

MASTER'S THESIS

Formation of safe spaces in gendered online communities

reddit and “the front page of the internet”

Hallie Workman

5/1/2014

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
Knowledge Sharing in Online Communities	5
Creating a space for women	6
Feminist Online Communities and Gendered Behavior	9
SIDE Model and Online Disinhibition Effect	10
Technology Acceptance Model	12
The “Front Page of the Internet”	14
METHODOLOGY	18
Grounded theory	18
Netnography	19
Community Questionnaire	21
Moderator Questionnaire	22
FINDINGS	23
Why do they come?	25
Community Rules and the Role of Moderator	27
Platform and User Interface	32
Unique language	35
Dialogue and Meaning	37
Brands as a vehicle for discussion	40
Is it really a safe space? Agents of destabilization	45
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	48
REFERENCES	53
Appendix 1	63
Appendix 2	64
Appendix 3	67
Appendix 4	68

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that reddit.com is one of the largest online social networks, there has been little research conducted on reddit.com, its users, and its usage. Reddit, which calls itself “the front page of the internet,” is a social news site driven entirely by user-created and user-curated content. A recent Pew Research study found that six percent of online adults use reddit. Men are twice as likely as women to become reddit users, or redditors (Pew, 2013). At the start of 2011, the site had about 30 million page views per day, but by December that number had shot up to 65 million per day (Shaer, 2012). Continuing to grow, reddit had more than 110 million unique visitors viewing a total of more than 5 billion pages in March 2013 (“About reddit”, 2014). It has been listed as the largest Internet message board in the world (Shaer, 2012) and the “largest petri dish around” of images and stories that go viral (Townsend, 2012), suggesting its potential as an interesting site of inquiry for consumer culture theorists. Reddit is made up of thousands of smaller communities called subreddits. One of these subreddits, TwoXChromosomes (or 2X) is a robust “subreddit for women to share information and experiences with other like-minded women” (TwoXChromosomes, n.d., sidebar).

Using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), this research began with netnographic research exploring the culture of this online space and the motivations 2X members have for participating in this community. Despite criticisms that the reddit culture is misogynistic and not female-friendly (Chen, 2012; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012; Zuckerman, 2012), and primary data suggesting that many people in 2X share this perception, the theme of 2X existing as a “safe space” or “safe haven” within the hostile environment of reddit emerged from the data as particularly salient. In order to further explore this theme, the author conducted

questionnaires of both the 2X community and community moderators along with the continued netnography.

Strategic communication research has not yet addressed the issue of how an online community can exist – and even thrive – as a safe space inside and insulated from a larger hostile environment. Given this seeming discord between the 2X subreddit and reddit culture as a whole, the author seeks to understand why people are coming into a space they feel is not friendly and how a “safe space” like 2X develops and exists inside a larger environment so seemingly incongruous. The following research questions, which the author now seeks to answer, emerged from phase one of research:

RQ1: What role does the reddit format and system play in the creation of 2X as a safe space?

RQ2: What role do community norms and moderation play in the creation of 2X as a safe space?

RQ3: How do members of 2X discuss ideas of gender and feminism?

RQ4: What meaning do members of 2X attribute to gender and feminism?

RQ5: What role do brands play in the creation of gendered meaning?

RQ6: How do members of 2X view their community?

This research begins with an examination of previous literature addressing online communities and how women interact online in order to understand how issues such as motivations for knowledge sharing and the types of online spaces that are conducive for knowledge sharing, particularly among women, might aid in understanding 2X and its members. Next, SIDE model, the online disinhibition effect, and the technology acceptance model are presented in order to lay a foundation for understanding why communities like 2X offer unique

opportunities (and challenges) for members due to the fact that they exist in the online realm. Then, in order to analyze and understand the complex relationships between and within technology and users, the author discusses actor-network theory. Moving towards application with theory contributing to our understanding, the author provides an overview of existing research on reddit, establishing the need for increased research of the social news site. Following a description of the study's methodology of netnography and questionnaires, the author then turns to the primary data and emergent themes in an effort to understand the heterogeneous actors and associations that form and enact the space. The author addresses community members' motivations for participating, the role of community moderators, the role of reddit as a system, shared group language, and threats to the stability of the "safe space." This research ends with a discussion of the findings and implications for various research disciplines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Sharing in Online Communities

A large amount of research has been conducted in an attempt to understand online communities, but there is little discussion about the motivations behind sharing knowledge in this way, especially when there is no immediate benefit to the person who is taking the time to share the information (Sun, Teresa, Chung, Wu, & Chao, 2009). "Knowledge sharing" can be defined as a process through which people gain knowledge by learning from other people's experiences and first-hand knowledge (Sun et al., 2009). Lin explored the concept of online community loyalty through the lens of social cognitive theory, or SCT. Lin's (2010) research found that affective commitment, which "refers to the strength of a member's attachment and identification with a particular online community" (p. 347), has a positive relationship to how

heavily the member participates in knowledge sharing. The presence of social norms was the other primary influence motivating community loyalty behavior (Lin, 2010). In this case, loyalty behavior was shown by participating in discussion boards, responding to questions, and interacting with other members. These findings are supported by more recent research which used the term “citizenship behavior” to describe the same type of involvement. For example, Xu, Li, and Shao (2012) found that motivations for citizenship behavior include enjoyment in helping other members of the community and commitment to the community. The authors also found that trusting relationships were instrumental in holding the members of an online community together and positively affecting the members’ feelings about that community to which they belong. Members of these virtual communities are willing to contribute their knowledge and experience at their own expense because they feel that it is the right thing to do, and it is part of being a member in the community (Xu et al., 2012; Lin, 2010). Sun et al. (2009) also found that trust is an important factor in the willingness of members in a virtual community to share knowledge. When members trust that their efforts in contributing experience and knowledge will be reciprocated, they are more likely to participate in knowledge sharing (Sun et al., 2009).

Creating a space for women

While researchers like Sun et al.(2009) establish the importance of trust and loyalty in the success and cohesion of online communities, scholars question whether the Internet can facilitate the creation of safe spaces for marginalized groups (Atkinson & DePalma, 2008; Mitra, 2006; Harris, 2005). Atkinson and DePalma (2008) define safe spaces “in terms of support and acceptance (particularly for marginalized people) and a lack of safety in terms of verbally expressed hatred and abuse” (p. 184). Harris (2005) argues that the internet can offer potential safe spaces that “operate as marginal spaces for the expression of missing discourses,” where

participants “are able to engage in unregulated dialogue and debate with one another, to generate their own meanings and terminologies” (p. 42). Atkinson and DePalma (2008) point out, however, that inequalities and marginalization offline may just be recreated online, as “for marginalized groups, discursive spaces, whether physical or virtual, are always threatening” (p. 185).

While a greater percentage of the female population is now online than that of the male population (Pew, 2012), not all online spaces are welcoming to women. Previous research in the area of gender and online behavior shows that women are marginalized in mixed-gender communities (Soukup, 1999; Herring, 2010; Herring, 2003). Additionally, in online spaces where women are well-represented, the behavior and community rules are often different than those of more mixed-gender spaces (Herring, 2003; Herring & Job-Sluder, 2002; Sarkio, 2009). In online spaces designated as women-centered or women-only, women have more control over the topics and the style of discussions (Herring, 2010). In a study of male and female online chat rooms, Soukup (1999) found that when larger numbers of males entered into a space created for females, “masculine styles of talk often dominated and disrupted the conversation” (p. 171). Perhaps because of results like these, Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto (1995) speculate that female-focused forums exist in an attempt to create an environment that is empowering to women, allowing them to take the floor. Indeed, as Herring (2010) points out, “the gender constituency of a group can be a source of empowerment or disempowerment for individuals – something that members of online women-only forums have long known” (p. 24).

Perhaps because of this empowerment, women tend to participate more eagerly and enjoy greater influence in online communities that are controlled by moderators or individuals trusted with holding posters accountable to community rules and maintaining focus within the group

(Herring, 2003). Without moderators or someone enforcing community rules, Soukup (1999) found that, as in other traditionally male-dominated spaces, females are intimidated through various tactics “from ‘flaming’ (overt attacks on a person) to highly sexual comments and visual pornography that dehumanize women” (p. 170). People exhibiting this behavior are often dubbed “trolls”: “To troll is to have negative intents, to wish hard or at least discomfort upon one’s audience...we are warned ‘do not feed the troll’...a troll is merely looking for any reaction as validation to continue with their activities.” (Bergstrom, 2011, para. 2). Trolling, especially trolling from men in a female-focused community, often leaves women to assume they are unwelcome “others” and not a part of the boys club of online communities and forums (Soukup, 1999).

Mclaran, Hogg, Catterall and Kozinets (2003) used netnography to explore the role of gender effects online in an online consumption-related community. Their research focused on discourse analysis in a masculine (cyber)space to highlight its potential to “illustrate how an online community has its own idiosyncratic voice which may also have gendered and gendering effects,” (p. 163). One gendered effect the authors found was that women attempting to join discussions in this largely male online space did so “on male terms” (p. 160) and often employed “male talk”. While disciplines like marketing and consumer culture theory have begun to take an interest in the subject of gender and CMC, much of the research like that of Mclaran et al. (2003) focuses on consumption-related communities. There is little research on the role of gender and consumption and brand-related discussions that take place in more general-interest online communities, or online communities not solely devoted to consumption.

Feminist Online Communities and Gendered Behavior

Among feminists, early discussions regarding the Internet involved imagining an online space in which users would be disembodied, thus genderless and the Internet would be a space devoid of discrimination so frequently experienced in the offline world (Brophy, 2010). As it became clear that this was not necessarily the case, there was a movement advocating for a new kind of “cyberfeminism” that rejected both leaving the gendered body behind and viewing the Internet as an extension of the body (Brophy, 2010). Women and girls on the internet found themselves wanting to both downplay their gender and openly flaunt it, but by and large, women did not choose to become genderless online. Teenage girls, especially, portray themselves as gendered while participating in online discussion (Sarkio, 2009).

Herring’s research explored how women spoke differently from men in online spaces, with specific differences in tone and speech. In their online communications (specifically discussion on message boards), women are more likely to be apologetic, justify and hedge, appreciate, and be upset by violations of politeness; men tended to violate politeness norms, post longer messages, assert opinion as facts, and use more assertive and active language (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011; Herring, 2003). Women tend to have less influence in mixed-gender online groups/discussions, and this may account for why online groups meant solely for women are so common (Herring, 2003).

Research shows that women also use online communities to reach out for support, report sexual assault, and to satisfy their needs for self-disclosure in general (Chen, 2012). Dare and Green (2011) found that women are utilizing the Internet more and more frequently when “distance, time constraints or emotion intensity” renders more traditional communication (telephone or face-to-face) problematic (p. 486). Many middle-aged women interviewed in this

study mentioned turning to online communities for help when the problem they were dealing with was rare or specialized (they did not know anyone personally who they felt could relate), or when they did not feel they could speak to close friends or family because the subject matter was too difficult for whatever reason. The Internet also facilitates new networks of support for women when the depth of social stigma means that a woman is unlikely to reach out to someone in her social circle when in need of support or advice (Dare & Green, 2011). Networks of support like these have the potential to evolve into online communities whose members readily share information, feel a sense of belonging, and provide mutual support, which make these forums especially appealing to women seeking support for suffering abuse, coping with disease, and to members of minority social and political groups like those in the LGBTQ community, racial minorities, or feminists (Herring & Job-Sluder, 2002).

SIDE Model and Online Disinhibition Effect

Online communities like reddit and the 2X subreddit are often criticized for suffering from “hive mind,” despite the fact that posters have the ability to be completely anonymous. Postmes, Spears, and Lea (1998) addressed this phenomenon with the SIDE model. They argue that computer mediated communication “does not necessarily lead to increased equality or democratization, and may even increase intergroup discrimination and hostility,” (p.694). Central to this model is depersonalization, which “refers to the tendency to perceive the self and other not as individuals with a range of idiosyncratic characteristics and ways of behaving, but as representatives of social groups or wider social categories that are made salient during interaction,” (p. 698). This salience can lead to a participant feeling a deeper similarity and liking of those with whom he or she is interacting.

Similar to the SIDE Model, Suler (2004) describes the online disinhibition effect, which can take the form of either “benign disinhibition” or “toxic disinhibition.” While benign disinhibition can take the form of “rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats” (p. 321) online, benign inhibition can “indicate an attempt to better understand and develop oneself,” (p. 321). Suler (2004) identifies six factors which come together to create this online behavior and sense of disinhibition. The first and one of the core factors that creates this effect is dissociative anonymity, wherein “the online self becomes a compartmentalized self” (p. 322), especially if the user is only identifiable by a username or pseudonym. The second factor, invisibility, amplifies the disinhibition effect even if participants’ identities are known; just as avoiding eye contact disinhibits, Suler posits, “text communication offers a built-in opportunity to keep one’s eyes averted” (p. 322). Asynchronicity aids in disinhibition by allowing communicators to feel “safe putting it ‘out there’ where it can be left behind” (p. 323). Solipsistic introjection and dissociative imagination describe the effects of a lack of physical cues and the propensity to think about online interactions as though they are in a make-believe world and have nothing to do with the communicator’s reality (Suler, 2004). Finally, Suler identifies the minimization of authority, which occurs when typical physical cues of status and power (such as body language and dress) are largely absent, creating a feeling more similar to a peer relationship. Suler (2004) does not, however, address the ways in which power and authority are expressed and depicted in online spaces. In the case of reddit (and many other online forums and chat rooms), moderators and their status/power are indicated by a particular symbol, typeface, or color.

Hollenbaugh and Everett (2013) applied Suler’s Online Disinhibition Effect to the bloggers’ levels of self-disclosure. Interestingly, their findings were only partly congruous with Suler’s when it came to anonymity. They found that bloggers whose profile had pictures of people

disclosed a larger amount of information (Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013). While visual anonymity had an inverse effect on self-disclosure, “bloggers were more disclosive under conditions of discursive, or dissociative, anonymity,” (Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013, p. 293) which supports Suler’s online disinhibition effect. Additionally, female bloggers disclosed more and to a greater degree, supporting previous research of gender and disclosure (e.g., Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987; Herring, 2003).

Walther (1996) describes behavior similar to Suler’s “benign disinhibition” in what Walther calls hyperpersonal computer-mediated communication: “CMC that is more socially desirable than we tend to experience in parallel FtF interaction,” (p. 17). Walther (1996) also found that these CMC interactions can result in less stress, more expression of feelings, “more positive evaluations of others and the self and more frequent reference to interpersonal issues” (p. 31). Sproull and Faraj’s (1995) research supports this notion of hyperpersonal CMC, finding that when online communities are formed around a common interest they are likely to share common experiences leading to a “more positive relation than the accidents of location-based FtF communities afford” (p. 45).

Technology Acceptance Model

Technology Acceptance Model, TAM, is the most commonly used theory in information systems research (Lee, Kozar & Larsen, 2003). Developed out of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), TAM identifies two variables, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, as predictors of behavior, namely the adoption and use of a new technology (Davis, 1989). Davis’s idea of perceived ease of use in TAM is similar to Bandura’s (1982) development and definition of self-efficacy. Additionally, TAM’s variable of perceived usefulness, Davis notes, is similar to Bandura’s “outcome judgment” (Davis, 1989). In Davis’s initial TAM study, usefulness was

found to be significantly better in predicting usage than was ease of use, as “although difficulty of use can discourage adoption of an otherwise useful system, no amount of ease of use can compensate for a system that does not perform a useful function,” (Davis, 1989, p. 334).

TAM has continued to evolve since it was first proposed in 1989, when computers were still used almost exclusively by professionals in office settings (Lee et al., 2003). TAMII (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) was introduced in 2000, adding external variables of perceived usefulness, such as social influence and cognitive instruments. In a meta-analysis of TAM literature, Lee et al. (2003) found that 58 studies (out of 101 included in the analysis) found a significant relationship between perceived ease of use and dependent variables, “indicating that [perceived ease of use] is an unstable measure in predicting behavior intention (or behavior),” (p. 759). Keil, Beranek and Konsynski’s (1995) research found similar results, and note that “no amount of [perceived ease of use] will compensate for low usefulness” (p. 89).

Actor-network Theory

Considering the significant role technology plays in the consideration of online communities, actor-network theory offers us a way to consider the underlying technology at play as having agency within this larger system of the 2X community. Within actor-network-theory, “a heterogeneous assemblage of human, nonhuman, and hybrid actors” (Martin & Schouten 2014, p. 857) have agency to affect actions of other actors. As Martin and Schouten (2014, p. 857) explain, “rules, standards, technologies, and infrastructure all exert shaping and limiting agency over human behaviors and practices,” opening one’s inquiry to the influence of these various forces or actants (Latour, 2005).

ANT has been used effectively in information systems research and in studies examining the adoption of new technologies (Tatnall & Gilding, 2005; McMaster, Vidgen & Wastell,

1997). Badje (2013) makes a cogent proposal of ANT's potential contributions to the work of consumer culture theorists, and various scholars have considered (e.g., Borgerson, 2005) and demonstrated its worth in this context (e.g., Chalmers, Price, & Schau 2013; Epp & Price 2010; Martin & Schouten 2014). Couldry (2008) examines the possibilities of ANT linked with media theory and demonstrates that, despite his misgivings of its "neglect of long-term consequences of networks for the distribution of social power" (p. 7), ANT warns the researcher against synonymizing media and social, "as if media were the natural channels of social life and social engagement, rather than highly specific and institutionally focused means for representing social life and channeling social participation" (p. 3).

ANT's approach provides a means to problematize not only the content and context of 2X as a subreddit, but more fundamentally to problematize the existence of reddit, of 2X, of safe spaces among "the vast linkage of networks that make up the media process" (Couldry, 2008, 4), and of heterogeneous assemblages of various actors (Latour, 2005).

The "Front Page of the Internet"

Previous literature suggests that reciprocity of knowledge sharing, online anonymity, a sense of community belonging, and consideration of human and non-human actants may contribute to our understanding of the reddit.com and its various subcultures. However, despite its popularity and growing pervasiveness both online and off, there is little academic research examining the social news site reddit.com. With more than 110 million unique visitors a month, in more than 190 countries, and viewing a total of more than 5 billion pages ("About reddit", 2014), reddit is a communication platform, news source, and online community that cannot afford to go unnoticed by researchers. What research does exist about reddit largely comes out of the information systems field (Narayan & Cheshire, 2010; Olson & Neal, 2013; Steinbaur, 2012; Wang, Ye &

Huberman, 2011). Media studies research that includes reddit usually groups reddit in with sites like Digg (Wasike, 2011), focusing more on the news-sharing aspect and less on the interactions between reddit users and the space itself. This research attempts to begin filling this gap in the literature.

Reddit closely resembles Usenet, a system that is quite old by Internet standards in both its organizational structure and its function. Usenet was the first publicly viewable discussion-based Internet system to organize topics and newsgroups into hierarchies supporting threaded conversations (Narayan & Cheshire, 2010). Yet, these conversation threads found on Usenet, reddit and similar networks receive little attention from researchers, despite the fact that “the dynamics of [these] conversations plays a fundamental role in opinion spread and formation, word-of-mouth effects and collective problem solving” (Wang, Ye, & Huberman, 2012, p. 1). Similar to Usenet, the interface and layout on reddit is text-based and strikingly simple. Reddit’s unusual interface is also accompanied by a particular set of social norms and a peculiar culture.

Just as in other social media outlets, one can find people with similar groups of interest. Users on Facebook can “like” a page or use hashtags on Twitter to find posts by keyword. Reddit contains more than 144,000 active smaller communities (Shaer, 2012) or groups—called subreddits—to which users subscribe. Each subreddit is devoted to a different topic, some of which are very specific (like /r/gaymers, which caters to gay and lesbian video game enthusiasts), while others are large and more general (like the subreddit /r/Texas). Most redditors consider reddit first and foremost not a website, but a community (Shaer, 2012). It has also been described as something living and complex: “Reddit is a single organism, a gigantic internet brain, composed of millions of cells, each of which vibrates at its own frequency” (Shaer, 2012, para 14).

However, rather than seeing reddit as a single, homogeneous group acting collectively, Olson (2013, p. 7) offered a different view of reddit as a place where many users “organize themselves into cliques based on shared interests and rarely interact with other reddit users outside their clique.” Each redditor begins his or her account subscribed to the 20 ‘default’ subreddits, which are the 20 largest and most active. From there, each redditor can choose subreddits to which he or she wants to subscribe. When browsing the aggregated pages, often referred to as the “front page,” the user only sees content from subreddits to which he or she is subscribed.

Redditors submit content in the form of text or hyperlink, and other redditors vote the content up or down (called upvotes and downvotes, respectively) and comment on the post (comments are also voted on by other redditors). An item’s net upvotes and downvotes, coupled with a time penalty for older votes, are used to determine how high up on the page it will appear (Mills, 2011). One outcome of this distributed moderation created by the voting system is frequent posts and comments complaining about reddit’s “hive mind” mentality and pointing out the exclusion of minority opinions. But also through this voting process, Mills (2011, p. 5) points out, “it could be said that reddit’s front page is what gives the website a sense of its own identity, and it is around this identity that feelings of community spirit involvement form. Through the voting system users can influence not only the chance of an individual post appearing on the front page, but by extension the very definition of reddit’s perceived identity or purpose.”

Through these subreddits, particularly those small in size but with an active user base, members can form what Belk (2013) calls an aggregate self. Redditors connect with other members of these smaller communities which are often based on a shared characteristic or passion. Part of building this online aggregate shared self is “coming to a shared understanding of what is a good look, a terrible movie, or ‘our kind’ of music” (Belk 2013, p. 488). Adding to

the emphasis on aggregate group-level identity is the anonymity and lack of individual identity on sites like reddit (Belk, 2013), echoing the SIDE model (Postmes, Spears, and Lea, 1998).

Reddit.com has seen an increase in both popularity and criticism recently. It has been listed as the largest Internet message board in the world (Shaer, 2012) and the “largest petri dish around” of images and stories that go viral (Townsend, 2012); but among the criticisms have been charges of the misogynistic tendencies and content on the site (Zuckerman, 2012; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012; Chen, 2012). Yet within the broader context of “anti-women” (Zuckerman, 2012) content exists TwoXChromosomes (or 2X), a robust “subreddit for women to share information and experiences with other like-minded women” (“TwoXChromosomes”, n.d., sidebar). Members of 2X share news stories and current events that affect women, ask other women for advice, share experiences and personal stories unique to being a woman, discuss feminism in general, and share blogs and other media that deal with these topics, all in a trusting and supportive environment (see appendix 4 for an example of front page posts and discussion threads). As of January 2013, 2X moderators reported between 150,000 and 350,000 unique visitors per month (“FAQ”, 2014, para. 8). Additionally, as of March 2014, there are 165,824 people who subscribe to 2X (“TwoXChromosomes”, n.d., sidebar), which means the most popular posts from the subreddit appear on their customized reddit front page (this requires a reader to create an account and change the default settings).

Through a netnography of 2X, a community questionnaire and a moderator questionnaire, this research seeks to understand the culture of this subreddit, 2X, within a broader culture of reddit.com that allows for anti-woman and misogynistic rhetoric. Understanding this culture of 2X and the motivations women have for participating yields insight into social interaction online and cohesion in the context of broader cultural tensions. Further, with much social interaction

now occurring online, this research has implications for communication scholars and professionals working to understand how people interact in online communities (Steinmetz, 2012; Kozinets, 2002), and how gender influences how people interact online (Kapidzic & Herring 2011). Previous research and literature in this area has included how members of online communities share knowledge with each other, the potential for online interactions to yield hyperpersonal connections, and how women tend to communicate online.

METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory

This research began with a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to explore the culture of 2X within the context of reddit, following recommendations for netnographic methods (Catterall & Maclaran, 2001; Kozinets, 2002). Rather than entering into data analysis with predetermined theories and themes, grounded theory evolves during the data collection process, and “it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection,” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 273). Two key concepts of grounded theory initially proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) are that data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously, and that decisions about continuing data collection are determined by emerging themes. Thus in applying these key concepts, grounded theory places the focus on “*patterns* of action and interaction between and among various types of social units (i.e., ‘actors’)” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 278), making this approach particularly useful when combined with netnography.

When using grounded theory and analyzing data for emergent themes, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest a process of open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding involves the researcher identify recurring words, phrases and ideas within the data, followed by axial coding

in which those words, phrases, or ideas are grouped and sorted into hierarchical or non-hierarchical themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding is Strauss and Corbin's final step, in which the researcher identifies a central theme or category then relates all other categories to it as well as to each other. Through selective coding, the researcher attempts to find and develop one key theme or concept around which all other emergent concepts are arranged. Jugenheimer et al. (2010) describe it as the researcher moving from describing a situation to attempting to explain the situation. Walker and Myrick (2006) describe Strauss's method as "fracture in open coding, relate and integrate in axial coding, and then select and integrate in selective coding" (p. 556).

Netnography

Netnography data was the first data gathered in this study, and the first to be analyzed through these three coding processes. Netnography is "ethnography adapted to the study of online communities" (Kozinets, 2002, p.61), and is faster, simpler, and cheaper than traditional ethnography; it is also more naturalistic and unobtrusive than in-depth interviews or focus groups (Catterall & Maclaran, 2001; Kozinets, 2002). Netnography works best when online communities have: a more focused segment, topic or group; higher traffic; a unique, collective sense shared by the members; interaction and discussion between members; and a large number of posters (Catterall & Maclaran, 2001; Kozinets, 2002). TwoXChromosomes fulfills these suggestions, as well as a common value system, norms, rules, community expectations, and its own cultural composition, which is why an ethnographic approach yields a better understanding of the community (Catterall & Maclaran, 2001).

Netnography however, does present some potential ethical quagmires, and previous literature struggles with the question of informed consent. Does a researcher have to announce

his or her presence and intentions? Is it acceptable to “lurk”? Steinmetz (2012) suggests a compromise of the researcher revealing his or her identity to the moderators or administrators only and receives permission to observe. Netnographers should also consider assigning pseudonyms just as one would offline, since usernames can easily be linked back to the singular user with a quick Google search (Steinmetz, 2012; Kozinets 2002). In order to address these issues, the researcher frequently communicated with community moderators about the research, especially about posting questionnaires to the subreddit so as to not make the moderators feel their community was being exploited. Also, upon Steinmetz’s recommendation, usernames included in the findings have been changed slightly.

Phase one of this research began in February 2013. The researcher conducted a five week netnography of the 2X community, recording each day’s top 15 to 20 posts and the first page of comments (usually 5-10, depending on length). In addition to the top posts, any particularly active post or discussion that was not in the top 15-20 posts at the time of collection was also recorded. The data gathered during phase one was analyzed primarily through open coding, as well as axial coding to an extent. The purpose of this initial phase was to gain a broad understanding of and begin to become familiar with the community’s culture, language, structure, social norms, the nature of interactions, and communication themes.

The second phase of the 2X netnography was conducted across 60 consecutive days – September 1, 2013 to October 30, 2013. To capture the data, a screen shots were taken each day of the top 15 posts and all accompanying comments that had been made by the time of collection. Additionally, the researcher captured screen shots of other posts that were particularly active and generated more discussion (comments) than average, but not in the top 15 posts at the time of data collection. In several cases, a post received a large amount of attention, garnering

many comments and discussion between community members, but not the votes necessary to be included in the top 15 posts (this sometimes happens with particularly controversial posts). When posts were on the “front page” of 2X for more than one day, only screen shots of comment threads that occurred since the previous collection were captured and added to the data (rather than duplicating entire discussions and posts). The 60-day netnography yielded approximately 657 pages of images (screen shots). The researcher reviewed all posts for pertinent emergent themes, and kept a journal noting trends, language, social norms, nature of interactions, communication themes, mentions of brands, meta discussions (posts and comments about the subreddit/2X community). Through an iterative process of open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the authors began to focus on ways in which community members constructed their identities—whether or not as feminists (and what meaning they ascribed to feminism), as consumers or through consumption—and on the ways in which they constructed their (sub)culture/(sub)reddit.

Community Questionnaire

In addition to the netnography, the researcher pursued emergent themes through an online questionnaire posted to 2X in January 2014. The questionnaire included nine open-ended questions and four closed-ended questions (inquiring about participants’ demographic information and 2X usage patterns; see appendix 2 for full community survey). The open-ended questions were based on observations and themes that emerged from the netnography. Namely, the questions attempted to probe deeper into the how members of 2X discuss ideas of gender and feminism, the meaning they attribute to gender and feminism, the role brands play as resources in the creation of gendered meanings, and their view of the 2X community itself. The volunteer questionnaire was first posted to 2X on January 25, 2013, and again on January 30. The post

included a greeting, brief description, basic instructions, and a link to the questionnaire (hosted by Qualtrics). Once participants clicked the link, they were taken to an informed consent document to provide consent, then asked to confirm that they were at least 18 years old. Once potential participants met these two conditions, the questionnaire began. The questionnaire was available for four weeks; however, responses slowed significantly after seven days, and there were no new responses after nine days. At the end of the four weeks 1,185 questionnaires were started, however only 498 were completed. This high abandonment rate may be due to the fact that respondents who were not 18 years or older exited the survey (i.e. closed their browser window/tab) after seeing the screening question confirming participants were at least 18 years old; approximately 67% of the surveys left incomplete only made it as far as this age screening question. The questionnaires (complete and incomplete) yielded approximately 92 pages of data. This data was analyzed qualitatively through an iterative process. The researcher engaged in open and axial coding, searching for recurring themes through selective coding.

Moderator Questionnaire

The community moderators of TwoXChromosomes were also asked to complete a short questionnaire consisting of six open-ended questions (see appendix 3 for full questionnaire). The moderator questionnaire aimed to learn what role moderators see themselves play in the 2X community; how, when and why they delete posts; and how their actions may contribute to the creation of a “safe space” within the larger reddit ecosystem. There are 15 moderators listed on the subreddit’s sidebar (plus one “bot”, which is an autonomous program tasked with removing spam). The researcher sent the moderator questionnaire via reddit private message to all of the moderators. The text of the message was similar to that of the community survey post. After receiving no survey responses in the first two days, the researcher sent a follow-up message

(which again included the link to the questionnaire). After this first follow-up message, one moderator questionnaire was completed. Despite sending a second follow-up message (three messages total), the questionnaire was closed with only one moderator having participated. The responses from that moderator, however, included links to several 2X discussion threads she felt might be particularly helpful in understanding the community and the role that moderators play. Two of the posts the moderator suggested were archived discussion threads from 2010 in which the idea for the 2X subreddit was originally proposed. The moderator's third suggestion was a post titled "Mods we have a troll invasion. What can we do?" in which several moderators participated in a discussion with the community about the balance they (as moderators) try to strike between keeping 2X open to differing viewpoints and keeping the discussion respectful from both sides. These suggested posts were included in the "texts" analyzed during this research, yielding an additional 13 pages of data.

FINDINGS

During the 60-day netnographic data collection, it became evident that the comments and self-posts that members of 2X post are distinctly more personal and emotionally loaded than most of the larger, more popular subreddits. Many women – and some men – post about serious issues in their personal lives, ranging from sexual assaults to the death of a friend or family member. Other more personal posts took a more positive tone, often in the form of someone sharing recent accomplishments like a job promotion, graduation, or recent award. Regardless of whether the personal story told was positive or negative, the community members almost always responded in the comments with words of encouragement or understanding (even if sometimes this was mixed with what the commenter would call "tough love"). While one would be

essentially rolling the dice on the attitude of responses should these things have been posted to a larger or default subreddit like /r/askreddit, comments in 2X were seldom unsupportive.

The theme of “safe spaces” emerged both early in the netnography and prominently through the online questionnaire, and was related to the ways in which redditors on 2X negotiated meaning and community norms and expectations—what is “okay” and what is not, especially when it comes to being a “good feminist.” More than half of questionnaire responses specifically included words and phrases like “safe,” “community,” “support,” “sisterhood,” “welcoming,” “non-judgmental,” encouraging,” “belonging,” “accepting,” and “open” to describe why they visit 2X and why they like it, and others alluded to the shared experiences of being a woman:

I'm a girl and I like having a space where being a girl isn't "abnormal" or unusual. In other places on the internet, people often try to insist that girls don't exist, or make environments hostile to women if they are revealed as such.

It became clear that community members feel that 2X is largely insulated from the casual misogyny and trolls found elsewhere on reddit and the Internet in general: “It's entertaining and I can relate. Honestly, I like reddit but I get really, REALLY tired of the misogynistic topics and comments that pop up in every single subreddit. TwoX feels safe.” This insulation and safety gives community members a sense of agency in the production of this space.

ANT is useful in examining the factors that contribute to the formation of this safe space. ANT reminds the researcher “to start off with uncertain and precarious networks and explore what holds these networks together/apart (i.e., what elements or relations compose it), how they grow stronger or weaker, how they facilitate and shape action and how they are ultimately *made into actors*” (Bajde, 2013, 235). Throughout the findings and discussion, this research will point to several actors – both human and non-human – in an attempt to understand how these safe

spaces (and potentially other safe spaces) are constructed in online environments regardless – and, in the case of 2X, even in spite of – being surrounded by a larger, more hostile environment.

Why do they come?

In order to begin to understand what makes 2X feel like a safe space for community members, it is first useful to explore the reasons people come to 2X. By understanding what the visitors and community members are seeking, a foundation is laid for the exploration of what role 2X plays in fulfilling those expectations. One theme that emerged through the netnography was that of community members finding things in 2X that they could not find in their offline lives or elsewhere online. One 2X post from September is titled, “Don’t know what to do or where else to turn.” Another title read, “I didn’t know where else to talk about this. Hatred from other girls/women.” Posts like these are relatively typical of community members turning to 2X for advice. However, advice is not the only role that 2X fills by offering something not found offline or elsewhere online. In a post titled “Seeking feminist electrical engineering mentor(s),” a woman wrote that she was seeking a mentor because there was a lack of female professors in her department and she “no idea what the hell [she] was doing,” looking to the community for motivation and a mentorship.

Responses from the community questionnaire added more detail and depth to this theme that emerged in the netnography. When asked why they visit 2X, respondents said they find things in 2X that they cannot find elsewhere on the internet or reddit.com. This included news stories, opinions, support, acceptance and the safety to share personal information. Respondents who mentioned that they find things on 2X they cannot find in other subreddits also reiterate the fact that 2X seems to be a somewhat insular community from the rest of reddit; one respondent explains why she comes to 2X: “To discuss certain topics in a more serious tone than I’m able to

in most other subreddits. These topics include gender equality, sexuality, different cultural norms around nudity and relationships.” Similarly, another respondent mentions that not only does she find content in 2X she does not find elsewhere on reddit, but also a different focus, or mentality:

It is a good resource for information on various issues relating to females, ranging from health and wellness to relationship issues to serious societal problems. It's also one of the few subs on reddit that's sole purpose/intent is for women, which is a complete rarity in almost all other forms of media/entertainment/etc.

Not only did respondents write about 2X offering things they feel they cannot find elsewhere on reddit, but they also find things they feel they are unable to find elsewhere on the internet in general:

There's a lot of well thought out advice for problems many people have but there's also many topics brought up that I have never thought of before. Many sites on the internet are really easy to interact with but really involve no cognitive engagement. 2X is thought provoking and helpful. I've posted about problems I was having for and received both well-thought out advice and support.

Another respondent also mentioned the variety of content he/she finds is unique to 2X: “There is everything from American politics regarding reproductive rights to sex questions, makeup and relationship problems. It's kind of like a sleepover with your girlfriends, but on the internet and anonymous!”

In addition to saying that they find things in 2X they cannot find elsewhere on reddit (or online in general), respondents said they find things in 2X that they feel they cannot find in their

offline lives or interactions. Many mentioned that they do not have many “girl friends” or older female mentors in their lives:

[Explaining why she visits 2X] For answers to thoughts I have about life relating to being female, or dealing with issues only women face. Especially when I'm lacking in social contact with close woman [sic] friends. It's also anonymous and so I can ask things I wouldn't dare speak aloud in my daily social setting.

Other respondents expressed that 2X fills serves as a reprieve from daily life saying, “I'm in a male-dominated workplace and so I'm always on-edge, it's nice to read posts from people more likely to understand me.” Another adds: “I like that the community is very supportive, sex-positive, feminist and progressive. It is easy to get advice and support on your issues that would maybe be uncomfortable talking about in the real world.” The feeling of community users seem to experience as a member of 2X, along with the fact that they find things they are unable to find elsewhere online or in their offline lives seems to bring members back to this subreddit.

Community Rules and the Role of Moderator

In addition to finding things they cannot find elsewhere online or off, questionnaire respondents mentioned moderators and community rules as their reason for visiting 2X. It became clear that these rules and the action of community moderators also help in the creation of a safe space, making them actors in this community. The discussions which take place are acted on—facilitated and impeded—by rules and regulations of the site. If comments were more hurtful than helpful, they were eventually deleted (either by the commenter or a subreddit moderator) or what redditors call “downvoted into oblivion,” which means that the comment score is below the threshold to be automatically shown; instead, the reader has to click “show hidden comments” to expand the thread to the point that the even the most downvoted comments

appear. The moderators and members of 2X seem to take the community rules quite seriously. These rules appear on the right-hand sidebar of the community's front page. They are: "respect," "equanimity," "grace," "relevance," "no direct links to images, except on Image-Fest Friday (IFF)," and "no links to fundraising pages."

A confidence and belief that the rules and conventions would keep posters safe in 2X was echoed in the questionnaire responses. The defining quality of Web 2.0 is the democratization of the megaphone. That is, inherent to user-created content – whether it be on listservs, Usenet, Youtube, Weibo, or reddit – is the fact that anyone can be heard by and disseminate messages to a large audience. One of the problems with this, of course, comes when that megaphone meets intolerance. When asked what she likes about the subreddit, one survey respondent explained how this tension plays out in 2X saying, "[I like] The diversity, the fact that the platform allows for anyone to "speak" and share with others...The fact that most people seem to take the "rule" of respecting others and their ideas seriously." Another respondent also pointed out the role that other 2x community members (who are not moderators) play in ensuring 2X is a supportive, safe environment: "I don't like to see people being disparaged or blamed when they're looking for help, but luckily this isn't extremely common and others will stand up for the original poster."

The community moderators (or mods) at 2X play the biggest (and most direct) role in making sure that both posters and commenters adhere to the community rules. Moderators not only review posts and comments, but can delete them and ban users from the subreddit. 2X has fifteen community moderators (and one spam bot with moderator privileges), and all have been moderators for at least one year; two moderators have been in that role since the community's start four years ago. Although the community survey did not ask any questions about community moderations, several respondents made a point of mentioning mods. One respondent said she/he

appreciated the role the moderators in 2X play: “It's well moderated... Unlike the rest of reddit, I can be confident most sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia won't be welcome.” The fact that reddit and its subreddits consist of user-created and user-curated content highlights the relationship between human and nonhuman actors. There is not a human decision maker shaping the site's identity, but rather its identity is enacted in the relationships between users, moderators, rules and regulations, discourses and technology.

In the 2X “FAQ” (2014, para. 8), the section explaining the formation of community rules includes a statement about 2X's (and moderators') goal:

At 2XC, our goal has always, always been to give women and girls a place on the internet to have meaningful, open discussion. All guidelines are intended to serve that purpose in a way that fosters community.

From moderator comments and interactions in discussion threads as well as the response to the mod questionnaire, it seems that these values of open discussion and community are moderators' top priorities. When asked how she describes her role as a community moderator, she said, “I'm here to help others get the most out of 2xc. I facilitate the users' ability to enjoy their time here and hopefully have good, open and honest discussions on a variety of topics.” The idea of open conversation was brought up as both a goal of community mods as well as a critique by community members (both in community posts and the questionnaire). Some 2X visitors feel that the moderators are too quick to delete posts and stifle differing opinions. This point of view, while not insignificant by any means, did not represent the majority of questionnaire respondents. A 2X mod explained in her questionnaire answers how often and in what cases the mods might censor content:

We try to keep 2xc a place for open discussion of many points of views while hopefully keeping the discussion respectful from all "sides". You'll note that while not everyone agrees we do try to be as fair as possible while still angling for a respectful place.

We also tend to moderate heavier depending on context. 2xc is a place where women post on pretty sensitive issues such as rape and abortion. When they do so we will moderate comments directed at them much more heavily than[sic] we would on an article discussing the same... We want people to be able to express opinions contrary to the "hivemind" but not when those opinions cause others emotional harm.

We also tend to get a lot of posts from guys. Guys are very welcome to participate in our discussions, and in many cases they are welcome to create posts. However, we decided long ago posts from guys looking for dating advice or wanting to make a "gotcha, women!" type post aren't welcome. 2xc is first and foremost a space for women and intended for our perspectives. We remove between 1 and 3 posts a day from guys that would be more appropriate elsewhere.

There are also a lot of trolls, we are a target rich environment for them and take action when needed.

In a March 2014 post titled "Mods, we have a troll invasion. What can we do?" the poster called for more censorship and moderator intervention. The most upvoted (popular) comment disagreed:

Sometimes they [the comments posted] irritate the crap out of me, but at the same time, if they aren't being offensive, I don't think the mods should be removing them...I think that if we want this to be a safe space for women, we need to avoid over-moderation that could silence some women who disagree with us.

A community moderator jumped into this discussion and advised community members to report offensive comments. She went on to explain that when someone reports a post or comment, a moderator goes into the original post and takes into consideration the context of the questionable comment as well as the post history of the user who posted it in an effort to determine “what they’re really up to.” She ends the post by reiterating the fact that comments are not deleted simply because they are disagreeable:

This is an open forum. TwoX does welcome discussion and the opinions of others, even if the majority of the community finds those opinions to be antiquated and/or offensive...we're just here to try to keep people from being mean to each other and guide the community (when necessary) towards a constructive end...This is YOUR community. You have the power to mold it.

While the mods may welcome those opinions the community feels are “antiquated and/or offensive,” it appears that the members of the community by-and-large do not. Members show this by downvoting those comments, sometimes to the point that their score (the net value of upvotes and downvotes) falls below a certain threshold, hiding the comment and requiring a reader to click to expand the discussion thread in order to see the “hidden” comments. In this way, the user interface of reddit itself acts as an actor. Some users are discouraged from posting less popular viewpoints by anticipated downvotes and perceived hostility. One community member wrote in her questionnaire:

People (and I don't mean trolls) still get downvoted for expressing opinions that don't line up with the majority. Some women have expressed—when the topic gets brought up—that they don't feel 100% comfortable voicing their more controversial opinions on TwoX, because of the downvotes/eventual animosity that they receive.

It is worth noting that this participant reveals the tensions that both destabilize and reinforce the “safe space” in the interaction of the system of upvotes/downvotes that minimize hostile voices but at the same time act in support of what participants call the hivemind by downvoting non-hostile but differing opinions. When examined through the lens of ANT, this consensus is not simply “understood” but acts, as is revealed by comments. Similarly, the rules of the community become an actant as well, acting on behavior exhibited by members and on the content of the subreddit itself, shaping what “makes it,” and what is deleted.

Platform and User Interface

Throughout this research process, a question that regularly surfaced was why this community existed inside reddit of all places. Given that reddit is known as a site that can be hostile to women, why does 2X makes its home there when it may be easier – less of a battle – to make its home somewhere else? The answer must be that reddit, as a site, offers and possesses a unique set of characteristics. After all, the community members, moderators, and discussions could have congregated in any number of online community spaces. With this reasoning, the researcher began looking at reddit itself – the site's set up, layout, user interface, and the environment created when those things coalesce – to answer the question “why reddit?” ANT becomes particularly useful in this line of questioning. Within actor-network-theory, “a heterogeneous assemblage of human, nonhuman, and hybrid actors” (Martin & Schouten, 2014,

p. 857) have agency to affect actions of other actors. As Martin and Schouten (2014, p. 857) explain, “rules, standards, technologies, and infrastructure all exert shaping and limiting agency over human behaviors and practices,” opening our inquiry to the influence of these various forces or *actants* (Latour, 2005). Through this lens, this section will examine what factors make reddit a unique space, drawing on netnography observations, questionnaire data, and the researcher’s own experience as a frequent reddit user for nearly three years.

One of the most basic differences between reddit and other social news sites is its voting system. As mentioned earlier, the reddit voting system allows users to upvote content (an ‘orangered’ up arrow) they like and downvote (a periwinkle down arrow) content they do not. Reddit rules or “reddiquette” gives more nuances to the voting system, telling users “if you think something contributes to conversation, upvote it. If you think it does not contribute to the subreddit it is posted in or is off-topic in a particular community, downvote it” (Reddiquette, 2014, para. 3). After one spends a fair amount of time on reddit, however, it becomes clear that users do not always follow these rules and tend to vote based on whether or not they agree with the post/comment. Reddit’s voting system allows anyone and everyone to comment (as long as he or she registers an account), but pushes what the community deems the best content to the top of the comment thread of front page. There are several other sites with similar voting systems, however. Digg and many other websites compile news from around the web and allow users to vote on each story. Digg was the first website of its kind when it launched in 2004. It was user-submitted news and links, curated by a voting system. In 2012, however, Digg went through a complete overhaul (partly in an attempt to recover from losing 25% of its traffic – much of which went to reddit – after a 2010 redesign) and moved from rows of headlines and text similar to reddit, to a focus on pictures (Lardinois, 2010). The ‘new Digg’ looks and feels like the front

page of a news site (similar to BuzzFeed or Huffington Post), and users can not comment on stories, keeping the focus on news content rather than community and interaction. The website Slashdot does allow comments and also works on a voting system, but is more complicated than a simple up or down vote. What Digg and Slashdot don't have however, is the mix of both links and text posts that reddit allows, nor do they have smaller user-created communities like subreddits.

Perhaps the most unique feature of reddit is its subreddit system. It is so central, in fact, that reddit administrators (those who are part of the small team that actually runs reddit) often reiterate that “the most important fact is that reddit is not a single community; it's an engine for creating communities” (Chromakode, 2011). The fact that a smaller, user-created and user-run community can exist on reddit's popular platform and infrastructure seems to be what makes users, including members of 2X, stay there rather than finding another home (that may be less hostile). Through the questionnaire, a 2X mod explains why she stays with reddit:

I love reddit for the fact that I can be sitting in my own home and talking to someone from thousands of miles away with completely different life experiences than me. I know that can be said of many internet forums, however where I believe reddit gets it right is in its subreddit system. Anyone can create their own space and grow it and moderate it in any fashion they wish. This allows groups to form over anything and nothing.

While reddit does allow for small, specialized communities, it also allows users to bring all the small communities they are a part of together into one personalized ‘front page.’ Rather than belonging to several small forums or communities or several different sites, reddit allows the user to participate in any number of small forums and aggregate them into one place where all

the top posts from each subreddit come together. An answer from the community questionnaire addresses what one community member thinks makes 2X different:

Despite all the negatives I have talked about, it really is a great subreddit. There are very few forums on the internet and even fewer on reddit that can allow women to get the emotional support they need. Men are sweethearts but they very rarely understand the nuances of emotionally charged situations and the role that being a woman plays in modern situations.

Unique language

Findings present a unique language and vocabulary among 2X participants that paints a picture of this community's mindset. One term often used is "vent" or "rant." This is a disclaimer that the OP (original poster) often includes in the title of a post to indicate that he or she needs to talk out or complain about something that happened to him or her. Sometimes community members end a post or comment with "/rant". This is a play on computer coding languages in which the slash essentially denotes the end of something. Consistent with Herring's findings on female language patterns online, namely hedging and apologizing (Herring, 2003), many posts contained apologies for no *apparent* reason; the poster would apologize for length of the post, for potential typos he/she may have missed, or would apologize in advance "if this doesn't belong here." This near compulsion to apologize despite the fact that there was no infraction may be a reflection of the unwelcoming nature they have experienced in other online communities or elsewhere on reddit. Similar to Soukup's (1999) finding of the influence in collectives of masculine styles of talk dominating and disrupting conversations, similarly "feminine" styles of talk may influence the formation and maintenance of "safe spaces."

Another term often used is “possible trigger” or “trigger warning.” This is a tag that appears next to a post warning sensitive readers, victims of sexual assault, or those suffering from related PTSD that they may find the contents of the post upsetting. This tag is usually added by the original poster (OP), but is occasionally added by one of the moderators after the fact. In the survey, several community members indicated that they look for these tags to avoid reading “heavier” posts when they don’t feel up for it. This is one instance in which both human (posters and moderators) and non-human (the trigger-warning label) actants play a role in one aspect of creating a ‘safe space’. By including warnings to sensitive readers, 2X becomes a safe space for victims of things like sexual assault or domestic abuse to share their stories and find support without creating an unsafe space for other community members who may be especially sensitive to these posts.

The topic of “victim blaming” also comes up frequently in 2X discussions. Victim blaming is insinuating that a sexual assault or rape is the fault of the victim or insinuating that he/she should have done more to prevent the attack. Members of 2X often call out victim blaming wherever and whenever they see it (online or offline), and it is absolutely unwelcome in the sub.

“Hive mind” or “group think” were terms also mentioned frequently by 2Xers. This refers to the homogenous views or opinions shared by members of 2X (and other online communities), as people feed off of each other creating something of an echo chamber. This occurs on reddit as a whole as well as in smaller subreddits like 2X, as pointed out by one questionnaire respondent who said, “reddit has certain ‘hivemind’ that decides what are acceptable view about some topics and this hivemind is very strong at TwoX.” This “hive mind” represents a possible threat to the “safe space” environment of this subreddit. The possible

repercussions of the ‘hive mind’ are discussed at greater length in the final subsection of this chapter.

Street harassment is an issue that received significant attention in the later portion of my netnography observations. Generally, street harassment is any unwelcomed comments or catcalls directed towards someone out in public, coming from a stranger. One post on the subject was titled “My observation on street harassment as a fat woman.” In another simply titled “I yell back,” the author shares her recent experience and reaction then asks community members what they thing is the right response. The women on 2X are beginning to speak out against it, talk about it, and share tips on how to deal with it.

Finally, image fest Friday (IFF), was a day that the community created where members are allowed to post pictures. Previously, pictures were not allowed to be posted in this subreddit because the moderators preferred posts that would facilitate more discussion. This year, however, IFF was created as the one day per week that pictures are permitted. One of the most popular IFF posts (and also happened to be one of the first posted after the rule change) was the women of the Curiosity Rover team at NASA (See appendix 1) with the caption “IFF: I work on Curiosity, and a few nights ago we realized there were tons of girls around and no guys! So we took an obligatory group picture.” This unique and shared vocabulary increases the communal feeling of the subreddit as a whole, this encouraging the formation of a safe space.

Dialogue and Meaning

Feminist narrative discourses occur with relative frequency on 2X. In an attempt to explore how discussions on 2X might affect member’s opinions or way of thinking, the questionnaire asked community members if a discussion on 2X had ever changed their way of thinking about something and in what way. Almost twice as many respondents said that their

thinking had been changed in some way than those who said it was not. Many of the responses in the affirmative referenced specific topics like body image, abortion, or transgender issues. One respondent said, “I think more about transgender rights than previously. I realize more about subtle inequality, especially statements people might make offhandedly not realizing they may be acting offensively or undermining women in doing so.” Another respondent mentioned previously held biases that discussion on 2X affected:

Yes, I used to be pretty close minded and very judgemental [sic]. Reading about what people have had done to them and the effects of what people have said to them really opened my eyes to the way I was raised to victim blame and the really awful biases that we all live with.

Responses to this question also revealed that the community discussions are not only changing the way girls and women think about certain issues:

Yes, I think so, mainly because as a man I do not see the world from the same perspective as many women, and the discussions have sometimes opened my eyes. For example, I feel like I have a better understanding of why women can often be afraid of men in some contexts; the idea of being powerless should a struggle occur seems terrifying.

This respondent, in answering a later question, added that he believes that because of the time has spent on 2X that he now “somehow knows more about feminine hygiene products” than his girlfriend.

The discussions taking place on 2X clearly have some impact on many community members, but there are other ways in which members of 2X co-create and negotiate meaning, particularly

of feminism. Some questionnaire respondents addressed this issue even before being asked specifically about feminism:

I am still learning about what feminism is. I used to be one of the gamers that simply didn't like other women. I bought into the "she's only here for attention" mentality that my guy gamer "friends" were spewing, for example. It's one of the reasons I come to this sub; I am new to feminism and like to learn about the "why" something bothers me.

Another respondent added, “TwoX has been one factor among many that have made up my education in feminism.”

The community questionnaire asked respondents for their definition of ‘feminism’ and whether or not they considered themselves a feminist. The reasoning for including this question came after a 2X member, Rebecca Cohen, posted a comic she had drawn in which the final frame the main character says “In short, I’m a feminist,” and her friend responds “A feminist? Why do you hate men?”

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

This sparked a lengthy discussion in which many version of feminism were proposed, often starting with a version of: “well that’s not *my* feminism.” One questionnaire respondent expressed the same sentiment that appeared in the cartoon (the cartoon was not mentioned in the questionnaire) in his or her definition of feminism:

Many people think that feminism means ‘man-hater’, or that a woman can’t wear high heels or makeup or something silly like that. My definition is simple because I believe a feminist doesn’t need a bunch of identifying traits to be considered a

'good' feminist. In my mind, if you want equality for men and women, you are a feminist.

Despite the individuation of feminism expressed in the discussion following the cartoon, findings from the questionnaire in particular suggest a mutually held belief among participants that feminism is defined by equality, illustrated by a respondent's answer saying, "Feminism is the idea that women are people, too – worthy of the same respect and fair treatment as men. We aren't just sidekicks or property. We are no less important than men." The value of equality continued to echo throughout respondents' definitions:

Feminism means fighting for equality in all ways for all genders: equal treatment, equal pay, equal standards, and equal expectations. Feminism to me is not about advancing the cause of women while disregarding or treating negatively the cause of any other group of people. It's about doing so in a way that furthers the goals of other groups as well, and helps create a harmony among all races, genders, and classes.

Some participants responded simply: "equality." The author proposes that while on close examination participant definitions of feminism are nuanced and different, the discourse of equality engenders a sense of community.

Brands as a vehicle for discussion

While discussions about particular brands are not especially common in this community, they do happen from time to time. During the 60-day netnography period, there were 18 instances of brands being the subject of a post or playing a prominent role in the comments and discussion thread (for example, a post asking where women buy their jeans, or what they keep in an "emergency period bag"). The brands covered a wide scope of categories and markets – from

NuvaRing to LEGO, and ‘Obamacare’ to *Jezebel*, to name a few. When examining these brand discussions it became apparent that when the community begins discussing brands, their discussions are not *actually* about the brands. Rather, when brands are the subject of posts, they predominantly function as a resource to discuss larger issues about feminism and being a woman in general. Brands become one way that community members question, discuss and negotiate what makes a good feminist or what feminism “looks like.”

In one instance of this, a user posted an article about using the Bechdel Test for Disney movies (and more specifically, Disney Princesses). This started a discussion in the comment thread about the messages these movies convey about women and gender roles (as well as a conversation about the Bechdel Test itself). In one thread, community members discuss Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*:

InvaDePixel: I have to admit, it always is shocking to see how much Ariel fails feminism standards or Bechdel tests because in my head I think of her as super headstrong and progressive...Also this article does a good job illustrating some flaws in the Bechdel test...

Darwin: The thing about Ariel is that yes, a large part of her story arc is about love, but hey, that’s true for plenty of real-world people. The difference is that she doesn’t passively wait to get rescued by her man or sit around on a fainting couch until he notices her. She saves his life twice, goes through great danger and personal upheaval to overcome the obstacles keeping them apart, and actively seduces him (well, in a G-rated way) to get what she wants. She’s extremely active and has agency and self-motivation throughout her entire love story, which I think makes her a strong feminist character.

Astrea: Except for the part where she changes herself completely in order to win his love. I would not call Ariel a feminist character. I do agree that she has considerably more agency than say Snow White.

In their discussion of the Disney character Ariel, the three community members use the character and storyline as their reference to negotiate and debate what constitutes agency. They attempt to negotiate what constitutes proper agency in the female's (Ariel's) romantic situation. They also discuss whether or not Ariel constitutes a 'feminist character.' Through this discussion, the commenters are negotiating a definition for 'feminist character,' debating what constitutes a feminist character by debating whether or not the Ariel could be classified as such.

In another example, someone posted an article from *The Independent* about a new Veet commercial airing in the United States. The premise of the commercial was that women who don't wax (or remove body hair in some other way, presumably) risk "dudeness." In one scene, a man wakes up next to his lover, who has magically been transformed into a rather hairy man after not waxing. The commercial tells audiences "don't risk dudeness" and suggests that using their product to remove body hair will help them feel "womanly around the clock." In one of the top comments, a user writes:

You know what? Usually I can take a joke. And if women want to spend hours every day de-hair-ifying their individual bodies, they can go nuts.

But in all seriousness, fuck you Veet for implying hair is not feminine. Fuck you for implying that not shaving makes you a man, or less of a woman. Men and women both have hair. Stop perpetuating these bullshit gender differences. Stop implying women lose their womanhood if they are not hair free.

This would've devastated teenage me. It's practically psychological warfare on adolescents who are already freaked out about being abnormal. A joke is a joke but this shit is exactly why people get so mad about the larger implications of hair removal.

Further down the discussion thread (in a reply to a reply, essentially), another user writes:

These adverts are not okay and they actively harm women's self-confidence. And also insult people's gender identity across the board. Its [sic] 'supposed' to be funny that there's a guy in girls' clothing there with a feminine voice. Haha. how abnormal and hilarious and stupid, right? wrong. It's making trans and non-gender normative people into a spectacle. We should be over that shit by now.

While nearly all of the commenters on this discussion thread agreed in their dislike for the Veet ad, the discussion of the advertisement and brand served to establish (or perhaps reestablish) community ideal of acceptance and equality on several levels. The first commenter quoted makes the point that adhering (or not) to certain behaviors (particularly those typically viewed as gendered behaviors like hair removal) does not make someone less of a man or a woman. She uses Veet's commercial as an opportunity to express her distaste for what she sees as "bullshit gender differences," echoing the attitude of acceptance (of all gender identities and any range of participating in gendered behaviors), even adding that if there are women who prefer to remove their hair they should "go nuts." The second commenter quote also uses the Veet commercial to respond to the issue of gender norms (in referencing traditional gendered clothes) and gender identity. Similar to the first commenter, she/he touches on the issue (and community value) of equality, in this case for trans and non-gender normative people. As illustrated in these examples, community discussions of brands often facilitate negotiation of

meaning and express community attitudes towards the ideas of feminism and equality, which again, reinforces a sense of community.

In addition to these brand discussions that turn into conversations about much larger issues, there are also brand discussions that stay on the more simple level (relatively speaking) of sharing information and opinions about brands. For example, one poster asks, “Do I need to store NuvaRing in the fridge?” She explains that the information on NuvaRing’s website is inconsistent, and commenters chime in with recommendations and previous experience. In another post titled “So I tried on my boyfriends’ boxer briefs today...” the writer espouses the fit of the boxer briefs saying, “Oh. My. God. So comfortable. It felt majestic...how can I emulate this?” She describes specific things she likes about the fit that she cannot find in women’s underwear. In the top comment, someone points the poster to a particular cut by Haines. Another commenter writes:

After reading this post, I told my bf I want to wear his underwear. I had to explain myself so I seemed a little less creepy, but decided that the Kirkland brand (from Costco) are the best. They’re almost more like bike shorts, tighter and less ‘ball fabric.’”

The larger safe space aspect of 2X likely contributes to such frank (and surprisingly constructive, even when somewhat silly) discussions, advice, and knowledge sharing about relatively basic product information. Conversations about brand uses and use-value like these could be of particular interest to brand managers, the implications of which will be discussed in greater depth in the final section of this paper.

Is it really a safe space? Agents of destabilization

The various themes, or actors, discussed above act to shape the culture of “safe space,” but at the same time, can work to destabilize it. Prior research points to several possibilities supported through our data. For example, scholars have noted the possibility that “the very processes of civilized discourse that should welcome participation of marginalized people can actively push them out by invoking an understood consensus of what is and is not talked about” (Atkinson & DePalma, 2008, 184). For purposes of illustration, the author points to data from the netnography and questionnaire revealing the “hivemind,” the term employed by 2X users to describe the phenomenon. One participant wrote:

There’s still quite a bit of hivemind that goes on, it’s just with a female/feminist slant. People (and I don’t mean trolls) still get downvoted for expressing opinions that don’t line up with the majority. Some women have expressed—when the topic gets brought up—that they don’t feel 100% comfortable voicing their more controversial opinions on TwoX, because of the downvotes/eventual animosity that they receive.

It is worth noting that this participant reveals the tensions that both destabilize and reinforce the “safe space” in the interaction of the system of upvotes/downvotes that minimize hostile voices but at the same time act in support of what participants call the hivemind by downvoting non-hostile but differing opinions. This consensus is not simply “understood” but acts, as is revealed by comments. In discussing what she does not like about 2X, one participant points to what she regards “as extremely harsh judgment toward those who do not conform to the TwoX hive mind.” Or, as another says, “Well, sometimes the community can be, like any other community,

a bit insular in its beliefs and react hostilely towards points of view opposite of what the community at large holds.”

There are several subreddit which can be viewed as foils to 2X to varying degrees. Two of these foils are /r/mensrights and /r/theredpill. Mens’ Rights Activists (MRAs) on reddit tend to be part of the subreddit /r/mensrights, self-described as “a place for those who wish to discuss men's rights and the ways said rights are infringed upon” (“MensRights”, n.d., sidebar). The subreddit’s Frequently Asked Questions wiki article “(FAQ MensRights”, 2014, para. 1) goes into more detail:

In short, r/MensRights (r/MR) is a community of members that seek to promote honest discourse in regards to male issues - including but not limited to custody, alimony, reproductive health and rights, and education. r/MR is a subreddit consisting of both men and women who believe that there is serious discrimination against men inherent in western societies.

The main issue that the 2X community has with the MRA community is that MRAs emphasize false rape allegations (which 2X tends to see as victim blaming), and that MRAs take issue with the existence of the ‘rape culture’ that 2X often discusses.

Members of the /r/theredpill community, or Red Pillers, tend to cause more of a problem in the 2X subreddit. Their comments are often deleted (and quickly), as they are usually much more caustic. The Red Pill subreddit describes itself as a “discussion of sexual strategy in a culture increasingly lacking a positive identity for men.”

Members of these subreddits were mentioned several times in survey responses. According to one respondent:

It's a little annoying that these MRA and red pill folks post every now and then. I agree with some aspects of their cause, but they fail to realize that many of their problems (women winning a disproportionate number of family court cases, rape in prison) are a result of a male-dominated society, and these problems would be fixed if they were more interested in working with women, instead of trying to return to an era where women are property.

Another wrote:

As the sub gets bigger and more and more people trickle in, we get not only deserting opinions, but a lot more bigotry and close minded behavior. We also get "brigaded" a lot by the red pill (a misogynistic PUA [pick up artist] subreddit), and it can get downright depressing at times.

Being “brigaded” is when a discussion thread from one subreddit is linked to another subreddit. In many cases, these two subreddits have completely different audiences and have equally disparate ideologies and beliefs. Brigading is often done, in part, to point out the ridiculous nature of or flaw in the thinking of whatever they deem to be the “other”. When a subreddit is brigaded, it generates more traffic than normal to the particular post being linked, thus significantly more downvotes (as people tend to vote depending on agreement, despite the reddiquite) and usually more negative, inflammatory comments. For this reason, brigading is not allowed in 2X. Members of 2X are not allowed to post any links (as original posts or as comments) to posts or comments on other subreddits. 2X will sometimes get brigaded itself however, usually by the subreddit /r/shitredditsays or SRS, which specializes in brigading.

A number of the questionnaire respondents espoused the communal and safe feeling of the subreddit in one answer, but in their next answer mention that they dislike the fact that 2X is

sometimes overrun by MRAs and RedPills. For example, one respondent, when asked what she likes about 2X, said, “It's the only female-focused place online I've felt safe in a while.” When the same respondent was asked what she dislikes about 2X, she said, “MRA's and red pillers hoppin' on and talking their trash.” This may suggest that the presence of MRAs and Red Pillers don't take away from the safety members may feel in the 2X community. Perhaps this is due to the relative rarity with which they appear and the community response in the instances that they do appear. This can be linked back to actions from 2X moderators (and the community members who flag and report posts/comments to the mods) and the voting system inherent to reddit. Posts that are offensive or not conducive to what 2X sets out to be as a community are rarely seen by many members because they are either deleted or ‘downvoted into oblivion’.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

By applying grounded theory and looking through the lens of Actor Network Theory, this study finds that the themes of moderation and community rules, reddit's features and technology systems, and shared language and meaning work together to create a safe space for the members of the online sub-community, 2X. At the same time, the tendency for groupthink or ‘hive mind,’ and disruptive brigades or trolls from subreddits with conflicting ideologies act on the 2X environment and occasionally conversation as agents of destabilization.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

A large range of actors including other subreddits, posters, lurkers, moderators, interfaces, technology, and more act on the relationship between reddit and reddit.com. The findings regarding the role of community moderators and 2X members' attitudes towards those moderators support Herring's (2003) finding that women tend to participate more in online

communities that have designated individual(s) holding posters accountable to community rules. Female online language patterns as well as the vocabulary and jargon unique to the subreddit help to establish a sense of belonging, thus a sense of safety and insulation from the rest of reddit. This use of unique language supports Harris's (2005) argument that the internet can offer potential safe spaces for participants to "generate their own meanings and terminologies" (p. 42). Also adding to the formation of this safe space is the fact that 2X gives reddit users the unique opportunity to be anonymous online but not automatically assumed to be male, as was predicted by the hyperpersonal CMC theory (Walther, 1996), the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004), and SIDE model (Postmes et al., 1998). The findings also pointed to community moderators and the reddit voting system working together to act as gatekeepers, promoting community-accepted behavior and discouraging hostile behavior and trolls. While all of these actants are working in this system to create a safe space, findings from the netnography and questionnaire responses show there are still other actors that destabilize. The /r/TheRedPill and /r/MensRights subreddits act as a foil to 2X, with members who occasionally appear in 2X to voice their opinions.

While this research works towards filling the gaps in the literature on reddit and its communities, there were several limitations. This research's greatest limitation was the lack of questionnaire responses from community moderators. Although the one response the researcher received did lend a great deal of understanding to the role of moderators in the community, additional input from the moderators may have revealed new and additional insights. Another limitation was the low number of completed questionnaires. Most questionnaires that were started were not ultimately completed, which could have had an effect on the variety of responses especially towards the end of the questionnaire.

This research adds to the discussions and literature regarding online community formation and management. This also fills a void in computer-mediated communication research when it comes to reddit.com, which had been surprisingly understudied given its size and popularity. The findings regarding the role of brands in discussion on 2X also has implications for public relations and advertising. The growth of digital media and Web 2.0 has presented advertising and PR professionals new ways to reach consumers and new ways to “listen in” to conversations among consumers and stakeholders.

As with other online communities, reddit is often seen as a new opportunity to reach consumers (e.g. Pathak, 2014). Brands should proceed with caution, however. Not only are redditors often unkind to marketers as Pathak (2014) points out, but reddit has several rules and guidelines about self-promotion (“Self-promotion”, 2014), falling afoul of which will get an account banned site-wide. As brands can sometimes play a significant role in discussions on 2X, advertisers, PR practitioners and marketers could still gain useful insights by ‘lurking’ or listening in to conversations that may involve their market segment or categories. This practice of listening means they will be able to better understand how brands become a part of the dialogue, and a part of meaning and identity formation: as catalysts for dialogue, as resources in the formation and expression of identity (at both an individual and community level), and through knowledge-sharing, about brand (or organizations, products, and services) use value. 2X also offers unique insight for brand managers because it is a safe space. Community members talk about issues in different ways than they might in a more public space in which they feel less secure.

This applies even to conversations like the NuvaRing and boxer brief examples. It is unlikely that these conversation would have happened the same way (if at all) in another

subreddit that was perceived as less ‘safe,’ or anywhere else online that is not the ‘safe space’ that 2X has become. Thus, safe spaces – and 2X in particular – offer PR, advertising, and marketing professionals the opportunity to gain perspectives or viewpoints that could remain unspoken elsewhere online. In the boxer briefs example, the poster (as well as commenters and community members) may not have felt comfortable weighing in about wearing male underwear, loving it, and giving tips and advice about different products. Discussions centered around (or even peripherally related to, as long as it comes up somewhere in a post or comment offers brand managers the possibility of hearing unique input from potential consumers and stakeholders.

It should be emphasized, however, that this research is no way a recommendation or “guide” for brands inserting themselves into this community. 2X is an online space with very personal content. It is unethical for brands to exploit this safety that the members of this community feel. A myriad of factors (and a great deal of work) has gone into creating this safe space, but brands can easily compromise this. Because the discussions are seldom about brands and often about larger, more sensitive issues, a brand inserting itself into the conversation could be seen as an intrusion and derailment of the conversation (similar to, even if not as caustic as, MRAs and Red Pills). 2X is unique from many online communities not only in the fact that it has fostered such a sense of security and safety, but also because it is surrounded by a more hostile environment, causing members to be hyperaware and critical of potential threats and intrusions.

It *may* be acceptable for brands who do not seek commercial gain to contribute to this community. There is even perhaps an opportunity here for nonprofits with a vested interest in this demographic, such as Planned Parenthood. Executives often participate in crowd-sourced interviews or question-and-answers on reddit (called an AMA, Ask Me Anything). An AMA on

2X from a nonprofit or other organization relevant to the community's interests could be successful if approached the right way.

To build upon these findings, researchers should aim to identify other gendered online communities providing a 'safe space' for its members. Further research should also continue to explore the networks of formation by which safe online subcultures may be created within hostile cultures (as opposed to forming in other spaces where there might be less fighting against trolls and institutionalized misogyny). Having begun this process, the research suggests that the reddit interface itself helps to facilitate not only the safe subculture that in 2X, but also the hostilities silencing of minority opinions that in the broader reddit culture.

REFERENCES

- “About reddit”. (2014). Retrieved April 4, 2014, from <http://www.reddit.com/about/>
- Atkinson, E., & DePalma, R. (2008). “Dangerous Spaces: Constructing and Contesting Sexual Identities in an Online Discussion Forum,” *Gender and Education*, 20 (2), 183-194.
- Bajde, D. (2013). Consumer culture theory (re)visits actor-network theory: Flattening consumption studies. *Marketing Theory*, 3(2), 227-242.
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American psychologist*, 37(2), 122-147.
- Belk, R. (2013). “Extended Self in the Digital World,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (3), 477-500.
- Bergstrom, K. (2011). “Don’t Feed the Troll”: Shutting Down Debate about Community Expectations on Reddit.com,” *First Monday*, 16 (8), accessed September 6, 2013: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3498/3029>.
- Brophy, J. E. (2010). “Developing a Corporeal Cyberfeminism: Beyond Cyberutopia.” *New Media & Society*, 12(6), 929-945.
- Buhrke, R. A., & Fuqua, D.R. (1987). "Sex differences in same-and cross-sex supportive relationships." *Sex Roles* 17(5). 339-352.
- Catterall, M., & Maclaran, P. (2001). Researching consumers in virtual worlds: A cyberspace odyssey. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 1(3), 228-237.
- Chalmers, T., Tandy, L., Price, L., & Schau, H.J. (2013). “When Differences Unite: Resource Dependence in Heterogenous Consumption Communities,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (5), 1010-1033.

- Chen, G. (2012). Why Do Women Write Personal Blogs? Satisfying Needs for Self-Disclosure and Affiliation Tell Part of the Story. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(1), 171-180.
- Chromakode [username]. (2011, September 2). How reddit works [Blog post] Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/11/how-to-cite-something-you-found-on-a-website-in-apa-style.html>
- Couldry, N. (2008). "Actor Network Theory and Media: Do They Connect and On What Terms?" in Andreas Hepp et al. (eds), *Connectivity, Networks and Flows: Conceptualizing Contemporary Communications*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Dare, J., & Green, L. (2011). Rethinking Social Support in Women's Midlife Years: Women's Experiences of Social Support in Online Environments. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(5), 473-490.
- Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, 13(1), 319-339.
- Epp, A. M., & Price, L.L. (2010). The Storied Life of Singularized Objects: Forces of Agency and Network Transformation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (5), 820-837.
- "FAQ MensRights". (January 2014). Retrieved March 3, 2014, from <http://www.reddit.com/r/MensRights/wiki/faq>
- "FAQ TwoXChromosomes". (February 2014). Retrieved March 3, 2014, from <http://www.reddit.com/r/TwoXChromosomes/wiki/faq>.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine.
- Harris, A. (2005). Discourses of Desire as Governmentality: Young Women, Sexuality, and Significance of Safe Spaces. *Feminism & Psychology*, 15 (1), 39-43.

- Herring, S. C. (2003). "Gender and Power in Online Communication." In J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Herring, S.C. (2010). Who's got the floor in computer-mediated conversation? Edelsky's gender patterns revisited. *Language@Internet*, 7, article8. Retrieved from <http://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2010/2857>.
- Herring, S., & Job-Sluder, K. (2002). "Searching for safety online: Managing 'trolling' in a feminist forum." *The Information Society*, 18(5). 371-384.
- Herring, S. C., Johnson, D.A., & DiBenedetto, T. (1995). "'This discussion is going too far!': Male resistance to female participation on the Internet," in M. Bucholtz and K. Hall (Eds.), *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*, New York: Routledge, 67-96.
- Hollenbaugh, E. E., & Everett, M. K. (2013). The Effects of Anonymity on Self-Disclosure in Blogs: An Application of the Online Disinhibition Effect. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 18(3), 283-302.
- Jugenheimer, D. W., Bradley, S. D., Kelley, L. D., Hudson, J. C.. (2010). *Advertising and public relations research*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Kapidzic, S., & Herring, S.C. (2011). Gender, Communication, and Self-presentation in Teen Chatrooms Revisited: Have Patterns Changed?. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(1), 39-59.
- Keil, M., Beranek, P. M., & Konsynski, B. R. (1995). Usefulness and ease of use: field study evidence regarding task considerations. *Decision Support Systems*, 13(1), 75-91.

- Kozinets, R.V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72.
- Lardinois, F. (September 23, 2010). Digg redesign tanks: Traffic down 26% (updated with new reddit stats). *ReadWrite*. Retrieved March 28, 2014.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, Y., Kozar, K.A., & Larsen, K.R.T. (2003). The technology acceptance model: Past, present, and future. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 12(1), 752-780.
- Lin, C.-P. (2010). Learning Virtual Community Loyalty Behavior from a Perspective of Social Cognitive Theory. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 26(4), 345-360.
- Maclaran, P., Hogg, M., Catterall, M., & Kozinets, R. (2003). Gender, technology and computer-mediated communications in consumption-related online communities. In K. Ekström, & H. Brembeck (Eds.), *Elusive Consumption*. (pp. 145-171). Berg Publishers: Oxford.
- Martin, D.M., & Schouten, J.W. (2014). Consumption-Driven Market Emergence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(5), 855-870.
- McMaster, T., Vidgen, R. T. and Wastell, D. G. (1997). 'Towards an Understanding of Technology in Transition. Two Conflicting Theories'. Information Systems Research in Scandinavia, IRIS20 Conference, University of Oslo, Hanko, Norway.
- "MensRights". (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.reddit.com/r/MensRights/>.
- Mills, R. (2011). "Researching social news – is reddit.com a mouthpiece for the 'hive mind' or a collective intelligence approach to information overload?" Paper presented at ETHICOMP 2011, Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

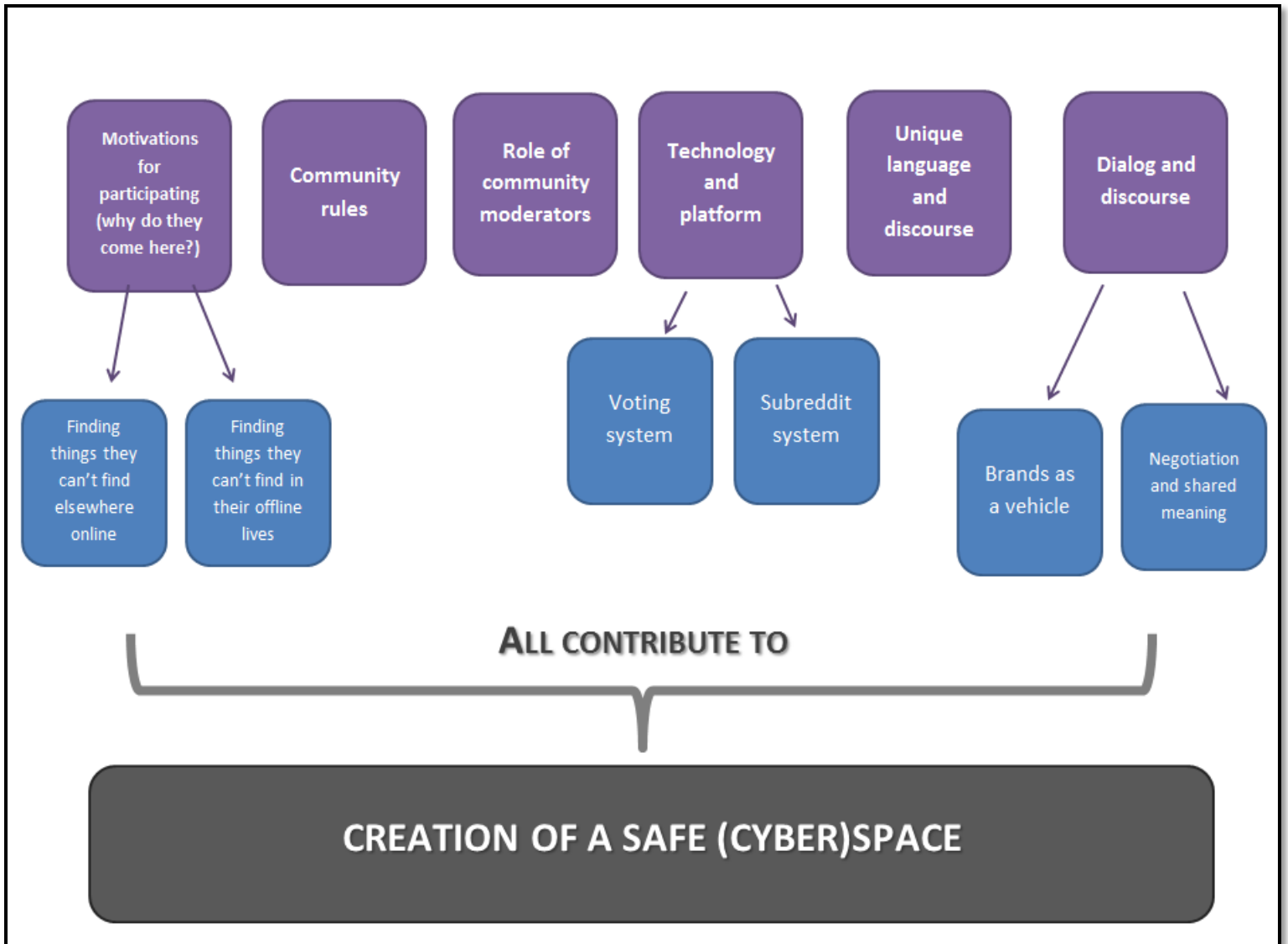
- Mitra, A. (2006). Towards Finding a Cybernetic Safe Place: Illustrations from People of Indian Origin. *New Media Society*, 8(2), 251-268.
- Narayan, S., & Cheshire, C. (2010). "Not too long to read: the tldr interface for exploring and navigating large-scale discussion spaces". Paper presented at the 43rd Hawaii International Conference on System Science, doi: 10.1109/HICSS.2010.288
- Olson, R.S., and Z.P. Neal. (2013). "Navigating the massive world of reddit: Using backbone networks to map user interests in social media," *arXiv:1312.3387 [physics]*. Retrieved from <http://arxiv.org/abs/1312.3387>.
- Pathak, S. (2014, March 10). Reddit hates marketing. How to market on it anyway. *AdvertisingAge*. Retrieved from <http://adage.com/article/special-report-sxsw/reddit-hates-marketing-market/292068/>
- Pew Internet & American Life Project. 2012. "Demographics of Internet Users". *Pew Research Institute*. Accessed September 6, 2013. [http://pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-\(Adults\)/Whos-Online.aspx](http://pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-(Adults)/Whos-Online.aspx)
- Postmes, T., Spears, R., & Lea, M. (1998). Breaching or Building Social Boundaries: SIDE-Effects of Computer-Mediated Communication. *Communication Research*, 25(6), 689-715.
- "Reddiquette". (January, 2014). Retrieved March 12, 2014, from <http://www.reddit.com/wiki/reddiquette>.
- Sarkio, H. K. (2005). "Online or Off, We're Always Girls': Gendered Behavior on an Online Bulletin Board Targeted at Girls," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New York, NY.
- "Self-promotion on reddit". (1 April, 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.reddit.com/wiki/selfpromotion>

- Shaer, M. (2012). Reddit in the Flesh. *New York Magazine*, July 8, accessed September 1, 2013: nymag.com/nes/features/reddit-2012-7/.
- Soukup, C. (1999). The gendered interactional patterns of computer-mediated chatrooms: A critical ethnographic study. *The Information Society*, 15(1), 169-176.
- Southern Poverty Law Center. (2012). "Misogyny: The Sites," *Intelligence Report*, 145, accessed September 6, 2012: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/spring/misogyny-the-sites>.
- Sproull, L., & Faraj, S. (1995). "Atheism, Sex, and Databases: The Net as a Social Technology." Public access to the Internet Conference, June 1, 1995.
- Steinbaur, T. (2012). *Information and Social Analysis of Reddit*. Stanford University: Accessed September 6. http://snap.stanford.edu/class/cs224w-2011/proj/tbower_Finalwriteup_v1.pdf.
- Steinmetz, K. F. (2012). Message received: Virtual ethnography in online message boards. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(1), 26-39.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 7(3), 321-326.
- Sun, S.-Y., Teresa L. J., Chung, H.-F., Wu, C.-Y. & Chao, P.-J. (2009). Influence on willingness of virtual community's knowledge sharing: Based on social capital theory and habitual domain. *Proceeding of World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology*, 41(1), 142-149.

- Tatnall, A. & Gilding, A. (2005). Actor-Network Theory in Information Systems Research. In M. Khosrow-Pour (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology* (pp. 42-46). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.
- Townsend, A. (2012), "Erik Martin," *Time*, 179 (17), April 30, 44.
- "TwoXChromosomes". (n.d.), Retrieved from <http://www.reddit.com/r/TwoXChromosomes/>
- Venkatesh, V. & David, F. (2000). A theoretical extension of the technology acceptance model: Four longitudinal studies. *Management Science*, 46(2), 186-204.
- Walker, D. & Myrick, F. (2006). Grounded theory: An exploration of process and procedure. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(1), 547-559.
- Wasike, B. S. (2011). Framing Social News Sites: An Analysis of the Top Ranked Stories on Reddit and Digg. *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal*, 27(1).
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-Mediated Communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal, and Hyperpersonal Interaction. *Communication Research*, 23(1), 3-43.
- Wang, C., Ye, M. & Huberman, B.A. (2012). "From user comments to on-line conversations," Proceedings of the 18th ACM SIGKDD International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining. Doi: 10.1145/2339530.2339573
- Xu, B., Li, D., & Shao, B. (2012). Knowledge Sharing in Virtual Communities: A Study of Citizenship Behavior and its Social-Relational Antecedents. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 28(5), 347-359.
- Zuckerman, E. (2012). 'Why is Reddit So Anti-Women?': An Epic Reddit Thread Counts the Ways. *The Atlantic Wire*, July 26, accessed August 27, 2013: <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2012/07/why-reddit-so-anti-women-epic-reddit-thread-counts-ways/55080/>.

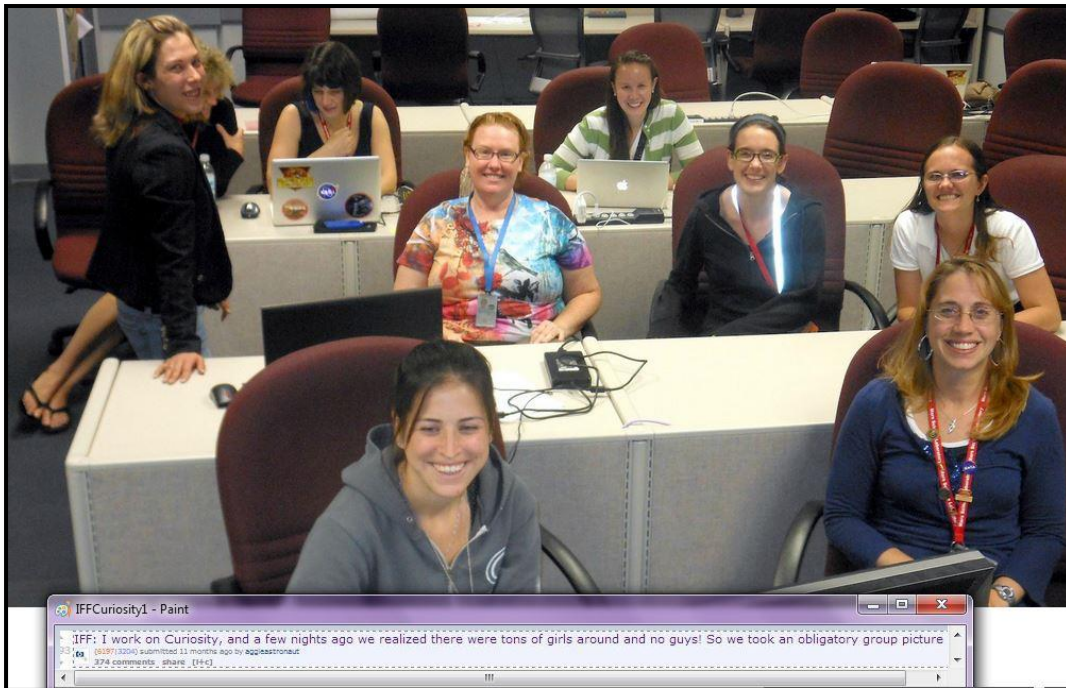
Figure 1: Cartoon by Rebecca Cohen (rebeccacohenart.tumblr.com)



Figure 2: Factors contributing to the creation of 2X as a safe space online

Appendix 1

Picture from Image Fest Friday; the women of NASA's Curiosity Rover team



Posted with the caption: "We're currently still on Mars time, so this picture was taken around 4am Pacific, but it was about 4pm for us. A lot of people went home early, but then we realized pretty much everyone left was female! And obviously, this meant a group picture. We hijacked one of the few guys left to take this picture. Every lady in this picture is on the science team! I'm the one in the white polo, if you're wondering. :)"

Appendix 2

TwoXChromosomes Community Questionnaire

Are you at least 18 years old?

- Yes
- No

Answer If Are you at least 18 years old? No Is Selected

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. However you must be at least 18 years old to participate.

If Thank you for your willingness... Is Displayed, Then Skip To End of Survey

The following questions are open-ended. There are no right or wrong answers. The we simply seek your thoughts and opinions. Feel free to respond with as much or as little information as you see fit.

Why do you visit TwoXChromosomes?

What do you like about TwoXChromosomes?

What do you dislike about TwoXChromosomes?

What does "feminism" mean to you?

Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?

Has a discussion on TwoXChromosomes ever changed your way of thinking about something?
Please explain.

Is there anything else you would like to add about TwoXChromosomes or your experience with the subreddit?

In observing the interactions that take place on TwoXChromosomes, we have noticed that brands are often the subject of posts. These posts about brands often lead to discussions about much larger subjects. The following questions aim to further explore this finding.

What are your feelings on children's toys and products marketed as gender-specific (e.g. GoldieBlox or the LEGO Friends line)?

How do you feel about companies using more diverse models in advertisements? Is there any company or brand in particular that you think has done this well or done this poorly?

The following questions are closed-ended. Please select the answer (or answers) you feel best describes you and your activity on TwoXChromosomes.

How long have you been visiting TwoXChromosomes?

- Less than one month
- One to 11 months
- One to two years
- More than two years

How often do you visit TwoXChromosomes?

- Less than once a month
- Once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Once a week
- 2-6 times a week
- Daily

Which of the following describes your activity on TwoXChromosomes? (Check all that apply)

- I read through posts
- I read through comments
- I up-vote/down-vote posts
- I up-vote/down-vote comments
- I have submitted a text post
- I have submitted a link post
- I have commented on a post
- I have responded to others' comments

What is your age?

- 18-20 years old
- 21-23 years old
- 24-26 years old
- 27-29 years old
- 30-35 years old
- 36-40 years old
- Over 40 years old

Which of the following best describes your gender identity?

- Female
- Male
- Other _____

Are you be willing to be contacted by email with further questions?

- No
- Yes

Answer If Are you be willing to be contacted by email with further questions? Yes Is Selected

Thank you, please enter the email address where you would like to be contacted.

Appendix 3

Moderator Questionnaire

Are you at least 18 years old?

- Yes
 No

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Answer If Are you at least 18 years old? No Is Selected

Thank you for your willingness to help with this research. However you must be at least 18 years old to participate.

How long have you been a moderator for TwoXChromosomes?

Why did you choose to become a moderator in this community?

How would you describe your role as a community moderator?

Do you filter or censor content posted to TwoXChromosomes? If so, how often and in what cases might you do this? If not, why?

What are your motivations for using reddit in general? Is there something about reddit that makes the site or your experience unique compared to other spaces online?

Can you think of any other spaces or communities online that are like TwoXChromosomes? If so, do you participate in these communities?

Appendix 4

Sample of a TwoXChromosomes front page, screenshot captured September 1, 2013

reddit TwoXCHROMOSOMES hot new rising controversial top wiki view images (1)

353 ↑ Read this awesome article on that dangers of selfies only to be more blown away to see an 11 year old girl wrote it (essentialkids.com.au)
 (56)16 submitted 10 hours ago by whereyoucantfindme
 84 comments share save hide report [I+c]

80 ↑ Ross Perot just donated \$1 million to Planned Parenthood -- The Texas billionaire's foundation has come through with a major gift to the bel
 provider (salon.com)
 (78)45 submitted 5 hours ago by mepper
 comment share save hide report [I+c]

59 ↑ When called out for omitting women from the "most influential" web designer list, they responded with a "hot" woman list... (1stwebdesigner.com)
 (46)7 submitted 5 hours ago by TransFattyAcid
 19 comments share save hide report [I+c]

89 ↑ Some Kiwi law students made a feminist version of Blurred Lines that calls the song out on its bullshit. (youtube.com)
 (154)68 submitted 10 hours ago by ComingUpMilhouse
 34 comments share save hide report [I+c]

70 ↑ Asked a guy out.. now I regret it... (self.TwoXChromosomes)
 (85)19 submitted 9 hours ago by sophieneveu
 50 comments share save hide report [I=c]

↑ My best friend killed herself, need some help or guidance on how to cope (self.TwoXChromosomes)
 (15)0 submitted 1 hour ago by wbholla2
 2 comments share save hide report [I=c]

93 ↑ My Unladylikeness and How Tumblr Makes Me Feel Like Shit (self.TwoXChromosomes)
 (165)73 submitted 12 hours ago* (last edited 6 hours ago) by zarpra
 84 comments share save hide report [I=c]

369 ↑ I refuse to be cheated like shit. (self.TwoXChromosomes)
 (467)101 submitted 21 hours ago by insomni666
 94 comments share save hide report [I=c]

30 ↑ There's a lot of talk about lack of female anti-heroes on television, but not enough about what a good one would be like. What qualities wo
 hero have? (self.TwoXChromosomes)
 (37)6 submitted 9 hours ago by ohshealthy
 20 comments share save hide report [I=c]

10 ↑ Is feeling "sexy" or alluring part of your identity as a woman? How do you do it? (self.TwoXChromosomes)
 (9)1 submitted 3 hours ago by PinkBubbleFish
 9 comments share save hide report [I=c]

↑ Diana Nyad, a 64 year old asthmatic, is farther on this, her 5th attempt to swim from Cuba to Key West, than ever before! Go Diana Go!!! (d
 (3)0 submitted 25 minutes ago by brotogeris1
 comment share save hide report [I+c]

581 ↑ A Woman is Defined By... (nsfw) (thatu.tumblr.com)
 (1291)708 submitted 1 day ago by the-infmits-jester
 NSFW 170 comments share save hide report [I+c]

↑ What is the shortest video that makes you cry? (self.TwoXChromosomes)

(Appendix 4 continued)

Sample of a self-post and comments/discussion thread, posted on September 29, 2013



The screenshot shows a Reddit post in the 'TwoXChromosomes' subreddit. The post title is 'Reading Lean In by Sheryl Sandberg and interested to hear what other readers think of it....' and it was submitted 6 months ago by user 'zazzlekdazzle'. The post content is enclosed in a blue-bordered box and reads: 'My impression is that most women hate this book, but I am listening to it as an audiobook and I almost want to pump my fist and shout "Amen, Sister!" as I am walking down the street. I find it so inspiring and her treatment of the material to be insightful, well researched, and modulated. On chapter 4 of 13 and it is getting me going! What did you think?'. Below the post are 6 comments, sorted by 'best'. The first comment is from user 'missintent' (6 points) who says they enjoyed it but it appeals more to a younger group. The second comment is from 'lvl2poopstrike' (2 points) who says 'I second this!'. The third comment is from 'magnetic_nebulae' (4 points) who relates to the book's focus on childcare. The fourth comment is from 'missintent' (1 point) who says they won't be as successful as Sandberg but her advice applies. The fifth comment is from 'ladyprestor' (3 points) who loved the book but hated the emphasis on children.

reddit **TWOXCHROMOSOMES** comments related

↑ 10 Reading Lean In by Sheryl Sandberg and interested to hear what other readers think of it.... (self:TwoXChr)
submitted 6 months ago by zazzlekdazzle

My impression is that most women hate this book, but I am listening to it as an audiobook and I almost want to pump my fist and shout "Amen, Sister!" as I am walking down the street. I find it so inspiring and her treatment of the material to be insightful, well researched, and modulated. On chapter 4 of 13 and it is getting me going! What did you think?

6 comments share

all 6 comments
sorted by: **best**

↑ [-] **missintent** 6 points 6 months ago
↓ I really enjoyed it, but I have heard it appeals more to a younger group - I'm 29, in the first few years of my career and haven't had kids yet.
I could see that if you're 50 and already feel shut out of a career, it would be frustrating to read (which is I assume why it got some poor reviews/negative backlash) but I think it also has a lot of truth in it, perhaps truth that some people don't want to read. I'm really glad I read it, and it's making me consider some career choices and what to chase, etc.
permalink

↑ [-] **lvl2poopstrike** 2 points 6 months ago
↓ I second this!
permalink parent

↑ [-] **magnetic_nebulae** 4 points 6 months ago
↓ I'm 22 and hated it. I felt like I couldn't relate to it because we come from such different backgrounds - I feel like half of her career was possible because she went to Harvard and had a husband with a flexible work schedule (if I remember correctly) and they could afford good childcare.
In fact, I hated the emphasis on childcare since I'm a lesbian and don't plan to have kids for a good while. I'm sure the advice in the book is good for a small subset of women but I don't know any of them (I'm currently a grad student in a PhD program)
permalink

↑ [-] **missintent** 1 point 6 months ago
↓ I won't ever be as successful as her, but I think what she had to say applies at all career levels. You don't have to be the COO of Facebook to benefit from not holding yourself back because you're female.
I also thought the focus on children/child care/spouses was particularly relevant for those of us who haven't had children yet - it gave me something to consider in the future, and if you don't have a permanent partner yet, it could be worth considering if the person you pick is going to be supportive of your career and completely share the responsibilities of parenting.
permalink parent

↑ [-] **ladyprestor** 3 points 6 months ago
↓ I loved the book and I think it should be required reading for any young professional woman.
I also hated about the emphasis on the children part, since me and my husband decided not to have kids, but I see how that could be of interest to other women, I just chose to ignore that part. I did love how she talks about how some of us as women are basically programmed since birth to hold back.

reddit.com/r/.../reading_lean_in_by_sheryl_sandberg_and_interested/