

Self-Presentation Assignment  
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Please consider the below post, taken from a friend's Facebook Timeline on October 21, 2012:



Ryan's post embodies several concepts of self-presentation as discussed in class. Ryan and I have been friends for several years, and though we attend different colleges, we still maintain regular contact. As an important note, I do not personally know Kelly or Kathleen; however, I have learned through Facebook that they are friends from college. Nonetheless, this post epitomizes traditional versus contemporary views of identity, identity negotiation, and it arguably demonstrates hyperpersonal communication and presentation.

The traditional view of identity states that individuals have one, true, fixed identity that remains stable throughout one's lifetime. As a close friend of Ryan, I can personally attest to the fact that Ryan has many different identities, yet only one true personality. To elaborate, Ryan may be found on stage playing guitar as an opening act for *Green Day* one night, and playing competitive ultimate frisbee the next day. Or perhaps at a social with his fraternity one evening, and in his calculus class at 8 a.m. the

next morning. Or he may be found taking several showers a day to retain cleanliness, and later “picking his nose” as mentioned in the above post. Truth be told, Ryan is a very talented and outgoing individual, who also has a serious side that is usually only seen by his professors, parents, and his employer. Scholars refer to this flexible, multidimensional sense of self as a contemporary view of identity. Computer mediated communication tends to draw participants that believe identity is flexible, so despite the audacity of his statement, viewers of the post will likely understand that he is not serious about his words. Rather, they understand that this post represents one of his multifaceted identities. Clearly, an evolved view of identity is present in his post, as well as identity negotiation.

This post also personifies the concept of identity negotiation. Ryan would like his friends to view him solely in a fun and light-hearted manner. To achieve this goal, he posts “I like to pick my nose and eat it.” In reality, Ryan probably does not pick his nose, nor eat the clogs of mucus that come from it. Moreover, he tries to make a statement about his identity. His friends, Kelly and Kathleen, then affirm his humor by commenting “Nice man, nice” and “Hot.” He then acknowledges their complements before Kathleen finally pronounces that Ryan is her *favorite*. While this may take months to happen in face to face communication, it happened in a matter of minutes online. Not only does the post express identity negotiation, it reveals hyperpersonal communication commonly found in online environments.

The above post arguably demonstrates hyperpersonal communication and presentation. On Facebook, Ryan has 955 friends. In a study conducted by Gallup, research suggests that any given person has between eight and ten friends, with an average of 8.6 friends. While some people have significantly more friends than this, the study suggests that the vast majority of people in our lives, whom we are not related to, are merely acquaintances. If Ryan told his acquaintances that he “picks his nose and eats it” in the channel of face to face communication, he most likely would receive negative feedback, both verbally through words of disgust and non-verbally through shocked facial expressions. In order to ascertain hyperpersonal communication, four factors must be established: the sender, the

receiver, the channel, and the feedback loop. Ryan, the sender, takes his time to think of a crafty post so that he can choose to influence the thoughts and opinions of others about him. In this case, Ryan chooses to highlight his humorous side. The receiver, Ryan's Facebook friends (and more specifically Kelly and Kathleen), may be read his post and perhaps over-idealize Ryan's humor. In fact, people are more likely to believe information online than face to face, so they may think that he is serious. This, however, is very unlikely, as they chose to comment on his post, which suggests they are friends who know Ryan's sense and style of humor. For all of his mere acquaintances, they may read "I like to pick my nose and eat it" and develop unrealistic impressions of Ryan, yet this proves why he posted such an audacious statement: to get a reaction. The post uses text as lean media to effectively communicate his message through Facebook, the channel. The comments regarding this post epitomize the feedback loop, as Ryan's friends recognize his humor and proceed to go along with it. Furthermore, Kathleen comments "Hot" and Ryan verifies her cue, responding, "I'm a hottie. You know. And I am man enough to leave it up lol." Hyperpersonal communication promotes strong impressions and miscommunication. Nonetheless, Ryan uses Facebook as a tool to have a good laugh, while simultaneously presenting himself as a fun and humorous friend.

Since Facebook posts are generally lean channels, many different interpretations can be made about Ryan's intentions. Nonetheless, social-presentation concepts indicate that Ryan intends his post to be strictly for laughs, rather than for accurate information about his hygiene. Ryan does not have a fixed identity, but rather a multidimensional one. Also, he chooses to negotiate how his friends perceive him, as his post demonstrates hyperpersonal communication. Clearly, Ryan's post illustrates many concepts of online self-presentation.