

Panel: Navigating Boundaries and Taboos in the Digital Frontier

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While “digital dualism,” the notion that online life is categorically different from offline, either as a site of utopian or dystopian imaginings, has largely been discredited (Jurgenson 2012), we have barely begun to understand the ways in which internet technologies, user and developer cultures, and the wider society in which they are embedded, co-construct each other.

Contrary to the dreams of transhumanist “uploaders,” who sought an Apollonian, post-embodied existence as pure constructs of thought – or software – (e.g., Moravec 1988) we have not escaped the gendered body and its politics in our online spaces. Rather, software mediation can foreground body politics by providing a contested space of negotiating the transgressive, its boundaries and meanings.

These papers provide a range of perspectives on the politics of the gendered body as developed in particular online environments, from representations of the physical body to avatarized constructs to the text based to a transmedia phenomenon. Each examines a discourse politics of the transgressive, detailing practices of policing normative identity expression through a mangle (Pickering 1995) of gender roles, power dynamics, software affordances and shaming systems. Collectively, they suggest an exaggerated manifestation of gender and power roles which, far from living up to the dreams of cyber-utopianism, point towards a strict policing of traditional roles.

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“So Much More Than Something Vulgar:” Social Construction of Breast Enhancement in Second Life

Abstract

The virtual world of Second Life allows users to develop their own software creations to transcend constraints imposed by its avatar creation engine. One such group of users, who choose to present as exceptionally busty, has formed a community built on the software artifacts of their digital bodies and a narrative of resistance to the inscription upon those bodies of an abject status. This paper analyzes boundary work enacted at a wedding of two busty avatars as enabling maximization of member identity and agency within a social context while providing an anti-transgressive narrative of gender expression, refuting rather than embracing the abject status of the sexualized (digital) body.

Keywords

gender; identity; avatar; boundary work

Boundary Work

Boundary work (Gieryn 1983) performed at a wedding of members of a group of particularly large-breasted avatars in the virtual world of Second Life (SL) illustrates the mechanisms by which avatar identity and agency are created, contested, supported and performed in a social virtual environment. While the anthropological literature on three-dimensional virtual worlds, including especially SL, has struggled to clearly answer the question, “who is the being exercising agency within the virtual environment?” (e.g., Boellstorff 2008, Pearce and Artemesia 2009) games studies has a robust answer. Linguist and games theorist James Paul Gee (2003, 2005b) describes the relationship between the user and the avatar as a “projective stance,” “a *project* I inherit from the game’s designers, and in that sense an imposition,” and also “a being into whom I *project* my own desires, intentions and goals.” (Gee 2005b, 213) It is precisely in the tension between these two “projects” where agency emerges in the virtual space within the constraints of software design.

Butler (1993, 95) describes the performativity underlying Gee’s “projective stance” as “a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production.” While death is not an option in SL, the remainder holds true as a description of the forces shaping identity for wearers of “prim breasts,” a software artifact used to provide a bustier appearance than SL’s default avatar creation tools allow. Posts on a community forum for prim breast wearers set forth their collective identity as “those rendered abject by prohibition, ostracism and taboo from outside,” a defining myth reiterated within the community in public, on group forums, and in private conversation. Butler adds (1993, 101) that “to accede to the law is... also always to fail to approximate that position, and to feel the distance between that imaginary identification and the symbolic as the threat of punishment, the failure to conform, the spectre of abjection.” It is within that distance between the normative and the desired, between the rendering-abject and the agency of performative identity in which boundary work within the prim breast community is done.

A Definitional Wedding

An example of such work can be found in the circumstances surrounding an SL wedding of two prominent figures within the busty community, B. and J. Their wedding invitation and messages repeatedly stressed a call for “appropriate attire,” one largely respected by the attendees. This call may be seen as “boundary work,” a term coined by Gieryn (1983) and widely taken up in the social sciences (e.g., Guston 2001, Faraj and Yan 2009, Essers and Benschop 2009). Gieryn describes the motivations for boundary work by scientists as expansion of authority or expertise, monopoly of authority and resources, and protection of autonomy over their collective enterprise. Only the last is of direct concern, to the extent that what Gieryn calls “autonomy” may be separated into “identity” and “agency,” enabling the addition of a social mechanism to the projective stance described by Gee.

The wedding couple’s boundary work was designed (author interview, 2011) to counter what they and others in the community saw as an attempt by outsiders to render them abject by defining them as (merely) sexually obscene. If, as Butler (1991, 95) says, “constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity,” then it is within the constraints inscribed by the normativity enacted in the default avatar creation engine, which prevents the creation of especially busty avatars, and by the rendering-abject by the larger SL community, where the collective construction and performance of SL busty identity takes place. Boundary work claims a collective circle inside which members reinforce their shared projective identities though validation and exclude attempts by outsiders to impose unwelcome

projections. Three sorts of boundary work seem theoretically possible: (1) ghettoization, or hardening the boundary to separate completely insiders from outsiders; (2) doubling down, or performatively exaggerating the difference between insiders and outsiders; and (3) assimilation, or maintaining a porous boundary by stressing the performance of commonalities between inside and outside. The couple's social performance included, or welcomed, elements of each; however, their own performative stance heavily emphasized (3), assimilation. In the context of the wedding, (1) was visible by the notable lack of non-busty attendees: one male avatar and one non-busty female avatar of a group of at least 50. (2) was the element the wedding invitation and notices sought to minimize, through a stress on "appropriate," meaning non-sexualized, outfits, while welcoming members displaying greatly exaggerated size. Conversely, (3) was maximized by the rhetorical attributes of a high-status, conservative wedding, particularly in the choice of a cathedral as a venue, and conventional choices of bridesmaids' and wedding dresses.

Boundary work began with the SL profile of M. One page, under a tab labeled "Breasts," states that "[b]reasts represents tenderness and giving, nurturing and warmth, calmness and intimacy, carefree, life and motherly love," a performative act "not... the act by which a subject brings into being what he/she names, but, rather,... that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena it regulates and constrains." (Butler 1993, 2) A previous version defined her large breasts as "so much more than something vulgar." This performative work is by no means universal within the community: a significant number of busty avatars both explicitly and implicitly reject her boundary work, embracing the abject as foundational to their identity within SL. The couple's boundary work negotiates the imposition of abject status from within as well as from without, complementary impulses towards ghettoization and mainstreaming, and the exaggeration and minimization of distinction from inscriptions of the normative female avatar body.

B. is explicit in her acknowledgement of her boundary work. In an interview, she stressed the conventionality, and particularly the non-sex-object, nature of her own identity and that of a few admired members of the community, accompanied by an openness to those who present as less conventional. This paired position is what links boundary work to the collective reinforcement of community members' projective identities. Both elements, B's stress on commonality across the boundary and her welcoming of autonomous self-definition within the boundary, act together to assert that identity is the project of the community, not a blank screen onto which outsiders may project their own concepts of members' identity.

Conclusions

Members of SL's busty community believe, with documented justification, that outsiders attempt to render them abject (highly sexualized and deviant). (Korobase 2011, Yeuxdoux 2011) While rejecting both the act and content of this projection, one community leader contests it via boundary work which simultaneously acknowledges and attempts to disclaim abject status through rhetorics of conventionality, even conservatism, while inscribing a space in which members, even those who regard themselves as highly sexualized and deviant, may project their own identity and receive validation for it from others with similar identity projects in the space.

The wedding of B. demonstrates the rhetorical breadth and complexity of boundary work, from architecture to calls for "appropriate attire," to the invitation of a set of attendees diverse in their own projections of meaning onto their appearance but united in a busty projection, in contrast though not opposition to larger SL norms. Boundary work was rhetorical, reflexive and performative, intended to maximize group members' personal and collective identity and agency within the space.

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Body-appropriation in a self-shooters' community – you are not Picasso!

Keywords

Tumblr; body blogging; selfies; visual narrative analysis; embodiment

In the late modern "somatic society" (Turner, 1984) and the consumer culture where body image is an imperative (Featherstone, 2010), the body, like the self, has become a site of interaction, appropriation and reappropriation (Giddens, 1991, p.218). At the same time self-shooting is becoming ubiquitous with the spread of mobile cameras and social media sites. Self-shooting and body blogging can be conceptualized as technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988), where our reflexive bodies (Giddens, 1991) are recreated through aesthetic self-stylization, critical self-awareness and self-care (Foucault, 1988). Selfies (self-images, autoportraits) shape the meaning of our embodied identity – images are not merely reflections of us, they are constructions of us.

Based on visual narrative analysis (working the interface of images, captions, ethnographic material and interviews (individual interviews conducted in November and December 2011 and relevant outtakes from group interviews in November 2012) with self-shooters) this paper examines the intense emotional reactions to unauthorized photo-shopping and stealing of images in a NSFW (not suitable for work) self-shooters community on tumblr.com (started 2007 hosts ~90 mil blogs (January 2013)). By utilizing the theoretical concepts of internet deviance (Denegri-Knott, 2005) in the context of online gift economies (Bergquist & Ljungberg, 2001) of 'reflexive bodies' (Giddens, 1991) this paper explores how a body constructed through selfies operates in a space of exchange and how the rules of this community translate photo-alteration into body-appropriation and result in understandably intense emotional responses.

Boreo and Pascoe (2012) call performative, relational and discursive embodiment "enacting embodiment", in the NSFW self-shooting culture, it could be called "selfied embodiment" - it works as status symbol, proof of life and authenticity, a sign of belonging; a source of joy and growing-self confidence. As such, the photographed body also becomes a commodity (examples of it being used as such are abundant: "birthday boobs"; "thank-you-note naked-picture" etc). Viewing selfied embodiment as consumable leads us to questions of social exchange and rules surrounding it. Social exchange is an elementary part of human interaction (Suhonen, Lampinen, Cheshire, Antin, & Hall, 2010 based on Blau, 1964, 1986; Homans, 1958; Emerson, 1972) and can be divided into three major types – negotiated (bargaining, direct exchange), reciprocal (no explicit agreement, direct exchange) and generalized (resources given, the recipient(s) may or may not reciprocate to others in the future) (Suhonen, Lampinen, Cheshire, Antin, & Hall, 2010 based on Cheshire et al, 2010; Cook & Emerson, 1984; Lawler & Yoon, 1993). Although reciprocal exchange happens in this community, it is often a part of OSA (online sexual activity) and not the focus of this paper. Generalized exchange is often used interchangeably with the concept of gift economies and is the prevalent type of exchange in the NSFW self-shooters culture. According to Cammaerts, gift economies are 'somewhere in the middle' (Belk, 2007, p. 128 via Cammaerts, 2011) on the commodity exchange and sharing continuum.

Describing open source communities, Bergquist & Ljungberg write that when giving is easy and gifts are made publicly available "dependencies are reshaped and transformed" and "gift giving is managed through acknowledgement: the giver is 'paid' by the community by receiving a certain amount of fame and respect" (2001, p. 313).

I've shared photos with people before [...], but that was more on a one on one level, whereas this is just putting it out there for whoever wants to come and find it [...] it's probably cultivated that part of me that ... uh ... that likes to be watched and ... uh likes the feedback and likes knowing that people are enjoying what they're seeing. (E, M, late-20s, interview 2011)

This is a key point to understanding why unapproved photo alterations and stealing are seen as deviant in this culture. If we take the contextual approach to deviance (Giddens, 2001), we have to ask, as Denegri-Knott (2005): "are new norms being developed online, or are they just offshoots of offline parameters of socially acceptable behavior, or a combination of these?" (2005, p. 97). NSFW self-shooters are all naked on the internet, thus blatantly violating mainstream cultural norms and co-creating a "stigma-suspending space" (Waskul, 2002). The reblog-function makes appropriation one of the platform's main affordances and most bloggers admit to posting images that they are unable to credit; touching up their own images for aesthetic (hide a bump) and safety (hide a tattoo, blur out the background) purposes.

I have looked at the most common conflicts that arise around images – photoshopping (usually non-selfies to give them bigger breasts or wider hips) and stealing selfies (altering them (cropping, colors), adding a watermark and reposting as original content), and interpreted these through the lens of selfied embodiment, group norms and assessments of deviance.

Photoshopping is seen as an act of (symbolic) violence against someone else's body and violation of the moral rights of an artist. In these conflicts the photoshoppers usually raise arguments of copyright allowing fair use (claiming parody; one of them even posted "Tête de Femme" by Picasso to draw a parallel with what he does when he "boobifies" the women) or argument questions of consent. Special blogs have been set up in this culture by enraged body-bloggers, who have seen too many fake-hipped images with comments that indicate that a large proportion of the audience imagines this to be an achievable ideal of the human body.

There are the rights over our individual body image and self-presentation, then there is a question of the effects on our broader culture's ideals of beauty, reality, etc, and how that may influence individuals' relationships to their own bodies. [...] individual ass-hats with photoshop messing with women's bodies – it's all wrong wrong wrong. (F, 40, from an open letter posted on her blog).

Stealing selfies is seen as body and memory (because often the selfie also captures a special moment for the original poster) appropriation and is met with even stronger anger than photoshopping. Community members recognize each others bodies and body parts (even on the fragmented level of "hey, this is S's forearm"). Often the injured party's friends and acquaintances react more strongly than the original source. They alert the owner of the image, scold those who posted or reblogged the stolen content, repost originals, add the source to the stolen image etc.

We share pictures, we don't gift them. If I rent a car, I can't put my own license plates on it [...] Your example was sharing music. [...] What you are doing isn't enjoying something you didn't pay for. It's more like taking a Jimi Hendrix song and rebranding it as your own. We say, "Look at this great thing I found!" You go, "Look at this cool thing I made!" (F, 41, from a response „rant“ on her blog after someone put his watermark „right above her friends ass“).

Self-shooters construct "a sense of community through a sense of shared embodiment" (Ferreday, 2009, p.198). The body comes to be in communicative action (Waskul & Vannini 2006, p. 7), which means that for people to be culturally intelligible they engage in embodied performativity, in this case – regular posting of selfies and respectful interaction with others selfies. Selfied embodiment is as delicate (if not more) as bodily co-existence in material space.

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“To Beseech the Mods: Popular Participation in Unequal Spaces”

Keywords

self governance; digital democracies; virtual worlds; negotiated norms; digital culture

Discredited yet durable Cyberutopian rhetoric holds that in ungoverned digital spaces, communities will spontaneously generate and uphold common values (Lanier, 2010). This is patently false, as most existent digital communities rely on moderators to police user statements and defend productive conversations from the assaults of spammers, trolls, bullies, the willfully dense, and other malefactors. This paper will examine the realities of moderator-user activity in two internet forums, SomethingAwful.com and RPG.net, which value high-quality conversations on many subjects, and how their divergent approaches to moderation and community norms sheds light on internet governance.

Communities in virtual worlds must contend with the fact that in multi-user computer systems, all participants are not created equal (Lessig, 2006). A durable feature of computer systems, holding from the early days of ‘Big Iron’ mainframes to modern virtual worlds and cloud systems, is differentiated levels of access between ordinary users and administrators. Inequality is built into the very architecture of computer systems, with most users constrained by the coded laws of the system, while administrators are constrained only by the mathematical laws of computer science articulated by pioneering mathematicians and scientists (Alan Turing, Gordon Moore, Claude Shannon, etc.). In multi-user computer systems, administrators have effectively god-like powers, being able to alter the content and governing rules of the system at will. Yet, in practice, admins do not use these powers arbitrarily, instead acting to maintain community norms.

For online forums, the most relevant administrative staff are moderators, concerned not so much with workings of a mature system, but the constant adjustment of the community through their admin-like power to censor posts and remove abusive users. Despite the importance of moderation staff and community relations to the stability and productivity of forums as a site of discourse and culture, the exact mechanisms of these socio-technological relationships is substantially under-examined. I examine these mechanisms in the process of breaking down, when heated topics of conversation create conflict between moderators and some members of the community, but also a public call from the majority of the community for the moderators to intervene, and defend community norms.

This paper aims to explore in two very different approaches to maintaining a cohesive set of forums norms and discouraging toxic disinhibition (Suler, 2004), through a comparative study of moderation controversies on SomethingAwful.com and RPG.net. I will show, contra to popular belief, cyberspace is not an ungoverned, even in the absence of formal legal mechanism. Information and human communication are held on physical servers, and servers demand maintenance and administration, which

leads to community norms and policing of speech by moderators.

SomethingAwful.com and RPG.net are on the surface similar communities; durable by internet standards, demographically similar (white, male, mid-20s and geeky), and both communities that pride themselves on more formal standards of conversation and etiquette compared to the internet as a whole, yet they have adopted very different moderation policies, and commensurate relationships between the community and moderation staff.

RPG.net has enacted a transparent and pseudo-legalistic system, with 10 explicit rules, and systems of moderation and appeal. Most noteworthy is their explicit goal of making RPG.net a friendly space for people of all identities—women, homosexuals, transgendered people. It is explicitly against the rules to make personal or group attacks, deny a woman's experience of sexual harassment, or argue that a transgendered person is anything other than their stated gender. While explicitly a place to discuss tabletop role-playing games, RPG.net's well-moderated and inclusive off-topic forums are a point of pride for the community.

By comparison SomethingAwful.com has an autocratic and arbitrary system of moderation, with "mod challenges", probations, and bannings being handed down from on high. SomethingAwful.com is a bastion of transgressive shock humor (a standard example is tribute.wmv-which plays the Benny Hill theme over footage of the 9/11 attacks), and exposing "the worst the internet has to offer" to public ridicule. The core ideology of the SomethingAwful.com forums is "We are all goons together [members of the SomethingAwful forums specifically]. We are all gross losers sitting behind computers, and if you pretend to be otherwise, we will destroy you." Those who believe that their internet activities constitute 'serious business' (Bronies, Ron Paul revolutionaries, Tumblr Otherkin Social Justice Warriors and so on), draw goon mockery and trolling of their communities.

Yet, despite its boys' locker room culture, SomethingAwful differentiates itself from forums like Reddit and 4chan through its paywall, a \$10 dollar registration fee, and considers itself to have a more enlightened forums discourse. "Shit posting" [a complex idea at the core of the SomethingAwful moderation strategy] is strongly discouraged, as are slurs and various ideologies, particularly Men's Rights Advocacy and Internet Libertarianism. Goons may be goony, but they see themselves as superior to communities which harbor pedophiles, stalkers, and people who cause unfunny drama, such as the much larger Reddit, 4chan, and Tumblr communities (Chen, 2012). Although SomethingAwful.com is explicitly opposed to the whole idea of safe space on the internet, the end result is a forums culture similar to that of RPG.net.

Drawing from Langdon Winner (1989) and Marshall McLuhan (2011), I will explore the technological affordances of threaded message boards via a pragmatic, ethnographically informed reading of controversies in forums management. Threaded message boards represent a medium that favors an immediate, asynchronous responses and interaction, yet it is also one that leaves an easily archived trail. The purpose of the thread- a request for advice, an open question, funny pictures, may mutate over time- but the overall assemblage maintains a sense of continuity. Online forums as a holistic entity, decades of posts and billions of words written by tens of thousands of users, comprise a distinct and relatively new form of community.

The basic technology of a message board, both its underlying infrastructure of code (vBulletin, PHP), and user experience (read, reply, report) are well-established and implicitly understood by users. Differences between forums can only be explained in terms of their membership and discursive content. The information and communication on message boards is not a spontaneously generated artifact of a certain level of technology, but rather the accumulation of a characteristically human need to talk, perform, entertain and be entertained, and to belong (Hagman, 2012).

The fact that these communities of belonging exist solely on servers and monitors, in the form of bits, words, and images, does not diminish their social reality. Nor should it lead to a panglossian belief that quality forums capable of supporting engaging and productive conversation over the long term, simply appear. Despite the absence of capital in online forums, their maintenance and utility demand intensive human effort in curation and management of content. Invested, motivated, and expert volunteer moderators backed by an active community appear to be in practice a necessary condition for maintaining that community over time.

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“The Attack of the Fake Geek Girl: a discursive analysis of gendering geekiness”

Keywords

geek; gatekeeper; discourse analysis; STEM; memes

Armed with his game controller and action figures, the basement dwelling geek is a common popular cultural trope. This archetype, evolved from an earlier pocket-protector-wearing nerd, found a divergent path with the mainstreaming of technological skills, games and comics in popular culture. This geek, still marked with otherness, wields the power of billion dollar media franchises. Given the durability of the marginalization of the geek (Ensmenger, 2010; Bennett and Yabroff, 2008), it is perhaps surprising that rather than leveraging newfound semi-legitimacy to construct an inclusive subculture, vocal gatekeepers have united against a common enemy: the Fake Geek Girl who seeks to exploit the sexual vulnerability of authentically geeky males. This paper uses Gee's discourse theories and tools to examines the discursive construction of the Girl Geek, and applies Gee's discourse analysis to internet memes and rants condemning the Fake Geek Girl, in an effort to illuminate the complex social and sexual scripts that reinscribe heteronormativity over females who are attracted to, proficient with, or express interests in science and technology and their imaginative subcultures.

What is a Fake Geek Girl and from what base does she launch her evil schemes? It is perhaps more productive to begin with a brief discussion of what is a Girl Geek. She has to be more than simply a geek who is female, because if deliberate cultural negotiations worked to gender the term, we might see “geekstress” or “geektrix” on the model of the dated terms actress and aviatrix. Thus the label Girl Geek might hold more cultural significance than mere gender. In a 2008 Newsweek feature on a female college engineering students titled “Revenge of the Nerddette: As geeks become chic in all levels of society, an unlikely subset is starting to roar. Meet the Nerd Girls: they're smart, they're techie and they're hot,” authors Bennett and Yabroff argue that unlike Voodoo and Mad Magazine’s historically male representations of the socially awkward geek, today’s female geeks “grew up on gender neutral movies like Hackers and The Matrix, and saw the transformation of Willow on Buffy the Vampire Slayer from awkward geek to smart and sassy sex symbol.” Their exposure to these “gender neutral” role models has, according to the writers, allowed female engineering students to construct their identities beyond those of the stereotypical male geek:

These girl geeks aren't social misfits; their identities don't hinge on outsider status. They may love all things sci-tech, but first and foremost they are girls and they've made that part of their appeal. They've modeled themselves after ... actress Danica McKellar, who coauthored a math theorem, wrote a book for girls called Math Doesn't Suck and posed in a bikini for Stuff magazine. Or even Ellen Spertus, a Mills College professor and research scientist at Google and the 2001 winner of the Silicon Valley Sexiest Geek Alive pageant.

It is interesting to note that while the writers describe Hackers, The Matrix, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer as gender neutral, the girl geek characters in these films, Kate, Trinity, and Willow, are highly sexualized on the screen. Trinity, for example, is difficult to defend as “gender neutral” when she spends most of her screen time in a patent leather catsuit. In this case, “gender neutral” does not mean the absence of gendering scripts, but the presence of conventional gender norms. These assertions that sexualized female geeks are gender neutral is to declare that for a woman, to be sexy is the neutral position. Indeed, the girls interviewed by Bennett and Yabroff self identify as girls first and geeks second, discursively constructing identities that juxtapose sexiness and techsavviness in self-describe endeavors to not be subsumed into the awkward, self-involved male geek stereotype.

The sexy spin on geekiness is not simply shaped in the discourse of popular culture. In April 2007, Prism, journal of the American Society for Engineering Education, published an article featuring female engineering students at Tufts University titled “Piercings Not Pocket Protectors” that describes female engineering students as “cute” with lip piercings and tattoos, and defines the Tufts engineering program as one that appeals to female students because women are allowed to have other interests in addition to engineering. This is significant given one of the issues raised in Jane Margolis and Allan Fisher’s 2003 study of Carnegie Mellon University around the scarcity of female computer science students was that there was no discursive identity for a female to assume the single minded focus permitted of male scientists. Margolis and Fisher argue that to excel in STEM requires a singular focus that in males can be viewed as commitment, but in females can be perceived as selfish or socially dysfunctional. Neither selfishness or social dysfunction are acceptable identity traits for females (Margolis). Yet, Cindy Foor and Susan Walden’s 2009 NWSA article titled “Imaginary Engineering” or “Re-imagined Engineering”: Negotiating Gendered Identities in the Borderland of a College of Engineering,” is an ethnographic study in which the writers document male and female engineering students discursively constructing female engineers as “softer” scientists and engaging in lengthy discursive proofs of demonstrating female heteronormativity. It is reinforced that while women can be engineers, there is an appropriate approach to constructing a female engineering identity “without the threat of committing gender inauthentication” (2009, 61). You can be a female and a geek, but you must always first be female.

The Fake Geek Girl is a thing: a meme, a trope, a much discussed threat in geek-oriented corners of the internet. But she gained access to the broader public consciousness with the viral dissemination of comic book artist Tony Harris' November 12, 2012 Facebook rant against female attendees of comic book conventions, in which he purports to defend (male) geekdom from the invasion of the "fake geek girl," defined by what he describes as "the rule" of the con-attending geek girl: "

THE RULE: "Hey! Quasi-Pretty-NOT-Hot-Girl, you are more pathetic than the REAL Nerds, who YOU secretly think are REALLY PATHETIC. But we are onto you. Some of us are aware that you are ever so average on an everyday basis. But you have a couple of things going your way. You are willing to become almost completely Naked in public, and yer either skinny(Well, some or most of you, THINK you are) or you have Big Boobies."

While it extends over several hundred words, the gist of Harris' post is that while geeks are willing to acknowledge their situation within the cultural margins, they will not fall victim to the wiles of the Fake Geek Girl. And she who would attempt to take advantage of the socially awkward male geek is simply a pathetic fraud. In short, women are sex objects. Geeks are not sexy. If Girl Geeks define themselves as geeks but sexy, in order to perform heteronormativity and not commit gender inauthenticity, the very act of foregrounding their sexuality marks them as fakes. Within this discourse there seems to be no quarter for a girl geek. Males can be geeks, but females never measure up.

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