Findings, Implications and Problems

Through this project we have shown that identity can be correctly determined on the Internet. Services, many of which are free, give users a space they may tailor to their wishes. Tumblr, in this instance, gave each of us the chance to display ourselves through words, photos, songs and video. In only a few pages out of seemingly endless space at our disposal we all did our best to display our personalities and preferences. We posted accurately our tastes as to gain the best results and were not intentionally misleading in any way. For the most part we were surprised how accurately people could read us. Additionally, we did not necessarily leave specific clues to the questions we asked in our surveys as to give away who we are. In the question on gender each person who took the survey correctly identified three out of four members even though we had not specified that in our posts.

There are opportunities on the Internet to show ones identity but, of course, some are more restrictive than others. Tumblr gives the opportunity to show identity in a user controlled way while places like facebook, reddit and World of Warcraft have more restriction. Tumblr is made specifically for ‘displaying’ like the bird mating songs of the technological human. There isn’t much opportunity Tumblr for social interaction and if it’s possible to personally message users it’s not clear how. This gives one the choice to display who they are and have medium for self-expression OR they may have social networking features like chatting and interacting with other users. While some of these other services do have medium for photos there is not as much user freedom and control over display and technical details.

From this project one can begin to see that identity is somewhat compartmentalized in this culture. A person’s literary interests go in one (literal) box, and movies in another. These boxes all go into one container labeled “who I am”. That is stacked next to another container filled with “how I interact with my friends” and another called “how I interact in larger societies”. There is one place to talk to friends and another to post pictures about saving the environment or to get feedback on one’s art from an informed community.

We inferred from our finding in this project something that could be extrapolated out to see a greater pattern in our society as a capitalistic one. This is that the nature of capitalist society today is about what boxes one fits into. For some reason being an Apple user says something about who you are, and being an Apple user who also prefers to drink Roma instead of Starbucks says even more about who you are. Brands, as an example of the compartmentalized self, now say more about who you are than who you rather than just what products you like. Capitalism makes the assimilation of products to human essence seem so natural within society that its mechanism is supported continuously. If people defined their individuality within groups based on common goals rather than common products then a communal system would fall in place that would render the mass competitive market useless. Brands are one the most prevalent themes of what seems to be going on Tumblr.

From our project findings we also saw a some what dependent self . We realized that through the process of creating Tumblrs that externalized who we are so much that there was a sense of dependency on Tumblr to show people who we are. There seems to be a sense through identity being increasingly defined on the Internet that when you’ve put work into something like a Tumblr page it stops being something one uses to individuate but something that makes them increasingly more blended into the greater society. There are so many mediums for what feels like self expression that one may feel seen and finally authentic now having the ability to show who they are when really each Tumblr that’s created just further encourages the system that limits individuation to these small avenues. It makes people complacent by feeding them the feeling that they have individuated when really they have only become one name on a long list. Each person is satisfied with a small feeling of individuality while simultaneously, in the greater system, the individual gets more and more lost in a greater mechanism of pacifying people’s dissatisfaction with feeling increasingly more uniform. From this the whole societal notion of how one is seen as an individual and the implications of the methods in which we identify ourselves can be recognized as the pacifier that it is.

We felt the pull of this system but realized that putting our labor into a Tumblr was not the product we wanted to use to see ourselves in the world. If our work transfers our value into something we felt that this forced template was not enough for individuation. While there is a lot of space to decide what to put on Tumblr there are still only so many options and to post a picture of a painting does not give one the true sense of reflection in the world that actually painting something might. We felt that while others could correctly identify some preferences we had and things we cared about that wasn’t enough on a grander scheme and were left ultimately unsatisfied. To feel a sense of connection to society as an individual an reflection of self by that society must occur. We realized we weren’t seeing ourselves in this society but rather that our individuality had been banished to this mediated third party on the Internet. Like having one room in your own house for your stuff putting the main method of individuating on the Internet made it so there was an eerie strangeness to a society that was supposed to reflect us but had only mediated us into easier complacency. People can tell who you are on the Internet but that in itself is too short sided a goal and the larger feelings we got from this project showed the true nature of identity via the Internet.

We did encounter some problems that could have an impact on the accuracy of our findings. One problem for our project is that we are all cis gender, didn’t ask about ethnicity and are all in college, so certain assumptions can easily be made that appear to be good inferences, but are actually only fair guesses. Taking all things into account this project could be done through different mediums to get a greater breadth of information of the Internet.