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Pinning Pretty: A Qualitative Study of Pinterest Users' Practices and Views

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MSc in Global Media and Communications

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Pinning Pretty:

A Qualitative Study of Pinterest Users' Practices and Views

Elizabeth White

ABSTRACT

The social media website Pinterest provides a fascinating field for studying the intersection between gender and Internet use. This study aims to answer the research question “How do women view, use, and incorporate the website Pinterest into their daily lives?” through the use of semi-structured individual interviews. Fourteen respondents were interviewed individually about their Pinterest views and habits. Their responses were then coded and analyzed via the method of thematic analysis. Emergent themes suggest that women view Pinterest as more of a personal tool than as a social website, but that they appreciate the communal ‘safe space’ for pursuing individual interests that Pinterest affords. Responses were analyzed and viewed through the lens of gender theories of technology and social constructivist theories of technology. Through an analysis of interviewees’ responses and an understanding of theories surrounding gender and technology, the results of this study suggest that women view Pinterest as a ‘safe space’ and useful tool for pursuing their predominantly ‘feminine’ interests in the otherwise traditionally ‘masculine’ realm of the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

'If you want to drive a girl insane, simply delete her Pinterest page. It's like destroying her memories, hopes, and desires.'

Dane Cook

Pinterest, with its unparalleled growth and disparate gender proportions, is a social media website unlike any other. Created in 2010 by two men (Ben Silbermann and Evan Sharp), Pinterest is now one of the fastest growing and most active sites in the online social media repertoire (ReadWrite, 2013). The purpose and design of the website is simple: Pinterest is a virtual pin board that allows the user to sort, collect, and organize online items. Users are equipped with their own personal online 'boards,' to which they can 'pin' items and group according to themes or topics (see Appendix 1 for an example). Indeed, the website's own 'about' page reads, in large bolded letters, 'Pinterest is a tool for collecting and organizing the things you love' (about.pinterest.com). Common board themes range from recipes to home décor to fashion ideas, but the user is capable of creating boards to suit their own unique interests and hobbies. The social media nature of Pinterest arises from the ability of users to 'follow' other users, re-pin their pictures, and comment on items that other users have pinned. As of now, users are unable to send private messages to other users, although they are capable of 'tagging' them in a comment or sending them a pin. For a visual example of a Pinterest homepage, see Appendix 2.

Despite the user's ability to pull and choose their own content from the Internet to place on their boards, a cursory glance at a Pinterest home page suggests that the content is largely what one might consider female-focused: makeup, fashion, women's fitness, etc. Recent user demographics show that Pinterest is most popular among white college-educated females aged 18-49. In fact, women are five times more likely than men to use the website (Mediabistro, 2013). Despite its heavy leaning towards one gender, however, Pinterest does not want for users: with over 70 million total users, a steady international growth, and a record-breaking speed for a 10 million individual user mark achievement, Pinterest has an unparalleled growth pattern among social media websites (Semiocast, 2013; TechCrunch, 2012).

Due perhaps in part to its relatively new arrival on the social media stage, very few media and communications studies focus on Pinterest. The few that do emphasize its quantitative aspects:

user demographics, statistical analyses of pins, frequencies of re-pins, etc. (see Hall and Zora, 2012 or Gilbert, Bakhshi, Chang, and Terveen, 2013 for quantitative studies). What is noticeably lacking, however, is a qualitative study on the uses and views of Pinterest users, as well as an exploration of this particular intersection of gender and technology. This dissertation aims to fill this gap in the literature. Fourteen Pinterest users were interviewed for this study, and their interviews transcribed and analyzed. The analysis of the collected interview data hopes to answer the question, ‘How do women view, use, and incorporate the website Pinterest into their daily lives?’ To assist in this analysis, a conceptual and theoretical framework that draws from both gendered theories of technology and social constructivist theories of technology will be utilized.

This dissertation will be divided into three major chapters: the first will review a sampling of some of the pertinent literature surrounding gendered theories of technology and theories of technology in general, followed by an overview of the conceptual framework used in this study. The second chapter will provide a detailing of the methodology used and the overall design of the research. The final chapter will present the results of the research, and finish with a few considerations for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of the relationship between technology and gender is an expansive field, as diverse and varied as the Internet itself. This dissertation will examine the variety of ways in which the link between gender and technology has been studied and theorized, along with an examination of more general theories regarding technology and individual use. I argue that a greater confluence needs to occur between theories of gendered technology use and theories of technology in general in order to provide a stronger analytical framework for understanding the interplay between individuals, gender, and Internet use.

Many of the primary studies on gender and technology focus on gendered aspects of the technological artifacts themselves. Wajcman (2004), for instance, argues that inherent in technological artifacts are ‘gendered power relations’ that shape and influence both the production and consumption of such goods (p. 23). She thus argues that more attention needs to be placed on the societal and social relations and hierarchies that affect technological design, rather than viewing it as something outside of these influences: ‘If we regard technology as

neutral, but subject to possible misuse, we will be blinded to the consequences of artefacts being designed and developed in particular ways that embody gendered power relations' (p. 23). Although this is seemingly similar to the Critical Theory of Technology (to be discussed later), Wajcman's focus is instead on what she calls 'technofeminism,' which draws from historical designs of technological artifacts (for example, the telephone and typewriter) to examine how technological artifacts can be gendered, and how gendered politics influence technology today. While Wajcman's argument that technology is not neutral is helpful in combining studies of gender with critical theories of technology, her emphasis on the technological artifacts themselves (rather than qualitative insights into the users' interaction with technology) proves too narrow to be used exclusively for this dissertation.

Other researchers have studied this hierarchical nature of technology, albeit with different foci. Dorer (2002), for instance, studied the Internet use of professional women and found that 'The connection "Internet-technology-masculinity" is therefore not self-evident but supported by societies' gender and technology discourse, and it is still developing in various ways on different levels' (p. 64). Because of societal and historical reasons, she argues, technology has been traditionally associated with masculine traits, which have carried over into society's understanding of the Internet as technology. Coyle (1996) argues that this attitude towards technology needs to change, pointing to the tendency for masculine activities to be considered as requiring greater skill than activities that have been deemed 'feminine.' She writes, 'The difference isn't in skill but in the social status already assigned to the activity, and we all support this status with our assumptions of the superiority of male activities' (p. 53). The significance of these observations on the study of gender and technology is an obvious one: due to a societal tendency to associate technology with masculinity, and masculinity with superiority, there is need for a greater number of qualitative studies that give women who use technology a 'voice,' so to speak. The relative lack of qualitative studies of women's Internet use suggests that the link between technology and masculinity still remains the predominant one and is in need of further critical evaluation.

However, there are some scholars who argue for less of an emphasis on gender (or at least a more balanced view) when studying technology. Carstensen (2009), for instance, argues that the Internet can no longer be considered a male domain, but neither can the entire emphasis shift to one of feminization- her study found instead a 'heterogeneous picture of gender relations in web 2.0' (p. 120). It is, at this point, important to note that this dissertation does not seek to propose

that gender is the sole defining factor of one's Internet use and views, nor that female use of the Internet is of more importance than male use- indeed, a variety of factors shape how one socially situates him or herself on the Internet, and all of which are worthy of study (Wajcman, 2004, p. 8). Due to the limited nature of this dissertation, however, gender will be the main focus. A larger study could benefit from studying how the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. interact in users' engagement with Pinterest. Indeed, Van Zoonen (2002) argues for a more 'multidimensional understanding of the mutual shaping of gender and technology,' noting that situational contexts will determine much of the use and adaptation of technology for different people (p. 20). Despite the limited scope of this dissertation in terms of its primary gendered focus, the qualitative nature of interviews allows for greater opportunity to study varying 'situational contexts' such as Van Zoonen proposes. Thus while gender is still the primary topic of interest for this dissertation, the use of interviews to explore the variety of opinions and viewpoints does allow for a slightly more nuanced portrait of gendered Internet use than perhaps other methods would allow.

Besides focusing simply on the gendered aspects of technology or the Internet itself, many studies have analyzed female-specific communities online and the ways in which women communicate and interact. For example, Postcolonial scholars such as Gajjala (1998) are concerned about women's activist networks online, noting that the mere privileged online presence suggests women are speaking for 'the Other' and thus 'Third World' women's voices are 'emerging' under this Western influence (p. 122). Although Pinterest is not an activist network by any means, Gajjala does highlight the fact that studying women's uses of the Internet involves an inherently privileged sample- especially so for Pinterest, where the majority of users are college-educated and of higher income (Mediabistro, 2013). Additionally, within many of these studies of female communities online, the emphasis is on female communication and the ways in which women interact with one another. Youngs (1999) views this in a positive light, noting the potential for 'knowledge building by women for women' (p. 66), and Austerlic (1999) suggests this provides a ripe opportunity for societal change (p. 69). Van Zoonen (2002) suggests a less positive outlook, however, noting that it is this 'communicative consumer' nature of females that marketers are currently emphasizing in an attempt to create a women-as-consumer 'e-commerce strategy' (p. 10). Indeed, Sadowska (2002) studied email list-serves and websites specifically for women, arguing that even the fundamental design of a website carries 'a set of strategies that communicate different gendered messages embedded in women's Internet portals' (p. 91). Because Pinterest is considered a social media website with a predominately

female user population, an understanding of Internet communication between females is important. Likewise, the potential for successful marketing strategies in a visually focused, female-dominated e-space is of rising importance. However, what these studies fail to address is a qualitative data-fuelled understanding of how women themselves view social media sites for communication with one another, along with acknowledging the possibility of non-female specific websites having a female dominance. This study hopes to fill this gap by studying a site that, unlike the previously mentioned studies, is not female-specific, but rather female-dominated. This will provide another dimension besides studies of female-specific websites: how does a gendered-neutral designed website become female-dominated? How do the women who use Pinterest account for this?

Another common focus in studies on gender and technology is the performative nature of gender online, or performance of self (see Danet, 1998, for instance). Much attention has been paid to gaming or role-playing virtual communities in order to study the ways in which people experiment with different genders online or to examine the ways in which women are treated in these online communities. In her study of gendered social interaction on MUDs, Kendall (1996), for instance, found that ‘Although individuals can choose their gender representation, that does not seem to be creating a context in which gender is more fluid. Rather, gender identities themselves become even more rigidly understood’ (p. 221-222). Thus even though the anonymous nature of the Internet provides an opportunity for individuals to experiment with gender, and the potential for gender flexibility is then perhaps greater, gender ultimately remains invariable. Because Pinterest has been understood as a place where, as one of my interviewees phrased it, ‘It’s all girls!’ this study hopes to explore another aspect of gender performance, where, unlike studies of gender anonymity online, users are most often using their Facebook profiles and real identities. Thus while studies of gender performance online provide insight into gender ‘performativity’ and the importance of gender in Internet activity, the object of research of most of these studies has been on anonymous sites or roleplaying sites, rather than on social media sites where users are participating under their actual identities (Butler, 1999, p. xv).

Self-performance or presentation is a topic closely related to gender performance, and is an area of study of great interest to Internet scholars. Turkle (1995) is one of the leading scholars on this topic, arguing that ‘the Internet has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life. In its

virtual reality, we self-fashion and self-create' (p. 180). This is arguably even more pertinent now with the arrival of social media, where users are afforded self-produced profiles that detail their personal information, likes, viewpoints, etc. This 'self-fashioning' or presenting is thus an important concept to explore for this study on Pinterest, where users are constantly creating and reworking personal profiles. Hogan (2010), however, prefers the term 'exhibition' rather than presentation, arguing that 'An exhibition is still a form of presentation of self... This is to say that people take their choice of what to display personally and consider it a form of impression management' (p. 377). This is arguably even more true of Pinterest than other social media sites, for users are incapable of adding to another's profile in the way a Facebook user can write on another's public wall or tag them in a picture that then appears on their profile. Pinterest profiles and boards are purely self-appointed and managed. Also important to consider, however, is Paasonen (2005), who, while agreeing that gender and Internet performance is 'performative,' also calls for the need to avoid placing too much emphasis on the 'online self' in comparison to the 'real world self,' for, she argues, 'If we confine ourselves to the figure of cyberspace, we are necessarily stuck in the binary of online versus offline that is in no way helpful for understanding the uses of the Internet as located, contextual, and embodied' (p. 5; 240). Thus there is an increasing need for qualitative studies that can provide insight into users' experiences with and attitudes towards self-presentation in social media, for qualitative studies can assist in avoiding this binary by allowing Internet users to express their contextualized experiences and uses.

Another rising concern and topic for study is the 'feminization' of the Internet, what Shade (2002) defines as 'the creation of popular content where women's consumption is privileged and encouraged, rather than production or critical analysis' (p. 9). Admittedly, the increase of women online has only increased advertising and opportunities for commodity consumption on the Internet (Sadowska, 2002, p. 90). However, what there is less of and a need for is qualitative studies that ask women themselves about buying habits and consumption-encouraging websites. Although that will not be the sole focus of this dissertation, it is important to note. Indeed, various scholars have noted the similarities between websites geared towards women and women's magazines- a topic that arose in my respondents' interviews as well (Shade, 2002, p. 56; Sadowska, 2002, p. 94).

It should be noted that there do exist some qualitative studies about female use of the Internet. However, they vary from the extremely broad topic of women's feelings and attitudes towards

the Internet as a whole (see Singh, 2001 or Consalvo and Paasonen, 2002, for instance), to the very narrow, such as Dorer's (2002) study regarding the Internet use of professional females in technological fields. Thus to this date, there is a lack of qualitative studies focusing on female use of a non-female specific social media website. This dissertation aims to fill this gap in research regarding women's uses and views of the Internet.

The second part of this review of the literature will focus less on gender and more on theories regarding technology and studies of general Internet use. I argue that a greater marriage between the two needs to occur: feminist research on female Internet use could benefit from introducing more theories of technology and vice versa. Thus this dissertation aims to borrow theories from both feminist research and theories of technology to study women's views and uses of Pinterest. The two primary theories of technology this dissertation will employ are the Social Construction of Technology and the Critical Theory of Technology. The choice of these two theories was greatly influenced by Bakardjieva's (2005) *Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life*, which provides excellent insight into general uses and views of the Internet, through the use and mix of qualitative interviews and participant observation. Bakardjieva's work proves useful for this dissertation because she utilizes qualitative methodologies in an attempt to 'understand technological practices from the standpoint of users' and to 'elaborate a conception of the user as an agent in the field of technological development and new media shaping' (p. 7). Thus while Bakardjieva's study was extremely broad in its scope (looking at users of the Internet as a whole), this dissertation will focus on users of just one website, as well as incorporating studies of gender and technology. Like Bakardjieva, MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999) use the Social Construction of Technology theory to highlight user agency in the shaping of technology, but they also argue that gender has an effect on this shaping. However, unlike Bakardjieva, MacKenzie and Wajcman do not use interviews and qualitative studies for their research.

Bakardjieva (2005) understood the importance of studying the Internet from the standpoint of the users to highlight the user's agency and to 'conceive of her as an active contributor to the shaping of technology' (p. 9). This stands in contrast to many previous studies that placed the user in a subjugated role, focusing instead on theories of technological determinism and computer dominance (see Heidegger 1998, for instance). Indeed, Pinch and Bijker (1984) argue that a social constructivist view is more beneficial for studying Internet use and point to the concept of 'interpretative flexibility' (namely, that different social groups can have completely

different ideas and views of a technological artifact, which can then affect even the design of technology) to argue against theories of technological determinism (p. 421). Instead, they propose the Social Construction of Technology (often referred to as SCOT) theory, which argues that 'Technology, as well as science, can be understood as a social construct'- that there is a 'multi-directional' flow of influence and shaping, rather than a unidirectional determinist transmission (p. 408, 419). The significance of this contribution to studies of new media cannot be understated- for if there was no variation in user experience and solely a unidirectional flow of influence, then there would be no need for qualitative research that studies user viewpoints and experiences. This study, then, will use the SCOT theory in order to gain insight into differing users' viewpoints and attitudes towards Pinterest.

Somewhat similar to the SCOT theory is Feenberg's (2005) Critical Theory of Technology. Feenberg argues that modernity theorists and post-humanist approaches are both overly deterministic, which 'often leads to a singular focus on the most "dehumanizing" aspects of computerization' (2005, p. 60). He offers instead a theory that merges the differing theories of technology through a critical lens, arguing that technology is inextricably linked with social influences, which impact both design and use, and even serves to maintain social hierarchies (p. 62). While the hierarchal critical focus of his theory might not be of utmost use to this dissertation, his critiques against the overly deterministic and post-humanist studies that afford little agency to the user prove useful and provide a good bridge and rationale for wanting to combine theories of gender and those of technology. Where some gendered technology theories become what Feenberg describes as too 'post-humanist,' SCOT and Critical Theories of Technology provide a good opportunity for studying user interaction with technology (p. 60).

Conceptual Framework

Thus the conceptual framework employed for this dissertation borrows from both gendered theories of technology and from more general theories of technology in order to best understand and analyze Pinterest users' experiences. In particular, a social constructivist viewpoint as outlined by Pinch and Bijker (1984) will be adopted, due to its flexibility (of both attitudes towards and design of technological artifacts) and acknowledgment of the mutual shaping of technology and society (p. 421). Indeed, the concept of 'interpretive flexibility' outlined by Pinch and Bijker (1984) will be a primary framework for understanding users' views and uses of Pinterest because it allows for diversity of experience and is a conducive framework for

analyzing and understanding interviews, which sometimes provide vastly different attitudes and opinions (p. 419). While some concepts and theories regarding individuals and technology position themselves in overly deterministic frameworks, social constructivism and interpretive flexibility allow for influences from both designers and ‘consumers’ of technology (Feenberg, 2005, p. 51).

In regards to gendered theories of technology, this study will use the concept of gender as a social construct and performance to analyze respondents’ interviews and answers (Butler, 1999). Furthermore, using the theoretical literature on gender and technology will serve as a propellant and argument for the importance of studying gender as it relates to technology. Because Pinterest is such a female-dominated phenomenon, an understanding of the role and function of gender and how it relates to technology is a necessity. Additionally, combining the concept of gender and theories such as the Critical Theory of technology is beneficial for highlighting the power inequalities and hierarchies inherent in technological design and use (Feenberg, 2005, p. 49; Wajcman, 2004, p. 22).

Objectives of Research

Thus the objective of this research is this: to produce qualitative insights into a female-dominated social media site through the use of semi-structured interviews. As has been previously discussed, there exist studies and theories surrounding gender and Internet practices and sites. What is needed, however, are a greater number and variety of qualitative studies regarding individual use of the Internet, in order to go beyond broad generalizations and instead explore the variety of attitudes and opinions held by individuals. This study aims to fill this gap by studying how women view and use the social media website Pinterest, and hopes to contribute to media and communications studies’ understandings of gendered e-spaces. It follows, then, that my research question is this:

RQ: How do women view, use, and incorporate the social media website Pinterest into their daily lives?

Additionally, a sub research question to consider includes the following:

RQ₂: What makes an online social space gendered?

By studying a relatively new (and fairly unexplored in academia) social media website, this study on Pinterest seeks to provide fresh insight into areas of study such as new media, audience, and gender studies. Additionally, the exploration of a website that is exceptionally inclined towards one gender, despite its conception as a gender-neutral site, offers a unique opportunity for analysis and promises to be an interesting study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to actualize these objectives of research, a qualitative methodology was needed. In particular, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate approach to examine the research questions at hand. The reasons for this are many. Arguably, a survey or questionnaire might provide similar results and could prove a useful methodology. However, my research question seeks to understand the variety of uses and attitudes towards Pinterest, rather than to provide a quantitative portrait of opinions. As Bauer and Gaskell (2000) write, 'The real purpose of qualitative research is not counting opinions or people but rather exploring the range of opinions, the different representations of the issue' (p. 41). It is exactly this exploration of opinions that is required to adequately answer my research question. Indeed, a qualitative methodology is not only conducive to answering my research question, but it is also *better* suited for my research question than quantitative methodologies because it allows the researcher to 'obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Thus it was determined that a qualitative research strategy would be employed, but the next question that arose was which of those qualitative methodologies would be most appropriate for my study.

Although ethnographic research and participant observation have their strengths and advantages (namely, the researcher experiences a greater depth of experience and is able to be involved in the participant's world, thus allowing for the spotting of inconsistencies for him or herself), they are less apt for answering my research question than interviews are (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000, p. 44). Interviews, as Berger (2011) argues, 'are one of the most widely used and most fundamental research techniques- and for a very good reason. They enable researchers to obtain information that they cannot gain by observation alone' (p. 135). Although I might be able to glean information from observing women use and navigate their Pinterest home pages,

interviews enable the researcher to go beyond pure observation and provide the opportunity to converse with the respondents in order to better understand their attitudes and beliefs.

Although interviews are better than other qualitative methodologies are for understanding respondents' diversity of attitudes, interviewing is not without its disadvantages and most often needs to be more than simply a conversation (to be discussed further later). A closer examination of the disadvantages involved in interviewing, however, suggests that the positives outweigh the negatives. Nonetheless, it is necessary to clarify the specific type of interviewing selected for this study prior to a critical evaluation of the methodology's advantages and disadvantages.

Berger (2011) outlines four types of one-on-one interviews in his *Media and Communication Research Methods*: informal, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews (p. 136). For this study, the process of semi-structured interviews was employed due to its structured yet flexible nature. Unstructured and informal interviews, although useful for certain studies, would be too unfocused for the limited nature of this dissertation, and would not ensure that the researcher would be able to cover certain topics that were of interest to this study. Conversely, structured interviews do not allow for the same spontaneity and flexibility that semi-structured interviews do, and as such, leave little room for previously unconsidered issues and topics to emerge (Bryman, 2004, p. 320). Thus it was determined that semi-structured interviews would be most appropriate for this study due to their flexible yet organized manner. Additionally, semi-structured individual interviews were chosen over focus groups due to the ability of individual interviews to provide 'far richer detail about personal experiences, decisions and action sequences' and their allowance for additional questions (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000, p. 48). Individual interviews also avoid undesired group dynamics, such as one group member dominating the conversation, fear about confidentiality, and distrust of other group members (Berger, 2011, p. 137). Because this study aims to explore the individual's views and uses of Pinterest in greater depth than a survey or focus group would allow, semi-structured qualitative interviews were deemed the most appropriate for this dissertation.

It should be noted, however, that semi-structured interviews are not without weaknesses. Indeed, Strauss and Corbin (1998) point to the time-intensive and other-dependent nature of interviews when they note that 'there always are constraints of time, energy, availability of participants, and other conditions that affect data collection' (p. 16). Beyond depending on

others' availability for the interviews themselves, the mere involvement of respondents often invites 'bias, error, misunderstanding or misdirection' and other such concerns (Orgad, 2009, p. 47; Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, p. 113). One form of error or faulty information may arise out of the respondent's desire to tell the interviewee things they believe the interviewee would like to hear (Berger, 2011, p. 150). However, potential fault may not lie only with the respondent. Holstein and Gubrium (1997) astutely note that 'interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents' (p. 114). Thus because interviews involve two human actors exchanging information, the potential for error and issues is not absent. This raises specific ethical concerns when the interviewee and respondent are both female, ranging from the fear of potential question and analysis bias if the researcher is a feminist studying female topics to the concern that data surrounding only one gender could be 'used ultimately against the collective interests of women' (Bryman, 2004, p. 337; Finch, 1993, p. 176). Indeed, Janet Finch's (1993) concern that this 'is a situation with special characteristics conducive to the easy flow of information' is not unfounded- in my interviews, I was cautious and aware when respondents used familiar terms such as 'us girls' or even 'we' when answering my questions (p. 168). However, Finch also argues that '*all* social science knowledge is intrinsically political in character' and that it is thus the role of the female researcher to be 'open and scholarly about her procedures and her conclusions' (1993, p. 179). Throughout the interview and analysis process, I thus strove for continuous reflexivity in the hopes of reducing bias and increasing self-awareness in all my procedures. Despite its potential weaknesses and ethical concerns, however, interviews (and in particular, semi-structured interviews) are, as previously discussed, inherently advantageous in a number ways, thus making it most appropriate for this dissertation.

Methods

A pilot study was conducted in April of 2013 in order to test the usefulness of semi-structured interviewing for the purposes of answering the research questions, and also to develop and refine the research tools involved. The pilot study suggested that semi-structured interviews are indeed the suitable methodology, and also helped to improve the topic guide by piloting what questions were more or less effective and clear. Three respondents were pulled from a convenience sample and interviewed for the pilot study, and their responses helped inform further topic guides. For this dissertation, fourteen respondents were chosen via a snowballing sampling technique to be interviewed. The women were contacted through various personal

networks, via colleagues' recommendations, and by advertisements posted on social media sites. An overwhelming number of women (twenty six) responded to these advertisements, but due to the limited nature of this dissertation, respondents were purposefully chosen based on their adherence to the majority demographics of Pinterest users. Because of this limited scope, this sample does not claim to be representative of all Pinterest users everywhere. Instead, this dissertation aims to explore a small 'purposive sample' of Pinterest users' viewpoints and attitudes (Bryman, 2004, p. 333). Thus the sample is as follows: all female, all university-educated, all within the 18-49 age range (note: the 18-29 and 30-49 year old age ranges, at 19% each, are equally split for the largest percentage of Pinterest users), and predominately white (Mediabistro, 2013). Although this is an appropriate sample due to its demographic representation of Pinterest's users, it is not exhaustive and a larger study could benefit by reaching a greater diversity and range of users.

The interviews were conducted primarily over Skype, with the exception of two in-person interviews at a London café. All interviews were recorded with a recording device and were later listened to multiple times and copied verbatim. Confidentiality was promised (hence, all names used in this dissertation are not real) and consent forms were signed by the participants prior to the interviews. As previously mentioned, an original topic guide was created for the pilot study based on the appropriate literature and an initial 'reconnaissance of the field,' and then continuously modified during the interview process to accommodate emerging themes and topics (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000, p. 40). The final interview topic guide (see Appendix 3) is thus divided into four general topics: personal use and views, social aspects, gendered aspects, and commercial aspects.

After the interviews were transcribed and formatted, hard copies of the transcripts were printed out for the first round of analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most suitable form of data analysis due to its exceptional 'flexibility' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). As Creswell (2013) argues, data analysis is a continuous process that is unique and 'custom-built' for each researcher (p. 182). As such, coding and analysis for this study was informed by and took inspiration from a variety of sources. First, the transcripts were individually reread and color-coded for emerging codes and 'potential patterns,' and a lengthy list of codes gathered (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Thematic codes were then developed according to Boyatzis' (1998) five elements for 'a good thematic code' – one that 'captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon. It is usable in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the research' (p.

31). After each interview had been color-coded and all the transcripts had been re-read multiple times, an excel sheet with five different tabs was created to track respondents' answers across the various themes and sub-themes (see Appendix 4 for examples). This, Bauer and Gaskell (2000) argue, allows for 'bringing responses together in an accessible way' (p. 54). Thus all the data was available in a single location, facilitating the analysis process by visually indicating trends in answers and concentrations of subtheme answers. Data was then analyzed by comparing and contrasting answers, looking for trends and oddities, and finalizing themes. However, it is important to note that during the duration of this dissertation, the analysis and collection of data was, as Bryman (2004) discusses, 'iterative- that is, there is a repetitive interplay between the collection and the analysis of data,' which helped to inform later interviews and to be constantly attuned to emerging themes (p. 332, 399).

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Due to this iterative process of research and analysis, the interview topic guide evolved to encourage certain themes that had emerged during interviews. Thus while the topic guide themes and the interviews' emergent themes retain some similarities, they remain distinctly different as well. The four emergent themes from the interviews to be discussed in detail below are the following: 'anti-social media,' female space, user appropriation, and self-representation.

'Anti-social Media'

All respondents were asked the question, 'Why do you think Pinterest is considered social media?' along with questions regarding if and how they used it to interact with others. Despite Pinterest's label as a social media website, all fourteen respondents mentioned that they view it more as a personal website, one even defining it as 'anti-social media.' Despite the user's ability to 'follow' friends on Pinterest, a number of respondents admitted that they simply do not:

When I started, I used it as social media, really, to follow my friends and have cool pictures, and in the end now I'm just using it for myself... Even now friends are joining and following me and I don't even follow back. (Chloe)

Another respondent explained,

I don't interact with a lot of people- I don't understand- I guess you can get connected with people on Pinterest. I know I have people who are following me. And I don't understand that. I just try to keep it more like it's my own private Facebook. (Julia).

The employment of the term 'private Facebook' is interesting to note- the pairing of the two words suggests that the respondent processes her social media experiences through the lens of Facebook, and also considers Facebook definitive of a public object (and thus, a non-public site is, to her, a 'private Facebook'). This concept of a 'private Facebook' was expressed similarly with other respondents: phrases like 'mostly for me,' 'personal use,' and 'individualistic' were repeatedly used. Respondents were thus, in their negation of labeling Pinterest as social media, actively defining what social media *is*. Some respondents processed and communicated this more explicitly:

I mean, I feel like social media is a way, of course, to connect to people online- I feel like there is an inner quality to Pinterest where you are displaying yourself more than you are looking for other people...Also, there's no chatting, is there? No one can really distract you from that. Whereas on Facebook, you can send someone a message and sort of take them away from what they're doing on their own- on Pinterest you are in and of yourself. (Kate)

I don't really classify it as social media because I don't really talk to anybody on it, it's just more of an outward showing I guess of some of my personalities and some of my interests. (Jenny)

I would describe it as something unlike any of the other social media social network sites. It's a way to – it's not talking, it's not typing out 'Hey guys this is what I'm doing today'- it's more just sharing about yourself and your interests through pictures. (Lauren)

An analysis of the respondents' interview data, then, suggests that the women interviewed view social media as something that facilitates connection and communication. Although Pinterest arguably fits into both those categories (as previously mentioned, users can 'follow' other users, comment on pictures, and 'tag' other users in comments), it is clear that the females interviewed require a greater degree of communication capabilities to consider the website 'social.' Thus while respondents did recognize the ability to connect with others on Pinterest, on the whole they view Pinterest more as a personal activity than a social one.

Within this broader theme of 'anti social media,' sub themes began to emerge. Two of these sub themes in regards to lack of communication on Pinterest were the webpage's layout and outside-of-Pinterest communication. For the former, some respondents mentioned that the website design itself is the primary restrictive factor:

I don't think the format really lends itself to having a conversation as far as text goes. I think that the conversation takes place more in just re-pinning or liking, or- I mean I talk about Pinterest outside of the website itself with people. (Mary)

Mary's response contains both sub themes, but we will first focus on the former: namely, that the format of the website itself inhibits verbal communication that is indicative of most social media websites. This is reminiscent of technological determinist theories (that the website is determining the function and use for the users), but a closer look at another emergent theme (to be discussed later) suggests that this is not wholly the case. Instead, I argue that this is evidence more aligned with the SCOT theory, which allows for a 'multi-directional' flow of influence among users and creators of technology (Pinch and Bijker, 1985, p. 419). In this instance, the website's layout influences how users view and use the site: the lack of personal messages, chat functions, or status updates suggests a less social purpose than perhaps other social media sites. Indeed, if we return to the website's aforementioned 'about' page statement, it boasts that 'Pinterest is a tool for collecting and organizing things YOU love' (emphasis mine). Thus from the site's own description and the page layout, the individual, rather than the social, is emphasized. This theme is echoed in Natalie's interview, when she states,

You can be a lot more individualistic. You don't have to interact with people. And I really like that. [Laughs] It can be a very individualistic activity. I'm sure you're relying on other people to pin those pins that you're looking at, but you can always go and find your own pins – [you can] have a very isolated Pinterest experience if you want to. (Natalie)

Her employment of the term 'have to' (*'You don't have to interact with people'*) is significant because it suggests that other sites require interaction; similarly, her use of the phrase 'can' (*'You can be a lot more individualistic'*) implies that Pinterest enables her to engage in an activity that is usually denied on other social media websites.

The second sub-theme to be mentioned here is what I term 'outside communication,' meaning

conversations surrounding Pinterest that occur outside of the website itself. While the respondents were dubious in terms of the inner social aspect of Pinterest, many of them mentioned that it has facilitated connections and conversations outside of the website itself:

I myself do this, and I hear people doing it, where it's like, 'Oh did you see that thing on Pinterest?' or things like that. Or people who I don't even know, I'll meet and be like, 'Oh wow, where did you get the idea to make that ornament?' or something like that, and they'll be like, 'Oh, Pinterest!' you know, and there's that mutual bond of like 'Oh yeah, I use Pinterest too'... I think it's something that a lot of girls share and-- it's like a little secret club and I like it. (Lauren)

I definitely think that it has really become popular because you can talk to somebody and say, 'Oh on Pinterest I found this' or 'I found this recipe on Pinterest' and they know what you're talking about. (Jenny)

Comments such as these provide the basis for the previously mentioned debates surrounding 'women's websites'- Youngs (1999) might focus on the positive evidence of 'knowledge building by women for women' (p. 66), while Van Zoonen (2002) may argue that this outside communication and sharing is evidence of what marketers are targeting and encouraging online (p. 10). Regardless, the emergence of this sub-theme suggests that, while women may not necessarily view Pinterest as their primary site for social interaction, it has facilitated offline connections and conversations.

Female Space

The second emergent theme to be discussed is that of 'female space.' Standing in seeming contrast to the first theme, this theme echoed the *'little secret club'* mentality of Lauren's aforementioned quote. Respondents were asked why they thought Pinterest is extremely female-dominated, and the overwhelming response was that it was due to the website's 'female content' (defined by many respondents as pretty images of fashion, weddings, makeup, and recipes- indeed, the word 'pretty' was used by each respondent). However, fascinating sub-themes emerged within this idea of a 'pretty female content' overloaded space- among them were the themes of 'camaraderie' and viewing Pinterest as a 'judgement-free zone.'

Despite the very same respondents' comments that Pinterest was more of a personal activity and less of a social one, many interviewees also described the site as a space for women to gather and

share ideas:

The one way I can think to describe it is it's like you're getting together with a bunch of your girlfriends and you're sitting around, and clipping pictures out of magazines- that kind of thing. You know, it's this group of people that are sharing their ideas and kind of getting together, so to speak, on a day-to-day basis and you know, giving input. (Jenny)

Pinterest is like the online form of a bunch of women gathering together in the kitchen and just talking about things that they love. Like different ways to cook pork loin, and discussing how they raise their kids and different things they do to keep them quiet or keep them entertained, or to discipline them, or you know, just things like that. (Mary)

Discussions of an online space for females to 'gather together' are reminiscent of media and communications theories regarding space and place (see Giddens (1990), Meyrowitz (1985), and Harvey (1989), for instance). Giddens (1990) argues that the 'advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between "absent" others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction' (p. 18). Thus while Pinterest users may not be in the same physical place, interviews with Pinterest users suggest that the website's sharing features allow users to effectively inhabit the same 'space.' Indeed, one respondent even described Pinterest explicitly as a 'space':

I think it's a lot of women and it sort of seems like a safe space to pursue domestic interests. Like, you know, nobody's making fun of us for wanting to make organic pizza on zucchinis, like [laughs] I don't know- it's like, yeah... nobody's making us feel bad for planning weddings, nobody's making us feel bad about thinking about our classrooms for next year- it's a safe space for crafting ideas, for the exchange of crafting ideas. (Emily)

Intrigued by her use of the term 'safe space,' I asked Emily if she could expand on that and provide an instance where women were made to feel bad online. Her response was enlightening, and highlights another sub theme that is closely related to the idea of 'female space':

I know a lot of women who are young and married, they're young mothers, and they're sort of like harassed by other people for wanting this- for wanting this to be what they do, and I think frequently some men, some women, make women feel bad for wanting to, you know, spend time in the kitchen, creating things, or spend time crafting because that's fun and interesting for them. It's nice to not have that guilt. I feel like, if you're on Pinterest, you don't think less of people

because they like to make rugs out of t-shirts, that's something that you are also potentially interested in. Yeah. There's nobody making you feel dumb for wanting to raise chickens in your backyard, instead they're instructing you how to do it. You know, I really appreciate that aspect of community. Like I mentioned, I don't have a wedding board, but I do have fun looking at other people's, you know what I mean? It's nice to see what other people have constructed for themselves within this community. (Emily)

Emily's response points to themes of community and space, but also brings up another sub theme: that of judgments. She mentions that Pinterest is a 'safe space' where women can feel free of judgment and guilt. Other respondents echoed this statement, noting that Pinterest does not place women at odds with each other, but rather encourages 'camaraderie':

I do agree that there is a feminine aspect to Pinterest; however, I do think that it is one of camaraderie and togetherness, which is really hard to find on the Internet...the Internet can be somewhere where judgments are made and a lot of times they are made and done anonymously, but I feel like for the most part Pinterest is very innocent when it comes to women helping other women beautify their homes, make recipes cheaper and tastier and easier and look better. I feel like there's a very innocent quality to Pinterest in the realm of social media that's otherwise very based in judgments. (Kate)

Although respondents emphasized that within Pinterest, they feel free of judgments from other pinners and women, some interviewees mentioned outside judgments from people who do not use Pinterest. One respondent mentioned that:

It's almost like Pinterest is associated with homemakers. And obviously the content is conducive to homemakers and homemakers have more time for these kind of projects sometimes, but I'll say, 'Oh I'm on Pinterest' or something, and it's automatically like 'Oh you must have planned out your children's future outfits and you must have your engagement ring picked out and know the color scheme of your wedding' and it's just kind of an odd set of assumptions that automatically go with using Pinterest but none of which really apply to me. (Emma)

This judgment surrounding Pinterest and, more broadly speaking, 'domestic' and 'feminine' subject matters underlines Coyle's (1996) argument that prevailing social attitudes place superiority over 'masculine' activities (p. 45). Thus it follows that a website that is predominantly female and 'feminine' would likely carry a social stigma of inferiority or frivolity. The 'space' afforded to females on Pinterest was emphasized by respondents as being female due

to the content, rather than website design. Indeed, Pinterest utilizes what Paasonen (2005) has detailed as the antithesis to women's website designs: it employs the use of straight lines, white background, and bold red color accents (p. 140). Thus if the content (rather than design) is understood as being the primary reason for female aggregation on Pinterest, this speaks to greater trends of gender-technology relations and social attitudes regarding masculine/feminine and superior/inferior binaries. When asked if she thought the website would change if the gender imbalance diminished, one respondent answered tellingly, 'I think they would probably add some more male topics. Well, I guess - isn't there a technology section on there? I feel like they would add more stuff like that' (Julia). Thus from the respondents' own answers to anecdotes of societal judgments experienced, it appears that the 'Internet-technology-masculinity' mindset prevails (Dorer, 2002, p. 64).

User Appropriation

The results thus far have suggested that women (at least, these fourteen respondents) use Pinterest primarily for personal use rather than as social media, and that, although they may not be actively communicating with others on the website, they consider it a safe space to pursue their interests, free of judgment. My research question aims to understand how women view, use, and incorporate Pinterest into their daily lives. Thus far the data has answered questions regarding attitudes towards and views of Pinterest, but it has yet to explore the uses and incorporation of Pinterest. Respondents' answers varied for uses, and usually followed the names of their Pinterest boards: fashion, recipes, crafts, etc. More interesting, however, was the theme of user 'appropriation' that emerged (Shade, 2002, p. 89).

Overwhelmingly, respondents emphasized the personalization aspect of Pinterest: that this is something they created, worked on, and have used. Indeed, when respondents were read the tongue-in-cheek Dane Cook quote mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, they generally agreed, noting that their Pinterest pages are a product of a lot of time and work. In all of the interviews, the respondents spoke of their Pinterest boards with a sense of ownership and control. Although the website provides users with preliminary boards (such as 'For the Home,' 'Favorite Places and Spaces,' and 'My Style,' among others), most of the respondents changed and/or added to the initial selection.

I mean, some of them were useful, but I prefer customized things generally. [Laughs]. Yeah the broader categories don't always encapsulate what I need them to. (Emily)

And I love that it's personalized- like you can create your own boards and structure them in your own way. (Katherine)

I mean, it was a lot of pretty pictures and once I figured out that you could search and all those sorts of things, I think over time I started liking it more and more and figuring out how I personally wanted to use it. (Alexia)

This user appropriation in regards to board categories and Pinterest use supports Pinch and Bijker's (1984) concept of 'interpretive flexibility'- namely, that users can view and approach Pinterest in a wide variety of different ways (p. 423). Although still under the confines of the website, users are able to customize and choose what they wish to display on their Pinterest page. However, one respondent mentioned that, although users have the capability to create their own pins and boards, if one wanted to pin from the preexisting collection of pins, their choices are limited.

I guess there aren't a whole lot of my other interests in pin form. Like there aren't biochemistry flashcards and diagrams coming up on Pinterest. I might create these boards, later on down the line, but they're not there for me to start one from stuff that's already on Pinterest. (Emma)

A defining feature, then, of Pinterest that allows for greater degrees of interpretive flexibility is the 'Pin It' button that users can install on their browser. The 'Pin It' button allows the user to pull and 'pin' anything from the Internet that they wish to save. Thus Pinterest users are capable of creating a uniquely personalized experience online, and can approach the website in a variety of ways. Among my respondents, the views and uses of Pinterest varied greatly: some used it as an educational tool, others as a way to plan events, while others used it as a scrapbook- one respondent even used it to collect pictures of sea glass.

Additionally, the ability of users to approach and use the website in various ways undermines some of the great concerns regarding the feminization of the Internet. These concerns center on marketing towards females: namely, that female consumption of goods and services is the primary concern and strategy of companies online (Shade, 2002, p. 9). However, when asked if they had ever bought anything off of Pinterest (meaning that they clicked through a link found on Pinterest to purchase something- as of yet, Pinterest does not have a buying option), only one respondent out of the fourteen said that she had. Another respondent alluded to this 'feminization' of the Internet when she said,

I'm surprised it hasn't been commercialized more than it has. Like sometimes I notice the little dollar signs- I guess there's a way you can buy it directly- I'm not sure, but it still seems very non-corporate- like no one's pushing things on you. (Melanie)

Admittedly, if this same research were to be undertaken a year from now, the results may prove different. Recent technology blogs' social media number crunching shows that Pinterest leads to higher e-commerce than any other social media site, and just recently Pinterest announced that they will send alerts to pinners when the price lowers on items they had pinned (TechCruch, 2012; Stern, 2013). However, if the website design remains the same, according to the concept of interpretive flexibility, users will still be able to approach the website in a variety of ways (Pinch and Bijker, 1984, p. 423). Indeed, the majority of my respondents expressed slight confusion when asked if they had ever purchased something after seeing it on Pinterest- most use the website to save money rather than for the consumption of goods. Explained one respondent:

Normally I use it kind of to save money and to make myself look as presentable as possible with what I already have. (Alexia)

This theme of using Pinterest to 'make it your own' was echoed among other respondents. As previously mentioned, users maintain flexibility in creating boards and pins to suit their interests and uses. Additionally, users expressed instances of appropriation within the use of ideas suggested on Pinterest itself:

So it [the idea on Pinterest] wasn't completely what I needed, but I was able to change it into what I needed based off of a picture and having an idea. (Jenny)

We took the ideas and made them do-able for us. (Tricia)

Thus user appropriation was an emergent theme throughout the interview process, albeit in a variety of forms, as previously discussed (Shade, 2002, p. 89). This affirms the conceptual framework of 'interpretive flexibility,' for it allows for divergence and variety in uses and approaches towards a technology. Additionally, its social constructivist roots acknowledge the mutual shaping of technology and social forces, allowing for a multidirectional flow of influence (Pinch and Bijker, 1984, p. 419).

Self-representation

An in-depth interview, as opposed to a casual conversation, provides a unique opportunity to explore various themes and issues- some of which the 'respondent may not be aware of or that are only dimly in his or her consciousness' (Berger, 1998, p. 55). Bauer and Gaskell (2000) maintain that interviews are inherently interactional in character- it is not a unidirectional flow of information, but rather both parties (respondents and interviewer) are exploring topics together (p. 45). This proved to be true with the final theme to be discussed in this dissertation: self-representation. When asked if they thought their identity played a role in how they used and viewed Pinterest, the majority of the respondents expressed that they had never considered it before. This was usually followed by a pause, then an exploration of the self by the respondents as they navigated their identity and Internet use. From their answers regarding the role of identity in Pinterest use, the theme of 'self-representation' began to emerge, and within this theme, the closely related sub themes of personality vs. taste and 'idealized self' arose. Respondents, for the most part, responded affirmatively when asked if their identity played a role in how they used Pinterest:

My identity? Like who I am? Probably, because I feel like if I were someone else I would probably be interested in other things that are on Pinterest. (Tricia)

Yes. Because I definitely look at the things that are interesting to me and I only pick ideas that I think reflect my personality especially when it comes to fashion and decoration. (Julia)

This question regarding identity was left intentionally broad and open in order to allow respondents to explore in their answers and take it whichever direction they wished. Some pointed to certain aspects of their personality that affected their views and behavior on Pinterest, such as being a 'practical person' or a 'structured person':

I am a structured person that doesn't like to get ahead of myself. So that really plays into my rules on Pinterest. And so it plays in what boards I do or do not have. And then a little bit of what I pin. Or I guess a lot of it, since that's, you know, what you're choosing to associate with yourself. (Natalie)

Berger's (1998) argument for the benefit of interviews for allowing the respondent to discover their own personal attitudes towards topics during an interview can be evidenced in Natalie's

comment (p. 55). She corrects herself- 'a little bit of what I pin. Or I guess a lot of it,' and the employment of the phrase 'I guess' suggests newly discovered knowledge on her behalf. Additionally, her statement that Pinterest boards and pins are 'what you're choosing to associate with yourself' touches on greater topics of self construction on the Internet and what Turkle (1995) describes as 'experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self' (p. 180). However, Turkle's description suggests an active and knowing construction of the self by the Internet user. Within this theme of self-representation, however, a sub theme of self-discovery also emerged from the data. Two respondents mentioned that viewing their Pinterest boards provides an opportunity for self-discovery:

I think when I go back to my boards and look at what I've pinned, I think it really shows a lot about my personality- like the things I put as quotes. Not so much the food, but more like you know- the pictures that I think are pretty and the places that I want to travel to. I think that's a really good way to show—not that I'm trying to like 'show my personality' [laughs] but even for me to see, on a board, 'Oh I really like all those things' and you can kind of deduct things about yourself from seeing that and learn more about yourself through it. (Lauren)

I like getting on there and seeing what I've kind of collected. I think anyone who has collections likes to just have them around and likes to look at them. And it's a way to kind of see yourself, without all the clutter. (Mary)

Thus within this theme of 'self representation,' the idea that Pinterest users are actively constructing an online representation of themselves through their pins and boards, a sub theme of self-discovery also emerged. However, some respondents had a harder time negotiating between personality and likes, and if 'likes' alone constituted a representation of themselves.

I don't think it's very representative of my life. I think it's representative of my interests, more than anything. Yeah, I don't think it represents me. Well, I guess my interests are me. But. I don't think you can look at this and picture who I am, you know? Just what I'm interested in. (Tricia)

Again, the use of the term 'I guess' suggests an internal shift of opinion- Tricia navigates between the concepts of 'interests' and 'self,' trying to reconcile if one equates the other. This is closely linked to another sub theme that emerged: namely, that Pinterest displays an 'idealized' or not wholly accurate representation of oneself. Hogan (2010) would agree- he argues that self-representation is less about representation, and more about an exhibition, due to the fact that

people are actively choosing what to display (p. 377). Hogan's theory was explicitly admitted by some respondents:

Maybe it's more who I aspire to be, rather than who I actually am. [Laughs]. Like I said, I don't actually know very much about cooking or crafting or anything, but those make up the majority of my pins- it's things I would like to move toward. Yeah, fitness goals more so than realities are up on my Pinterest board [laughs]...Yeah. Yep. More of my ideal self than my actual self. (Emily)

I don't know if it'd be my identity playing a role in it, or if I'm using Pinterest to help shape what I want people to see, I guess?... I would think that Pinterest would be more shaping what I want my identity to appear to be. (Alexia)

I think social media sites show you what people want you to know [laughs]. (Tricia)

Less explicit, perhaps, but similar in concept to the idealized self on Pinterest was the idea of 'pinning vs. doing' that was mentioned by the majority of respondents. Whether in regards to fitness exercises, crafts, or recipes, a prevailing joke on Pinterest seems to be that, as one respondent claimed, 'You can pin it now, and then you're never going to do it.' It should be noted, however, that when asked, all respondents answered that they had indeed created or done something that they had pinned on Pinterest. Regardless, the emergent sub theme of the 'idealized self' in terms of 'self-fashioning' or 'self-creating' appears to suggest a discrepancy between the ideal (Pinterest) and the actual (self) (Turtle, 1995, p. 180). However, this conclusion treads dangerously close to the 'online self' vs. 'real world self' binaries that Paasonen (2005) argues are unhelpful 'for understanding the uses of the Internet as located, contextual, and embodied' (p. 240). Thus while interesting to note that many respondents conceive of Pinterest as an idealized version of themselves, this analysis will not attempt to differentiate or define this in terms of 'real life' or 'Internet life.' Instead, I argue that the aggregated data suggests that Pinterest users view the website as a positive online tool for collecting things they find relevant or interesting, and in the process engage in 'self-creating'-like tendencies, actualized or not (Turtle, 1995, p. 180).

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study aimed to answer the research question, ‘How do women view, use, and incorporate the website Pinterest into their daily lives?’ Through the use of fourteen semi-structured interviews and an application of thematic analysis, various themes emerged to answer the posed question. It was discovered that women view Pinterest more as a personal activity than a social one, rarely using it to connect or communicate with others on the website. Additionally, respondents expressed affinity for the ‘safe space’ they felt Pinterest created for pursuing activities and hobbies that are otherwise judged and denigrated by other members of society. Interview responses showed a trend of user customization within the website, along with themes of self-representation and idealized versions of the self.

These findings present a unique angle for studies on gender and technology. A sub-question for this study was ‘What makes an online social space gendered?’ According to my respondents, it is the type of *content* that determines the social space. However, through an analysis of the aggregate selection of answers, it appears that greater issues are at play. Historically, women have struggled to find their place online in a ‘masculine’ realm (Coyle, 1996, p. 43). Previous studies show that women are uncomfortable with technology when it is labeled as such, or that women who do try to break into this ‘masculine’ field experience tension due to rigid societal norms and confines (Singh, 2001, p. 413; Dorer, 2002 p. 78). And although this is arguably a new era, with a heightened sense of comfort and numbers of women online, respondents’ interviews suggest that there is still a slight hostility or unwelcome sentiment for what is traditionally considered ‘female interests’ online. Thus for a website that is by no means exclusive to women to have such a disproportionate number of female users suggests there is something particular and special about Pinterest as an online space. Respondents described Pinterest with an affinity unfamiliar for the author in casual conversations about other social media websites: when asked at the end of the interview if there was anything else the respondent would like to mention, the vast majority expressed something along the lines of ‘I just love Pinterest’ or ‘I just really love the site.’ The interview data for this dissertation suggests that women view and use Pinterest as a personal online tool that allows them to pursue their interests and hobbies without fear of retribution or judgment.

Admittedly, this is a smaller sample size. Although interviews allow for greater depth of answers and insights, the time commitment, practicality, and access often limit the sample size (Bryman,

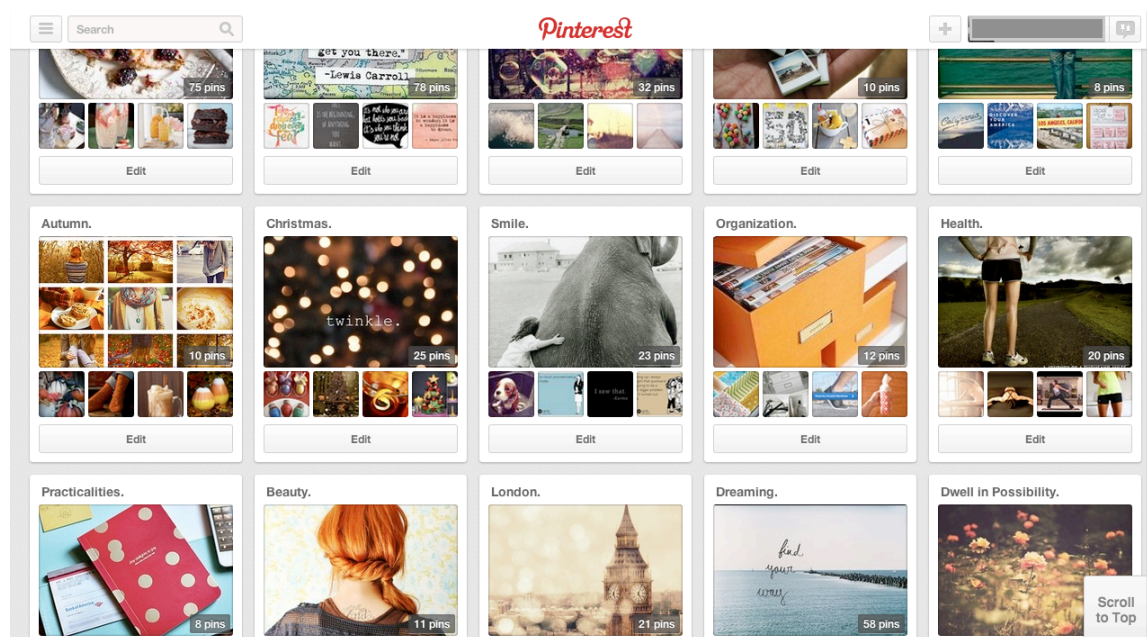
2004, p. 333-4). Further research could benefit by reaching a wider sample. Additionally, including a participant observation element to the interviews in the style of Bakardjieva (2005) could prove useful, for, as she argues, it allows ‘respondents the chance to validate and concretize their narratives’ (p. 86). Potentially equally as insightful would be a study that included men in the research- whether that be the comparatively small number of men who do use the website, or men (and women) who choose not to use Pinterest. Lastly, due to its recent inception, Pinterest is likely to experience a vast number of changes within the next couple of years. There are already evidences of a potential shift towards the introduction of advertisements or other monetarily fuelled strategies. Should this occur, Pinterest would prove an attractive study for researchers interested in the feminization of the Internet. Regardless of the future of Pinterest, however, the website in its current state has provided a fruitful and fascinating subject of research for this dissertation. It is my sincere hope that it will be beneficial for further research regarding gender and Internet use.

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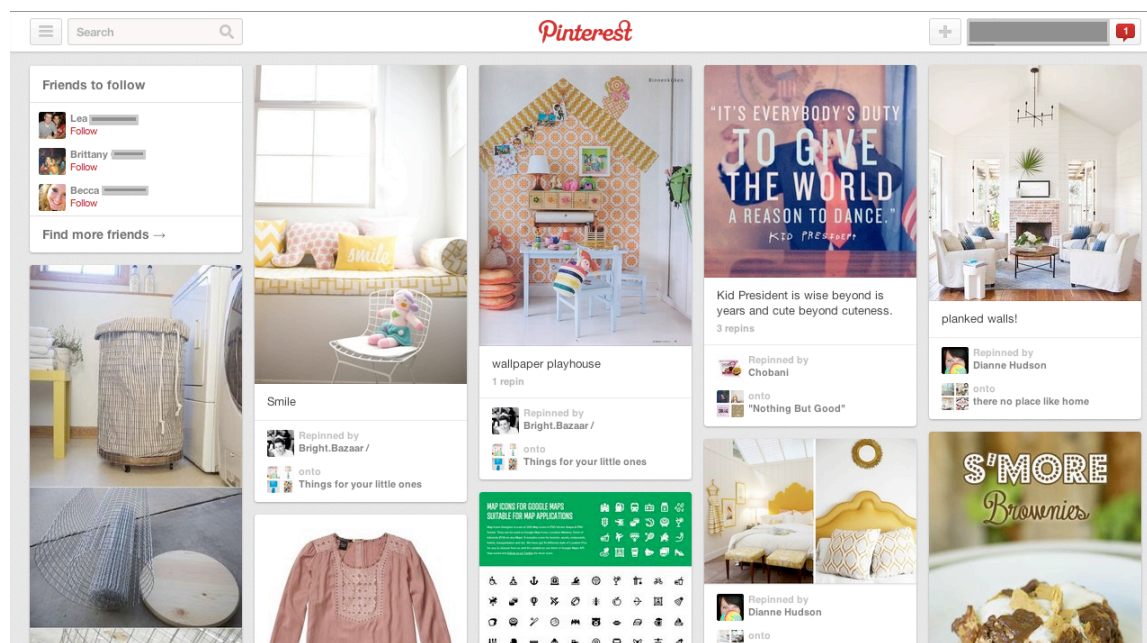
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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE PINTEREST BOARDS



APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE PINTEREST HOMEPAGE



APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

Introducing/Initial Open-Ended Questions

Name/age/job?

When did you start using Pinterest?

Why did you initially start using it? What attracted you to it?

When you think about Pinterest, what words and images come to mind?

How would you describe Pinterest to someone who had never come across it before?

Personal Experience with Pinterest

How do you usually spend your time on Pinterest?

Types of boards? Different than the ones suggested?

What kind of content are you attracted to on Pinterest?

How do you decide what (or what not) to pin? Standards/rules when pinning?

Do you use ideas or things off Pinterest?

What do you like/dislike about it?

What does Pinterest offer you that other sites don't?

Does your identity play a role in how you use Pinterest? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

Has the way you use Pinterest changed since when you first started using it?

Pre-Pinterest life vs. now- does it look any different?

Gendered Aspect of Pinterest

Why do you think it's so female dominated?

Why do you think there are not more men?

Do you know any men that use it? Do they use it differently than the women you know?

How, if at all, do you think the website would be any different if more men joined?

Social Aspect of Pinterest

How does Pinterest compare to other social media sites? How do you use them differently?

Do you think Pinterest is a social activity? Solo activity? Both?

Why do you think Pinterest is considered social media?

Do you ever talk to anybody on Pinterest? Do you ever see people talking to each other?

Do you think about what other people think when you pin something?

Is there such a thing as 'Pinterest culture'?

Do you think there's a Pinterest community?

Commercial Aspect of Pinterest

Do you buy things off Pinterest?

Does it encourage you to buy or create?

Dane Cook quote:

How do you feel about it? Any thoughts?

Is there anything we haven't covered, or anything else you'd like to say?

APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE THEMATIC CODING SHEETS

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
1	NAME		Outside talking		Followers/fes		Connecting		Inside Talking		Ties to other social media				Space		Not so social		P, Culture
2																			
3			Coworker referred		Mostly strangers		Be able to see one anothe	No comments			Doesn't advertise she's on P				Friendlier quality				
4					Bloggers		Inner quality more than co	Easily shareable	descriptive	Not tied to Facebook					Camaraderie				
5					Open to public, not perso		inverse for Pinterest-	understand from online profile	vs meeting first						Feminine space- togetherness				
6					Follows those who 'Do it v	No chatting- in and of yourself									Women helping women- innocent quality				
7					Doesn't know what friend	Strangers pinning from strangers									Not at odds				
8					Conscious that it's her ref	Very personal site													
9						Female togetherness													
10						Connecting, not at odds													
11			All say the same thing		Mostly strangers (bloggers)				Commenting on how they like the pin/product							Mostly for me		You can pin it, then you're	
12					Bloggers have fresher perspectives				Rarely sees people talking							Just do it for myself		It makes people feel good	
13					Not thinking too much about what others think be she doesn't think they look at her boards											Doing it for yourself		We're all Pinterest brainw	
14					Pins for herself														
15					Someone could see her board and get an idea of what she's like														
16			Friend was wedding plann		Almost exclusively people	Never looks at people's pr	Less direct user interaction									Less about the people, m	Scorosity girls planning wec		
17			Friends wanted her to loo		Similar to Twitter in that y	Less about the people, mc	No 'face to face' talking like on FB												
18			People described it as 'sor		Doesn't expect anyone to	Can get a feel for someone's personality, but focus is not about the person													
19									Long comment threads on recipes- offering suggestions										
20			People post a pin to their		Doesn't really look at wha	More than other social me	Not talking- just sharing al	Unlike any other social media site								Not talking, not telling wh	Talking about P outside of		
21			Mutual bond of outside to		Doesn't follow strangers	Says more about a person	Dislikes lengthy pic descrij	Not a social media person at all								Not for keeping up with pi	Used the word Pinteresty		
22					Doesn't pin things if she th	It's like a little secret club	Never comments, doesn't like anymore									Personal use	Everyone has same weddi		
23					Didn't plan wedding on P	I Becoming more global- m	Sees random people commenting but not her friends												
24			Pinaholic- always bring it		Mostly friends from RL, bu	Group of people, getting t	Doesn't tend to comment on things								Group of people, getting t	More for her than anybod	Pinaholic		
25			They know what you're talking about						Gain insight into worlds of	Doesn't talk to others- not social media							Pinterest 'feel'		
26									Different ideas, bc every c	People commenting are mostly friends to friends (hers don't)						Doesn't consider it social	r Become a big thing globall		
27									Fantastic resource for peo	Sometimes changes captic	Blog promotions								
28					Can either be really social,	Not as interactive, but you	Can't interact, except for f	Powerful advertising tool									Can either be really social, or use Pinterest for yourse		
29					Follows those suggested to her in the beginning and friends												More personal use than social media use		
30					Started by using it as social media, now uses it just for herself												Started by using it as social media, now uses it just fo		
31					Friends are now joining, she doesn't even follow back														
32					Doesn't care about other people seeing what she pinned														
33			Many judgments made ab		Writes descriptions that w	More anonymous	Ways she labels it is for ot	Disconnected- annoying to see on FB									About the usefulness, not	Wedding obsessing	
34					Hates when people pin th	Common TASTES												Motivation boards and the	
35					Rabbit trailing	Tastes link you to people													
36					Follows FB friends & stran	All about sharing													
37					Does take into account wh	Watch others, but don't do it yourself													
38					Taking other people's input and changes behavior														
39					Follows friends and strangers equally														
40					Others influence thinking (ex wedding)														

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
1	NAME		Descriptions		Changes		Uses		Determinism		Navigation		Buy?						
2																			
3			Collage of your interests		Takes the place of magaz	Fashion, travel, recipes		Felt she had to make her t	Study break										
4			Online version of own real		long lasting		Online version of own real	YOU are creating the atte	Some she looks up, but doesn't pin										
5			Traveling, cooking, all that		Cleanliness		Domestic, feminine, funny	Miscellaneous board	Want to keep it clean										
6			Online bulletin board		Thinks about cooking mor		Money saving												
7			Cleanliness				Christmas party recipes												
8			Very helpful				Travel ideas												
9			Welcome distraction				Light and fun												
10			Wardrobe modeling (cold weather)				Scrolling diary												
11			Light and fun																
12			Good way to be creative																
13			Friendlier; camaraderie aspect																
14			Very personal site																
15			Innocent																
16			Fashion & travel		Used to tear from magaz	Organize things- ease of h	Took some suggestions, then made changes						Found shoes on Pinterest, went and bought them						
17			Virtual pin board		Don't have to buy magaz	Procrastination/ study break							Boyfriend used it to buy a gift for her						
18			Practical application kind of stuff			Fashion, travel, food, drinks							Surprised it's not more commercialized- non corporate						
19			Putting all your desires and dreams online			DIY for when back to the US													
20						Future planning													
21						Ideals, but maybe not reality (ex: house board)													
22			Online collection			Wedding planning (friend)	Used some, but prefers cu	Binging											
23			Convenient website to store collections of things on			Organization, arts & crafts	Broader categories don't always encapsulate what she needs them to												
24			One place			Store collections of things	Wide variety of interests												
25			Collection			Fitness, teaching													
26			Big tool			Planning events													
27			Place to organize your thoughts, ideas, and inspiratio		Up-cycling														
28			Fun, girly		Stopped using cookbooks	Recipes (out of collge)	Didn't make any boards of her own						Hangers for wedding (on etsy)						
29			Organized, helpful		More creative ideas	Sharing about yourself through pictures													
30			Visually appealing		Everything's more fun	Keep a file for things to do in the future													
31			Easy to navigate			Get ideas													
32			Modern woman, girls in general			Quotes- uplifting													
33			Easy place of access			Interesting things													
34			Everything you can think c		How we look at ideas, voic	Teaching (church)	Uses ideas, and then adap	Addicted											
35			Variety			Wedding ideas	I CHOOSE	Looks at what friends have posted first											
36			Food, teaching, wedding			Helps because you don't feel so overwhelmed, trying	Depends on mood												
37			Group of ideas that pertains to a lot of different area			Idea generator (ex: packing or chambray shirt pairing)													
38			Starting point, and then will branch out if need be																
39			Handy tips- DIY projects/things			Future planning	Personalized- create own boards, structure them in your own way												
40			Organization- in one place			Home board (future)	Something you can personally organize												

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
1	NAME	Online & Offline	Likes	Rules	Representation	Understanding Self	Deletion												
2																			
3		Online version of previstin	Online bulletin board, arrz	Avoid repetition	I see myself in them	Scrolling diary													
4		Editorial bc of background	Domestic likes and interes	Editorial/aesthetically ple	PERSONAL form of Pinterest														
5		Still rips from mags- online behavior	a reflection of who you are outside of the	I DISPLAYING yourself															
6		Doesn't fully showcase what she thinks about bc she wants to keep it light and		f	Conscious of the fact that it's her reflection														
7																			
8																			
9																			
10																			
11			Ideal self rather than actual self																
12																			
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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S
1	NAME	Feminine	Masculine	Why?	Space	Men who joined													
2																			
3		Clothes, hair, 'looks'	There is a masculine aspect	Search engines geared tow	Camaraderie														
4		Presentation- recipes, clothes, etc- female gendered	First presented- tech dete	Togetherhness															
5		Grouping things according to your life	Not design- CONTENT	Innocent															
6		Female aggregated		Women helping other women															
7		Working through what is gendered and what is not- eg humor, quotes, etc		Non judgmental															
8		Content w/ feminine look- pink, florals, etc		Not at odds															
9		Cute, innocent, fun, sweet																	
10		Fashion	Wishes more men were or	New form of magazines	Joined then forgot about it														
11		CONTENT	Content would change if n	You would expect content to be fashion with many women															
12		Nothing intrinsically femal	Very gender neutral	Stereotype that men think of (all women)															
13		Sorority girls planning wec	Guys who are on it- for food and fashion	SAFE SPACE															
14		CONTENT		Place to hang goals															
15		So many women started it initially		Nobody's making us feel bad															
16		Topics that don't concern men- ex: women's fitness and women's health		Guilt-free space															
17		Guys not interested in crafting		Community															
18		Crafting ideas																	
19		Community																	
20		Modern woman; girls in general		Mostly girls, not pinning 't	It's like a little secret club and I like it														
21		All friends on P are girls		Naturally more girls	Can go global bc girls are the same everywhere														
22		Girly, pink, cute, about babies		Boys don't sit and stare at	Easy and fun place for modern woman to go														
23		Working girl on a budget																	
24		Input, connection	Different use and idea of it in their minds	Connection with another f	Flance shares wedding board														
25		Affirmation	Ideas related to men: grilling, building	Getting together w/ a bun	Has his own, but doesn't post much- just car stuff														
26		Content		He 'actually' uses Pinterest too															
27		Caretaker	Matt uses P, but doesn't h	God-intilled															
28		Caters towards caretakers	cars, hiking, hunting, beer	CONTENT															
29		Frilly= details	Men would still utilize fashion and tattoos and travel and	EVEN the DIY stuff															
30		Care about the meat'	Categories that appeal to men would grow if more men joined																
31		CONTENT																	
32		First looks like a magazine	Cars and motorcycles	Guys not interested in it	Uses it differently (ex: geek, Movember)														
33		Girly logo (curvy)	Dry'																
34		Pictures about women	Sober																
35		Layout & content girly																	
36		All girls, essentially	Most of what's on P would annoy bro	Outside judgments- dream wedding board															
37		Traditionally women things (I guess)- isnt concerned with those things, though																	
38		Childcare tips, wedding pics																	
39		Went on manterest & stole some things																	
40																			

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