"Outcast Among Outcasts": Identity, Gender, and Leadership in a Mac Users Group
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Abstract: Studies about women and technology continue to lament the lack of women involved in the design process, a key area for leadership development in technologically based organizations (Liker, Hadda, & Karlin, 1999; Lorber, 1993; Stein, 2006; Turkle, 1997; Wajcman, 2000). In cases where marginal technologies and members (e.g., Macintosh and females) are present, how participating members discursively and materially construct leadership identities among a myriad of other possibilities (e.g., expert technology user or programmer, student, technological consultant) deserves attention. We used a grounded theory approach to analyze interviews, field observations, and online archival data. Findings indicate that members constructed competing and often contradictory Macintosh and gendered identities and identifications as well as tension-filled micropractices that both replicate and disrupt the gendered order.

Donna Haraway (2000) discussed how individuals’ productions of lived experiences through language shape collective social realities. Social realities include not only the ways in which technologies affect and are affected by the fabric of social culture, but also the ways in which specific groups, such as specialized users and creators of technologies, exist. Language naturalizes identities and social culture. Although Haraway directed attention to women’s work and use of language in technological contexts, her call also echoed women’s struggles to form and enact productive identities in multiple and intersecting communication contexts (Acker, 1990; Borghi & Sborgi, 2000; Lorber, 1993; Perry & Greber, 1990; Stein, 2002; Wajcman, 2000).

One such site of struggle is women’s leadership, particularly women’s involvement in, direction of, and meaning making in technology-based organizations (for leadership overviews, see Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Hickman, 1998). To date, research has focused on the tensions, difficulties, and opportunities that women have experienced while developing credibility and enacting leadership in the workplace, elected or appointed positions, and professional groups and organizations (e.g., Acker, 1990; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Bormann, Pratt, & Putnam, 1978; Bunyi & Andrews, 1985; Jamieson, 1995; Johnson, 1994; Jorgenson, 2002; Sullivan & Turner, 1996; Wood & Conrad, 1983), but relatively little research has examined these processes in less formally structured and in technology-focused contexts. Even less scholarship has studied women who are in the process of learning how to craft and be called upon to play different identities out of myriad leadership and membership possibilities (Kondo, 1990). As a major aspect of and process in leadership, gender must be studied concerning women’s roles in technological contexts. For it may be in less established contexts that some younger or less experienced women not only test and learn how to negotiate their leadership identities, but also enlarge or constrict their repertoire of identity possibilities in concert with other organizational members.

As such, we examine how some young women come to understand and navigate choices and contradictions that may surface in their leadership identities in a context that is traditionally instrumental (in role and organizational culture), alternative (in its structural location, history, and “progressive” interests), and inclusionary (in its recruitment, retention, and promotion of local members as well as historical corporate membership and appointment of leaders). In such a context, many women might expect the usual overt and covert biases against women in power to be lessened or absent (e.g., Haslett, Geis, & Carter, 1993; Lorber, 1993) and the power-sharing and nurturing styles characterizing many women’s leadership approaches to be celebrated (e.g., Fine & Buzzanell, 2000; Helgeson, 1990; Rosener, 1990). Specifically, we examine the case of an unfunded university campus group that draws members because of its mission to promote and support alternative (non-Microsoft based PC) technologies; a group that sustains membership because of members’ passion for this alternative technology and that eschews university funding to retain its integrity as an independent agent.

Literature Review

We begin by providing the context for our study, the technological milieu of Macintosh, then provide an overview of socially constructed membership identities and women’s leadership and technology. We conclude with our research question.

Macintosh: An Apple of an Alternative Flavor

When addressing Macintosh as a technology one must consider the ideology purported and sustained by its creators, culture, and users. It probably comes as no surprise that Macintosh often is viewed as more than just a computer. As an operating system (software) Macintosh was developed for Apple computers (hardware) in the late 1970 to mid 1980s. While studying at Penn State University, Jef Raskin developed the Graphical User Interface (GUI), moving the computing world from expert-only textual and binary computer interfaces to more user-friendly graphical displays. Raskin worked with Apple co-creators Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs and a small group of developers “in an effort to create a low-cost, easy-to-use computer” (Pang, 2000a, ¶ 1). In the wake of IBM’s super computer (Big Blue), which could only be used by computer experts, Apple sought to develop the first-ever personal computer (Stein, 2002; Wozniak, 2005) and Raskin’s Macintosh software program became the means to help non-experts use...
computer technology. Thus, in the words of Raskin (1979), "Macintosh is a communications device" (¶ 2).

Apple's focus on personal, more grassroots organization, Mac computers gained a following, coined by Steven Howard (1988) and popularized by Kahney (2004) as the "cult of Mac." When considering its groundbreaking communication structure (through the use of graphics rather than text-based computer language), Macintosh was "responsible for sparking new movements in computing" (Pang, 2000b, ¶ 1). In addition to the individual user focus, Apple promoted an ideology that "encourages innovation and supports creative thinking" (Raskin, 1981, ¶ 2). Such technological and human resources creativity was highlighted in the *In Search of Excellence* (Peters, 1983) video spotlight on Apple. As a product Apple focuses not only on creating efficient systems, but also on nurturing the kind of talent that would produce meaningful aesthetics to enhance the user-friendliness of that system.

Apple promoted products by creating sign and symbolic identification with its users (Stein, 2002). Apple not only used aesthetically pleasing programs and hardware, but it also promoted itself as a rebellious, free-spirited underdog in the computing world (Pang, 2000c; Stein, 2002). Although Apple developed its image through rhetoric of freedom and revolution, its ads were "used to constitute consumers, not rebels" (Stein, 2002, p. 169). There was a sense of showmanship and secrecy involved in product unveilings that only enhanced Apple's mystique (Wingfield, 2006). Apple earned itself many dedicated supporters and a buzz of interest about what might be the next technologies to be unveiled—qualities that have allowed it to survive over the last few decades and to attract the original as well as new younger users. A member of the University of California, Berkley Macintosh User Group (BMUG, the first university Mac users group) Louise Kohl (1988) noted, "perhaps the most important [criterion] for the Mac's longevity [was] the near fanatic partisanship of those early users" (¶ 6). Mac was known for the loyalty of its users.

Although criticism existed concerning Apple's deployment of its ideals (Kahney, 2004, 2006; Stein, 2002), Macintosh User Groups continued to sprout up all over the country. The first user group BMUG, which began in 1984 at the University of California, Berkley, seemed to echo the Homebrew Computer Club, a group that was started by Lee Felsenstein and included such members as Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. This first group was complete with a computer Bulletin Board System to help members network information. BMUG member Bernard Aboba (1998) claimed, "the purpose of a User Group is to give away information" (¶ 11).

Specifically, BMUG perpetuated a consistent philosophy, regularly exchanged software programs, offered insider information concerning Apple, and aided new Macintosh users (Seidel, 1984). In an interview with Macintosh historian Alex Soojung-Kim Pang (2000d) founding member Chris Espinoza stated the Mac users groups "were there to teach other people about computers, which was a great social purpose, and it was a great place to share knowledge and get your questions answered" (¶ 39). Although BMUG did draw many different types of people to its organization, its primary group members were programmers (Jones, 1988). As a result many of the founding members, such as Reese Jones, Raines Cohen, and Tom Chavez, all built on Apple software and hardware all formed other networking companies, such as Farallon and Netopia, as well as (Pang, 2000e).

**Technological and Gendered Identities Constructions**

Apple has historically and currently been a mix of entrepreneurial thinking, talent development, grassroots organizing, and aesthetics, blending information-sharing, and efficiency abilities within user-friendly hardware and software packaging (Aboba, 1998; Rushkoff, 1997; Stein, 2002). In these respects, Mac may appeal to both women and men's sense of complex gendered and other identity(ies) constructions as individuals look for and use technologies that express and support their changing interests, lifestyles, and values. Theorists argued that, in the technological age, media expose people to many different lifestyles, from which they construct self-identities that are coherent, fragmented, and locale-specific (Gergen, 1991; Kuhn, 2006; Turkle, 1995). As a "people's source of meaning and experience" (Castells, 1997, p. 6), identity acts as a means to interpret the outside world and to understand cultural changes. It is a subjective response to different contexts in order to form a coherent understanding of social relationships and one's participation in these relationships. Identity negotiation, then, becomes "a process whereby one attempts to maintain, retain or retrieve custody and authority over defining the self despite knowing that one cannot control how one's self is socially understood" (Jackson, 2002, p. 245). In cases where individuals identify strongly with particular groups and these groups' values and objectives, such as Mac users' identifications with the products and Apple or Macintosh ideologies, the pull toward particular identity constructions is strong.

In the pull toward particular manifestations of oneself, identity has contextual value (Kuhn, 2006; Minh Ha, 1984). The self is constantly shifting and adapting to the new contexts one encounters that may contribute to an individual's struggle to form a consistent self-conception. At times and places, people may express an affinity to a particular group or cause. At other times and places, individuals' commitments may be placed elsewhere. The process by which these identities are formed, enacted, resisted, performed, and altered may be similar to bricolage, or individuals' abilities to "think through the problems using the materials at hand," to adapt to particular contexts (Turkle, 1995, p. 51). In these ways, identity construction, negotiation, and enactments are dynamic, contextually-bound processes formed through language and social interaction in both stabilizing and seemingly contradictory ways (Ashcraft & Mummy, 2004;

As identities are formed and labeled by the self and others, individuals sort through “a multiplicity of self-investments” (Gergen, 1991, 74)–they invest themselves into teaching, mothering, brokering, mentoring, partnering, working, learning, and the many other everyday roles and other possibilities. Individuals attempt to enact fluid identities that can respond to different contexts. However, identities and, in particular, identity labels, may hold people to certain expectations and standards. Individuals may struggle to adapt to and feel torn by static identity labels (Stone, 1996). For instance, sex, gender, occupational, and other socially (re)enforced patterns may produce identities, behaviors, and role-related behaviors not conducive to individuals’ best interests or desired participation in organizational processes (see Bem, 1993; Lorber, 1993). In these cases, such linkages and their associated gendered identity constructions may be perceived as detrimental, but may continue through inabilities to counteract expected gender performances (Bem, 1993; Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1993).

Women’s Identities as Leaders

When considering leadership identities, one must recognize how leaders and leadership have been articulated in research and in popular imagination. Research on women in leadership traditionally has focused on the setting, style or behavior patterns, and language use (see Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Past leadership studies noted that women struggle for and in leadership positions and processes in university (Bormann et al., 1978; Bunyi & Andrews, 1985; Johnson, 1994) as well as workplace settings (Acker, 1990; Aldoory & Toth, 2004). Females who asserted themselves as leaders in experimental groups exerted great effort to attain credibility with their male peers. For instance, women used exceptional amounts of “evidence” to enhance their credibility as leaders (Bunyi & Andrews, 1985). In zero-sum college groups, women leaders faced reactions of withdrawal, lower individual male productivity, sexual inferiority, fantasizing, and/or sexual-focused subversion (sexual harassment) from male group members (Bormann et al., 1978). In response to these male group members’ reactions, women leaders have tried to respond with humor or deflecting and rerouting comments, such as references to male members’ immaturity. Women were expected to neutralize their power by smiling and laughing more often than men, even in authority contexts (Johnson, 1994). Although women may be able to use similar verbal communication patterns and evidence as men (Johnson, 1994), women still have been expected to exhibit more pro-social nonverbal behaviors than men in the same roles.

Research indicates that women struggle as leaders due to their leadership styles and gendered expectations. For instance, studies on women who have broken the glass ceiling through organizational hierarchy ascension described how they moved up within their organizations and industries by networking, having a sponsor or champion, and navigating the niceness-assertiveness dynamics that many women face in maintaining their femininity and professionalism (e.g., Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Women in technology-based work settings and careers discursively position themselves as being in a gender-neutral environment where they may voice concerns about work-family issues, but deny the gendered (masculine) aspects of their technologically-based organizational cultures (Jorgenson, 2002).

Organizational structures and language also hinder women’s emergence into leadership positions. Acker (1990) argued that the “masculine ethic” prominent in many organizations was based in rationality and reason with organizational job descriptions and evaluations focused on “levels of skill, complexity, and responsibility” (p. 147) such that women were limited in interactions, expectations, and organizational participation. Gender stereotypes, or expectations, seemed to guide what women did and were supposed to do. When women broke normative gender expectations, others deemed such behaviors as negative (as gender and leadership research would suggest; for overviews, see Catalyst, 2005; Eagly & Johanssen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995), derailing women leaders through negative identity labels and lost leadership credibility.

Women in Technological Settings

Besides issues of women and leadership that describe the tensions, contradictions, and stereotypical expectations with which many women cope, other contextual aspects, such as the technological basis of their environments, also influence women’s positions and leadership. Early scholars foresaw negative impacts that technology might have on the women’s organizational participation (Borghi & Sborgi, 2000; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Lorber, 1993). In these cases, the values of technology and society became incorporated into institutional structures and vice versa. As Perry and Gerber (1990) argued, “If science reflects at least some of a society’s values, then technology developed from it must also embody these values” (p. 76). These scholars anticipated values that reinforced an instrumental, hierarchical approach focused on controlling and exploiting female service labor. They felt that, when using computers, gendered work would not change: “women’s work becomes more fragmented and isolated, output is tightly monitored and the pace and stress of the work is increased” (Perry & Gerber, 1990, p. 78). Through technology, men have had an advantage as the programmers, marketers, and creators of technological products, whereas women have been those who simply use, rather than design, the technologies (Lorber, 1993; Stein, 2006; Wysocki, 2004). In these views, technology
simply reinforced many women's marginalization by men and "masculine" ways of doing work.

After the introduction of the Internet, however, more positive scholarly feminist perspectives arose concerning women and computer technology (Haraway, 2000; Liker et al., 1999; Turkle, 1997; Wajcman, 2000). Fighting for the role of technology in women's lives, Wajcman (2000) noted, "there has been much criticism of the all-too-common tendency to treat women as the passive victims of technology" (p. 450). Female computer users were and are shaping technology in society. Although computerized technology began as a limiting activity and the power to decide how technology is used still resides at top corporate levels (Liker et al., 1999), technologies associated with networking potentials offer alternatives that seem conducive to women's productive identity(ies) constructions as well as to decentralizing organizational control. Women use online support groups for social support and possible empowerment (e.g., Edley, 2004; Nakamura, 2006; Turkle, 1997). As women's use of the computer and online groups continues to grow (Pew Internet Studies, 2005), they may continue to co-opt technology to serve their interests. However, it is still unclear how women can enhance their credibility, leadership, and interests in technology-focused circles.

Summary and Research Question

As Haraway (2000) argued, researchers need to understand not only how women use and lead technology-focused groups, but also the limitations that these women face before society can achieve greater gender equality. In broaching these points, it becomes important to learn more about how women, particularly young women, learn how to navigate the myriad of identity possibilities and deal with leadership issues in contexts that seem to be both enabling and constraining in their pursuits. In a context, such as Mac user groups, for which individuals pride themselves for their strong identification with technology and with innovativeness, aesthetics and functionality, and idealism and business savvy, women might find a more conducive setting for their development of leadership capacities. While these possibilities exist, there is very little research about Mac user groups themselves to indicate how gender, leadership, identity, and identifications might play out: "no one has made a systematic study of [Mac] user groups" (Pang, 2000e, ¶ 5). Bringing these threads together, then, our research question is: RQ1: How do women socially construct their leadership identity(ies) in a technology-focused group?

Method

Participants and Context

Three primary types data collection techniques were used that resulted in inclusion of different research participants over the course of year and a half. First, four elected board members, or top officers out of a total of six leaders (President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and two Special Interest Group Leaders), of this student organization were interviewed. Although leaders can be re-elected to specific roles, all of the leaders (except the Vice President) were serving their first terms in their board member role. The other two said that they were too busy at the time for a formal interview, but participated in informal conversations and observations. Of these four, two were female and two were male. One was a new member, but the others had been members (e.g., participated in group meetings and/or in online forum) for one to four years. All were undergraduates at a large Midwest public university majoring in Communication, Computer Graphic Technology, Journalism, and Computer Programming. All but one used only Macs in their schoolwork and personal correspondence and all were the most active members of the student organization.

Second, interviews were supplemented by 12 hours of initial field observations (i.e., group meetings) that yielded 55 pages of single-spaced field notes. These field observations focused on interactions among all members at group business meetings, meetings for recruiting new members, and skill enhancement sessions. The total number of people who could be observed at these times ranged from 15 to 70 and field observations typically focused on 15 participants per observation. The numbers fluctuated because this group operated outside of the university's funded extracurricular activities system and had only been in operation for four years. The Macintosh group existed in a Microsoft- and pc-intensive and officially supported environment. As a result, there is a small but dedicated group of members and other university and local community members who engaged with the group at various times during the academic year and in different ways. These initial informal observations were supplemented by informal observations and conversations with members over the next seven months.

Third, documents also were gathered about the history and current workings in this group. We analyzed three personal blogs from 2005-2006 and the group's website, including the discussion forum, from the 2004-2006. Three different past and current leaders of the group, 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 presidents and the Social Special Interest Group (SIG) leader, constructed these personal blogs entries. We also examined relevant pages from the organization's online forum from this year and the same number of pages from last year. These pages were chosen as a result of their relevance to the research question. Although not all of the members physically come to bimonthly meetings (typically one may see around 30-40 members), 41 different individuals posted on the forum during 2005. The 2005 registered user list was unavailable, however, the forum from 2004 contained around 207 registered users, meaning that more users seemed to be registered than who have revealed themselves through posting. "Lurkers," or online presences did not post, who may have followed the forum discussions, but did not make themselves known through
registering. On the 2005 forum there were about eight “strong” posters (i.e., individuals who posted more than twenty times over a three month period and who were group officers, informal leaders, and active past members), around five to 10 mid-level posters, and large group of individuals who posted only once during the time of this study. During study clarification, participants were notified that pseudonyms would be used in lieu of their names to protect their identities.

Procedures

Over the course of 10 months, we conducted four initial field observations (the group’s callout, two official meetings, and a SIG, or Special Interest Group, meeting) and four semi-structured interviews (two officers and two SIG leaders) that then were supplemented by another seven months of informal conversations, observations, and document gathering and analysis. The organization’s website, last year’s forum, current forum, the president’s blog, and the Social SIG leader’s blog also were analyzed. What has not been mentioned was that both authors are current and past Macintosh users and that both authors were participants in campus technological groups. The first author initially connected with this campus group (as a member) because of her use of new Macintosh and Apple technologies during 2004. The second author worked with engineering design teams that used varied platforms and operating systems.

The first author began this research project by attending the callout and first meeting. These two meetings, like all of the group’s meetings, are open to the public and are advertised via campus flyers and on their website and listserv. Both meetings consisted of 2.5 hour presentations and approximately 45 minutes of social time before and after the meetings. As she gained entrée into the group, she solicited volunteers from the most prominent officers and leaders for interviews that focused around core areas in a semi-structured format. Primary questions were: How long have you worked with Mac computers?; How long have you been a part of this group?; What are some of the roles females play in this group?; and How would you describe how members and officers interact with the president? (see Appendix 1).

Interviews were recorded using Garageband and notes were taken using Voodoo, both Macintosh-compatible programs, and observations and document gathering and analysis continued as interviews took place. The use of these programs not only facilitated data gathering and analysis but also proved important for the first author’s credibility with this particular group. Voodoo Pad is a notetaking program that works like a wiki in that the users can create hyperlinks (see http://flyingmeat.com/voodoopad/). Garageband is an audio software program made for Mac computer platforms (see http://www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/).

As data gathering took place, we used the constant comparative technique of a grounded theory approach to analyze the data (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). We started reading data separately and together, meeting face-to-face and via phone and computer technologies to discuss impressions, to write memos, and to derive categories in an iterative fashion about the themes that occurred within and across the different data forms. In order to preserve the voices of the members, we offered their perspectives overlaid with our interpretations. We repeatedly returned to the data for evidence of support as themes about identity construction and issues of gender, leadership, and technology began to emerge. These categories guided our interest within the discussion board and blog postings. We then searched the 2 years of archival discussion boards and read the blogs for content related to gender, leadership, and technology. Through memoing and discussion we adapted our original themes to smaller sub categories of negotiated, shifting, and gendered identities and (b) dialectic tensions in gendered images and micropractices. We discussed and rated the significance (pervasiveness and importance) the categories that resonated within the interviews and within our field notes. In particular, we sought out information related to women and their experiences from others in technology-focused contexts.

Results and Interpretations

In examining individuals’ gendered identity(ies) constructions in a technology-focused (Macintosh) group, we located two interconnected themes: (a) negotiated and shifting Macintosh and gendered identities and (b) dialectic tensions in gendered images and micropractices.

Negotiated and Shifting Macintosh and Gendered Identities

Identity is composed of societal identity labels, emergent and locale-specific understandings of self and other, and the identifications or attachments that individuals form as a basis of their identity constructions. In our study, group members identified strongly with the Macintosh youth and entrepreneurial culture and with the technology itself. Like other technology groups (Faulkner, 2000), the predominantly male members focused on new uses of and programming for the Macintosh as well as male user identity expectations, such as embodying leadership roles and using technology proficiently and efficiently. With the election of a female president, however, the technological identification and Macldentity incorporated the leader with a more artistic and relationship-focused presence. At this time, a variety of different processes emerged, according to members. Dialectical tensions and interplays of seemingly contradictory and oppositional dynamics emerged in members’ talk, perceptions, and reported interactions (for an overview of dialectical research and theories, see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). These tensions included relational dialectics, such as autonomy-connectedness, but also interactional dialectics, such as acceptance-nonacceptance, inclusion-exclusion, and ordered-
emergent activities (see Kramer, 2004). As a result, these dialectical processes seemed to form a backdrop to the complex identity constructions and identifications that members' perceived and enacted, particularly (a) Macldentity and identifications, and (b) shifting (gendered) identities.

**Macldentity and identifications.** Melissa Jennings, an outgoing and energetic student, noted that Macintosh was warm and friendly and, as a result, compelled or pulled members into commitment: "Apple is a way of life for these people. ... once you are in, you can't explain it to those who are out." Melissa described the group as "student driven," inviting, collaborative and passionate "overachievers." Although it started at the university, the group has remained separate from the university by "fly[ing] under the radar" (or not being aware of by) the student group business office on campus. As a result Melissa labeled the group as "loosely university sanctioned." She admitted, "very few people know about the group," but those who do "take it very seriously."

This love of and dedication to the Mac separated people into in-group and out-group members. Melissa shared a story about when she came to a Mac meeting with a tablet Microsoft based PC (a non-Apple product) that she borrowed from her department. During the group meeting, a member approached her and asked her to leave. Melissa told the individual to ask the current president if he thought she should leave the meeting. The president, who happened to be her boyfriend and knew of her long-term commitment to Mac, noted that she should be allowed to stay. The person then left her alone, but this incident did not appear atypical. During the meetings the use and display of Mac appeared essential to group identity formation and members' visible commitment to Mac values. During member meetings that we attended, field notes showed that all participants with computers (typically more than half of present in the meetings) used Apple computers.

In contrast to other groups on campus that people might join to develop their career portfolio, Melissa argued, "people do it [join] because they really love it." People enjoy going to the meetings in that "meetings aren't meetings, they're like a social gathering." Melissa noted that even though "no one says that you have to be there," many members schedule their days around this association's meetings. Melissa identified herself as a part of a caring social group, referring to the group as "my social network." Melissa's identification with the Mac group focused on the group's caring environment. Melissa noted that she was welcomed, incorporated into the group, and felt comfortable with the group because of their shared Mac and social interests. Although she described the group as exceptionally bright, Melissa argued, "we don't parade our talents," indicating further that nothing was more important than the Mac and all else revolved around the shared love and passion for Mac. Other necessary, but not sufficient, qualities for inclusion into the group were love of learning, integration of individual interests, and freedom to do what members want to do, such as use multiple technologies to tune in and out of meetings. Melissa noted, "everyone in that room feels equal" as that "no one is fighting for the power."

A few members stated during interviews that for the last few years the group has been a small, tight-knit organization composed of and led primarily by men with interests in computer programming. The group's 2005/2006 secretary, Jake Karn, was one of many members who seemed to fit this Mac ideology. In an interview Jake noted that he has used Mac "since I knew how to use a computer" and recalled that he "kinda wiped my mom's hard drive when I was like eight [laughs]." Jake described the members of the group as "a lot nerdier than your average person, I mean, we're all computer nerds, we'll admit it, but I think it's a little bit less than you might find in computer science in general because the creative facets that the Mac platform offers." During our field observations, we noted that members seemed to listen intently and ask many questions of the speakers. A few members even continued their discussions long after official meetings ended.

Beyond strong Mac identification and Macldentity formations, the group purported its desire to help new and current Mac users (as did the original Berkley Mac User Group). On the group's website, they claimed that they were "the #1 source for all your apple needs at [university]!" They sought to help those "fragmented" Mac users on campus. On the 2005-2006 website, last year's president (and technology major) Robert indicated, "We hope to address both [university] specific problems and Apple computing problems as well, but with a definite focus on helping . . . students with . . . [computer] problems."

**Shifting (Gendered) Identities.** Within the past academic year, the group experienced an ideological shift from a technology majored, typically male enclave and instrumental enterprise to one that has revealed more complicated identity constructions and identifications. In the 2005-2006 academic year, they voted in their first-ever woman president, Betsy Vale. Betsy was a transfer student who taught herself graphic design using Adobe programs to develop her artwork and was studying visual rhetoric. Betsy said that her love of technology brought her to the group—not a surprising statement given that the Mac identifications and Macldentity seemed to be the core process whereby members were drawn to and retained membership in the group. However, Betty's identifications with this particular campus group were not without tensions:

I don't know what attracted me to the group because really I was kind of bothered by the way these guys acted because they don't take it seriously and yet there was something that connected them that I felt made sense . . . so I just kept coming back.

Betsy felt connected and different, serious about the organization and disconcerted by others' perceived lack
of seriousness. Her identification with the group could be phrased, on one hand, as contradictory, conflicting, and inconsistent or, on the other hand, as evolving as she was learning how she wanted to situate herself within the group. Moreover, people often display their identification through attire, demeanor, communication style, accessories, and other means. In Betsy’s case, she was visibly different in terms of the clothing and artifacts that she chose to display—identity displays that might be perceived as more consistent with her gendered than her technology-group identities. Specifically, Betsy’s typical communication style was excited, animated, and fast paced. Since only 12% of members were women, all officers (except Betsy) were men, and engineering or technology majors, Betsy’s highly decorated and sexualized appearance (long hair, low-cut blouses, make-up, and short skirts) and female sex seemed drastically different from the computer equipment and an all male executive board surroundings. She was, by her own admission, “girly.” Yet, she believed that she would have support for her leadership of the group because, when she originally intended to run for “something like secretary” in the 2005 election, both the current treasurer, Jason, and vice president, Chris, encouraged her to run for president.

As president, Betsy designed an agenda that sought to capitalize on the contradictions that she already perceived in the group and its relationships to the larger campus and corporate communities. Betsy indicated that she wanted to increase the number of club members and offer assistance to new members—identity displays that might be anticipated the degree to which her difference in style, appearance, and motivations would become problematic for group members—even those supportive of her presidency and of her as a person.

Tensions in Gendered Images and Micropractices

In attempting to combine instrumental and relational concerns and desired outcomes in this group, some members, particularly the leader, may have tended more toward one pole rather than a mixture of, or reframing of both poles in gendered dialectic tensions, paradoxes, and double binds in women’s leadership (see Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Fine & Buzzanell, 2000; Jamieson, 1995; Sullivan & Turner, 1996). As a socialized production, identity can display the “contradictions” in a modernist conception of self. The handling of gendered contradictions are difficult for even more seasoned female leaders (e.g., Sullivan & Turner, 1996). Women leaders are expected to engage in a complex and shifting mixture of identities that invoke their statuses as women (seen as primarily relational) and as leaders (seen as primarily instrumental) separately in some cases and simultaneously at others. The difficulty is knowing how and when to shift toward one or the other pole, reframe, or transcend the female-leadership dynamics (for strategies in managing oppositions, see Baxter, 1988; Jamieson, 1995; Sullivan & Turner, 1996).

These campus group members seemed to work at extremes in their efforts to manage these issues. Member images and identities became discursive sites in which language and micropractices differentiated among group members along gendered lines in a variety of ways such as (a) appearance, (b) activities, such as baking, (c) linguistic choices, such as the use of one-liners, (d) gendered hierarchy of expertise, and (e) supportive and harassing communication.

Appearance. As president, Betsy confessed her desire to “normalize” the computer user image from a “pale, unstylish, awkward computer nerd” to one embodying a much savvier image and broader (societal) appeal. During her interview, Betsy revealed, “I really wish that some of them would bother to shower more before they showed up at meetings.” Robert also voiced a similar concern with computer group members whom, in part, he characterized as “unix nerds and [who] haven’t bathed in weeks.” Other interviewees commented on members’ physical appearance and lack of cleanliness in ways that indicated that physical presence that proclaimed a lack of concern about simple appearance (and, perhaps, more of a concern...
with instrumental concerns, such as tasks and technologies) was normative.

However, female members’ talk took the issue of appearance a step farther. Their talk indicated that the issue was not simply cleanliness and neatness. Instead, the female members also commented about and promoted notions about aesthetics, and played up physical differences from the men and from each other. When describing the women of this group, Melissa noted, “of all of us I’m the girly one,” clarifying that she was the one who was most into makeup and the more social aspects. Appearance not only marked women as different from men and each other, but also marked their emerging gendered identity in this particular group. The researchers noted that Betsy’s physical appearance changed over the course of this research project. Betsy’s dress varied from a professional-looking pantsuit at her presentation in the spring of 2005 to a tight blouse and short black skirt at the group’s callout to more conservative (less physically revealing), pants or jeans and organizational t-shirt outfits in the spring of 2006. Betsy noted that she initially dressed up for meetings to show her dedication and help the members feel important:

I definitely dress up for meetings...in a very feminine way... I think that you should show your members that you care enough about them and you care enough about the group to bother to shower, to look presentable, to wear something nice to the meeting, to come prepared, basically...To me it’s just another thing that I think I should do.

Betsy perceived her own appearance as having symbolic value. She considered her appearance and behaviors as a means of developing and maintaining mutual respect and caring among group members.

Activities. Beyond dressing up, Betsy explicitly discussed baking for their meetings as another means to earn respect. Betsy argued that she wanted “them to see that she cares enough about them that I’m going to go out of my way to make something for them ... I want them to see that their officers care.” However, at mid-semester Betsy stopped baking for the group; instead Betsy offered pizza (sponsored by the Mac technology representative) and fresh Krispy Kreme™ donuts. Her remarks indicated that she changed her behaviors to incorporate greater efficiency and time management into her caring behaviors. Supportive of this interpretation was Betsy’s rationale for this change when she noted that donuts seemed to go over well and were easy to buy. However, the purchase and provision of food still are typically considered a women’s domain. While members might be appreciative of the gesture, it also signaled difference—especially in a context when such actions had not occurred previously.

Linguistic Choices. Linguistic choices that were perceived and enacted as gendered were the uses of “one-liners.” One-liners offered members a way to depreciate themselves or the situation to earn respect from the group. These one-liners often signaled both a disregard for societal conventions in presentations and a means of signaling in-group status.

During presentations, many male speakers and audience members used one-liners to joke about university technological support and financial gains of Mac software production. When some technical difficulties with the classroom LCD projector occurred, the Mac on-campus technician commented, “you’re going to blame that on [technical campus organization], aren’t you?” In another meeting when Betsy asked that the Mac on-campus technician would give a campus update he stated, “What lies can I make up tonight?” jokingly and then stated that he had nothing to report. As a final example, during the first member meeting Robert walked the group through his presentation demos. As he worked through each program and faltered, he typed self-depreciating comments such as “I suck at highlighting” and “I cannot type” on the projected computer screen during his presentation.

Women also were involved in this type of humor, but to a very limited extent. During a discussion about an upcoming speaker Robert asked for the speaker’s credentials and a member named Jade chimed in with a sexual innuendo. Although this behavior (one liners) was typical for her as an individual (as seen in meetings and as asserted in member interviews), it was unusual for the women of this group.

As a whole, the humor seemed to reaffirm members’ lack of regard for non-members, their prioritization of technological expertise displays over the niceties of conventional grammar and presentational style, and their desire to simplify talk to the necessities without elaboration and relational aspects. These patterns fit within “masculine” communication styles that are associated with efficiency, report rather than relational speaking, instrumental orientation, and simplicity in design and execution (Dannels, 2002; Darling & Dannels, 2003; Wood, 2007).

Gendered Hierarchy of Expertise. An ideology of hierarchical computer expertise also seemed to contribute to behaviors that fell along gendered lines. Women and men in the group described females’ interests in Mac as focused on creative and/or social abilities. When making her decision to buy a Mac, Betsy noted that she did not know that most of the computer market used Microsoft-based PCs. Betsy liked the aesthetics and accessibility of the Mac:

I always associate the Mac as being a very creative platform and I expect more liberal arts people to show up. And it’s actually a bunch of programming geeks which [smiles] maybe should be expected given the type of school we are at but I guess that I expected them to be more interested in the more creative aspects.
Men also described female group members as interested in the creative aspects. Robert said that the women were “the more artsy and...although I don’t know what you would classify social SIG leader [his girlfriend] as...arty, blogger-types...there are no hard-core programmer, cocoa addicts in there.” Robert’s quote refers to cocoa, a design language/program that is focused on image-based programs for Mac to make them more user friendly (see http://developer.apple.com/cocoa). The distinction Robert made between men and women seemed similar to the distinction between hard/soft sciences and programmer/technology user bifurcations. Jake cooerated that men are directed “towards the programming or technical aspects and they feel that it’s more important” than creative ones. Although the creative, multimedia aspects of Mac, typically used by women in the group, were seen as less important, women who illustrated their programming expertise and abilities gained respect in the group, but may struggle for organizational support to due to the group subordinate perception of his interest area. Jake explained,

I’d definitely say that Jade has the most respect, I’d say that she has as much respect as any guy...after that I’d say that all the women have less respect than the guys who will express their opinions more loudly, I guess, or they won’t listen to the girls’ opinions ... Generally the guys in the group are more oriented toward networking and that aspect of computing so working at (campus office)...so their conversations will be geared more toward which kind of blocks the women out ...women are geared more toward the creative aspects of the platform with the exception of Jade, which is why she gets a lot more respect.

The gendered expertise hierarchy subjugated some men as well. Jake said,

honestly, I feel like I am kinda pushed off to the side...because a lot of people in the group have very specific areas ...they are experts on, I mean, Betsy is excellent at Adobe and everything having to do with artistic stuff, everyone has their different areas, and I just kind of dabble in a lot of different things, but I don’t really have one thing that I know a lot about .....I wouldn’t say that my input doesn’t matter, but I definitely feel like a lot of members who are not officers don’t view me as having an authority at all ... I can quote you prices, I mean, everything, but as far as web design and how to write widgets and java scripting and all that stuff or adobe or anything like that ....not so much.

Jake argued that other group members, such as Will (a student interested in video and music production), that have a variety in expertise areas should take on strong leadership roles.

Supportive and Harassing Communication. Finally, women in the group experienced both supportive communication with each other and harassing communication from some men of the group. As a minority (women) of a minority (Mac technology and unfunded campus group) group or “outcasts among outcasts,” the women offered each other strong social support in person as well as through online contexts. Melissa felt both empowered and supported when Betsy asked her to present on her Mac expertise and she was well received by members. Melissa felt that Betsy “has a different level of trust in me” and that “Betsy has made the group, in my opinion, better because she has created a lot of opportunities.” Social support among group women was not unusual. Betsy felt supported when Jade helped hang up callout flyers even when Betsy’s (male) officers did not help:

My officers, I asked them to meet with me and none of them came through. She [Jade] was able to get color prints...she flyeried over the weekend and called me up and tell me exactly where she flyeried. We flyeried 5 hours on one night and then she did more on her own. She helps out a lot.

Further on the group’s forum as well as Betsy’s blog, women offered support for one another’s accomplishments. In one instance on the member online forum Melissa wrote, “Betsy - the site and the forums look great! We really appreciate your hard work!!!” Melissa later explained in her interview that she wanted to make sure that Betsy received credit for all the work she alone had put into the website. On her blog Betsy posted her determination to support women in the Mac users’ group: “Now with women! It’s going to be a flyer” (Blog post, October, 2005). In response a woman named Janus posted,

It could even have a Ms. Mac-Man on it. You know, how the Apple logo looks kinda like Pac-Man? You could put a red bow on it.

Or, okay, not. XD/random *hugs*

Janus offered a Ms. Mac-Man option to help support Betsy’s focus on women in the campus Mac Users group as well as sent her the equivalent of a virtual hug.

As the semester continued Betsy felt as though both executive board members were not pulling their fair share. Betsy admitted, “I didn’t realize that they would need it spelled out for them. ...I guess that I should have been more vocal in asserting myself.” However, Betsy reported that as she became more assertive with her officers, some men withdrew and others, like her vice president Chris, attempted to assert more control over her through public disagreements about tasks and networking.

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as well as engaging in behaviors that could be labeled as sexual harassment.

Betsy noticed that Chris seemed to “hit on” every female she saw him come in contact with. While conveying an executive board meeting situation where Chris and Jake (the secretary) were both present, Betsy noted that Chris exclaimed, “hey, Betsy, let me satisfy your sexual desire.” Over the course of the semester, Betsy, although hesitantly, began to see these interactions as sexual harassment and other members, like Jake and Melissa, corroborated her opinion. Jake even went so far as to say that “the group is extremely sexist.” Melissa reported a change in Betsy’s assertiveness and confidence, not an uncommon response to sexual harassment (Bingham, 1994; Clair, 1998; Kreps, 1993). This issue of harassment and the tensions among gendered and technology communication, leadership, and identities remained unresolved at the end of the 2005 semester. By the end of the 2006 semester, Betsy had come into full awareness of the extent to which some male members’ behaviors constituted harassment but, through a series of encounters between some group members, herself, members of the campus sexual harassment network, and the researchers, she decided not to file a formal complaint (for the complexities of this sort of decision on a college campus, see Buzzanell, 2004).

Summary. There were a number of micropractices enacted by others and the women themselves that served to both enhance and constrain women’s construction of leadership identities in the Mac group. These gendered interactions, talk, and values escalated to some members’ awareness over time of sexual harassment of the female leader, Betsy.

Discussion

Much has been written about the exclusionary practices and organizational cultures of technologically-based organizations that contribute to relatively low female participation and leadership (Liker, Hadda, & Karlin, 1999; Lorber, 1993; Stein, 2006; Turkle, 1997; Wajcman, 2000). Our study contributes to this research by displaying the complex and often contradictory ways in which women in a particular context are positioned and position themselves in leadership, gendered, and technological expertise identities and identifications in microlinguistic practices through organizational structures and culture.

In our study, shifting Macintosh and gendered and technological expertise identities as well as tensions in gendered images and micropractices played significant roles. The Mac User student group displayed varied identity and identification constructions and tensions as leaders and members simultaneously encouraged and discouraged women leaders through elections, commentary during and about “artsy” presentations and networking sessions, and responses to “caring” behaviors, such as bring food to gatherings. In these processes, most members also upheld instrumental ethics of control, efficiency (one-liners that constituted simple and efficient talk), expertise (technological and programming abilities and talk), and prominent images of the lone male programmer. Female and male leaders identified a MacIdentity as a pro-social, collaborative, “cool” identity that comes from a “grassroots” (bottom up) perspective. Leaders expressed identification with Apple’s “progressive” attitudes and approached Apple groups with an expectation that its “progressive” nature seemed open to women leaders and alternative leadership. However, what is not clear is what “progressive” politics are, including the gendered limits/boundaries to women leaders and alternative leadership, such as seen in movements (Einwohner, Hollander, & Olson, 2000).

Through their talk and interactions, group members also struggled with tensions and contradictions found in many different contexts where there is female leadership. Specifically, leaders struggled with bifurcated, modernistic identity standards, on an ongoing basis, with acceptance/nonacceptance, inclusion/exclusion, ordered/emergent, instrumental/communal, rationality/ emotionality, and public/private behaviors and leadership (see Buzzanell, 1994; Kramer, 2004). Leaders indicated sex-based appearance expectations. When faced with conflicting self and other perceptions of identity expectations, the female leader’s appearance and identity (including her level of confidence) changed over time. Differing discourses and related practices worked in concert with subgroups formed along gendered lines (male and female, programmer and user, serious technology user and artsy user, disregard for appearance and concern for appearance, independent and networked member, differentiation and supportiveness in communication behaviors). Leaders clarified a sex-based difference in respect-building activities (baking, soft v. hardware knowledge, humor, etc.) that also may have limited women’s success as leaders. As part of that process, the woman leader lost the power of her self-legitimacy through her acceptance of the dominant discourse concerning leadership styles.

Limitations

This study was exploratory in that it focused on only one Mac User group with a female leader. However, we observed most of the entire membership base and also analyzed written and internet-based documents. Additional studies focusing on singular groups and organizations would enable researchers to understand when and how technologial, gender, and leadership identities are performed in repetitive or in innovative ways (see Butler, 1990).

Implications

Additional research can contribute to greater understanding of the ways young and less experienced (in terms of technology and leadership) women use online spaces, such as bulletin boards, personal blogs, and online.
forums, and to the ways these potentially decentering technologies affect leadership and feelings of empowerment, especially in groups using alternative and institutionalized technologies. Research also needs to explore the ways in which women, and other oppressed groups, can use technologies to suspend and address gendered inequalities (Lorber, 1993; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Wysocki, 2004). In particular, research needs to focus on supportive communication between women in online contexts (Nakamura, 2006) as well as hierarchical barriers to face-to-face group process and leadership concerning women and technology. However, in order to not reify sex-based social identities, research should be completed on the gendered (instrumental and relationship-centered) rather than sexed (male and female) dynamics in online contexts (Zeitz, 2002). The interplays among micropractices, gendered images and technologies, and shifting group identifications, identities, and structures are ongoing tensions and opportunities as group members in our study sort through and continue to sort through intersections among gender, discourse, and practice.

Beyond the theoretical implications, practical applications exist for corporations like Apple. Apple may support user driven groups and conferences, such as this university Mac group and Macworld, however, a glass ceiling of respect may still exist for women in technological context. Twenty years ago Apple advertised a commitment to women when releasing the Macintosh personal computer (Stein, 2002). Apple argued that it could empower non-expert computer users to achieve incredible feats and still purports today a similar, grassroots ideological stance. As Steve Jobs continues to come under public scrutiny for his lack of follow-through of his pro-social rhetoric (Kahney, 2004, 2006; Stein, 2002), Apple may want to reconsider how it enacts that commitment to such a large potential consumer base, namely, women and new users of either sex. Putting stated commitment to gender equity and innovation into action through web-posted materials on discrimination, harassment, and the like as well as a poster image of an egalitarian social world featuring Macs would appeal to individuals such as campus Mac Users groups. As part of that process, the woman leader lost the power of her self-legitimacy through her acceptance of the dominant discourse concerning leadership style. Instead accepting her own identity construction, her identity was silenced.

Conclusion

In this study we examined a technology-based group that drew members through its ideology of technological innovativeness and user-friendliness, but struggled to appreciate the diversity that existed within it. Further research on aspects of gender, leadership, and technology could broaden understanding of how group members construct both disempowering and empowering macrodiscourses and micropractices. Women are tied not only to their identity possibilities, but also to their contextual, socialized identity perceptions. As noted by Haraway (2000) one’s “liberation rests on the construction of consciousness” and technology offers space for a world of possibility (p. 291). Women must create and accept their realities as valid rather than taking in the socially constructed world of the dominant discourse. Further contexts need to be not only ideologically, but practically open to women leaders and alternative leadership possibilities. Online environments may offer new possibilities for alternative leaders and leadership. For the female members of alternative technology users groups or the “outcasts among outcasts,” it is to these possibilities that our research attends.

Notes

1 Apple as an organization and its structure and leadership are considered alternative and innovative. The technologies are “alternative” insofar as personal computers (PCs) are normative in the marketplace with Apple computers capturing only about 4% of the world market share (http://www.appleinsider.com/article.php?sid=781). The term PC is predominantly used to clarify a “personal computer” created first by IBM and to contrast a PC from an Apple computer. In addition, Apple’s operating platforms for software and graphical user interfaces (GUIs or the display that users see when logging into a computer software program) have been considered easy to use and easy to navigate even for first-time computer users. These operating systems and GUIs have since formed the basis for Microsoft products.

2 Apple’s structure and leadership have been touted as innovative, public relations-savvy, and alternative insofar as they promote creativity, temporary non-hierarchical task groups, and value-based decisions premised on their point that personal computers should be fun and easy to use (for an overview of alternative structures and leadership, see Buzzanelli et al., 1997; for information on institutional settings and corporate milieu, see Lillington, 2006; Markoff, 2001; Shamah, 2004). These qualities about Apple and the Macintosh are described and documented more fully in later sections of our article.

3 Identification theory, introduced by Kenneth Burke (1969), stated that although humans experience division from other humans, all humans “have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial!” (21). These things allow us to “consubstantialize” or experience identification with each other through the use of linguistic symbols (Cheney, 1983).

4 Modern society described “normal” people as “predictable, honest, and sincere” (Gergen, 1991, 6). The moral structure of society was based on rational dichotomies of control. These dichotomies helped to illustrate societal ideals, such as good/bad, white/black, mind/body, and man/woman. Separation of mind and body, between the consistent, rationally organized mind and the inconsistent, emotionally flawed body, defined self as a centralized being who engaged in a “rational” lifestyle (Turkle, 1995).

References


Appendix 1:

Interview Schedule

A. Mac Background
How long have you worked with Mac computers?
What convinced you to use Mac?
How long have you owned your Mac?

B. Interpretations Of _____ (Group Name)
How long have you been a part of _____?
What makes _____ unique?
How would you describe how _____ members interact with one another?

C. Role in Group
What got you interested in becoming a member/role in group?
How do _____ members act toward you as a member/role in group?

D. Impressions of Female _____ Members
How many females are apart of _____?
Are certain types of females drawn to _____?
What are some of the roles females play in _____? What are some of the roles that males typically place in _____?
What are some of your thoughts about last year's presidential campaign? (How did you feel about _____ (name of female member) running for president?)

E. Actions/Interactions Connected to Sex
What are some of the roles that males typically place in _____? Are there males that are untypical? How do others treat those members in the group?
How do _____ members interact with the female members of the group?
How would you describe how members and _____ officers interact with _____ (name of female member elected as 2004-2005 group president) as president?