Visualising Facebook
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Published by University College London

Miller, Daniel and Jolynna Sinanan.
Visualising Facebook: A Comparative Perspective.
University College London, 2017.
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This chapter has a rather different intention than the others. So far we have written largely from the perspective of the anthropologist as analyst of social values at a level of abstraction which most people have no reason to consider. By contrast, this chapter presents the comments made by Trinidadians themselves. The reason was not because we think that our informants’ opinions represent a more direct or authentic truth. Rather it is to show that there is considerable variety in the ways in which people interpret the same image. Indeed the same individual may consider an image to have several possible meanings, and be in some doubt as to which one to favour. These informants generally regarded the question as to why someone posted any particular image as a puzzle to be contemplated in much the same way that we did. They assume that people constantly change their minds, posting an image one day and the next saying to themselves ‘What WAS I thinking?’ When we use the word ‘Trini’ it is in recognition that there is a constant discourse within Trinidad as to what is typically Trinidadian. We do not use it to homogenise actual Trinidadians, who represent an extremely varied population.

There is, however, another, crucially important point to this exercise which will gradually emerge during this chapter. Everything in this book depends upon the ideas of the typical. In as much as people do conform and do create typicality, we need to investigate the mechanisms and pressures that may account for this. Perhaps the single biggest pressure is other people’s responses to what we post. So this chapter explains the process of how cultural normativity is created and maintained, and that shows how the rest of the book is even possible.

We conducted this work in Trinidad, but not in The Glades, simply because Trinidadians enjoy openly discussing and criticising images while people in The Glades are much more circumspect and embarrassed.
by such a request. We carried out this exercise by showing images we had gathered from El Mirador to Trinidadians living in Port of Spain; they would not recognise the anonymised people concerned and so would feel free to comment based on the visual image alone. We showed 50 images to our 10 informants, but for reasons of space include only those that elicited the most extensive responses, and therefore best illustrate the points we want to make in this chapter.

The 50 postings we used were intended to reflect the range of people in El Mirador as described more fully in Sinanan’s own book within the ‘Why We Post’ series. The 10 people we showed these postings to consisted of six women and four men, most in their late teens or twenties, which is the dominant age group posting on Facebook in this site. They mainly came from a lower income area, but had better than average educational levels for people from that area. A factor that should be kept in mind is that because they all come from Port of Spain, the capital city, and knew that the postings were from some lower income region they would have regarded as ‘country’, the tone of these comments has something of the scorn of the town mouse looking down on the country mouse. No doubt if the exercise were reversed, the people of El Mirador would have been equally derogatory about the inauthentic, pretentious and ‘stush’ character of those postings. But what they have in common is a Trinidadian penchant and rich dialect of disparagement.

The first two posts we examined were helpful in gaining a sense of the importance of vocabulary for describing people (Figs 8.1 and 8.2). One of our informants called this individual ‘a wet man’, which could mean ‘a lot of girls, a lot of money, a lot of clothes, always in the latest brands, trends. So that seeing that you could show the girls: I’m a handsome guy, I could dress, I have a lil vest, I have a lil gold chain’. Another called him ‘Dudes man, yeah he look like he now coming up, Images of a young man hoping to look sexually appealing
kind of thing. He now probably getting a lil – facial hair… muscle and he want the girl to see, so prob have a few girls chatting him down. My sister would say “hot man” “wet man”. To a third, the image seems to say ‘yeah I posing, gallerying, this is me. Yeah that’s all he saying, this is me. Gangsta style, showing off his fedora, gold chain, just showing off to my friends’.

Another woman described him as a ‘Tusty guy’. She explained ‘well, the expression could be said like a dog who panting for water. So they use it for guys who running down women, like thirsty for women. So he saying there are so many “tusty” guys on Facebook. It’s embarrassing me.’ A fifth informant explained: ‘This looking like one of those blingers, players, who just tryna glam before the camera, show off the look… somebody hip, stylish, usually with a lot of gold blinging as we see here, gold teeth, gold chain like a rapper. Tryna emulate the vibe of a rapper or a person who just out there, who live large, you know do things to the extreme. Decadent lifestyle… This looking like a man who tryna hook up with some girl out there.’

Another described him as ‘swell-headed… a lot of people would put a picture like that, and you see them in Port of Spain the next day and is like a normal short pants, nothing’. Yet another responded by saying: ‘they looking delinquent, and I would probably assume he going be one of those, you know those schools where you would stereotype the students as being bad. How he have his hands on his face, that’s a kind of bad man or gangster kind of look. And then he also wearing the chain and the vest. So I don’t know if the reason he might post that is to fit in with his peers. Maybe he have that kind of culture with him.’ While this comment tries to narrow and pigeonhole the look, the next does the opposite: ‘That’s a typical Trini man, kinda “I real sexy boy!” kinda “look yuh know”, and the fedora and the gold chain, yea that’s what it is, typical, typical Trini man.’ Finally one girl responded: ‘Wow, I am speechless, I’m sorry. Well, why would somebody put that up? They too nasty. They so Trini that I have to laugh at them sometimes, but it’s really a slack… this one is really slack, but I find it so.’

Another term that could be used of this image is ‘metal’, as in “I could go in work right now and one of the co-workers would say “Boy I went and lime last night, bounce in d’ dance, real metal around my neck”.’ This obviously refers to the gold chain which one of our informants held as particularly significant ‘because gold is a hit thing right now in the country. Gold is a lot of money and as the trend is now, gold could allow you to get a lot of things. Gold could allow you to get a lot of girls, that have a lot of money, plus you might get a lot of clothes.
The main thing is really the gold that he have around his neck.’ [D: ‘You still use words like bling?’ I: ‘Nah bling, don’t really . . . ’]³

Three main points arise from these responses. The first is that most terms used are as much about making a judgement as a description, no doubt facilitated by the fact that these were not people they actually knew. Secondly, these informants are just as ready to engage with the question of typicality, based on the idea that there is a characteristic ‘Trini culture’, as any anthropologist. Thirdly, this is a place with an extraordinarily broad-ranging vocabulary. In the experience of both Miller and Sinanan, Trinidadians are typically extremely articulate and verbal compared to people in other places where we have lived. Skill in talk is highly valued, and although people here have far lower levels of education than The Glades, it is much harder to keep up with the sheer richness of expression in Trinidad, especially in the use of innuendo. Not that this is consistent. One person is happy to use the term ‘bling’, for instance, while the final informant avoids it.

Establishing morality

If description of these images is typically also judgemental, then it represents a system for establishing moral positions. We will explore this in three stages. Firstly, we consider how people establish their sense of morality and its boundaries. Secondly, we will look at how people ‘put other people down’. Thirdly, we will see how the combination of these two creates the conditions for establishing normativity. The word normative is central to anthropology. This whole book is actually about normativity, as are most books in anthropology. Our premise is that individuals will always try to establish what the people around them regard as appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. These may not be enforceable. We may decide to act in a way other people dislike or disdain, but the point is that we are aware how others will judge us. So the present chapter helps us to understand previous chapters as cultural generalisations. Because most people most of the time prefer to avoid such disdain, the result is that most postings conform to what is ‘approved’. In the next three posts, we see how the comments about images are used to make clear what the viewer sees as the boundaries that should determine what is or is not acceptable for a posting in Trinidad. The focus is on a genre where this policing of boundaries is particularly pronounced, that of sexualised images.

In the first, we see two girls posting a photo that shows them having a good time at a party (Fig. 8.3). They would probably have welcomed
the first comment ‘OH LORD I COMIN N STORMIN DAT DINNER’, likely a friend who is tempted to come there uninvited (‘stormin’) to join them. Our informants noted what is displayed – their dresses, the weave in their hair, the fact that they are hot and ‘wassy,’ have good bottoms and are having fun. The pose is of them ‘wining’ – the dance form associated with Carnival where it is very common for one female to wine on the arse of another, especially as far more women than men dance in Carnival.

In response some felt this is exactly what they should be doing, having fun. But others say: ‘It’s nasty, they look like whores, especially the one at the back.’ They are seen as promoting ‘slackness’. For others, the issue is one of context. This would be acceptable within Carnival, but outside of that ‘I not homophobic, but I know I don’t want no woman winning on me.’

Informants saw the fact that the woman had posted this image as a deliberate attempt to show off her ‘assets’: ‘Let’s parade to the world. Let’s parade my boobies to the world’ (Fig. 8.4). Another suggests ‘That one, to me she saying – boobies rule’. The photo is seen as reflecting the way Trini men focus mainly on ‘tits and arse’. ‘The person seems like they in love with her breast. Most likely, the husband who taking those photos and he’s proud of what seeing.’ ‘If she posted a picture of her full self that would be fine. I think she’s drawing attention to a certain area, and a lot of women they post these pictures and they would feed off of the comments.’

There is plenty here informants find to disparage. ‘That’s her bra underneath this? It’s a sun dress. Look, I see strap things there. Eww, that’s wrong.’ Or they comment on her figure. ‘Chunkalunks…you ever heard that word?’ [D: What does it mean?] I: ‘Is like a term that means kinda round, kinda thickish. Is like a discreet way of saying you’re fat, chunky, chubby. Also is a term of endearment.’] There is also considerable speculation on what she is drinking and how much she has already drunk.
The issue is more precise with the final example of a photo of a woman who has posed in her Carnival costume (Fig. 8.5). Usually this is seen as expected and appropriate. Given how much money people spend on their costumes, they would naturally want to post a picture of themselves looking good. This involves not only wearing the costume, but also the display of the body as fully inhabiting it. The local expression is that ‘I playing mehself’. This can be explained as: ‘Is like I not holdin back, no restrictions . . . play yuhself, break free, doh worry what anybody say, you just doing what you want, where you want, yuh know. You just doing thing without any kinda consideration. You ain’t offending anybody or whatever. Is like a reckless abandon . . . an just the way she have that . . . I seeing like I playing mehself here. I come to get on bad. I come to get on wassy.’ Similar lyrics are found in countless Carnival songs and this ‘freeing up,’ or going beyond the everyday, is precisely the point of Carnival.

So almost every element of this image is entirely acceptable. Almost – because one part of it is not accepted even within that Carnival context: ‘Her breasts basically out and sure she could see the dark area around the nipple is showing and normal people wouldn’t do that.’ Another informant observed: ‘I could almost imagine I think I’m seeing areola down in the corner there. That goes too far.’ This is what we mean by policing the boundaries – determining the precise point at which things are no longer acceptable.

**Putting people down**

There are many ways boundaries can be established, with praise as well as insults. But this was a context in which our informants had nothing to lose by having fun at the expense of those who posted these images. So the emphasis was on being extreme and showing off through the type and degree of the put down. The trait that was most subject to this was any suggestion of pretension. The term ‘sweet man’ is already ambiguous in Trini dialect (Fig. 8.6). It still means sweet in the sense of ‘caring’ or ‘attractive’, but it also has connotations of ‘sweet talk’ – the way men use...
language to get women to do things they really don’t want, or shouldn’t want, to do.

The informants assumed that no man would construct such an image for himself, but that the woman who made it had done him no favours since it made him into a ‘pimp with flowers, that is an automatic strike off from sweet man’. One suggested: ‘This person tryna diss him or something because this cannot be her man!’ Or even that this is in fact a man ‘that has a vendetta or something against him and tryna make him look bad or something’. Worse still, the man is seen as quite old, but the style of the posting is that of a young girl, so this particular man should not be fooling around with a girl of this age. Others describe him as ‘pathetic’, also as a ‘gyalis’ (a girlist), that is, a man who tries to get a girl anywhere.

There is a rich repertoire of implied claims: ‘a sweet man is like a heart breaker, I love to break hearts, I entitled to do it. Yeah a sweet man is the male jargon here. Is a good thing, is like, you know you – a king, a sweat man, you know all the moves to make, you know all the right things to say, you know how to win over the ladies. All the different ins and outs, the tricks of the trade. Just showing how hot he is. Thinking he could get a woman with gold chain around his neck and thing.’ But she concludes, ‘Those things don’t impress me though’.

At first glance this seems an innocuous enough post, but the resulting comments show how what might be termed its underlying semiotic richness can be mined by a critical observer to pretty much tear it to shreds (Fig. 8.7). ‘The shades, even though you can clearly tell it’s dark out, he’s got the shades on. The ultimate symbol of coolness, of youth and being cool. So he has the shades on and yuh know the haircut, so I think that’s it.’ Or ‘In fact not actually drinking – just put it to his mouth to take the picture’. Somewhat more brutal was the comment: ‘douche bag…he not even drinking. And first of all he’s drinking Carib Pilsner which is less calories – like – come on – who you trying to fool, that have less alcohol. Then the big shades in the night.’ Finally the fact that this is a selfie provided still more grounds for the assault. ‘I would say that is kinda sad’...
well maybe if the reason for him posting is to show that he is out doing something, but he himself took it. It’s kind of… what’s the word… kind of fake in a certain sense. Yeah, he’s showing himself off as if he’s out doing something – but then again he’s by himself.’ To summarise, the informants see a man trying to look cool by taking a selfie. But for them wearing shades at the wrong time, drinking a lower alcohol beer, or not even drinking it, and being on your own betrays another, rather less cool, side to this image.

Similar remarks are directed to the next image (Fig. 8.8). ‘Her facial expression. Her glasses needed to be off. I take my glasses off for my selfies. Because you don’t want glare. So the fact that she keeps her glasses on, she’s not a person that usually takes selfies.’ In a second case: ‘Well she looking like she pouting there. It looking like a pout…the glare on the eyes there…I can’t really tell what’s the expression, well…it looking like she tryna advertise that she have thick lips, seductive lips that kinda thing…come and get me kinda thing.’ [A third was asked by D: ‘But you think she looks good in that?’ I: ‘No, I hate that face’ D: ‘Because?’ I: ‘It’s fake.’]

In the last three cases criticism is justified because the posting is viewed as pretentious or fake. But even without such justifications, people find things to condemn.

Most people saw the next image as rather ‘sweet’, testimony to the loving relationship of a couple (Fig. 8.9). They speculated whether they were married or siblings or a couple dating. Others criticised the clothes as not really suited to what should have been a party-like celebration. Most of all, they criticised the cake. As one put it: ‘It could have been very last minute and they couldn’t have gotten a cake. So they rush to Hi-Lo or Pricesmart to get one. They could buy that cheesecake in either of the places.’

Similarly with this next image, which would seem to be merely a rather benign attempt to give thanks to some good teachers and to the school (Fig. 8.10). Several informants found it quite amusing that teachers would be congratulated with a card containing the grammatical error of an inappropriate apostrophe. Others speculated that if this
had been made by the teachers, they must be very ‘full of themselves’ to have made such a self-congratulatory posting.

Establishing normativity

If we now combine these two elements of establishing moral boundaries and putting people down, we can see how these become foundations for the larger project of establishing cultural normativity. The normative is by no means constrained to the arena of morality. Almost anything can be considered either appropriate or inappropriate.

This next posting would be entirely positive, and indeed common, were it from The Glades. But it is seen as entirely inappropriate for Trinidad (Fig. 8.11). In England pets are kept inside the house, but in Trinidad dogs are assumed to be always outdoors. Indeed this was seen as so strange that the issue was not used to condemn the owner so much as to infer that they couldn’t be Trinidadian. ‘Well yeah, that’s definitely not here. Well not definitely, but chances are it might, is possibility it’s not from Trinidad. If it is from Trinidad . . . it could be, but the common thing is put the dogs outside.’ Similarly another person noted: ‘Yeah, they not looking like they’re from Trinidad. I don’t think they’re from Trinidad. But is always what kind of dog you have, and at the same time I know that in Trinidad, not much people is have their dog inside.’

From this develops a further logic: that if the owner is Trinidadian, they are trying to assert class distinctions by taking up this more
international style. This seems reasonable on the basis that it is a very expensive breed of dog. ‘Well, let’s say in Westmoorings (a wealthy part of the capital) then. That’s a high class area and sometimes some of the people that live there have quality dogs like that.’ Or: ‘When I see someone who has an animal that lives in the inside that’s the stereotype that the person have money or middle class or probably white.’ Indeed one informant makes clear that this is how she would like herself to be seen: ‘Well it just normal, it just chilling on the couch. So if I could get a dog like that, I have no problem with a dog in the house.’ Another disagreed: ‘You know I kind of see animals as being dirty creatures. I guess it’s because of, well, I never really used to take proper care of our dogs – so the idea of the dog being inside and being on the chair . . . ‘ Finally another informant mimicked what they saw as an old-style rural curse: ‘What! Dog inside the house is ok? Get your tail outside and in the kennel. Lock you up and I will throw hot water on you and kill you later.’

Trinidadians are often fiercely egalitarian, with a rich culture of disdain for anyone who thinks they are better or superior. It is unlikely that most people would have come across the term focaccia, but would simply assume that it is pretentious cooking (Fig. 8.12).

The current term for describing pretentious behaviour is ‘stush’, with connotations a bit more derogatory than the English word ‘posh’. One informant commented: And some people could just be honest and say that looking like a fancy dish . . . yeah and somebody might be like “what really fancy about that?”’ Another says: ‘I don’t know if she’s trying to show what she cooked . . . making foh . . . focasi . . . foccacia’ – probably it’s something international, she’s trying to be international, that kind of thing. Stush to me, if you stush you really ignorant with it. Some people have, like you could have stush clothes, stush food. That would definitely describe you as stush.’ ‘What’s that you making there? Like people would put up a lot of things like “that looking real good gyurl” When in real, it’s not looking good.’ ‘Because look at that. Tomatoes there? I don’t really think it looking all that fancy. I think it looking like an omelette and they put tomatoes on top of it.’ The one informant who does recognise it responds positively: ‘She’s experimental and confident in cooking. Brave enough to make something different.’ More people, however, would just be confused as to what is going on.
Comparing across the nine sites of field work in the ‘Why We Post’ series, some show a tighter control over normativity than others. The clearest case of all would be the field site in North Chile. Much of Haynes’s book is concerned with how visual posts on Facebook show a pressure to post unpretentious, inclusive images that suppress differences in identity as well as in class. There, as noted in previous chapters within this book, the meme is a common instrument for establishing normativity.

As already noted, the normative can be bolstered by approval as well as disapproval. In Trinidad it is entirely acceptable to post a religious meme, while in The Glades some would see this as intrusive and an inappropriate presumption about other people’s values and beliefs (Fig. 8.13). Trini informants responded that ‘This picture just states the truth of what the scripture says’ or ‘You trying to spread the gospel as well. You really want people to understand your stance yes, and why there is a God’. Another reflected on the time it was posted: ‘Yes, is a way to reinforce and to rise above all the Carnival mentality…. especially now for people who are church-going people, who are Christian people, who are religious and don’t subscribe to the Carnival thing. They would more cleave at this thing at this time because we as a culture, we can get caught up in the Carnival thing.’ This comment clearly reflects the dualism between the values of transience and transcendence discussed in Chapter 7.

Similarly the next image is one that would be unlikely to be posted in The Glades, but that has a clear and appropriate purpose for Trinidadians (Fig. 8.14). Trinidad is a country where births can elicit
gossip over the likely paternity. However, this image reinforces a foundational principle of Trinidadian social relationships – the status of a man increases when a woman has his baby, while that of a woman increases when she has retained the affection of that baby’s father. Informants recognised this and approved.

‘I would be a little Trini right now and say – this is meh man, this is he child and this is meh child father.’ Another states: ‘yeah, this is my man, this is my child father, we having a baby together. She might go to the extent to say “all haters”, because she might know it must be have some women like him. And as I saying she might go to an extent to say “all the haters go ahead and hate.” [D: ‘So haters just mean like people who are jealous of me?’ I: ‘Yeah, jealous people that, as the slang they use, – fight you down, bad mind…. So she know that it have some people don’t want them to be together’.] Mostly, however, the comments are positive such as ‘nice pregnancy pic.’ or ‘I’m proud of my girl, I’m proud that I’m gonna be a father’, or ‘She looks very happy… he look kinda neutral…but that’s a man thing too…just being himself…as they would call it’. ‘OK, that’s definitely a proud couple and they expecting an…it have a baby in there…. a bun in the oven, yeah.’

How men succeed

So far the emphasis has been on understanding how critical responses help us to understand the mechanisms and pressures that create normative behaviour. But this book and the other 10 volumes are published under the title ‘Why We Post’, and in this last section we will show one rather different reason that explains why some people post what they post. This reason is simply that the right post can advance the interests of the person posting. To demonstrate this, we will use the example of posts that men use to seduce women.

Most women who responded to this post took it at face value (Fig. 8.15). They assumed this was the sentiment that the person posting believed in. For example: ‘A picture like this would say a lot of things. It would also say what type of person it is. It could be a Christian, as some Christians decide to really wait on God to send the right person for them. It could also be a non-Christian also because it
have non-Christians who also decide to really wait as you read there. So I think somebody just post it after a bad experience or that’s what they’re feeling or maybe they hear a song that speaks about that and they decide to post it.’

For this reason, woman also tended to assume that it was a woman that had posted this meme. ‘I think it’s most likely a woman posting this. Well, from my experience, women mostly share those kinds of sentiments. Men really wouldn’t share that. It could be directed to one particular person. Yes it could be, from my own experience, from my own use of Facebook. Yes, just posting it in terms of wanting to send a message to someone she loves or wants back. In terms of how we have begun to think, in terms of communicating, it’s sort of the verbalisation of your love for the individual in a public space. So while it’s a personal act, it has become a public thing. Yes, my friends would post things like this. I have posted things like this.’ Another woman stated: ‘Yeah, it is, I think it would be a woman posting. Yeah, I don’t know if men would actually take the time to reflect on things like these, might be a woman. For the person to see, and if she is single, maybe it might give her a sense of justification for being single.’ A third woman stated strongly: ‘That is a woman post! I feel the woman – no honestly, it’s kind of hard to see a guy post something so sentimental.’ A final example of a woman commenting is less certain as to the poster’s gender, but still assumes sincerity: ‘Man or woman could post something like this because relationship is something that…you know…it could be a lot of things. It could be to get something out or it could be to encourage some person because you know in daily life, everyone experience different things during the day and by posting a certain post it could impact someone’s life. It could be to one person, as I said they might have a bad experience, a break up, and they now come out of a relationship, and they just decide to post that to either get back at the person.’

Yet the evidence of our research was that men do routinely post memes of this kind, and the reason they do so was made brutally clear once we turned from the female to the male respondents. ‘Women would suck up things like this. They like this kind of romantic things.’ [D: ‘OK. But some men would post it just to play they are sensitive and that kind of thing?’ I: ‘Yeah to rope in girls.’ D: ‘And girls would kind of believe it?’ I: ‘Not kind of – they will.’ D: ‘They will?’ I: ‘Yeah.’ D: ‘So this kind of thing does work?’ I: ‘Yeah.’ Another man, as soon as the meme came up, responded: ‘OK – we post things like this on our pages for “likes”’. After hearing the different responses of the two genders, Danny then asked a woman whether, if a man had posted it, he would succeed in such a cynical aim. Her response was simply ‘It would be successful’.
The men seem clear that they use Facebook posting to take advantage of what they regard as women’s gullibility in allowing them to pretend to an empathy that is merely a strategy for getting to sleep with more women. In the next case, the man posting seems to be getting the best of both worlds: he has the potential to both look sensitive and post something he would see as very sexy (Fig. 8.16). This is exactly what male informants saw: ‘Yeah, well he’s trying to show well... he’s coming off in the way that every girl wants – a prince. I don’t want you just for sex. I want to be with you. But the bottom line is they want sex. So he just not going directly. He just going around in a circle.’ D: ‘OK, and most men would do that?’ I: ‘All men do this.’ Another male replied to Danny as follows: D: ‘You think a guy would post this?’ I: ‘Yeah.’ D: ‘You think he’s posting it because it’s what he really thinks or...?’ I: ‘Reverse psychology.’ D: ‘You think he’s using psychology. You think this would work out for him?’ I: ‘Yeah.’

By contrast, most women continued to take this as sincere. One suggested: ‘Yeah, that’s deep and it makes sense. It’s about being naked and this is what being naked is. It’s showing them yourself and the person is in a way venting. Maybe they’re hurt and they just letting you know it. Like opening up your soul to someone. That is very deep.’ Another said: ‘I don’t see men expressing these sentiments. I think a woman would be comfortable posting this because the nudity is not raw. It’s not savage. It’s not a woman with her breasts displayed, yuh know. So it’s done very subtle in terms of how it’s communicated. So you just see the outline of someone’s side and a thumb slipping into the under- wear. So it’s not overt, it’s not dirty, yeah.’ A third stated: ‘Its anti-sexual, I don’t think it have much, because they use the sex as an example – but the main thing they say is that being naked is like you surrender, you open, you show that, well come into me. You naked. So it could be a lot of things, like spiritual being naked, a lot of things.’ A fourth said, ‘I know a guy who might post this’. D: ‘For good reason or bad?’ I: ‘For... he’s the emotional type, so he would just post it for posting it.’ Finally, however, one woman did, on this occasion, see an alternative interpretation: ‘If it was a man posting, I think it’s not really his true feelings. Often you would find posts like this, like you would find fellas posting this, that girls would think they have a soft side and like them.’
By the stage of this final posting it might have seemed that there was no room left for ambiguity, given that it seems just to make explicit what these male informants were consistently stating. Yet even this posting elicited quite a variety of responses (Fig. 8.17). In this case, it was one of the men who assumed precisely because it was so open it must be a woman posting. ‘OK... yeah, is a woman put that, a woman, definitely a woman. It just telling you the rawnness of the male species... we just looking for action.’ D: ‘You think this is fairly true for Trini males?’ I: ‘In a general sense, yeah’. Women also saw this as a positive posting by a woman: ‘I guess that’s part of what would be empowering, these messages on Facebook that people put out as to, yuh know, yuh have a lot of those online yuh know, those empowerment messages where women share and re-post, and all of that. These things about being a strong woman, it’s like feminism and social media.’

Some women still followed the logic of their previous responses, but this time realising that it led to a rather different conclusion. ‘This one might be a male posting it, but a sensitive male. I would actually think that he wants to give the air of being sensitive and kind so that he can attract women. I think that’s the way it normally is. Yeah sometimes to show females, “I’m considerate and I’m kind and I’m loving”. Yuh know, when they’re actually the total opposite.’ As in the previous two cases, men could be a good deal more forthright about what was going on. D: ‘You think it’s put out for entertaining or like serious?’ I: ‘Nah I don’t think it’s serious. It’s just like for a laugh.’

We would not wish to preclude the possibility that there are sensitive men who post such memes for sincere reasons, but the male respondents in this exercise do precisely refute such a possibility. For them, such memes are simply part of the strategic arsenal that men store up for the sole purpose of sleeping with more women, pretty much exactly the sentiment of the final meme.
Conclusion

It may seem asymmetrical to have not conducted the same exercise in The Glades, but we found this would just not have been possible. There are contexts in which people in The Glades enjoy banter and putting other people down, such as at the pub or at school. But when asked to look at other people's postings they were generally cautious, reticent and mainly polite. In our ethnography at El Mirador, we had already seen people enjoying collective dissection of other peoples' Facebook profiles, so this seemed quite a natural thing to do. However, in The Glades it would have seemed forced and made people uncomfortable.

Yet in the preceding chapters, it is the English in The Glades who if anything seem more homogeneous and conformist, suggesting a still greater pressure to normativity. The reason is that people in England achieve the same effect using different means. Instead of this explicit talking, we have in fact already encountered the analogous behaviour in The Glades when we examined their use of humour online. The one place where the English seem quite unrestricted is in funny postings, indeed the word ‘fuck’ probably appears a good deal more often in The Glades postings than in El Mirador. In England one can get away with many more things as long as they are considered funny.

In both societies, people have differing expectations about how an individual should respond to such criticism. Trinidadians have their own pride in their ability to take negative comments as funny and not serious. One of the worst things a Trinidadian can do is to lose their temper and self-control, actions described as being ‘ignorant’. A true Trini always keeps things on the surface as humour and banter to show that they can ‘take it’. By contrast, central to individual sensibility in The Glades are self-deprecation and irony, both of which are rarely found in postings within El Mirador. So each place has its own normative ways of creating and responding to critical pressures – which explains why this exercise worked very well in Trinidad, but would have been inappropriate for The Glades.

It seemed worthwhile to avail ourselves of this opportunity within Trinidad simply because this chapter plays such an important role in explaining the content of others. The topic of this book is, after all, social media – it is the anticipated responses of other people to one’s postings which explains the patterns of posting that we have found, as well as the pressures and constraints that emerge as each society’s values often contrast with those of the other. These are the processes that help us to understand typicality and normativity in both field sites.