now used more loosely, generally representing music and performers that have made some mark or withstood the test of time (Runowicz, 2006). Classic rock or yesterday’s hip hop/rap can be hence be oldies. Following are two Facebook wall posts with the word oldies.

**PROFILE 12 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:**

**Endcouch, Texas.**

Yea buddy jamming out to some oldies and some bone thug N harmony love it takes me back to them days in chuco town yea buddy
PROFILE 13 (Male) / Current Residence or Location:

Fort Worth, Texas.

thank god for pandora!!! listening to oldies and wishing i was El Paso Tx the big bad chuco town!!!

Similarly, The way music triggers specified time and location can be noticed in the next example.

PROFILE 14 (Male) / Current Residence or Location:

Las Vegas, Nevada.

Esta cancion me recuerda mucho de cuando yo vivia en CD. JUarez, en los 70s

King Clave - Los Hombres No Deben Llorar

www.youtube.com

Vicente Villarreal A classic..I love this song brings back memories.....Yesterday at 1:05pm

Hearing music that was heard while being in another context becomes a way to re-live that moment, as if going through a portal to the very sociocultural context in which the song was first heard.

Davis (1979) informs on the nostalgic’s desire to return home. Music’s transporting qualities further awaken this condition of remembrance. The Facebook
user, proceeds to divulge this experience with friends and contacts, the act itself an escape valve or emotional outlet. Here the painful yearning for better days elsewhere turns self evident and public.

Less apparent is that emphasizing music heard in the past may also reveal musical estrangement where the user now lives. Alienation of this kind could very well represent an alienation with the very context under which the new style of music is heard. Individuals are therefore led to emphasize more heavily the music they feel nostalgic about as they are further away from where it is taken for granted and popular. Cummings (2001) sees the relevance of cultural displacement in musical trends like hip hop as explaining the genre’s very own persistence in many areas of its popularity.

On a similar note, authenticity in items of collective identity, those taken to arise from a specific locality, are also fundamental when having to discern the real from the copied cultural materials i.e., grass-roots (local-organic) versus commercialized (Global-plastic). As the following example shows, the user asserts in capital letters she loves “real Mexican music” and, where better to find it than were the good times were, in Juarez.

**PROFILE 15 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:**

**El Paso, Texas.**

All I have to say is that I LOVE REAL MEXICAN music (Vicente, Antonio Aguilar, Los Rieleros, Banda Recodo etc......lately the bandas from today are sooo STUPID, I cant believe that they call that artist.....Pshh get out of here! I
miss the good old times in Juarez!!! Will we ever c that again :(

In a study of sociolinguistic nostalgia, Bucholtz (2003) notices a search for authenticity in language and for identity. As a form of language, musical heritage, or what is perceived to be such, would also be pursued with equal determination, part of producing one’s identity through past exploration. Moreover, music’s role in the formation of both national and ethnic identities has been examined in the work of Applegate and Potter (2002) as they note the importance of concert-hall music in the German imaginings of nationhood.

Culinary Nostalgia

While the qualities inherent in music make it prone to recollection, food arouses our taste reconnecting us with the context and time of which it is part. Like musical nostalgia, food nostalgia or culinary nostalgia, as coined by Bessiere (1998), was also highly present in wall posts. Mexican and Mexican American Facebook users mention food as one of the things they most strongly miss about where they lived or visited; wall posts being very descriptive wherever the subject of eating surfaced.

As Bessiere (1998) notices, traditional foods ‘food generally associated with nostalgia, allow the individual to trace identity along practices of gastronomy. Nostalgia over eating practices, liking certain foods, and the places evoked by certain meals are part of a process of self-discovery. One sets out to find culinary roots, and with it self-origin, knowing in this way, where one is and where one was (Bessiere, 1998)
Moreover, food’s ability to connect the individual to the larger social collective, the inner world of the person to relations outside, uncovers an integrative process (Fischler, 1988). Food descriptions found in Facebook wall posts are contextual, as in one is not just being nostalgic of food and its particular taste but also a moment made up of many things; of people, group behavior etc.

As the next example suggests, users are detailed when discussing their culinary heritage. This is probably one of the most descriptive wall posts.

**PROFILE 16 (Male) / Current Residence or Location: La Mesa, New Mexico**

Having a midnight snack...dinner roll with butter and cajeta de membrillo! This flavor reminds me of all the great times I had in Juarez. So even though it's a sweet snack, it's a bittersweet moment. I really miss mi gente! I hope I can go back to visit soon!

One might also observe how behavior in the present is affected by the user’s recollection. In having a dish that reminds of the great times in Juarez, this Facebook user is reenacting a tradition. It is a “bittersweet moment, the user describes, since remembering something that no longer is, entails also a painful process: a ritual both festive and mournful.

Many wall posts share publicly the aroma of a time and space that no longer exists but can be peaked-through ‘reconstructed’ by the Facebook user’s descriptions.
Once inhabited space becomes synonymous with certain diet. A taste impossible to attain outside the conditions it was originally experienced. Hence, the wall post in the next example, one must actually re-visit the place.

PROFILE 17 (Female) / Current Residence or location: Albuquerque, New Mexico

Si asi saben los hot dogs de Juarez mmmm pues ya se me antojaron una tortas hamburgeras un elote jeje Un dia me llevaran al 'parque borunda'

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: Yes, thats how hot dogs from Juarez taste. Well now I want some tortas hamburgers and corn. Some day they will take me to ‘Borunda park’

Though hot dogs and hamburgers may not be typical Mexican cuisine, there are obviously hot dogs and hamburgers in Mexico and the one’s from Borunda park in Juarez apparently taste unlike any other in the world. This user is tying food to a specific environment and expressing a desire to go there.

Food gives location uniqueness, the distinguishing features from all other space that in turn allow it to be made exotic. As an example, the staged arrangement of social space for authentic tourist experience (MacCannell, 1973) sheds light on how food among one of such arrangements would endow an area its local flavor.

In these respects, Bessiere (1998) has analyzed local development in rural France as both a construction of territorial heritage and the culinary practices that give
meaning to its authenticity. Spatial theorists like Bourdieu (1989) on the other hand, witness the more exclusionary processes embedded in social space, via the symbolic categories of available products like food.

I add here that the existing relationship between space as a concept and the eating practices that articulate it, are fundamental in producing food nostalgia. Occasionally, one's food remembrance involves more than just the actual plate, although the taste of food can be attributed to the actual food itself, it also incorporates the context of the food, linking the original taste to a broader experience. Nostalgia would make little sense if food were removed from its background.

**Regarding location: Two Types of Nostalgia**

I provide in this section several theoretical conditions, in which the concept of nostalgia develops. This analysis agrees with most definitions of nostalgia namely that a nostalgic form of communication requires that, at the moment of publishing the post, the Facebook user be away from the desired geographical area in order to express missing it, romanticizing thus its cultural uniqueness.

One condition, though not always necessary, involves McCann’s (1941) homesickness, as preceding nostalgic expression and as vital to it. Others (Sedikides, Wildschut & Baden, 2004) maintain that nostalgia and homesickness are fundamentally the same thing. There is therefore and under the peculiar set of circumstances, a desire to return to the motherland, that in turn produces the readable symptoms of the nostalgic personality.

There is also a willingness to re-connect with the prior setting by not only describing selections of personal biography but also cultural signs that others, other
Facebook users/personal contacts in this case, will also recognize in the geographical setting; as both related to the area and meaningful in the discursive environment of Facebook. One must, in this regard, remember that posting publicly in Facebook introduces certain strategies of communication, to capture the more noticeable aspects of a place that others Facebook users would relate to.

A more exclusive, reserved-group nostalgia, on the other hand, would have a more intimate life, with only a few members knowing the meaning behind what once occurred as an embodied participation and in specific space. Some manifestations such as these, however, being published/posted publicly, could also be interpreted as making noticeable to all contacts and to whomever has access to that profile’s wall, the exceptional character of these reserved activities, as when introducing the inside joke to the audience that does not understand it with the hidden intention to call out the unique position of the group that does.

Motivated by the findings of this research, however, I do want to differentiate between two main types of nostalgia detected in the obtained Facebook wall posts. The first, which I will call nostalgia type A, involves Mexican/ Mexican American users who are away from the US/Mexico borderland comprised of El Paso and Juarez. It is necessary for this type of nostalgia that the Mexican/Mexican American Facebook user live outside this region. Many of the above Facebook wall posts, involve profiles whose [personal descriptions, About (Timeline version) or Info (Standard version)], claim to live outside the Paso del Norte (Juarez/El Paso) area or outside of either El Paso and Juarez.
The data shows that, nostalgia type A emphasizes more a nostalgia arising out of homesickness than type B. Type B nostalgia, flourishing under the unique conditions of two adjacent and neighboring cities who are each in a different country, unravels a situation where the user having been on both sides of the region expresses missing an area when in the other. This kind of nostalgia would involve users who, at the moment of publishing in their walls, are in El Paso remembering the good times they had in Juarez, or desiring to go to Juarez, or the inverse situation can apply as well.

Other findings suggest that within these two types of nostalgia, though more associated with type B, is the yearning of a space that is not the motherland or place of origin but has been visited, often or rarely, and hence can be discussed in a nostalgic style. This would be more along the lines of a vacational nostalgia or missing the novel experiences that alternate settings to where one lives can offer, than the more severe version: arising from actually switching from one residence to another with the cultural displacement that goes with this permanent change of settlement. Type B nostalgia is then unlike the one laid out by McKann (1941) not founded on the place of origin, but on settings that due to a variety of reasons, are able to provoke similar nostalgic symptoms on Facebook users.

**Missing the Borderland**

When referring to a nostalgia expressed towards the borderland, this region would encompass both Juarez and El Paso even when wall posts indicate missing one of the two cities individually. Furthermore, it is assumed by either the profile’s basic description *(About/Info)* of the user or the wall post’s content, that at the moment of writing and posting the wall post, the Facebook user is neither in the city of El Paso nor...
Juarez but elsewhere. Nostalgia is, in other words, directed to either El Paso or Juarez or to both simultaneously from a different location.

Like all the examples incorporated to the present study, the wall posts in this section include the claimed location of the user as current place of residence or location. Wall posts from profiles whose current location is outside El Paso and Juarez fall into this group of examples.

Of the gathered wall posts meeting this criterion Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users would usually include either certain associations commemorating the environment in which they priorly lived or their anticipation for a future visit, if not already taking steps towards this action.

Many of the obtained profiles showing users living outside the El Paso/Juarez area were still nevertheless close to it. Of the 24 wall posts whose users professed living somewhere else than the border region, 10 were residing within some part of Texas; four were within New Mexico and three within Arizona. Despite this relative proximity, Facebook users still expressed nostalgia or desire to visit the El Paso/Juarez border region. Following are some examples of wall posts indicating nostalgia over the borderland.

**PROFILE 18 (Male) / Current Residence or Location:**

**Odessa, Texas**

Well here i come el paso chuco town 3 months away wow cant wait for it all cant wait for my kidz hold them yup y up :)
PROFILE 19 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:
Lakewood, Colorado
Extraño las borracheras que nos poníamos en la feria Juarez y cuando los bailes se acababan hasta las 6 de la manana!!!
ENGLISH TRANSLATION: Miss all the drunkenness in the Juarez fair or when the dances would end until 6 in the morning

PROFILE 20 (Female) / Current Residence or Location:
Fort Worth, Texas
I really miss my homeboys from juarez:/ damn what a good memories with them!

PROFILE 21 (Male) / Current Residence or Location:
Chama, New Mexico
Esta es mi rola y tambien va para mi familia mexicana y todo mi familia en Juarez Mexico y los que estan enamorados jaja :D
ENGLISH TRANSLATION: This is my song and it also goes out to my Mexican family and all my family in Juarez Mexico & lovers
On the Other Side of the Border: Distance Despite Proximity

Although Juarez and El Paso are proximate regions, literally a few miles away from one another, nostalgia of being on one side of the border and wanting to be in the other constitutes a specific form of romanticizing with a place. The posts presented concern this very circumstance, what I identified as nostalgia type B, of being on one side and expressing nostalgia as a sign that one simply wishes to be in the other.

A recurring pattern in the research was that all wall posts which were found by browsing the term *Juarez* or *Juaritoz* in *Openbook*, resulted in profiles of users that did not live in Juarez but El Paso, or were temporarily in El Paso because of special circumstances, a perhaps self-evident finding. This would also support the idea that, within the usual discussions and postings taking place in Facebook, especially among contacts who live in the same area, one rarely mentions where one lives as a taken-for-granted fact. What was surprising, however, was that through browsing word entries like *‘El Paso’, ‘El Chuco’* or even *‘missing el Paso’* no Facebook wall posts were found whose users were presently living in the city of Juarez. Current location, however, when not accompanied by current residence “From” might also present some challenges in knowing where the user is from.

Every nostalgic wall post falling under Facebook users having lived on one side of the El Paso/ Ciudad Juarez border region and who now lived in the other, were of profiles of Facebook users currently living or temporarily staying in El Paso but that had either lived in Juarez or visited it before and perhaps some lived there, (Profiles that did not have anything written down in the *From* category in self descriptions) There were
no profiles whose current location was Juarez, no wall posts expressing nostalgia towards El Paso from Juarez.

To nostalgia type B, I would moreover incorporate a possibility and a fairly recent if not still current set of social conditions. Due to the violent episodes that have assailed and continue to threaten the people of Juarez, many Juarenses and people living in Juarez have sought refuge in the sister city of El Paso. It is probable that some Mexican Facebook users living in El Paso and who express nostalgia over Juarez might pertain to this category of individuals. Following are six examples of wall posts that either express nostalgia towards Juarez or the excitement of future visits perhaps a return.

**PROFILE 22 (Male) / Current Residence or Location: El Paso, Texas**

WAT A WEEKEND AT JUARITOZ WIT MY PEOPLE N FRIENDS...MEMORIAS ALEGRES Y TRISTES :(  
ENGLISH TRANSLATION: “Memorias alegres y tristes” Happy and sad memories

**PROFILE 23 (Male) / Current Residence or Location: El Paso, Texas**

Manana sabado,,,a juaritoz! A visitar a la jefa,,,,,,
ENGLISH TRANSLATION: Tomorrow Saturday to Juarez to visit mom
PROFILE 24 (Male) / Current Place of Residence or location: El Paso, Texas

it was great to see my son again thank u for the great time in juarez mijo came back to el paso to hear that my dad is in the hospital :( but I know God is his healer n has everything in his hands thank u all for the support Cande I see u next time

PROFILE 25 (Female) / Current Residence or Location: El Paso, Texas

Mmm q aburridote esta la tarde extraño juarez ....mmm pero en la noche se me pasa jajaj a dormir se a dicho ..."_"

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: what a boring afternoon miss Juarez. But in the night it will pass. Off to sleep

PROFILE 26 (Male) /Current Residence or Location: El Paso, Texas

Ya me quiero ir a juarez:( y de pensar que apenas es martes://

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: Already want to go to Juarez and its barely Tuesday.
PROFILE 27 (Female) / Current Place of Residence or location: El Paso, Texas

Pfff zuper aburrida en la zkuela ia kiero k sea manana pra irme a juarez jaja :p

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: Very bored in school want it to be tomorrow to go to Juarez

Profiles 22, 25, 26 and 27 show users who are in El Paso longing to be in Juarez while also having already made the decision to go visit. They are in other words excited about the trip they will be making to Juarez or are in the mournful situation of missing relatives who still live, or simply are, in Juarez, unlike them in that moment.

Also present in some posts is the mixture of Spanish and English indicating the back and forth cultural-linguistic exchange characteristic of border areas such as the Paso del Norte region. Boredom a possible form of displacement is also evidenced in some wall posts.

As the last post is suggesting, another category of users could very well involve those who live in Juarez and yet go to school in El Paso as well as users living in El Paso for the same reason who go back to Juarez on weekends to visit family and/or friends.

Under a climate of constant distrust and uncertainty, Facebook users who lived, still live, or continue to have ties in the city of Juarez might feel the need to connect with other Facebook users for emotional support or simply acknowledging that people from one’s social circle are safe and well. A study by Tolstedt & Stokes (1983) shows that
SNSs provide a space for emotional support and affective intimacy that positively impacts users’s offline lives. Amidst the violent turmoil in Juarez, this quality would be of critical importance.

**Facebook Wall Post Responses**

Included here is a Facebook post with it’s respective feedback: Showing responses from other users to probe beyond the producer’s own nostalgic expressiveness and how Facebook peers identify and respond to it. As discussed in the literature review, the posting of a wall post is a public act in which meaning is created for its interpretation.

The very act of discussing nostalgia is a type of performance of the self, a romantic, mournful or even adventurous personality being imitated in a dramatic process. Someone is desiring an experience or reliving a memory and writing about it. Others, recognizing this style of communication can react accordingly, agreeing or cheering up in the sense that a similar experience will follow. Users, for instance, who also shared the moment, or are in the motherland, might be called upon to reinforce the experience. Following is a wall post with a response of other Facebook member included.

**PROFILE 28(Female)/ Current Place of Residence or location: Fresno, Texas**

WTF went from oldies to Vicente Fernandez! Gotta love his songs.

Volvere Volver, Las llaves de mi amor, La ley del monte etc.

Mmmmm puros pinchi recuredos ♥

Share · April 5 at 3:40am via mobile ·
What is being discussed here is music heard in the past. Music that brings back many memories. This time, however, another is also expressing feeling the same nostalgia.

Similarly, the number of “likes” in the post, four in this case, may also reflect other Facebook users appreciation for the same style of music or the artist Vicente Fernandez or additionally, their affiliation with the time period and region to which it is associated.

Group life is then strengthened by items of memory. these are able to locate the Facebook user in specified collectives as in generations of people exposed to the same music and films and/or people from a similar demographic background and territory.

Photography: Visual Renditions of Yearning

In this section of the chapter I have included ten visual items to show how Facebook users express visually that which gives meaning to their social world. It will thus introduce symbols of identity, artifacts of memory and various participations as embodied experience through the elements included, not included as Fiske (1990) and Szarkowski (1966) have paid attention to, in the photograph or visual item itself. Here
from a theoretical standpoint what stands out, will not be taken as coincidental even if coincidence was part of the photograph’s overall production. I avoid committing the first error which misses a communicative element rather than ignoring it out of the possibility that it appeared arbitrarily.

**Visualizing the Pluralized Self**

The analysis of the following photo gives an illustration of some of the approaches within visual sociology and photographic interpretation. First, I borrow from Goffman (1959) the performer’s manipulation of props and setting, of background and foreground, through the photo’s careful staging and composition. Hence, in a photo there is a performance of identity, of the self concept or an aspect within it that the Facebook user is attempting to show to others (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010).

Secondly, employing Chalfen’s (1987) approach, the observer must identify what individuals are saying about themselves and their environment. We situate, through this interpretive process, the photograph as a legible object containing information that is related to, but may also transcend and show other things beyond what is accessible to the immediate eye; A instantly legible object, certainly, but one in which the observer can also read between the lines of imagery. One is therefore allowed to imagine, in tradition of Hall’s (1975) presences and absences, what is not in the picture by the picture. Figure 1.1 illustrates various aspects of the self concept; The production of multiple selves.

By including them in the photo’s background, the objects shown acquire representativeness or symbolic potential in relation to the user. As with the concept of multiple selves these items exhibit different aspects of the self concept. The flag may
symbolize the national aspect or national self ‘a self construction based on territory, region, shared history etc’. The Virgin Mary shows the spiritual beliefs ‘identity understood in religious practices, rituals or personal faith: A spiritual self. The baseball cap, as another important marker of identity may equate the self to various embodiments including sports culture, hip-hop music, etc.

Moreover, these items might ultimately represent the same concept of Mexico, the motherland, or the origins the user feels comfortable identifying with. The Virgin Mary, intentionally positioned within the flag, is specifically *La Virgen de Guadalupe* linking the user to Mexican Catholicism. Similarly, the cap may also stand for many things that would in turn connect it to a cosmology shared by the other items.
A Frozen Past

In terms of nostalgia in photography, Sturken (1999) holds that photos are artifacts to elicit memory and its contemplation. One may appreciate the recreation of a Christmas through a posted photograph on Facebook. A memory being re-told by a snapshot and not words (see Figure 2.1).

Photos and their meaning are social constructions. They are in other words, context-based (Becker, 1996). Photos depict the environment and social world of which they are part. Things that the users who upload them feel important to communicate to their network of contacts or even, since many of the profiles in this study are public, everyone searching Facebook.

Figure 2.1 : Profile 30 (Female)/ Current place of residence or location: Chicago, Illinois
The images recount visually both a personal and a collective narrative of shared values, attitudes and behaviors strengthening the very ties and relationships that give meaning to them (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). Telling by showing as opposed to the other way.

As applied in the classification Facebook Wall posts, I employ again Ferraro and Andreatta’s (2009) three main components of culture to organize the different photos and images into particular categories. I have additionally included the photos caption (if included in the original photo), the component of culture to which they belong and the gender and current residence/location of the Facebook user.

**Images of Group Behavioral Patterns**

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 3.1: PROFILE 31 (Male)/ Current Place of Residence or location: Saginaw, Michigan. Photo caption: “Como buenos Mexicanos”**
Depicted in figure 3.1 is a popular Mexican custom, that of hitting a piñata on birthdays or other celebrations, practiced within the United States now, that through its enactment gives meaning to the group life and its various members. We may also find nostalgia in what gives meaning to the act and preserves a way to remember who one is with regard to an ethnic/region based self-construction.

The same can be said of the Mexicans/ Mexican Americans who continue to celebrate Quinceañeras (Figure 3.2) away from the context in which they are usually celebrated, in order to preserve them and the inner-life experience these occasions bring to both individual and group self-definition. It is the very nostalgia of cherished traditions that serves to explain their re-enactment in a new setting and different country.

Figure 3.2: PROFILE 32 (Male)/ Current Place of Residence or location: Fresno, Texas.
Main component of culture: Behavioral Patterns
Images of Attitudes, Beliefs and Ideas

Complex ideas are often captured in logos, emblems that display simultaneously many features of a cultural context. As if encapsulating a whole range of values, experiences and folklore into a single packaging, popular logos, like the Indios Club de Futbol from Juarez, are able to act autonomous by conjuring all these systems of meaning at once and as a culture itself.

An effective emblem (Figure 4.1) of course is one easily recalled, able to stir nostalgic sentiments with the environment and ambiance it evokes.

Figure 4.1: Component of Culture: Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

An image may also demonstrate an actual setting, along with social behavior and rituals, that of which sports logos such as these are part of. One can also appreciate here the affiliation of sports culture with national identity. The publisher of this photo is a
user from Denver, Colorado, who has attended a football game in Mexico. These encounters would serve to embody the user’s national regional forms of identification when they would otherwise lack a more tangible meaning (See figure 4.2).

![User image with Mexican flag]

**Figure 4.2: **PROFILE 33 (Male)/ Current place of Residence Location: Denver, Colorado
Component of Culture: Behavioral

**Images of Material Culture**

As had been mentioned in the literature review and the methodology chapters, photography of food is popular in Facebook as a way of visually showing food memory, culinary roots, self-attachment to certain food and drink.
I had also discussed how remembrance of food reproduces the environment and localities to which it is regularly linked. Memory, however, is also subjective in the way in which it attaches food to certain settings. Crepes (Figure 5.1) are not necessarily the most typical recollections others would associate with the city of El Paso, but this user does, along with other users who have similarly experienced an environment within an environment.

Chicos Tacos is an El Paso tradition. A closer inspection into the photo (Figure 5.2) itself reveals this declaration: in the glass. This user from Dallas was already craving the Tacos before setting out to El Paso to visit family. One thing this

**Figure 5.1:** PROFILE 34(Female)/ Current Place of Residence or location: Durango, Colorado  
**Photo caption:** recallin’ good timez in ep  
**Main component of culture:** Material Nostalgia
Facebook user had to do and could not miss was to eat at Chicos Tacos. After following a very brief profile odyssey of culinary romance, I reach its climax: A photo of the much-desired food. The photo caption was actually a prior post. Campbell (2005) comments on the strong symbolic associations the acclaimed fast food restaurant has on a specifically Mexican-American experience, A phenomenon neither essentially Anglo or Mexican

Musical imagery or rather digitalization of album covers connects the visual aesthetic with its respective music. Figure 5.3, however, presents a more intricate cultural object. In it is a process of continual adaptation that would make for a fascinating item to someone like Jean Baudrillard.
What we have here is an iPhone screen shot of an iPhone application called Pandora which has been then uploaded to Facebook as a nostalgic object. This user represents the modern pastiche of cultural expression, the creative efforts of contemporary individuals in communicating, showing and preserving what they value.

Finally, one aspect of music that can be seized visually for its future revisitation is dance. Photos of partying, dancing and night club life have become ubiquitous in the largely adolescent culture of Facebook as figure 5.4 demonstrates.
Figure 5.4: PROFILE 37 (Male)/ Current Place of Residence or location: Atlanta, GA
Main component of culture: Material Culture
Chapter 5

Limitations

Limitations in this study include several difficulties in examining the online world. First of all, and as has been mentioned throughout this paper, computer mediated communication (CMC) is carried out and interpreted very differently than face to face interaction.

As Hine (2005) mentions on a study of technology-mediated communication, the quality of data is frequently put into question. Face-to-face interaction being the standard for interactive analysis, brings then into speculation its alternatives knowing that such types of interactions might lack a certain degree of outside accountability or even honesty. Cummings and Butler (2002) similarly report less quality in the formation of interpersonal relations when such are mediated by technology.

Since this study sought to find how regionally-based constructs of identity are reproduced and enacted in online communities, the same problem may apply here. Such scenario would suggest that the construction of an online self presentation would be less surveilled and controlled than the offline self presentation. Backing this claim is a substantial body of research, included in the literature review chapter, supporting the idea of online interaction to be more playful and flexible than in actual “offline” interaction (Turkle, 1996; Zhao, 2008).

Assuming, then, that online self-constructs are elaborated with greater flexibility and freedom, than their enactment inside the online context may be taken to some extent as less serious. This would equally have an impact on the research of online
constructions that incorporate qualities based on location such as the region specific self-concepts used by Mexicans that Vila (1997) noticed. How, then, should one make sense of the identity claims of Internet users?

Having been addressed since the inception of the Web 0.2, another issue centers on the technology itself. Here questions such as interface design and the speed of messaging may produce different outcomes in the communicative process (Collins & Bostock, 1993; Perrolle, 1991; Porter, 1993; Rominiski & Mason, 1996). The present study has been limited to SNSs, so other online environments might yield other findings that in turn might affect or impact the results of this research.

Regarding the methodology of the study, some shortcomings could be evident in the lack of a time analysis where the profiles responsible for publishing the selected wall posts are followed to discover future posting activity and responses. An example of this would be not being able to analyze possible future respondents to a Facebook wall post.

The dependence of the Openbook search engine itself as the exclusive instrument for tracing the data of this study, at least in obtaining the Facebook wall posts, could also be a weakness in the research. Other avenues beside Openbook that are available in seeking the data from SNSs such as Kurrently and Social Mention were not explored, yet at the same time do not allow a more qualitative analysis that the present study focused on. In addition this study did not base the interpretation of wall post content on any prior study of internet posting activity that made reference specifically to Facebook.
Finally, there is the problem of visual interpretation within the area of photography. Chalfen (1987) has developed several approaches to social insight via pictorial interpretation. Among these is what people are saying about themselves and their environment, and the historical period and technological innovations within it. It is still difficult to enter the subjective dimension that this visual sociology lends itself to. The possibility of finding symbolism in a photo when its author did not even intend any signification would represent an illustration of the possible problems of wanting to find meaning where it may not exist. This would take us to the multiple ways of interpreting visuals as part of the broader and intersubjective dimension of aesthetic reading. Within the art of seeing, Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) note possible distractions in the setting, themes and mental states of any aesthetic encounter. I would add here the difficulty of interpreting images after this, through a more objective gaze.

Another shortcoming, the most critical in my view, involves the inability to analyze profiles whose privacy settings restrict public access. This leaves out a large segment of Facebook wall posts that could have also been analyzed, possibly impacting the results if they were included. Already there is a condition where only certain profiles/users and what they post will be available for analysis, namely those that are open or public. Facebook users pertaining to this situation are either aware of it or not.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

The present has provided a glimpse into identity, its intricacy through various enactments and its contextual determination. It has done so by observing the development of identity in settings that are unique from the other environments in which the self-concept has traditionally been studied. Computer-mediated communication has opened a new social field wherein many individuals interact in a non-face-to-face manner, providing new strategies for self-assertion.

The study is also a discussion of a new phase within symbolic interaction in which selfhood is being rethought; this involving its existence in online settings but also, I would include, in offline reality. Beginning as early as the Internet's inception along with Turkle's (1995) influential book *Life on the Screen* there has been a new debate in identity theory and this study has sought to both address this and add to what is being said of Internet identities within SNSs.

The re-configuration of online interactive frameworks for communicating has thus transformed the very practices by which individuals and the groups they interact with produce meaning, allowing a new interactive process to emerge. Selfhood has become more pluralized in these online settings adapting to its various demands as well as benefiting from the largely anonymous 'disembodied' context they allow.

Though not incorporated in studying the profiles collected, this study also attempted in various sections of the literature review to include a more critical perspective of the tenets of symbolic interactionism and, thus, of Internet interaction.
This was done in order to show how internet space, though seemingly devoid of any social structure, might inhibit the agency and democracy of its users through more subtle forms.

The research itself was a personal effort to integrate online communication inside the popular SNS Facebook with the complex dynamics of the El Paso / Ciudad Juarez border region. Inspired by Vila’s (1997) narrative identities, I explored the concept of nostalgia as an extension of this narrativity in the discursive styles of Mexican/ Mexican Americans either away from the borderland or in one side of the border and desiring to be in the other.

The findings supported the idea that a nostalgic presentation of the self is only made possible by the remoteness to the place and time that is missed. Yet other findings revealed the objects treasured by the Facebook user and the manner by which they were recollected. The prevalence of music and food, as items usually associated with nostalgic forms of writing, revealed their significance not only as examples of usual nostalgic items, but integral in Mexican/Mexican American dialogue.

The present study has also shown the significance of online nostalgia in maintaining group ties when Mexican/Mexican American Facebook users who live physically apart from one another, how nostalgia in online settings is different from other forms of nostalgia considering the immediate and disembodied character of SNSs like Facebook. The El Paso/Ciudad Juarez borderland has further added to this conceptualization since nostalgia operates under a very unique socio-cultural context where constant exchange and movement are part of everyday life. Within this border reality, the violent circumstances that have assailed the city of Juarez in recent times
have opened the possibility that some of the nostalgia expressed towards Juarez in Facebook wall posts could be a result of Facebook users who have moved to El Paso in order to escape the insecurity in Juarez and now miss Juarez along with friends and family that might still live there.

Ultimately, in showcasing the phenomenon of the SNS Facebook as a current vehicle of sociality, I have tried to capture a new approach in the study of cyber-communications, establishing thus a new field where social investigation is more likely to increasingly take place.
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Curriculum Vitae

Daniel Domínguez was born in El Paso, Texas, on November 17, 1984. His parents are Daniel Domínguez, Sr., and Diana Vargas de Domínguez, both from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, and both graduates from The University of Texas at El Paso.

Daniel graduated from The University of Texas at El Paso having obtained a Bachelor of Arts in 2008; his major was in sociology and his minor in film studies. From 2008 to 2009 he worked at the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies of The University of Texas at El Paso doing research for the Casasola Project, a photographic exhibition of immigrant life in El Paso’s early history. Daniel also worked as a teaching assistant at The University of Texas at El Paso’s sociology department in 2011. Daniel is currently a member of a musical rock group, VDO, acting as the band’s guitar player and lead lyricist.

Daniel’s elementary and secondary education was completed in Juarez, Chihuahua. He graduated high school in 2003 from Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Ciudad Juarez campus. Daniel currently lives in El Paso, Texas.