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Published online: 01 Dec 2015.

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A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words: A Mixed Methods Study of Online Self-Presentation in a Multiethnic Sample of Emerging Adults

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Using a mixed methods approach, this study examined the meanings that emerging adults ($N = 261$; 195 women, 66 men; M age $\approx$ 22 years old) ascribed to their online self-presentation. A thematic analysis based on 761 Facebook photo descriptions and 714 wall posts and status updates revealed that these emerging adults presented their individual, social, gender, ethnic, and spiritual identities as well as their positive, neutral, and negative affective states online. Individual and social identities were presented more frequently than other types of identities, and were linked to positive and negative affective states. The emerging adult women presented their social and gender identities in their photos more frequently, whereas the men presented their individual identity more often. When presenting their individual identity, women disclosed positive states more frequently whereas men disclosed neutral states more often. Latino American participants presented their individual identity less frequently than their Asian and European American peers, whereas Asian American participants presented their gender identity less frequently than their Latino and European American peers. When presenting their individual and social identities, Asian American participants disclosed neutral states more frequently and positive states less frequently than their Latino and European American peers. Findings have implications for the psychosocial development of emerging adults from ethnically diverse backgrounds, as well as for theory and research about self-development within online contexts.

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are times when individuals make meaningful attempts to consolidate multiple aspects of their identities into their theory of self (Arnett, 2014; Kroger, 2006). They make sense of their identities via self-presentation about aspects of the self to a real or an imagined audience (Brown, 2007) and self-disclosure about identity-related information and affective states to intimate friends and partners (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Extant research on emerging adults' identity development has examined self-explorations mainly within offline contexts (see Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013, for a review). It has

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become clear that young people use social media (e.g., Facebook) for self-presentation and self-disclosure (for a review, see Michikyan & Subrahmanyam, 2012); thus, these new online venues are an important developmental context for identity research. Research on emerging adults' use of social media for identity-related explorations have primarily used quantitative measures (Michikyan, Dennis, & Subrahmanyam, 2014) and methodologies (for a review, see Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013), with mostly European American samples (e.g., Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Little is known about the identity-related experiences of ethnic minority youth on social media (Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012; Tynes, Garcia, Giang, & Coleman, 2011).

Ethnic minority youth are as likely as their European American peers to use the Internet (Krogstad, 2015), and we need a rich and nuanced picture of the aspects of the identities that they present online and the meanings they ascribe to these identity-related experiences. In this study, we applied a mixed methods approach to systematically document and analyze the meanings that a multiethnic group of emerging adults ascribed to the online self-presentation of their identities and affective states. We used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive and rich picture of identity-related online explorations, including gender and ethnic differences in these experiences.

Identity in Emerging Adulthood

To examine some of the identity-related online experiences of emerging adults, we drew from the psychosocial theories of identity and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014; Erikson, 1959). Erikson (1959) proposed that formulating a unified sense of the self is the central developmental task for adolescents. Youth try out a variety of roles in different contexts as they attempt to integrate these facets into a coherent identity. On this view, *identity* is defined as multiple aspects of the self that include affective (self-feelings), cognitive (self-images), and behavioral (self-presentation and self-disclosure) components (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Scholars have suggested that young people make sense of their identities via self-presentation (Brown, 2007) and self-disclosure (Greene et al., 2006), and that the process of identity formation is influenced by internal (e.g., feelings, self-images; Markus & Wurf, 1987) as well as external factors such as context (Farmer & Van Dyne, 2010), situation (Alexander & Knight, 1971), and relational dynamics (Greene et al., 2006). As a result, identities that are central to the self-concept may be psychologically available and salient, influencing how young people make meaning of their identity-related experiences (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

As identities become salient, affective states may become more consistent with them, in turn eliciting a strong preference for identity-consistent emotional experiences and behaviors (Coleman & Williams, 2013). In other words, emerging adults who are devoted sports fans, and who consider this social membership to be central to their self-concept, may present social aspects of their identities in situations where there is the need to show devotion to the team, even if the team never wins a game. Although individuals may psychologically assert multiple identities (either in relative isolation or in combination; Bowleg, 2008), they might consider the identities that are central to the self-concept based on meaning and expectations. These identities may become psychologically salient based on external triggers, enacted (presented or disclosed) in multiple ways, and integrated into the theory of self via *meaning*

making: creating and maintaining a sense of identity by talking and reflecting on life experiences (McLean & Thorne, 2003). The task of consolidating multiple identities extends beyond adolescence and into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014; Kroger, 2006), and studies have shown that many young people actively explore multiple aspects of the self, including their *individual* (Ravert, 2009), *social* (Macek, 2003), *gender* (Lips, 2008), *ethnic* (Phinney, 1996), and *spiritual* (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008) identities (for definitions, see Appendix).

There may be gender and ethnic group differences in explorations related to identity. For instance, young adult women have been found to place greater emphasis on aspects of their social identity (e.g., relationships), whereas young adult men have been found to highlight aspects of their individual identity (e.g., independence; Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006). Moreover, young women use more positive and negative affective words than young men to describe their personal experiences (Newman, Groom, Handelman, & Pennebaker, 2008). These gender differences may stem from differences in socialization patterns (Guimond et al., 2006) as well as gender norms and expectations concerning self-presentation and self-disclosure that influence identity development (Lips, 2008).

With regard to ethnic group differences in emerging adults' identity exploration (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009; Syed & Azmitia, 2008), research has suggested that particular identities may be a more salient feature of the self-concept for young adults from certain ethnic groups, and may be triggered in different situations and contexts in college (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008). For instance, in a mixed methods study of college students, a greater number of Asian and Latino American participants mentioned that they had explored their ethnic identity compared to their European American counterparts (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Findings from these studies indicate that, although addressing issues of ethnicity and culture are important for identity development within a multicultural society such as the United States, researchers should also study other kinds of identities that may be self-relevant for ethnic minority youth who are likely undergoing identity changes on a personal and group level.

Social Media as a Context for Self-Development

Research has shown that identity-related explorations in emerging adulthood are migrating to online venues (Michikyan & Subrahmanyam, 2012). This is not at all surprising given that emerging adults are avid users of social media such as Facebook (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). It is estimated that every 60 seconds on Facebook, about 510 comments are posted, 293,000 statuses are updated, and 136,000 photos are uploaded (Noyes, 2015). Facebook's versatile platform allows users to share photos, post messages on each other's profiles (e.g., via wall posts), and express their thoughts and feelings (e.g., via status updates). Research has demonstrated that young people use social media for self-presentation and for self-disclosure, and these behaviors may be linked to their developing sense of the self (e.g., Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Michikyan et al., 2014). Consequently, this makes Facebook an ideal forum to gather rich descriptive identity-related information.

Drawing on qualitative (e.g., Grasmuck, Martin, & Zhao, 2009) as well as quantitative (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012; Pempek et al., 2009; Qiu, Lin, Leung, & Tov, 2012) methodologies, researchers have documented that college students present multiple facets of their identities (Grasmuck et al., 2009; Manago et al., 2008; Pempek et al., 2009) and disclose

various affective states online (Manago et al., 2012; Qiu et al., 2012). For instance, in Manago et al.'s (2008) focus group study, college students explained that they used comments and photos to present aspects of their personal, social, and gender identities on MySpace. Subramanian (2010) also found that South Asian Muslim women in college presented aspects of their ethnic identity on Facebook by posting photos of themselves in traditional South Asian clothes and by discussing cultural norms and practices via wall posts and status updates on Facebook. Similarly, using a content analysis as well as interviews with a subsample of participants, Grasmuck et al. (2009) found that college students from diverse ethnic backgrounds presented information on Facebook that was linked to their racial and cultural identities. Additionally, Gannon et al.'s content analysis revealed that emerging adults' Facebook profiles contained information about their religious identity and affiliations (Gannon, Becker, & Moreno, 2012).

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that young people use social media in their quest for identity, and their online self-presentation may be a function of gender, ethnicity, and as well as the features afforded by the online site. Moreover, findings from Grasmuck et al. (2009) and Subramanian (2010) suggest that online platforms may provide opportunities for young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to present aspects of their ethnic identities in ways that may not be possible to do offline. No doubt, it is easier to display affinity to one's ethnic group by uploading a photo of an ethnic flag than to physically carry a flag around. The studies also showed that young people use features that enable them to upload photos and post comments to present their identities (Manago et al., 2008) and post status updates to express their affective states (e.g., Manago et al., 2012).

This Study

Our goal in this article was to provide a rich picture of emerging adults' online identity-related self-explorations. Specifically, we analyzed self-presentation of multiple identities and affective states in a multiethnic sample and tested the relationship between identities and affective states since the enactment of identities may vary with affective states (Coleman & Williams, 2013). This work contributes to our understanding of youth social media use and identity development in several important ways. First, we extended voice to emerging adults from ethnically diverse backgrounds by asking them to describe, in their own words, the meanings they ascribed to their online identity experiences. This allowed us to tackle questions about identity enactment, salience, and meaning making in an online context, topics that have received scant attention in the identity literature. Second, we applied a mixed methods approach to study online self-presentation of identities and affective states in a multiethnic sample of emerging adults. Our approach adopts the recommendation that innovative methodologies be used to better understand the processes of constructing a cohesive self (Schwartz, Vignoles, & Luyckx, 2011). Third, we expanded on prior work that has focused on personal and social identities with European American samples, and on cultural and ethnic identities with ethnic minority samples, or that has examined identity and affective states quantitatively (Qiu et al., 2012) and separately. Keeping in line with our research goals, we proposed the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What meanings do emerging adults from ethnically diverse backgrounds ascribe to the online self-presentation of their identities and affective states?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Which aspects of identities and affective states are salient in online self-presentation?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What is the relationship between online self-presentation of identities and affective states?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): What are the similarities and differences in online self-presentation of identities and affective states between Asian, Latino, and European American emerging adult women and men?

METHOD

Participants

We recruited 261 (195 women, 66 men; aged $18 - 30$; $M = 21.92$, $SD = 2.76$) students from a psychology subject pool at a large urban public university in Southern California. Participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 30 years old and be a Facebook user. The sample reflected the diverse ethnic and racial makeup of the institution and Southern California: 5% African/Black American, 19% Asian American, 57% Latino American, 10% European/White American, and 9% other ethnic and racial groups. The majority of our sample (76%) was born in the United States. With regard to their daily average Facebook use, participants reported spending about 145 minutes on the site, logging on about six times, posting comments about four times, and updating their status at least once. On average, participants reported having approximately 197 photos on their Facebook profile, and 87% reported having at least 50 selfies. About 90% of the sample reported having a private Facebook profile (only friends could view all information).

Measures

Participants completed all measures on www.surveymonkey.com, a survey-hosting site, for course credit.

Demographics Questionnaire

Participants reported their age, gender, and ethnicity and race. For ethnic and racial background, we asked them to either select from a preexisting list of ethnic and racial labels or to type in their own ethnic and racial labels. For the purpose of the study and the analysis, we combined the ethnic and racial categories into a single label (e.g., Mexican/Mexican American and Salvadorean/Salvadorean American were combined under the label of Latino). Those who identified as both Nicaraguan and Armenian American were first placed in mixed ethnic and racial group, and then other ethnic and racial groups.

Facebook Use Questionnaire

We collected information about participants' average daily use of Facebook, including time spent on Facebook, and a variety of Facebook activity questions about their average number of logins, status updates, and wall posts.

Facebook Photos and Wall Post and Status Updates Qualitative Questionnaire

We used a qualitative questionnaire to collect information about participants' identity-related online experiences. First, we asked participants to select three Facebook photos and wall posts and status updates that best captured who they were. Next, we asked them to describe the content of each photo in detail (what was going on in the photo?), and to type in (or copy and paste) their wall posts and status updates. We then asked the participants to interpret and explain the meanings of each photo and wall post or status update, and to describe why the photos and statements were important to them. There was no limit on the number of words or characters for these responses. Because our goal was to capture the meanings that participants ascribed to their photos, we collected only their descriptions and interpretations or explanations of the photos and not the photos themselves. On the questionnaire, participants were told to have their Facebook profile open in another tab, so they could browse through their photos and wall posts and status updates and select three of each that best captured who they were.

Coding Scheme and Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis involves searching the data for themes and patterns of meaning that appear essential, and using the emerging themes as the categories for analysis (Saldaña, 2013). We employed a deductive and an inductive thematic analysis using the responses to the qualitative questionnaire ($N = 1475$; 761 photo descriptions and 714 wall posts and status updates). The first author carefully read and reread the responses for the following five identity-related themes, which were identified from the developmental psychology literature about online and offline identity development: (1) individual identity, (2) social identity, (3) gender identity, (4) ethnic identity, and (5) spiritual identity; in addition, the responses were reviewed for three themes related to affective states: (1) positive, (2) neutral, and (3) negative (see Appendix). Although the positive and negative affective themes were developed from social media research, the neutral theme emerged from the data. To ensure interrater reliability, two research assistants individually coded a random sample of 120 responses (60 photo descriptions or interpretations and 60 wall posts and status updates). Following this, the first and the third authors along with the two research assistants resolved all discrepancies, and then used the coding scheme to code the complete data.

The first author and two research assistants coded all responses using a binary coding scheme: 0 (*not present*), 1(*present*). Since the codes for identities were not mutually exclusive, the photo descriptions and wall posts and status updates could be coded into multiple identity categories. This technique was appropriate as participants could make more than one identity-related reference in a response. As prior research (e.g., Manago et al., 2012) has shown that young people use comments and status updates to disclose affective states online, we coded only the wall posts and status updates for three affective tones. Participants often disclosed more than one kind of affective state. However, to more accurately capture the meaning and essence of their affective states, we referred to the participants' explanations of their statements. Based on the observed patterns, we felt that it was appropriate to make the affective state categories mutually exclusive (either positive, neutral, or negative). The final interrater reliability (as measured by Cohen's kappa) for photo descriptions and wall posts and status updates ranged from 0.8 to 1.0, indicating substantial to almost perfect agreement (Viera & Garrett, 2005).

RESULTS

In the following section, we present examples of the themes of identities and affective states. The examples have been edited to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, but preserve the meaning and essence of their responses. Furthermore, to reach a deeper understanding of the meanings ascribed to online self-presentation of the participants' identities and affective states, we also provide subthemes and context for their statements and explanations.

Qualitative Approach: Identities and Affective States

Individual Identity

Participants' photo descriptions (35%) and wall posts and status updates (69%) reflected themes of individual identity. Many emphasized their personal characteristics and traits in an attempt to show their ''real self.'' For instance, a 20-year-old woman selected a picture of herself ''with the violin'' because it captured her ''melodious side'' and because she liked ''calming and soothing music, especially one that involves the violin.'' Similarly, a 21-year-old man described a photo of himself ''playing volleyball with friends'' and explained that it communicated his personal characteristics such as being ''very outgoing and athletic.''

Although some of the statements were straightforward, others were more complicated and cryptic and could be understood only with participants' explanations. For example, a 21-year-old woman described her photo as follows:

[M]e standing on the ground at the beach with my arms outstretched to both sides of my body in a gesture of surrender. I also have an undecided expression on my face because often times in life, there are moments when I feel just like giving up, and to just let life carry me where it will, instead of always stubbornly fighting it.

This sense of individuation was also expressed via photos and wall posts and status updates that reflected subthemes of participants' sense of autonomy, agency, personal interests, commitments, and accomplishments. For instance, a 26-year-old woman explained that her photo ''shows that I was in Hawaii for my birthday, lying out on the beach,'' and that this was ''the first time I took time to be by myself.'' A 22-year-old man selected a photo in which he was ''sitting in a race car'' that he ''helped to design and build.'' He continued to explain that he has ''been interested in cars since I was 5 years old and I am pursuing a career as an automotive engineer.''

In their responses, participants also expressed a greater sense of growth and maturity as well as decisiveness, reflexivity, and deliberateness. For example, a 23-year-old man was pondering how to ''explain to a 10-year-old [brother] that game consoles back then didn't have online capabilities, controllers had to be plugged in.'' In his wall post or status update, he noted that one ''needed to blow on game cartridges for them to work.'' By engaging in this kind of reflection, he admitted ''I feel old'' but, at the same time, liked ''to reminisce about the past and just going back to see how much has changed over the years.''

The subtheme of being ''heard'' featured prominently in many of the photo and wall post and status update selections. Participants made their presence known by sharing their opinions, by

requesting advice or feedback, and by asking questions. For example, an 18-year-old woman shared that ''gas prices keep going up and jobs are still being lost; what a shame.'' In her post, she also revealed that she ''had just been told I was being laid off this summer.''

Participants also made their ''presence'' known via photos; for example, a 27-year-old woman described that her photo ''is showing that I'm at the beach. I'm telling friends I had a good vacation during holidays.'' They also made self-relevant announcements to a large or a small group of people or to a friend. The following example illustrates this point: ''Job interview in 40 minutes! Wish me luck'' (male, aged 18). This participant felt the need to share this status, as this was ''an important job interview'' and to show his personal characteristics that he was ''motivated'' and ''actively looking for a job.'' Overall, participants' responses suggested that self-presentation to a larger audience might be a way to facilitate a general sense of connection to others.

Social Identity

Participants' photo descriptions (65%) and wall posts and status updates (32%) reflected themes of social identity. Many pointed out that their lives had changed, at least to some extent, because of moving to different cities and colleges. For example, a 27-year-old woman shared the following comment, ''Good friends are like stars. You don't always see them, but you know they're always there,'' as a way to make sense of her mixed feelings about her current situation. She explained, ''We [friends and her] are separated at different colleges and sort of far away, yet we know that when we really need each other we will always be there.'' Playing pranks and sharing inside jokes, in addition to revealing their humorous side, were examples of their leisure activities with friends, peers, and others. For example, a 21-year-old woman used a photo in which she was ''putting bunny ears on my best friend with a wide grin'' to capture the quality and social position in her ''relationship'' with a woman friend as she explained, ''I'm always happiest around her.''

Despite moving away from home, many of the emerging adults reported that they remained in close contact with family members electronically, and that they got along with their parents better than they did during the adolescent years. A 20-year-old woman commented on her cousin's profile, ''I miss you!'' because this was something that her family members expected. She explained, ''My family likes to receive updates frequently from everyone. We love each other and miss each other when we don't see each other.'' Another 22-year-old woman selected a comment that captured her feelings of disappointment because ''my little brother and I are both away at college and he is going back home to visit the family. Usually we go home together but I can't go this time because of work.''

For many of the emerging adults in our sample, relationships (in particular, romantic relationships) were more identity focused and serious, and they seemed to perceive and receive more social and emotional support from their romantic partners. For example, a 19-year-old man selected a comment that showed his role as a romantic partner and his feelings about his relationship with his girlfriend: ''Babe, Happy Anniversary & Happy Valentine's Day :).'' He explained that this wall post or status update captured who he was because it showed that ''I am committed and that I care about my girlfriend.'' Similarly, a 19-year-old woman presented aspects of her social identity with a photo of herself and her boyfriend at Disneyland. She described the photo thus: ''on our first trip to Disneyland together.'' She continued to explain, ''I really love

Disneyland and we've only been together for less than a month but he was so willing to take me to this place that makes me happy. It shows that he cares about me and wants me to be happy.''

Many of our participants shared their social identity by expressing their sense of belonging to a social group—either by highlighting that they were a fan of a sports team (e.g., ''at the L.A. Kings hockey game because I am a big fan of the Kings'' [male, aged 20]) or were a fan of music artists (e.g., ''I'm a big fan of Bob Dylan'' [male, aged 23]). In presenting this type of social identity, they acknowledged their roles and the roles of their friends in their social relationships. For a 21-year-old man, being ''at a Lakers game'' was meaningful in multiple ways; he explained that the photo communicated to others that he was ''a big Lakers fan,'' that he ''love[d] basketball,'' and that he had ''a good time with good friends.''

A subtheme that emerged from the data was based on participants' selection of photos and wall posts and status updates that featured their relationships with their pets—a social quality of their identity. The following wall post or status update exemplifies this point: ''OMG my cat is adorable. She puts her toys in my bag for school, and I don't find them until I get to school :)'' She then explained that, ''Everyone knows I love my cat, Tilly. I always post things about her because she makes my day. Everyone on my Facebook knows Tilly.''

Gender Identity

Participants' photo descriptions (9%) and wall posts and status updates (5%) reflected themes of gender identity. Many of the emerging adult participants' online gender identity presentation reflected some of the norms around gender and the meanings they attributed to their experiences related to gender identity. For example, a 19-year-old woman shared with us that she uploaded a photo, which her friend helped to take, to share a novel and meaningful moment in her life. She explained that the photo was taken ''after I finished my first makeup I have ever had. It shows the effect of a makeover on people, and it completely brings confidence when I wear makeup.'' Others emphasized their subjective sense of role transitions and explorations related to gender identity. A 28-year-old woman explained, ''a photo of me smiling and holding my children, this captures the fact that I am a mother who enjoys motherhood . . . it represents a change and a different life phase. I'm no longer by myself.''

Although most of the photos and wall posts and status updates presented more gendered or stereotypic roles and behaviors, participants' explanations or the ways in which they made sense of their gender identity were more nuanced. For instance, a 19-year-old man and a 25-year-old woman emphasized their sense of agency, instrumentality, and autonomy, but they made meaning of their identity-related experiences in qualitatively distinct ways. The younger man noted, ''I fixed my car by myself, I am a REAL man! [the comment] shows that little by little, I'm able to do things on my own without the help of my parents''; the older woman noted, ''I am standing at the beach with my long board in one hand! I am a California Girl and I love the beach; it's calm and relaxing, and it makes me feel like nothing can go wrong.'' Although the younger male participant conveyed a sense of exploration and gradual achievement of his gender identity, the older female participant conveyed a stronger sense of her gender identity. This qualitative difference, in part, could reflect the subjective differences between early versus late emerging adults.

Ethnic Identity

A small proportion of photo descriptions (0.8%) and wall posts and status updates (3.9%) also reflected themes of ethnic identity, which included the extent to which participants made references to their ethnicity, their active role in participating in ethnic or cultural events and holidays, and the use of ethnic expressions. For a comment to be coded as containing this theme, it had to be in the heritage language and had to contain context and content relative to ethnic identity

For some of our participants, sharing information about their ethnic group affiliation was part of their self-development. For example, a 23-year-old Chinese American woman had posted a comment in Chinese characters, which translated to ''Happy New Year.'' She explained that this comment was to show others that ''I'm Chinese'' and that she posted the comment for the ''Chinese New Year.'' On the other hand, a 25-year-old Mexican American man chose to describe a photo of ''an island off the West Coast of Mexico'' as this ''represents my native culture and birthplace of my parents.''

Other participants emphasized aspects of their ethnic customs and traditions. For example, a 19-year-old Filipina woman chose to describe a photo of her ''two brothers, my dad and I on my 18th birthday. It's taken at home, and my youngest brother is putting the corsage on my hand.'' She continued to explain that ''this photo shows the 3 most important boys in my life, and this was the day I turned 18. In the Filipino culture, this day is important because it is of coming of age.'' Another 19-year-old woman described a photo of herself in a ''Folklorico dress'' after one of her performances, and emphasized that ''Folklorico has been a part of my life and I love dancing to Mexican folk songs'' (Mexican American). A few participants shared their sense of connection to their native country and longing to visit their family and friends there. For example, a 21-year-old Thai American man commented that he wanted ''to go back to Thailand!'' because he wanted ''to see my family and friends.''

Spiritual Identity

A small percentage of the photo descriptions (1.4%) and wall posts and status updates (2.4%) also reflected aspects of participants' identity related to spirituality or religion. For these emerging adults, religion or spirituality was an important part of their lives, and they used Facebook to share their religious affiliations and participation in faith-based activities, events, and holidays. Although some participants identified themselves as religious by noting, ''I am a religious person and I believe in God'' (19-year-old), others highlighted the role played by those who shared their faith or spirituality. For example, a 20-year-old described a group photo in which she was with ''some of my church members and me at a picnic we had during the summer. Church plays a big role in my life and we're all close to one another.''

Affective States

Participants' statements about their wall posts and status updates also revealed positive (50%), neutral (33%), and negative (17%) affective tones. The statements that reflected affective states often contained emoticons, letter repetition, excessive punctuation (e.g., ''Woohoooo Lakers are up!! I am a die-hard Lakers fan!'' [positive state, 20-year-old man]), and capitalization (e.g., ''ASAP HELP''). For example, a 20-year-old woman disclosed her positive

affective state by updating her Facebook status with ''Tonight should be fun ☺'' as this was a way ''to let people know that I'm out with my best friends, and we always have fun.'' Other participants were more neutral in their comments. For example, a 20-year-woman chose this comment, ''Counting time is not as important as making time count,'' and explained that this ''was important because I believe that time is very valuable and we take it for granted. It is not always important to be aware of the time, but what is important is making good use of that time.'' A 21-year-old man posted, ''Great'' as his status and explained, ''Life is tough right now so I put 'Great' to symbolize another challenge I have to overcome.''

Salience in Identities and Affective States

Based on the frequencies in Table 1, the most salient features of online self-presentation were individual and social identities. The frequencies in Table 1 show group trends in online self-presentation; we believe that identity salience is determined not only by frequency, but by taking into account the participant's voice. The kinds of self-relevant photos and wall posts and status updates that participants opted to describe in relation to their gender, ethnic, and spiritual identities suggest that these identities may also be salient features of online self-presentation for some users. In fact, ethnic and spiritual identities were salient in the online self-presentation of some of our ethnic minority youth. With regard to affective states, the most salient themes were positive and neutral states. However, our qualitative findings imply that positive, neutral, and negative affective states (whether in isolation or in combination) may be a salient feature of online self-presentation at a given time.

Quantitative Approach

We conducted Pearson's chi-square tests to address RQ3 and RQ4. For the analysis to give reliable results, no more than one cell can contain less than five frequencies and, for cells that contained less than five frequencies, we used the Fisher's exact test (Htoon, Chan, & Allen, 2012).

The Relation Between Identities and Affective States

Since the enactment of identities might vary with affective states, we conducted a series of five one-way chi-square tests comparing the frequency of each type of affective state for each type of identity presented in wall posts and status updates (Table 2). Results were significant for

TABLE 1
Frequencies and Percentages of Identities and Affective States Presentation for Facebook
PD ($N = 761$) and WPSU ($N = 714$)

	Identities					Affective states		
	Individual	Social	Gender	Ethnic	Spiritual	Positive	Neutral	Negative
PD	270 (35.5%)	492 (64.7%)	70 (9.2%)	6 (0.8%)	11 (1.4%)	—	—	—
WPSD	494 (69.2%)	227 (31.8%)	32 (4.5%)	28 (3.9%)	17 (2.4%)	354 (49.6%)	239 (33.5%)	121 (16.9%)

Note. PD = photo descriptions; WPSD = wall posts and status updates. Affective states were coded for wall posts and status updates only. Since the coding categories for PD were not mutually exclusive, percentages exceed 100%.

individual, social, and spiritual identities. Specifically, when presenting aspects of their individual and social identities online, participants also tended to disclose greater positive states, followed by neutral and negative states. For spiritual identity, positive states represented the majority of the Facebook wall posts and status updates.

Due to small cell sizes for ethnic and spiritual identities, we combined the frequencies for neutral and negative states (nonpositive) and examined whether there were differences in the proportion of positive states versus nonpositive states as a function of identities in Facebook wall posts and status updates. Five chi-square analyses, one for each identity category, revealed that participants disclosed positive states more frequently than nonpositive states in their online self-presentation of social, ethnic, and spiritual identities. Again, for online presentation of spiritual identity, positive states represented the majority of the wall posts and status updates. On the other hand, participants disclosed nonpositive states more frequently than positive states in the online presentation of their individual identity (bottom portion, Table 2).

Gender-Based Trends in Identities and Affective States

To examine gender-based similarities and differences in the online self-presentation of identities and affective states, we conducted a series of one-way chi-square analyses.

Identities

Female participants presented aspects of their social and gender identities in their photos more frequently whereas male participants presented aspects of their individual identity more often. We found no significant gender differences in self-presentation of identities in wall posts and status updates (upper portion, Table 3).

TABLE 2
Frequencies and Percentages of Affective States Disclosure for Facebook WPSU ($N = 714$)

	Affective states		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	χ^2
Individual	231 (46.8%)	164 (33.2%)	99 (20.0%)	11.66**
Social	136 (59.9%)	58 (25.6%)	33 (14.5%)	14.55***
Gender	21 (65.6%)	6 (18.8%)	5 (15.6%)	3.94
Ethnic	19 (67.9%)	7 (25.0%)	2 (7.1%)	3.84
Spiritual	15 (88.2%)	1 (5.9%)	1 (5.9%)	10.07^
	Positive	Non-positive	χ^2	
Individual	231 (46.8%)	263 (53.2%)	5.10*	
Social	136 (59.9%)	91 (40.1%)	14.21***	
Gender	21 (65.6%)	11 (34.4%)	3.45	
Ethnic	19 (67.9%)	9 (32.1%)	3.89*	
Spiritual	15 (88.2%)	2 (11.8%)	10.41^^	

Note. WPSU = wall posts and status updates. Fisher's exact test is used when more than one cell contains less than five frequencies (Htoon et al., 2012).
*$p < .05$, **$p < .005$, ***$p < .001$, ^Fisher's exact, $p < .005$ (two-tailed), ^^Fisher's exact, $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Affective States

We examined the frequency with which emerging adult women and men presented each type of affective state for individual identity and social identity in wall posts and status updates. There was a significant gender difference in individual identity presentation, and female participants disclosed positive states more frequently whereas male participants disclosed neutral states more often (bottom portion, Table 3).

Ethnic Group-Based Trends in Identities and Affective States

To examine whether there were ethnic group similarities or differences in online self-presentation of identities and affective states, we conducted a series of one-way chi-square analyses.

Identities

For Facebook photo descriptions, we found that Latino American participants presented aspects of their individual identity less frequently than their Asian and European American peers did whereas the Asian American participants presented aspects of their gender identity relatively less frequently than their Latino and European American peers. We found no significant ethnic group differences in online self-presentation of individual, social, and gender identities in wall posts and status updates (upper portion, Table 4). Since only ethnic minority participants described Facebook content that reflected their ethnic and spiritual identities, we did not test for ethnic group differences for these two types of identity presentation.

Affective States

We examined the frequency with which Asian, Latino, and European American participants presented the different types of affective states for individual and social identities in wall posts and status updates. There were significant ethnic group differences for neutral affective states. Specifically, when presenting their individual and social identities online, Asian American participants disclosed neutral states more frequently and positive states less frequently than their Latino and European American peers (bottom portion, Table 4).

DISCUSSION

We used a mixed methods approach to study identity-related online experiences of emerging adult college students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. By asking participants to choose and describe pictures as well as wall posts/status updates that best captured who they were, we were able to privilege their voices, document their online presentation of multiple identities and affective states, and learn about their meaning making of identity-related experiences in an online context.

Identities and Affective States

Our thematic analysis of the responses regarding Facebook photos and wall posts and status updates revealed that individual and social identities were the most salient aspects of our emerging adult participants' online self-presentation. Less frequent were gender, ethnic, and spiritual identities.

TABLE 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Identities and Affective States Presentation for Facebook PD and WPSU by Gender

Identities

	Individual	Social	Gender	Ethnic	Spiritual
PD ($N = 761$)	($\chi^2 = 1.70$)***	($\chi^2 = 15.97$)***	($\chi^2 = 8.58$)**	($\chi^2 = 0.01$)	($\chi^2 = 0.003$)
Women	185 (32.1%)	395 (68.6%)	63 (10.9%)	21 (3.9%)	13 (2.4%)
Men	85 (45.9%)	97 (52.4%)	7 (3.8%)	7 (4.1%)	4 (2.3%)
WPSU ($N = 714$)	($\chi^2 = 0.58$)	($\chi^2 = 2.66$)	($\chi^2 = 0.94$)		
Women	379 (69.9%)	181 (33.4%)	22 (4.1%)		
Men	115 (66.9%)	46 (26.7%)	10 (5.8%)		

Affective States

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
WPSU Individual ($n = 494$)	($\chi^2 = 4.35$)*	($\chi^2 = 3.98$)*	($\chi^2 = 0.64$)
Women	187 (49.3%)	117 (30.9%)	75 (19.8%)
Men	44 (38.3%)	47 (40.9%)	24 (20.9%)
WPSU Social ($n = 227$)	($\chi^2 = 2.36$)	($\chi^2 = 2.59$)	($\chi^2 = 0.02$)
Women	113 (62.4%)	42 (23.2%)	26 (14.4%)
Men	23 (50.0%)	16 (34.8%)	7 (15.2%)

Note. PD = photo descriptions; WPSU = wall posts and status updates. Ethnic identity and spiritual identity domains in PD were omitted due to small cell sizes. All numbers represent only the frequency and percentage of "Present" codes for identity and affective states category.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .005$. ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 4
Frequencies and Percentages of Identities and Affective States Presentation for
Facebook PD and WPSU by Ethnicity

	Identities		
PD ($N = 761$)	Individual ($\chi^2 = 8.38$)*	Social ($\chi^2 = 6.65$)	Gender ($\chi^2 = 14.76$)***
Asian American	55 (41.0%)	77 (57.5%)	7 (5.2%)
Latino American	147 (31.6%)	315 (67.7%)	40 (8.6%)
European American	33 (39.3%)	55 (65.5%)	7 (8.3%)
WPSU ($N = 714$)	Individual ($\chi^2 = 1.79$)	Social ($\chi^2 = 0.36$)	Gender ($\chi^2 = 0.82$)
Asian American	82 (64.6%)	39 (30.7%)	5 (3.9%)
Latino American	310 (70.1%)	139 (31.4%)	21 (4.8%)
European American	50 (68.5%)	25 (34.2%)	4 (5.5%)
	Affective states		
WPSU Individual ($n = 494$)	Positive ($\chi^2 = 11.89$)**	Neutral ($\chi^2 = 13.60$)***	Negative ($\chi^2 = 0.64$)
Asian American	30 (36.6%)	36 (43.9%)	16 (19.5%)
Latino American	160 (51.6%)	86 (27.7%)	64 (20.6%)
European American	25 (50.0%)	17 (34.0%)	8 (16.0%)
WPSU Social ($n = 227$)	Positive ($\chi^2 = 14.25$)***	Neutral ($\chi^2 = 9.19$)*	Negative ($\chi^2 = 5.30$)
Asian American	18 (46.2%)	15 (38.5%)	6 (15.4%)
Latino American	95 (68.3%)	26 (18.7%)	18 (12.9%)
European American	15 (60.0%)	8 (32.0%)	2 (8.0%)

Note. PD = photo descriptions; WPSU = wall posts and status updates. Ethnic identity and spiritual identity domains in PD were omitted due to small cell sizes. All numbers represent only the frequency and percentage of ''Present'' codes for identity and affective states category.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .005$.

Responses relating to online presentation of individual identity emphasized personal characteristics or traits, commitments, accomplishments, interests, opinions, style, and sense of presence. In contrast, the role of friends, direct and extended family members, romantic partners, peers, pets, and a sense of belonging to a social group were emphasized in responses relating to social identity. For responses relating to gender identity, participants emphasized their gender roles, masculine and feminine physical features, and gender identifications. With regard to ethnic and spiritual identities, participants emphasized their sense of group identification or affiliation, participation in ethnically or spiritually relevant events or activities, and expressions, including those in their ethnic language (ethnic identity) and religious scriptures and verses or images (spiritual identity). The thematic analysis also revealed that these emerging adults did not always disclose a positive or a negative state; in fact, the second most frequent kind of online emotional disclosure was neutral state.

Our results add support to prior research (e.g., Salimkhan, Manago, & Greenfield, 2010), and show that emerging adults use different features of social media to present aspects of their identities. They used their photos to largely present aspects of their social and gender identities, and their wall posts and status updates to present facets of their individual, ethnic, and spiritual identities. This may be because wall posts and status updates make it easy for individuals to share with others what they are thinking, feeling, and doing individually. In fact, a majority of the participants expressed their personal thoughts and interests (likes and dislikes) textually. Different

features also seemed to afford other differences; for instance, the expressions of personal thoughts and reflections appeared to be more cryptic when done via photos compared to textual expressions.

The salience and nuanced presentation of individual and social identities in our sample attests to the complexity of self-development during emerging adulthood. Although individuation may be associated with a sense of agency, maturation, and growth, it may also be linked to less positive experiences. For example, the emerging adults who more frequently presented individual aspects of the self also presented greater neutral and negative states (non-positive states). These findings seemed to capture one side of the story. The other side may be best understood in the context of others, and the majority of the participants also emphasized their social identity and the role of important individuals in their lives. Interestingly, this was most frequently done via photos. Participants reported that sharing social aspects of their lives online provided a sense of purpose and meaning. Although we did not explicitly capture participants' intimacy-related experiences in our study, it is clear that emerging adults create and use social media to foster social and emotional connectedness (Salimkhan et al., 2010; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). In fact, participants' responses indicated that they felt happy by presenting their social identity online and showcasing shared moments with the important people in their lives. In addition, a collective sense of self-presentation, involving social, ethnic, and spiritual identities, may be linked to greater positive states.

Our analysis of online self-presentation of identities and affective states revealed similarities with identity explorations and emotional fluctuations documented in offline contexts (Arnett & Schwab, 2013). Specifically, the online presentation of positive, neutral, and negative states may reflect emerging adults' resilience in navigating through their social world and mixed emotions as a result of feeling ''in-between'' (Arnett, 2014). It remains to be seen whether young adults disclose positive states online so as to buffer against social stress (e.g., Zuckerman & O'Loughlin, 2006), whether they disclose their thoughts and feelings about a negative life event as a way to improve their overall health (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), or whether the disclosure of negative states may be indicative of more serious psychological distress. Furthermore, meaningful offline identity exploration and commitment are linked to positive well-being (Waterman et al., 2013), and it is likely that meaningful online self-presentation of identities may also be associated with psychosocial well-being. Future research should continue to examine the relation between online self-exploration, identity development, and well-being.

Gender- and Ethnic Group-Based Trends in Identities and Affective States

Our findings showed that online self-presentation might vary, to a small extent, as a function of gender. For instance, the emerging adult men were less likely than women to display their relationships or disclose positive emotions online. This pattern is consistent with the stereotypic-gendered characteristics related to emotional control that young men may have learned; specifically, that expressiveness—an orientation toward emotions and relationships—is a stereotypic-gendered characteristic of women (Lips, 2008). Findings in offline contexts have indicated that stereotypic-gendered behaviors may become salient in the presence of an audience (Lips, 2008). Though we did not examine offline self-presentation, we speculate that the presence of an audience on Facebook contributes to such gendered behaviors. The fact that the gender differences in online self-presentation of identities were small may reflect changes in gender norms and expectations among young adults, which may be attributed in part to the cultural exchanges that occur on the Internet (Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013).

Despite the fact that our sample was largely comprised of ethnic minority youth, only a small proportion of the participants' responses reflected online self-presentation of ethnic identity. This suggests that an exclusive focus on ethnic or cultural identities in studies of ethnic minority youth may not fully capture their self-exploration experiences (Schwartz et al., 2009). It is also conceivable that online presentation of ethnic identity may vary as a function of the norms and expectations within an online context, users' demographics, and the composition of their offline settings (see Subramanian, 2010; Tynes et al., 2011). Living in Los Angeles and attending a diverse institution where they were not the numerical minority, the emerging adults in our sample may have experienced fewer inconsistencies in their self-system and felt less need to convey their ethnic identity (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

Our findings that Asian American emerging adults disclosed neutral states more frequently and that Latino and European American students expressed positive states more often may reflect cultural display rules concerning self-disclosure. For instance, results derived from offline contexts suggest that Asian American youth may follow Asian cultural display rules, which include nondisclosure of negative events and maintenance of emotional modesty as a way to prevent loss of face and retain relational harmony (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). Overall, our results suggest that, although ethnic minority youth were somewhat similar to their European American peers in their selection of identities to present online, there were qualitative differences in such self-presentation. However, to our knowledge, the question of whether or not similarities between cultural groups can be attributed, in part, to the cultural exchanges that occur on social media by culturally diverse groups of young adults (Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013) is unexplored.

Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions

Our study had a few shortcomings. Although we asked participants to select three self-relevant photos and wall posts and status updates, not everyone did so. We are not certain whether participants chose the more recent photos or wall posts and status updates or whether they searched through their Facebook photo album and wall to select the ones that most accurately captured who they were. We purposefully left the decision up to the participants, but future studies should be more explicit in their directions or employ checks to ensure that participants do choose content that is most self-relevant. Regardless of which photos and statements our emerging adult participants selected, the resulting sample captured an array of their identity-related online experiences. Another strength of the study was our use of a qualitative questionnaire, which enabled us to draw from a substantial sample of descriptions and statements in participants' own words.

Future work should seek to identify the specific characteristics of ethnic minority youth who present their ethnic identity to better understand whether immigration experience or generation status may shape trends in the online presentation of ethnic identity. Research should also explore the relation between ethnic identity presentation online and ethnic identity offline. Our goal is not to make sweeping generalizations from our findings, and the relative gender and ethnic imbalance of our sample should be noted. Importantly, more work needs to be done to understand how adolescents and emerging adults from different ethnic groups (e.g., African American, Armenian American) and from different regions of the United States use social media in identity-related experiences.

Implications

Our in-depth analysis revealed that the emerging adults in our sample might have presented multiple identities simultaneously in their online self-presentation since their responses could be coded in multiple identity categories. This finding can inform theory regarding intersectionality of identities in online contexts. In other words, people do not always think of their identities as separate or in isolation as their identity-related feats are often experienced simultaneously (Cole, 2009), and we speculate that online self-presentation may reflect such intersectionality. The application of the theory of intersectionality (Cole, 2009) to online contexts is an interesting and exciting area that warrants empirical attention. Furthermore, our findings further support the notion that there is considerable variability in the experiences and states of ethnic minority college students during emerging adulthood. In other words, although some emerging adults in college are exploring their identities and are experiencing instability in their lives, others have a strong and stable sense of who they are. Taken together, this reminds us that caution must be exercised when using a blanket characterization to describe all 18- to 29-year-olds.

The findings are also significant for conducting research in online contexts and indicate the importance of using qualitative questionnaires when investigating identity and identity-related processes. Rather than having the researcher guess at meanings, such a qualitative measure uses participants' own words. In fact, by using this method, we have identified different ways by which each identity can be presented online, and our taxonomy of identity and affective states (see Appendix) can be used or further refined in future research. It can also be used to inform the development of quantitative measures of online self-presentation of identities and affective states. Our finding that the participants chose to present their ethnic identity more frequently via wall posts and status updates suggests that researchers should pay close attention to how ethnic minority youth use site features to express, explore, maintain, and make sense of their ethnic identity. Finally, it is important to use multiple methods such as qualitative questionnaires, observations, and interviews in addition to quantitative measures to more fully understand individuals' identity-related experiences in online and offline contexts.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps a picture is only worth a thousand words when it is explained by the person who creates it. Examining descriptions of Facebook photos and wall posts and status updates provided by the emerging adult authors allowed us a closer glimpse of their identity-related online self-expressions. The participants' interpretations and explanations of their photos and posts gave a more personal feel to their life experiences and opened a window to their psychological world that would be harder to capture using conventional methods such as a content analysis done by researchers. For instance, when asked why the ''picture of my face smiling'' was important, a participant explained that ''I love to smile even when hard times come''; such personalized explanations of online self-presentation would not be available to a researcher coding the content from an outsider's perspective. Indeed, emerging adults' narratives demonstrated their continued quest for identity and, to a lesser extent, intimacy. More than anything, their responses reflected a sense of maturity, independence, hope, optimism, and possibilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX

Taxonomy: Online Self-Presentation of Identities and Affective States

Identity themes and subthemes	Definition: Subjective sense of . . .
Individual—Personal characteristics, individuality, and uniqueness	
Traits	References to personal characteristics
Interests	References to likes and dislikes
Commitment	References to personal commitment
Accomplishments	References to completing a task or activity or achieving personal goals
Style	References to one's unique sense of style; also includes ways the photo or profile looks
Presence	Showcasing the self, including broadcasting or sharing thoughts, opinions, or inside jokes via comments, status updates, or photos
Social—Relationships, social positions or groups	
Friends	References to friends
Family	References to family members
Romantic partner(s)	References to significant other(s)
Peers	References to classmates, coworkers, etc.
Pets	References to or showcasing the self with pets or just pets only
Groups	References to social membership—groups, being a fan of a sports team, music artists, etc.
Gender—Being a woman or a man, masculinity or femininity, norms or expectations	
Identification	References to being a woman or a man
Roles	References to gender roles
Physical appearance	Reference to or emphasis on feminine or masculine physical features
Ethnic—Belonging to an ethnic (heritage) group	
Identification/ affiliation	References to being from a particular ethnic group
Participation	Taking part in ethnic behaviors, events, etc.
Expressions	Ethnic expressions in ethnic language
Spiritual—Religiosity, faith, and spirituality	
Identification/ affiliation	References to being from a particular spiritual group or religion

(Continued)

APPENDIX
Continued

Participation	Taking part in faith-based activities, events, activities, etc.
References	References to higher power or being, faith-based or spiritual scriptures
Affective state themes	Definition
Positive	Explicitly positive tone: excitement, optimism, joy, and happiness
Neutral	Neither a positive nor a negative tone
Negative	Explicitly negative tone: frustration, pessimism, sadness, and hostility