Visualising Facebook
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Photos of young people shared on social media are a valuable resource for learning about a society for two contrasting reasons. Photographs provide an opportunity for adults to project their values on to their infants. Once these children grow up, photographs posted on social media then become their first opportunity to establish an autonomous mode of self-expression. In the case of Trinidad, this chapter will show far greater continuity between these two stages, while in The Glades there is a radical break, especially evident when people become parents and mainly signified by the way in which they relate to photographs of their babies. For this reason, the discussion of baby photographs in The Glades appears in Chapter 4 as an aspect of mothering. By contrast, this chapter about El Mirador starts with the posting of babies and continues through to older children.

Families in Trinidad tend to be larger than those in the UK, with an average household size of 3.7 compared to 2.3 in the UK. They are also less dispersed since in El Mirador, unless they migrate, families tend to remain in close proximity to each other, with extended families living in the same area.

There are three main genres of photos posted of babies. The first, also found in The Glades, consists of babies doing ‘cute’ things, including wearing sunglasses, reading or sitting behind the wheel of a car. In these genres ‘cute’ implies mimicking activities more associated with adults. The aesthetic suggests spontaneity, often with downward angles that emphasise how small and young the child is. Blurring or poor composition may be retained as evidence of such spontaneity (Figs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3).
The second genre is of photos that appear to be edited or which form part of a photographic collage. These images typically mark a special event or significant age stage for the child. They may also include effects added through the phone or an editing platform, such as preset borders or embellishments regarded as special or stylish (Figs 3.4 and 3.5).
This practice of marking special events through the exchange of sentimental notes and gifts contrasts with The Glades, where ‘making a fuss’ about people has declined and Christmas and birthdays, are now, for most people, the only remaining significant annual celebrations and occasions for gifting. Trinidad, on the other hand, retains a rich tradition of special and social occasions accompanied by card and gift giving, for example graduation, Easter and St Valentine’s Day. The sharing of decorative and collaged images online seems to continue the intensive circulation of cards that previously marked such occasions (Figs 3.6 and 3.7). A transitional phase was represented by the mass circulation of e-cards, but today the practice has largely migrated to Facebook where, for example, new parents will circulate photos of their children modified with filters, borders and text.

The continued use of embellishment and decoration within photos provides visual evidence for our larger point about the relative continuity from early childhood into adulthood for Trinidadians as compared to The Glades. In the English case the emphasis is on showing the authenticity of the child as ‘natural’, which would be diminished by such embellishments, while in Trinidad the continuity comes from an...
emphasis upon how young people are embedded within the family and wider relationships. The profile pictures (Appendix Figure 2) include only 10 instances of embellished pictures in The Glades but 185 in El Mirador, posted by 25 different people.

Mothers in El Mirador post fewer images of themselves holding their babies, partly since they seem to be more often behind the camera. However, this allows them to show more images of babies and fathers where the intention seems to be to suggest a stolen moment of bonding, closeness and relaxation, such as shots of sleeping (Fig. 3.8).

By contrast, fathers make less effort to take and post photos of mothers with their babies. These would indeed look incongruous amidst the bulk of their own postings, which are dominated by topics such as work and sports. The exceptions, noted in the wider ethnography,\(^1\) tend to occur where the father doesn’t live with his children (Fig. 3.9). Here photographs are often used to suggest a close relationship between father and child or children, with subjects smiling and often appearing to be on an outing or sharing quality time together.

This reflects a discussion of Trinidadian kinship in our previous book *Webcam*. Here we suggest that, given the frequency with which parenting develops outside of marriage, there is more of an emphasis on the kin role being created directly through appropriate behaviour. That is to say, a father is someone who consistently acts like an appropriate father even if they are not a husband nor even the biological parent.\(^2\) As a result, absent fathers may often use such images to show that they are doting and have an emotional bond with their child. Text such as ‘my baby’ or ‘my angel’, ‘he love me’ or ‘the love of my life’ often accompanies these images to reinforce the message.
In a similar fashion, posted images of babies are used to demonstrate the significance of wider relations to the extended family. There are often several posts within a parent’s profile showing the baby with a cousin, aunt or uncle. Again this contrasts with The Glades where we shall see the baby is more directly identified with, and sometimes subsumes, the category of mother.

In El Mirador, photography is also used to demonstrate bonds beyond the extended family (Fig. 3.10). Proximity and juxtaposition can be used to demonstrate affinity also with a street or neighbourhood, typically including several related families. This makes the experience of growing up very different from in The Glades. One of the reasons the previous chapter focuses so much on peers at school is that children in England are far less likely to have a sustained friendship group based on their extended family. Their photos posted on social media mainly feature their school friends. By contrast, in El Mirador, postings are much more likely to be a record of events at which the extended family came together, with, for example, cousins playing together; these images are then shared through social media with the still wider family. Such occasions, held at home, occur throughout the year, for example weddings, birthday parties and Hindu prayers (pujas) to which the entire family and friends would be invited, regardless of religion or ethnic background (Fig. 3.11). Another effect of this is that in El Mirador, babies and toddlers are surrounded by relatives of various ages, while children in The Glades spend most of their time with others of the same age.

As we progress to photos of slightly older children in El Mirador, there is a change in emphasis. Ideally parents would wish to continue to post images of children at play that show spontaneity and authenticity, for example (Figs 3.12 and 3.13).
As children grow and become conscious of the camera, however, they refuse to acquiesce in the desires of the photographer, insisting instead on playing up to the situation. This becomes the first stage in an important culture of performance and more self-conscious posing for photographs. Children who were previously just playing together now stand as a group and smile when a parent or relative appears with a camera. They also take delight in subverting the intentions of the photographer by taking up postures that their parents regard as ‘silly’ (Figs 3.14 and 3.15). In other instances they can look embarrassed and awkward, since the choice of that moment to have a picture taken was the adult’s and not their own (Fig. 3.16).
A common genre at this age is of young children hugging, but with variants. Often cousins or children of family friends are encouraged to ‘hug up’. Adults especially like it when the hug is between a boy and girl (Fig. 3.17), since this is seen as especially ‘cute’. The children here are cousins, but hugging can be seen as equally natural behaviour for siblings who are posing for the camera.

After about the age of five, children of both sexes start to adopt poses emulating those they have seen adopted by older siblings or relatives. A typical example is young boys who respond to the camera with the ‘gangsta’ pose (Figs 3.18, 3.19 and 3.20). We also see children emulating the styles of photographs more associated with older people at parties, such as the dancing associated with ‘soca’ music (Fig. 3.21).

Boys tend to start posing at an earlier age than girls, from around the ages of five to seven. Girls may smile or put one hand on their hip at that age, but they don’t seem to experiment with posing as much until they are aged around 10. At around the same age there is also a change in the stance of boys; their pose becomes rather stiffer and more formal – and, one might assume, more self-conscious – compared to when they were much younger (Figs 3.22 and 3.23).
Children mimicking poses they have seen in older relatives, such as ‘gangsta’ poses for young boys.

Children emulating ‘wining’ as they dance to soca music.

Young boys and girls are far less self-conscious in photos compared to when they are older.
Trinidadian high school students on Facebook

There is a marked shift in the posting of photographs once children go to school. A prime reason for this is that until then most photographs have been taken by the parents or in the context of home. Such images are either constrained by what the parents want to project or represent the child’s attempt to refuse to accede to this. The context for this next stage, by contrast, is photographs in which the child is performing in order to impress his or her peers. Children starting high school are also starting to establish their own social media accounts. This might have brought us closer to the genres found in The Glades – except that, as pointed out in Chapter 2, very few photos posted in The Glades are ever taken at school itself, while this is a common context for peer photos in El Mirador. We shall see below that the same contrast is found with respect to photographs taken at work.

In El Mirador, the bulk of posted photos are taken either at school or in school uniform, mostly by 12–13-year-olds and then again around the age of 17–18, suggesting an emphasis on both starting and finishing high school.

Camera phones and any sort of smartphone are not permitted to be used by students during school hours; if students are caught using a phone at all, it is confiscated. Therefore the majority of images seem to have been taken after school hours, some with children still in uniform and on or near school grounds and others when teenagers visit each other after school or go out to the mall (Figs 3.24 and 3.25).

With young teenagers, we find a marked contrast between single sex and mixed sex photos. Within the mixed groups, the students appear more posed, restrained and self-conscious. By contrast, in single sex images both boys and girls appear more playful and spontaneous (Figs 3.26, 3.27, 3.28 and 3.29).
The one genre that is also found in The Glades is the ‘last day of school’ photos, where friends sign each others’ school uniform and portray themselves loosening up and celebrating. Such images contrast with school outings or photos intended to show achievement, which are common in Trinidad but not in The Glades (Figs 3.30 and 3.31).

In El Mirador both boys and girls also post photos of birthdays at school, including embellished messages and collages of photos that look like a re-mediation of the previous genre of birthday cards (Figs 3.32 and 3.33).

A popular genre of photos posted by boys at school are images showing achievements and sports, especially team sports, that display camaraderie (Figs 3.34, 3.35, 3.36, 3.37, 3.38 and 3.39). Usually these are teams representing the school in competition, but there is particular pride in showing that one is representing the nation of Trinidad (see discussion of nationalism in Chapter 7).

Boys use ‘likes’ to express interests more than girls, especially to associate with sports and entertainment sites (Figs 3.40 and 3.41). They also post more humorous memes and images around sports, gaming and
interests than they do of themselves (Figs 3.42 and 3.43). This is consistent with a general tendency shared in both field sites for females to define themselves more in relationship to people and males to define themselves more in relationship to things.

Gaming frequently appears in boys' postings, and gaming characters or avatars may be used for profile and cover photos. This seems a genuine reflection of their devotion to gaming because as one student put it, ‘yuh come home from school. Yuh can't go anywhere and you don' want to do homework so yuh just be playing games'. We spent a considerable amount of time with young people in internet cafes that were devoted to...
after-school gaming. Posts about gaming continue well into adulthood and, in some cases, parenthood. Appendix Figure 4, based on people’s last 20 posts, shows 39 posts of gaming by 19 people in El Mirador, but only four images, each from a different person, in The Glades.

If the boys post photos that focus upon sports, games or educational achievement, the girls of El Mirador seem to define themselves more in terms of friendship. Representations of friendship are not restricted to visual posts, but dominate girls’ interactions on the public timeline. They include various forms of memes and tags based on
a variety of best-friend themes, reminiscent of the BFF (‘Best Friends Forever’) designation found in The Glades (Figs 3.44, 3.45 and 3.46).

If BFF represents the more benign side to these intense relationships between girls, it can also quickly fragment, leading to various accusations. Social media has encouraged the use of ‘indirects’, that is, posts about a person or incident which do not explicitly say who or what is being referred to, so that only the people closest to them would

Boys use ‘likes’ to express interests more than girls do

Boys’ posts of interests typically include sports and gaming
recognise the target in question (Fig. 3.47). Indirects are also expressed through shared memes that contain commentary on ideals around relationships (Fig. 3.48).

Moralising postings which proliferate around relationship issues are also prevalent in adult postings, as seen in Chapter 5. Aspiring to ideal relationships and the desire not to be taken for granted are two themes in #reltalk (‘real talk’) where, as with the indirect, the sense that a person has been wronged or mistreated is expressed though a generalised moral comment on how people should treat each other.

An example of an ‘indirect’: a post about a person not named in the post

‘Indirects’ also include memes that contain moral commentary on the state of relationships


(Fig. 3.49). ‘Rel talk’ is also often an indirect in which the subject is not acknowledged and only certain people would know the true context.

Adult posting exhibits more explicit moralising around gender and other relationships, and the humour becomes somewhat harsher as compared to that of the teenagers (Fig. 3.50).

An equally important component in the emergence of gender identity is the way in which teenagers start to pose using their own bodies and associated outfits and styles. From quite early on there is a marked and sustained difference between The Glades and El Mirador, with the latter showing more interest in emulating the images of models or celebrities posing in popular media. For women this meant standing with one leg slightly turned out from the body, a hand on the waist or hip, standing to the side with the front shoulder slightly lowered and displaying the behind – either from the side or standing with one’s back to the camera, looking over the shoulder. We called these images ‘faux model’ poses. Appendix Figure 1, based on last 300 images posted, shows 198 such images posted in El Mirador compared to only three in The Glades. Classifying images according to a more general criterion of whether individuals or groups seemed to be drawing attention to what they are wearing, we identified 576 such images in El Mirador and only 142 in The Glades. The latter were almost entirely young people.

Young people in Trinidad, while expending considerable effort on looking good, have little by way of disposable income. So their clothes are mostly very casual, for example jeans and Aeropostale T-shirts (Figs 3.51 and 3.52). Although these come from New York they are not expensive, while still rating as a cut above plain polo or sloppy T-shirts. Teenage girls already have a sense of how to compose a well put-together outfit. If the girl is wearing a pink T-shirt, for instance, she may also have a pink bobble in her hair or pink bracelets to match.

Apart from selfies, teenage girls also post images focusing on parts of the body, such as hair, nails and shoes. Shoes have always been a key component of the wardrobe for women in Trinidad. They are particularly prominent in postings by girls of around 17 or 18 years old, when they start wearing high heels (Figs 3.53 and 3.54).
Teenagers dress casually, but still pay attention to details of coordinating outfits.

Teenage girls often display high heels when they start wearing them, usually aged 17 or 18.

Hair is the principal area of experimentation for girls, based on colours, styles and cuts; it is often piled high and pulled back off the face to show facial features, especially the eyes (Fig. 3.55). We don’t yet see weaves or wigs in postings by Afro-Trinidadian teenage girls, but there are lots of plaits, short cuts and different styles (Fig. 3.56). There is also relatively little make-up at this age, with some occasional lipstick but little else. There is also very little of the long hair, hair flicking or hair to the side expressions of femininity that were found among teenage girls in The Glades.

With regard to the wider context of these images there is little of the ‘bling’ and branded goods associated with adults in Chapter 7, since teenagers do not yet have the requisite income. In fact there are few
photos of food, drinks and people eating and drinking together, unless representing an event. In Trinidad, alcohol is more used as an adjunct to showing people enjoying themselves in company, rather than the frisson found among young English people in showing their relationship to alcohol itself. The most common food that appears is Subway or KFC, when kids are hanging out together after school, but the appearance of food in the photo is incidental. Food, drink and restaurants are more prominent when it comes to young adults who are working or are at university.

Having established photo posting norms for young males and females respectively in El Mirador, there are some popular cross-gender genres. An example would be anime, which appears as posts, profile and cover photos (Fig. 3.57). These have emerged from genres associated with younger audiences such as *Pokemon* and *Ben 10*. At that early age the link is more to merchandising. By contrast, the teenagers who would post anime consider themselves to be more creative and artistic, and will often draw and post images of their own art to Facebook.

As in The Glades, it is important to note that Facebook is very much a social media platform rather than merely a place for individual expression. Very few teenagers post regularly on their own timeline. There is the occasional expression of mood, such as comments about how bored they are at school and posts, generally from boys, about sports and gaming. The latter was especially common during the month of the World Cup in 2014, where teenagers commented on matches and declared their
support for teams (Fig. 3.58). However, a key point is that Facebook represents other people’s presentation of the person rather than self-expression. Mostly teenagers appear as tagged in other people’s shares, memes, events and comments that expect interaction from others, banter or are expressions of their common interests. Most of this sharing and responding is concentrated around the same few people that correspond to their offline friendships and relationships.

It is important to note that simply posting something doesn’t necessarily make that action significant. Quite often a person’s own postings suggest little concern to curate these images; they are rather a casual dumping of their record from some event, such as a visit to the zoo. In such cases every photo taken is posted into an album which may contain a couple of hundred such photos, no matter how bad or blurry the image (Fig. 3.59). As a result we find some who make a habit of posting everything (600+ photos) and other people who post next to nothing (30 photos); relatively few seem to occupy the in-between position of posting, say, around 100 photos.

**Genres of selfies among teenagers**

In Trinidad the purpose of selfies seems to be quite different to in the UK and to represent a different aesthetic. As in The Glades, women generally post more selfies than men, although more young men in their late teens and early twenties post selfies, especially if they are more committed to style and fashion. A key difference is that in Trinidad the majority of high school girls post selfies, not simply those considered by others to be the most attractive. Unlike in The Glades, where possessing a certain hourglass shape seems to be the pre-requisite for endless posting of selfies, in El Mirador body type doesn’t seem to matter: people taking selfies are of all body types. Teenage girls start to post selfies at around age 12 (Figs 3.60 and 3.61). At that stage they are mainly focused around the face, looking flirtatious or confident, but not overly sexy or provocative. From an adult’s perspective, they may suggest the little girl playing an adult. Even girls from stricter or more conservative households will post photos in which they are clearly trying to look their most attractive.
The selfies of older teenage girls don’t just concentrate on the face, make-up or the mid-section; they rather tend to present the look or style of a full outfit. Face shots are still common, but equally common are full-length mirror selfies. In some cases the camera phone obscures the face.

Photo albums are rarely curated and often show all photos taken on an outing, even if several are poor quality.

Teenage girls start posting selfies alone or with friends from age 12.
completely, so that only the outfit, or the top half of the outfit, can be seen (Fig. 3.62).

There are other clear contrasts with The Glades which are evident from Appendix Figure 3. Since pretty much anyone in Trinidad is comfortable posting a selfie of themselves alone, far more selfies of this kind are found in El Mirador – 557 compared to 138 in The Glades. In The Glades most young people emphasise selfies that are used to demonstrate friendship with others, rather than the attempt to achieve a certain individual look. So there are 474 selfies with more than one person compared to 116 in El Mirador. The latter also has more mirror selfies, and selfies in which girls are clearly trying to look ‘hot’.

Trinidadian teenagers do pull faces in photos, which usually represent them having fun out in public somewhere or with someone (Figs 3.63 and 3.64). What is missing is the use of such actions as an act of self-deprecation, as found in The Glades.

Another genre of selfie that seems completely different from The Glades is the ‘sleepy’ or ‘intimate’ selfie. These are usually taken on a bed where the girl is horizontal, sometimes resting on a hand or on a pillow, wearing little to no make-up; she usually stares straight at the camera and is fully clothed or wearing a strappy top (but never pyjamas or overly casual clothes only worn at home). The look is intended to be natural, but in fact the girls look as if they have styled themselves
to look especially ‘natural’; certainly they don’t look messy. Around 50 per cent wear headphones and the photo is taken either with a camera phone, where you can see some of the extension of the arm, or a webcam (Figs 3.65 and 3.66). There is an element of an ‘indirect’ about the ‘sleepy’ selfie, in that it seems to suggest that the girl is in a relationship with a boy and the photo is mostly taken to be shared by webcam, chat or WhatsApp. This sort of intimate photo suggests that the girl could be lying next to a person, and it is intended for their view. Examples of updates and comments that appear next to this genre of selfie include ‘I miss you’, ‘missing my boy’ or ‘you’re too sweet’. Such intimate selfies seem to compensate for being unable actually to fall asleep with the person indirectly referred to in the post.

Among young people there are also ‘boredom’ selfies, such as selfies accompanied by the status ‘I’m bored’, ‘so bored’ or simply ‘boredom selfie’ (Fig. 3.67). They appear to be slightly tongue in cheek as well, since some pose with more animation and style than their ‘regular’ selfies. Some girls also take boredom selfies with one or a couple of other friends.

Few boys post selfies, and when they do, as in The Glades, they need a reason to legitimate this action such as ‘I am somewhere important’ or ‘I am experimenting with art, drawing, animation or something that requires skill’. While young
men want to show that they look good or to show off their outfit, they generally don’t want to appear overly vain. As a result far more photos of young men are taken by others rather than as selfies (Figs 3.68, 3.69 and 3.70).

As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 7, selfies are most commonly posted by young women who are post-high school but pre-family. They post selfies that emphasise a lifestyle that includes work, if they have a job, which in turn allows them to wear nice outfits, experiment with their hair, make-up and clothes alongside friends. Middle-class and upwardly mobile women post more selfies on Instagram, using filters, collages and embellishments, than they do on Facebook.

**Coming of age and becoming (not just) parents**

We noted earlier that teenagers in El Mirador post photos of mixed gender socialising less frequently than socialising segregated by gender. Graduation photos seem to be the rite of passage after which this pattern shifts. For teenagers that go to brother-sister schools, where a boys’ school and a girls’ school share co-educational activities, students may have friends from the other school, but the majority of their time is spent with peers of the same sex. Graduation is an opportunity to suggest that
they are no longer children or students. While they continue themes of achievement and accomplishment, we also see the first unashamed performance of sexuality, through kissing and hugging friends of the opposite sex and especially through the Trinidadian dance style known as ‘wining’, discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Often they include both more formal ‘before’ shots and more celebratory partying or ‘after’ photos (Figs 3.71, 3.72, 3.73 and 3.74).

Graduation is a bridge rather than a break which seems to reflect a much greater emphasis on continuity in El Mirador than in The Glades. The most significant instance of this emerges in Chapter 4 where we shall examine how parenting is seen as a marked break for people in The Glades; as part of this, adults try to ‘cleanse’ themselves from associations with youth. By contrast the emphasis in El Mirador is on continuity, with mothers continuing to show themselves as attractive based on the cultivation of individual style. Rather than being seen ‘only’ as mothers, they still dress and pose much in the same way as they did prior to motherhood, emphasising their attractiveness and ability still to look ‘hot’. At certain times of the year, for example Carnival and during the pre-Carnival parties locally called ‘fetes’, parents rarely show themselves with their children at all (Figs 3.75 and 3.76).
Even for mothers of teenagers or adults, appearing attractive remains important – as does the continued cultivation of individual style and personality (Figs 3.77, 3.78, 3.79, 3.80, 3.81 and 3.82).
Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated one of the core purposes of this volume: to use cross-cultural comparison as a way to highlight differences between El Mirador and The Glades. With regard to almost every genre of posting we have found marked contrasts between the postings of young people in the two field sites. So, rather than a global common culture of youth, there seems to be just as many differences between these regions in this age group as in any other. We are able to draw on quantitative evidence from our survey of thousands of images, as well as the many selected here to illustrate our qualitative sense of difference. The reason we have gone into such descriptive detail is to try clearly to establish the nature and extent of these differences.

This chapter is also intended to lay the groundwork for establishing themes in Trinidadian posting that become both clearer and more prominent with adulthood. Genres such as selfies and the focus on style and humour will continue to appear across the different age groups. The same is true of themes such as commenting upon gender, moralising and expressing both religious and nationalist sentiments. But while these themes continue, different age groups may express them through different genres. Moralising, for example, takes the form of ‘rel talk’ and indirects in younger years, but then migrates largely to memes in the postings of adults. Nationalism appears at first mainly in relation to sports, competition and achievement at school. Later on, in adult postings, it is increasingly expressed through vocational activities and overt images such as flags. Other themes discussed here in relation to ‘rel talk’ and indirects will later manifest themselves more fully as bacchanal, the defining character of Trinidadian society.6

The reasons why such acute differences between The Glades and El Mirador persist is because postings are expressive of much wider differences in cultural and social norms. We saw that people in El Mirador are enmeshed in a larger set of relationships from childhood, so more photos appeared of babies and toddlers with their extended family than in The Glades. Other differences in kinship structures are also apparent through these images, such as those of absent fathers in Trinidad. For Trinidadians the very concept of family implicates a much wider network than the domestic and nuclear family typical of The Glades. A sense of ancestry and family continuity is also more important, forming one part of a wider set of values for which we use the label ‘transcendence’ in Chapter 7 and which is most fully expressed through the festival of Christmas.
Over the course of this chapter we have seen how young people start to become socialised into gender roles and social norms. They emulate the poses and behaviours of adults and older siblings, for example the ‘gangsta’ V-shape fingers for young boys, and starting to pose as ‘hot’ or feminine for girls. Style and aesthetics around personal image are already shown to be important – not only through dress, consumption and hair, but also through the embellishment of images. In Chapter 5 we will consolidate this examination around structural categories of gender, class and ethnicity, showing how they intersect in complex ways.

A final characteristic of Trinidadian posting that reflects an important general consequence of social media is the emphasis upon the visual – something we shall see later on developed through the usage of memes, but which is prefigured here in textual genres such as the ‘indirect’. As the book progresses we shall see how this increasing use of visual communication is important not only for the anthropologist, who is now able directly to ‘see’ the way in which values are expressed, but also for the population of El Mirador. Here people exploit this new media to associate themselves with what will emerge as the core opposing values of parenthood: domesticity and the values of the family on the one hand and the public world of the street and sexuality, as epitomised by Carnival, on the other.