

## The Landscape of Internet Culture

Within the last decade we have seen the rise of ordering systems for online communities commonly known as social media. Social media is so ubiquitous that although those of us 20 and older remember a time before Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Twitter, it's hard to imagine the world now without them. In the 21st century, Western society is wholly engrossed in the social scene of the Internet. In cyberspace, our presentation of self can best be described as an elaborate performance. I will explore the complexities of communication via the Internet, the conventions of communities of Internet users, and the real world implications of having an online persona. Ethical considerations must be made in regards to privacy, but most of all, our own behavior online.

According to Webster's Dictionary, social media is defined as forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (Merriam-Webster). The term was first used in 2004, around the time that Facebook went live. Simply put, social media is a means of communication, though it is much different than a phone call or correspondence between small groups of people. From one perspective, the use of social media is seen as a utopia of equality. Yet, from another perspective, the erasure of a person's "real" identity can be dangerous, and as we have been seeing in recent years, downright deadly.

I liken the culture of the Internet to a "landscape" because it is a land that we as users are still exploring and defining. In early Internet terminology, a sense of travel was inferred in

phrases such as "surfing" and "information super highway." (Westlake 25) This landscape is controlled and ordered with websites and social media.

### **Social Performance In an Online Setting**

Social media is categorized through communities and sub communities. Though each "community" existing within social media has its own set of governing rules to exist as a cohesive group, how one behaves online requires some understanding of the language and culture in the virtual land of the Internet. Understanding the governing rules of any specific social media site are not only unique to the context of the website but also the sophistication of computer knowledge an individual possesses. Other than a basic knowledge of how to properly use a computer, "an individual must have a grasp of sense of the social context of Internet-based media and the implications of the technology on a wider scale. (Wilson and Peterson)" A lack of sophistication in an individual's usage of a social media outlet can result in a revocation of that person's welcome to the online community. In the context of an online gaming community, a newcomer or inexperienced player is referred to as a "noob" until that user proves him or herself to the community.

A friend of mine is a budding urban explorer and photographer. She recently joined an online group of urban photographers and was eager to share her experiences of finding abandoned structures to shoot in. Unknowingly, she broke a minor rule and the backlash was frightening. Regardless of how much information we provide about ourselves on social media, the result will always almost be a type of performance. According to Erving Goffmann in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in a correspondingly appropriate way. Basic information about a person, for example,

what he or she does for a living, is necessary for one to “define the situation” or understand the social context (Goffman 6). However, what ultimately leads one to take a person seriously is that person’s behavior. When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. (Goffman 6) It is easy to see that the anonymity of the Internet amplifies the usual performative aspects of presenting a self. In the case of my friend, her performance of self was not successful.

Goffmann notes that within established communities, members of that community love to pick apart flaws in the “reality” that they were fed. The anger at my friend’s mistake was *not* because the Urban Explorers group could not trust her; it was because they never truly accepted her as one of “them” at all. Though it has been several months, her initial flub has led to the impression that she is an inexperienced photographer, a wannabe. That begs the question why is it that the group is unwilling to look beyond her mistake? We all know the crucial importance of first impressions in the real world; however, it is much easier to change perceptions face to face. There is little way to definitively prove much about a personal identity on social media; therefore, retracting a bad “performance” can be very difficult.

### **The Anonymous Internet**

In my interview with sociologist Rebecca Erickson, she noted that anonymity on the Internet could be a very positive thing in the case of support groups for victims of abuse or violence. That notion is also held by other sociologists who assert that “people who are isolated by illness, especially those who are homebound or in remote locations, can feel a real sense of connection as they give and receive compassionate friendship and advice through ex-changing public and private email” (Mayer and Till).

It is possible to perform and still remain anonymous. An avatar, or a username provides a substantial alias to hide behind. A person need not tell one lie about who he or she is to remain hidden. I will admit, my own apprehension to come to terms with the comfort that remaining anonymous gives me while surfing the Internet. Most of my online “personas” represent me, but few are “real” images of my face. Rather than using a photo of myself, I feel more comfortable painting or drawing a portrait. My current Facebook cover and profile images were actually created for that very reason.

My hesitation in revealing my “true” self online extends further than Facebook. I have been a member of a social media website dedicated to artists and art appreciators called deviantART for over six years now. DeviantART was founded in August 2000 and has grown from a handful of art appreciating web designers to well over 3 million artists worldwide. Unlike Facebook, one can visit and comment freely on user profile pages. You would imagine that this freedom would mean that the interaction in this particular community would be more personal and genuine, however that is not the case at all. It is easier to perform an identity when there are few rules governing exactly *how* to present it. A deviantART user needs only an email address and to check a box that he or she is over 13 years of age in order to create an account. In order to combat the alienation that can occur because of the seemingly inhuman contact that can occur, I participated in a project on the website called “Face Your Avatar.” The premise of the project was to replace whatever image a user had representing his or her avatar with a real life picture of that individual’s face.

The Internet is a cool place. There are people to meet and things to see. I'm sure we'll all agree that deviantART is an amazing online community filled with plenty of like-minded individuals for potential friendships. But there's one problem with online communication - it's just not like face to face conversation. There are many differences between online chatter and physical chatter which set Internet friendships apart from physical ones. You can learn a lot about somebody when you talk to them in person - from the expressions on their face, to their hand movements, to their tone

of voice, to the way they represent themselves through their appearance. You can also learn a bit about them from their face itself. Because none of this exists on the Internet, barriers are put between online communications. It's not easy to jump over these barriers to make talking on the internet more personal and more relatable. –Miontre via deviantART

My old avatar was a pixelated representation of my face, so I imagined that replacing it with a real image wouldn't hurt. I should mention that I interact with several thousand people monthly on deviantART, and I'm not shy about it either. In fact, because I'm so involved with the community, I have the status of Senior Member. My basic information is displayed on my profile page, and my image gallery does include a few rare photos of myself for curious friends. When I changed my avatar image to a recent image of myself, I felt suddenly exposed. The boldness I had when typing replies was quickly tamped down by the fact my *real face* was going to be next to whatever I wrote. That being said, I've never written or done anything that I regret on the Internet, much less that website, but the event did cause me to question my intentions. Is it ethical for me to present a modified version of myself online? Though I am drawn to performing my online identity, I am very interested in guarding my privacy.

### **Seeing and Being Seen**

The other side of performing is being seen. While social media certainly allows a person to build whatever identity he or she desires, that person is under surveillance. Because of the NSA and the Patriot Act, we cognitively know that at any time our government can monitor or investigate our activity on the Internet. Yet, many find governmental surveillance more disconcerting than the fact that practically *anyone* could be stalked through social media websites such as Facebook. We don't mind that anyone can see an image uploaded to the Internet, as long as Big Brother isn't looking too.

In October 2013, Facebook began allowing users to make posts completely public, that is, they can be seen not only by friends, but anyone online. What we can see within social media is people “performing and offering themselves up for surveillance for their chosen audiences, opening new stages for the operation of and the resistance to hegemonic power” (Westlake 38). It is worth noting that the U.S Constitution does not guarantee a “right to privacy,” though the Supreme Court recognizes that the amended portions of the Constitution do *indeed* secure Americans several rights to personal privacy. One reason that Gen Y’ers/Millennials *may* have ambivalence about privacy is because private and public have collapsed together thanks to social media.

The social becomes obsessed with itself; through this auto- information, this permanent autointoxication, it becomes its own vice, its own perversion. This is the real obscenity. Through this feed- back, this incessant anticipated accounting, the social loses its own scene. It no longer enacts itself; it has no more time to enact itself; it no longer occupies a particular space, public or political; it becomes confused with its own control screen. Over informed, it develops in- growing obesity. For everything which loses its scene (like the obese body) becomes for that very reason ob-scene. (Baudrillard and MacLean, *The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media*)

We want total freedom to do or say whatever we want online, but are appalled by regulations. There is often an automatic assumption that surveillance is inherently not to be trusted, when in fact it exists for the purpose of maintaining safety and order. Jeremy Bentham invented the Panopticon in the late 18th century as a building model for institutions such as hospitals, schools, and of course, prisons. The Panopticon design allows for hidden observers to have a clear view of every cell in the institution. Foucault expanded Bentham’s idea of ultimate control with surveillance in his book *Discipline and Punish*. The Panopticon was not designed specifically to be a prison, but Foucault recognized that if it were implemented for the purpose of discipline, it would be extremely effective. Inmates cannot tell when or if they are being watched (therefore, they can only assume that they are *always* under supervision).

He who is subjected to a field of visibility and who knows it assumes responsibility for the constraints of power, he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault and Sheridan)

The panopticon is a successful model of surveillance in this way: every individual is under the consistent assumption that he or she is always being watched, therefore they are consistently rendered powerless to “the gaze.” The Panopticon is all the more effective not because individuals are surveyed and reported to an authority, but because individuals are punished directly by others. Surveillance comes not from Big Brother watching the Internet, but from users affirming or denying the performances of self they encounter on the Internet. (Westlake 36)

In many ways, social media is like a Panopticon. Every user has the ability to survey any profile at any given time, and on that same notion, every user is exposed to surveillance. Kelly Blazek is the founder of the Cleveland Job Bank, an online job search source, and in 2013 she was named “Communicator of the Year.” In January 2014 she was involved in a controversy on the social media site LinkedIn. She received an email from a 26-year-old job seeker named Diana Mekota who was requesting to join her job bank, and she included her resume. Blazek responded to the email in this way:

Apparently you have heard that I produce a Job Bank and decided it would be stunningly helpful for your career prospects if I shared my 960+LinkedIn connections with you—a total stranger who has nothing to offer me, I suggest you join the other Job Bank in town. Oh wait—there isn’t one.

Mekota shared this response through other social media outlets and within hours Blazek issued this apology: “The note I sent to Diana was rude, unwelcoming, unprofessional, and wrong.” However, others have come forward saying that they had similar run-ins with Blazek.

To another job seeker who inquired as to why he was removed from her job board she replied via email:

I provide an amazing free service to an entire industry that needs to remember I have no idea, nor do I want to know, the personal resume behind 7300 emails or 2700 Twitter handles. People are removed from my list from spamming me, for annoying me (you're doing a great job) and perhaps you were removed on purpose?

Blazek didn't apologize because of the pleading of the people she verbally abused; she apologized because the spats were made public through Twitter. Yet, Blazek failed to realize that she was not outside of the all seeing eye of the internet herself, simply because she was part of social media. The panopticon is a successful model of surveillance in this way: not because individuals are surveyed and reported to an authority, but because individuals are punished directly by others. (Friend me if you Facebook, 36) Panopticism worked in this case, causing the vindication of the job seekers and the formal public apology by Blazek. But why were Blazek's responses so unprofessional to begin with?

Blazek most likely assumed that she would never meet Diana Mekota or any of the others face to face, let alone speak with them over the phone, therefore, she could say whatever she wanted without any consequences.

### **Anonymity Gone Bad**

Like most things meant for the common good, anonymity can spiral out of control. Websites such as Encyclopedia Dramatica, as well as pages on Tumblr and Facebook are dedicated to stirring up conflicts (what is commonly known as "trolling") and generally encouraging harassment. All it takes is one person to set off a spark to burn down a forest. Though mediated through the medium of the Internet, mob mentality still exists because humans

are social creatures. The abuse of Internet anonymity combined with the victim's unsubstantiated trust of the perpetrator has even led to homicide, such as in the case of the Craigslist Killer.

This was the situation in the tragic suicide of Canadian teenager Amanda Todd in 2012. Todd was convinced by a stranger to expose her breasts during a video chat. The stranger later repeatedly harassed Todd by using the image of her topless as a profile image on Facebook and sharing the recording of the chat at her school. Todd was physically assaulted in her school and harassed further online until she hanged herself on October 12, 2012. Anonymity offers such a blanket of protection to an Internet user that normal inhibitions he or she may have in real life vanish.

## **Conclusion**

One can't help but wonder if the pervasiveness of social media is chipping away at real life face to face interactions, yet sociologists insist that this has not yet happened.

According to sociologist Rebecca Erickson, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Akron, social media does not replace real life communication; instead it acts as a tool to organize real life activities. Others have argued that "the Internet does not reduce in-person or telephone contact, or any other form of social activity; it replaces only sleeping or TV watching." (Westlake 31)

I believe that our concerns about the ever-evolving animal that is social media should be placed within ourselves: the users. Fingers can be pointed at websites, privacy policies and governmental snooping, but at the end of the day, it is you and I who are directly influencing social media. The way we behave, or "perform" mediates our experiences in the real world, and it is more than evident that our actions online can directly affect our lives within the real world.

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# The Landscape of Internet Culture

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# Social Media



**WELCOME TO THE INTERNET.  
I WILL BE YOUR GUIDE.**



Internet University Cast by  
Jennifer Bach

**Social Marketing Management**  
shoutlet, SYNCASE, vitrue, involucr, hootsuite, Flowtown, Spreadlast, awareness, tweet, tapfi, hearst, MUTUALMIND, SPROUT SOCIAL, offerpop, Seesmic, Strutta, votigo, Fanzilla, SocialAppsHD, extole, Zuberance, Beazgent, CalunSea

**URL Shorteners**  
bitly, TinyURL.com, tinyurl.com

**Stream Platforms**  
UberMedia, TweetDeck, Aol Lifestream...

**Twitter Apps**  
twibpic, tweetmeme, Stocktwits, Cadmus, wefollow, fixup!, Listorious, tweetvid

**Social Publishing Platforms**  
Socialware

**Content Curation**  
hunch, memlane, summyv, SkyGrid, Storify

**Facebook Apps**  
BranchOut, snapto, bodoo, smule, causes, booshaka

**Social Promotion Platforms**  
Social Amp

**Social Advertising Platforms**  
TBG, Lexity, spruce, MEDIA, Acqply, BLINQ, epic social, CALTYZE, nanigans, Ybrant, KENSHOO, Marin, EfficientFrontier

**Social Brand Engagement**  
socialvibe, mylikes, adly, appsworthy, sharethrough

**Social Commerce Platforms**  
Payment, Moontoast, SHOP TAB, dotbox, FLUID, shop igniter, milyani

**Facebook Gaming**  
Playdom, zynga, socialpoint, DIGITAL

**Social Ad Networks**  
rockyou, across, LIFESTREET, radium, AGRAPH

**Social Data**  
DATA SIFT, RapLeaf

**Social Search & Browsing**  
spokeo

**Social Intelligence**  
Trendr, ATTITUDE, VISIBLE, actiosly, bottlenose, colligent, lockbyte, ALTERIAN, NETBASE

**Social Scoring**  
KLOUT, PeerIndex

**Social TV**  
Social Mobile Apps & Games

**Social Networks - Other**  
LinkedIn, TAGGED, my, Path, orkut, Google+, #hashable, renren, goiq

**Social Shopping**  
Zaarly, zappi, Swipely, SUPPLY, iBeebook

**Content Sharing (Reviews/Q&A/Docs)**  
topix, photo, photo, DocShare, yelp, Angies list, Scribd

**Social Business Software**  
External (Customer) Facing: inpage, Satisfaction, LeverageSoftware, huddle, cubetree, acquia, yammer, maxie  
Internal (Employee) Facing: TWiki, Socialtext, yammer

**Blogging Platforms**  
tumblr, posterous, Blogger, WordPress, Squarespace, Joomla!, JUX

**Social Referral**  
social, social, social

**Photo Sharing**  
SmugMug, iStockphoto, flickr, ZangZing

**Community Platforms**  
Community Platforms

**Plug-ins/Widgets**  
tunt, sharethis, spinbook, janron, condult, widgetbox

**Traditional Publishers**  
ABC, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, HEARST corporation, AOL, CONDÉ NAST

twitter  
facebook

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# Social Media by Category



# 2013

WAS ALL ABOUT

# SOCIAL

Socialbakers.com

**The Story of Social Media in 2013 #SocialStory2013**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEzoEuiP1-o>

# Social Performance In an Online Setting



# Runescape Terminology most frequently used by The Wild Ones

- Afk/ Afkable/Afking- away from keyboard. Any kind of gameplay that allows the user to step away from the computer temporarily while still logged in and “playing.”
- Bankstanding- socializing with other players in a populated area such as a bank.
- PK/PKer/PKing/PKed- player Killer, player killing, killed by another player.
- Nuke- a system upgrade.
- Nerf- a change to a game that reduces the desirability or effectiveness of a particular game element.
- HAGD- Have a good day
- BBS- be back soon.
- BBL- be back later.
- Skiller- someone who trains Non-Combat skills (can be any Combat level)/More commonly someone who trains non-combat skills primarily or exclusively.
- Noob/Nub/Neeb/Nublet- a new, young, or inexperienced player.
- RS- Runescape



Xadrea of Saradomin



My Runescape character  
Xadrea



# The Anonymous Internet



On the Internet, nobody  
knows you're a dog  
1995 Illustration



**on the internet, no one knows you're a cat.**

ROFLCAT.COM

via [roflcat.com](http://roflcat.com)



Self I, 2013



Self II, 2013



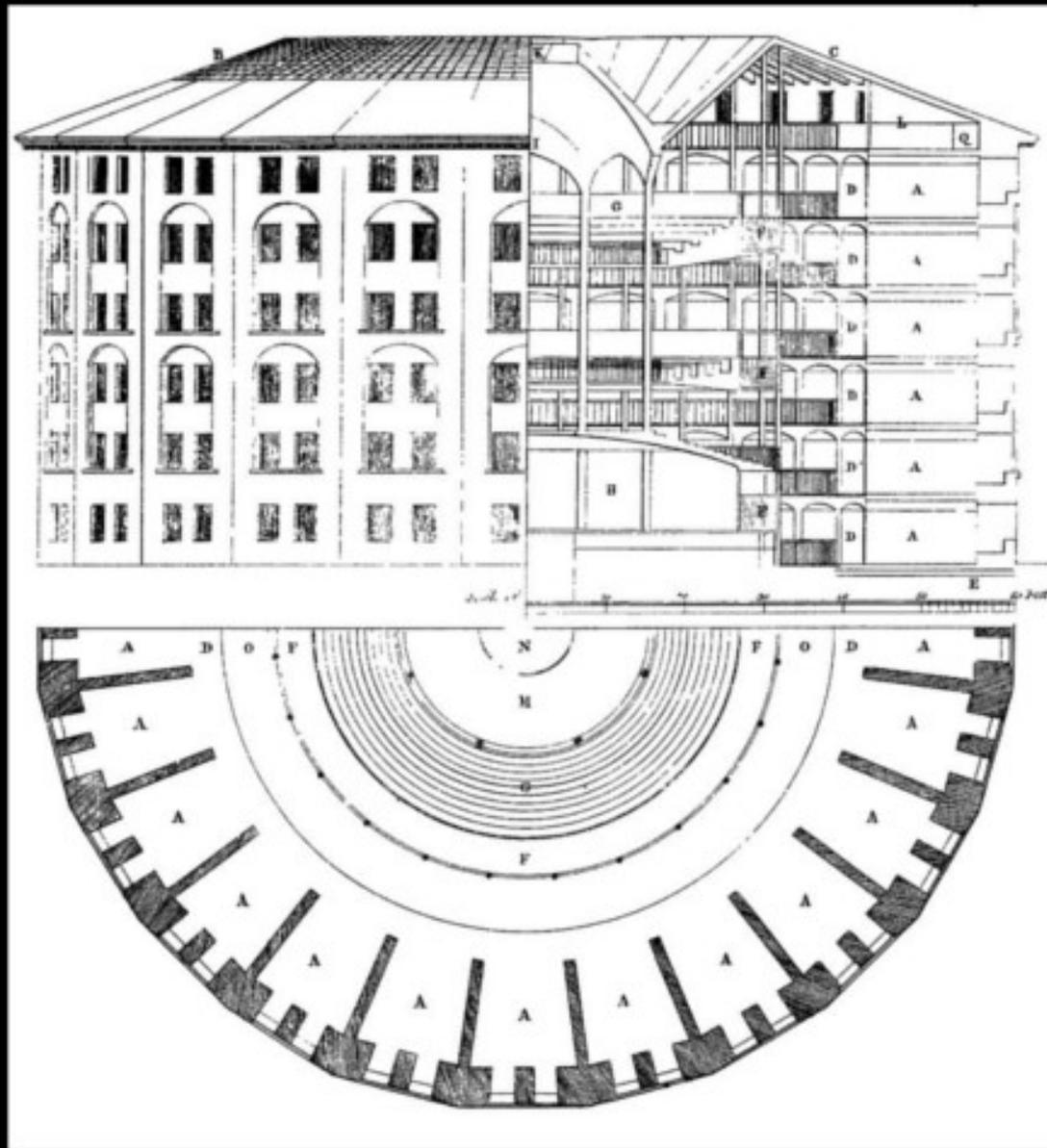
My deviantART Profile Image  
created by Thiefoworld

# Face Your Avatar Project



I'm sure we'll all agree that deviantART is an amazing online community filled with plenty of like-minded individuals for potential friendships. But there's one problem with online communication - it's just not like face to face conversation. There are many differences between online chatter and physical chatter which set internet friendships apart from physical ones. You can learn a lot about somebody when you talk to them in person - from the expressions on their face, to their hand movements, to their tone of voice, to the way they represent themselves through their appearance. You can also learn a bit about them from their face itself. Because none of this exists on the internet, barriers are put between online communications. It's not easy to jump over these barriers to make talking on the internet more personal and more relatable.- Miontre via deviantART

Seeing and Being Seen



Panopticon Building Plan



Red Onion State Prison,  
Virginia

ARE YOU COMING TO BED?

I CAN'T. THIS  
IS IMPORTANT.

WHAT?

SOMEONE IS WRONG  
ON THE INTERNET.





---

**From:** Kelly Blazek <kblazek@nls.net>  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 31, 2013 6:23 PM  
**Subject:** Two Things

1. Where in this note do you indicate what industry you are in? Am I a mind reader?

I love this group! I was getting the lists emailed to me but now, I noticed I'm not getting them. I'm looking for work, so I'd love to start getting them again

All subscribers are screened to ensure they are in the industry I serve. My December Job Bank had a 5 paragraph rant about what a poor job my subscribers do when telling others to sign up for my service – explaining one's career field is paramount to entry. Period. I promised to deny any requestor who made me guess what they do. Congratulations – you're another one.

2. Taking to social media to rant about my denial (excuse me, your failure to follow instructions) is in poor taste and immature. I am offended that you're too lazy to send me an e-mail. Half the world has my e-mail – not difficult to find. Too busy posing for pouty Twitter pictures?

I provide an amazing free service to an entire industry that needs to remember I have no idea, nor do I want to know, the personal resume behind 7,300 e-mails or 2,700 twitter handles. People are removed from my list for spamming me, for annoying me (you're doing a great job), and perhaps you were removed on purpose?

Your super-brilliant Twitter stunt sealed your fate. And does that work well when you interview for a job and don't get hired? @Advanstar Denied? Why?

I suggest you sign up for the other Job Bank in town. Oh, guess what – there isn't one.

Done with this conversation, and you.



I love how the internet has improved people's grammar far more than any English teacher has. If you write "your" instead of "you're" in English class, all you get is a red mark. Mess up on the internet, and may God have mercy on your soul.

Smile 😊 Share ➦

Anonymity Gone Bad





This is a page to expose bullies, liars, back stabbers, shit talkers, pedophiles, and everything you can think of within the Site Modeling world. If you have something you would like us to post on the blog, then please submit it. If you wish to remain 100% Anon, submit the post to us with a caption saying "Please make sure this is 100% anon." and we will make sure it is.- via Butthurt Brigade's Tumblr page

You are /such/ a fatass. You will never make it in the sitemodeling world, [REDACTED]. Never. You're too ugly.

 Anonymous

Seriously, [REDACTED]? Are you going to be so immature, and send me Tumblr hate? At least have the decency and the balls to do it off anon. I know it's you. You're the only one who knows my actual name, that I'm a site model, and this Tumblr other than [REDACTED]. And I know damn well that [REDACTED] wouldn't say this shit to me. You need to grow up. Really. Seriously. You really do. You're no better than me. You're no skinnier than me. And you're no prettier than me. So I don't understand why you think you're up on this pedestal, when you're below me. I had the decency to leave you alone after that Facebook fight, but no. You keep dragging it on. No wonder people don't like you. No wonder all of your "friends" talk about you behind your back. You're a [REDACTED]. Plain and simple. A [REDACTED]. And you know what? I'm glad [REDACTED] hacked your account. I wish I would've done things too. I wish I would've taken action instead of talking. I would've done so much worse than she did. And as you already know, screenies of you lying, back stabbing, and such have been leaked. You've been exposed. And I'm looking forward to seeing your world crash and burn. Don't bother me anymore. I want you out of my life. I honestly cannot believe I dated such an evil conniving bitch such as yourself.

With that being said, I hope you have a great day and I hope you decide to do the right thing and leave me alone.

Goodbye, [REDACTED].

via Butthurt Brigade's Tumblr



Cyberbullying

## 1. **catfish**



A **catfish** is someone who pretends to be someone they're not using Facebook or other social media to create false identities, particularly to pursue deceptive online romances.

*Did you hear how Dave got totally catfished last month?! The **fox** he thought he was talking to turned out to be a **pervy** guy from San Diego!*

*or*

*I was really falling for that **gorgeous** gal on Facebook, but she turned out to be a **catfish**.*

by **sbacker** July 22, 2010



👍 3545    🗨️ 1963

# Signs that you've been 'Catfished'

- A random, attractive person starts talking to you online in some capacity.
- You can't get this person to use Skype, or his or her phone is often out of commission.
- When a breaking point is reached, then and only then does the catfish say he or she will visit you. This visit doesn't usually pan out, it's just used as leverage to keep you interested in the interim.
- Getting a physical address from them is incredibly difficult.
- You never hear people in the background during your phone calls because they are made with extreme caution.



Manti Te'o



MTV Reality TV show:  
Catfish

Conclusion

