NEAA NEWSLETTER

NORTHEASTERN
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

BELOIT COLLEGE RELEASES THE MINDSET LIST FOR THE CLASS OF 2008

Beloit, Wis.—This fall, a new generation of students is entering colleges and universities with its own particular view of the world. Most of them are about 17 and were born in 1986.

For the seventh year, Beloit College has distributed to its faculty and staff the Beloit College Mindset List, which identifies some facts of life that distinguish this generation from those that preceded it. One of its primary purposes has been, in the words of co-editor Tom McBride, Keefer Professor of the Humanities at the Wisconsin liberal arts college, an attempt to slow the onset of hardening of the references experienced by some faculty.

This year, the list was edited by Professor of Classics Art Robson who regularly teaches in the College's First Year Initiatives (FYI) program for entering students, along with Public Affairs director Ron Nief. Robson notes that these first-year students were born in the year that Chernobyl melted down and the Challenger exploded. Clint Eastwood was elected mayor of Carmel, Calif., and the Soviets had been bogged down for the seventh year of frustration in Afghanistan. Domestically we were preoccupied by the Iran Contra scandal, and internationally the Iran-Iraq war continued to reveal a disturbing list of atrocities.

The entering class offers to us as teachers both a Rosetta stone of information and unique approaches to the world, and a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which to inscribe the knowledge they will need to pursue careers or further study. The joy of welcoming the new generation makes our work in the classroom rewarding. Each generation is unique, keeping all of us, whether we are teaching classical history or cutting-edge physics, prepared to look at our disciplines with a fresh eye.

With the help of hundreds of people who made suggestions, Beloit College is pleased to present the Mindset List for the entering class of 2008.

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Message from the Editor

My first editor's note—I am a little overwhelmed. First, I want to thank Amy Gazin-Schwartz for all her commitment and hard work on this newsletter over the years and to thank her for taking the time to show me the ropes. I would also like to thank the people at Roger Williams University who supported my efforts in getting my first NEAA Newsletter produced and distributed from RWU: Dean Ruth Koelle, Joan Romano, Ellen Almeida, and Manny Pasqual.

I am excited about my new role. I strongly believe in the NEAA as an organization and appreciate its professional approach. In my tenure as editor I plan to recruit a few more anthropologists to participate in editing the newsletter, to make new additions to the subdivision editors, and to introduce new topics for articles—so be on the lookout for these changes over the next year.

I welcome any comments and suggestions from the readership and hope I can successfully continue the established tradition of this newsletter.

Thank you,   Roger Williams University, CAS 158
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Anthropology Enters Cyberspace: Hit Any Key to Continue

By Matthew D. Smith
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As anthropologists, our training inspires us to think critically about the social construction of cultural difference in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, sexual performance, and social class, as well as the interactions and overlaps among them. Moreover, our discipline has us constantly searching for rich terrains of human culture in which to explore and examine. At this age when it seems as though the world keeps getting smaller and smaller, it appears as though there is not a single society left on Earth that has managed to elude Anthropology's curious ethnographers.

As this world shrinks, another one is constantly growing out of technology. Michael Benedikt describes this new society as running parallel to our own, created and sustained by the world's computers and communication lines. A world in which the global traffic of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, entertainments, and alter-human agency takes on form; A world which Benedikt describes as, "Sights, sounds, presences never seen on the surface of the earth blossoming in a vast electronic light." (2001)

This new world is cyberspace, and its citizens assert that cyberspace constitutes an organically separate, sovereign realm. Benedikt's descriptions, however poetic, serve to describe a unique society that has taken on a culture and an identity all its own. He further goes on to describe cyberspace as a "territory swarming with data and lies, with mind stuff and memories of nature, with a million voices and two million eyes in a silent, invisible concert to inquiry, deal-making, dream sharing, and simple beholding." (2001)

Building off Benedikt's lyrical descriptions of cyberspace it becomes easier to develop a definition of cyberculture. In fact, David Bell, a well-established researcher in the field of cyberanthropology, believes that there is no distinction between cyberspace and cyberculture. "Cyberspace is always cyberculture, in that we cannot separate cyberspace from its cultural contexts." (Bell, 2001) Cyberculture is another way of saying cyberspace, "one that emphasizes precisely the interaction of ideas, experiences, and metaphors in their [peoples'] interaction with machines and material change." (Edwards, 1996)

One venue of virtual human interaction that has become popular among researchers has been labeled the cybercommunity. The many social relationships forged through cybercommunities have been a draw for anthropologists. These social interactions encompass many behaviors including, "individual bonding (e.g., friendship, romance, and professional interests), public address in virtual for a debate, calls to political action, underground networking for illegal activities, and virtual stalking, rape, and anarchy." (Fernback, 1999) Howard Rheingold further describes what constitutes a cybercommunity:

> In cyberspace, we chat and argue, engage in intellectual intercourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and metagames, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. We do everything people do when they get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind. Millions of us have already built communities where our identities commingle and interact electronically, independent of local time or location. (Rheingold, 1999)

How then do people become members of these new communities? The roles one can take in a cybercommunity can vary greatly from person to person, and from community to community. Moreover, the purposes of cybercommunities have enormous range. Nevertheless, Nancy White describes some common participation styles. The roles cybercitizens take, she labels as "dominators, flamers, energy creatures, defenders, newbies, spammers, and lurkers," to name a few (White, 2001). The roles each of these members takes within the online community all differ with one exception; they are all *active* within the community.

There are many examples of cybercommunities that exist throughout the Internet. Traditionally, anthropology has focused on the MUDding community. A MUD environment is a "text-based descriptive environment which uses the metaphors of buildings, towns or landscapes to create an atmosphere." (Sempsey, 1997) MUD, which is an acronym for multi-user dungeons, dimensions or domains (depending on the source) also has a number of subcategories that include MOO (multi-user dungeons, object orientated), MUSH (multi-user shared hallucination, or mail users' shell depending, again, on the source), MUSE (multi-user shared experience), and MUCK (multi-user character kingdom, or multi-user chat kingdom).

To discuss how rules and norms of a cybercommunity are developed, I will introduce another type of online community; the genre of MOGs, or Massive Online Games. MOGs come in many different forms ranging from MORPGs (massive online role-playing games), to MOFPSs (massive online first person shooters). It is this area of MOGs that I focus my own research.

The popularity of these virtual environments is staggering. Right now, more than 90,000 players are interacting with one another online though the MORPG Everquest, whose game characters and virtual objects obtain thousands of dollars on eBay. (Dibbell, 2003) According to one recent study, the world of Everquest is the 77th richest *nation* in the world with a per-capita GNP that out earns China and India. (Castranova, 2001)

We now return to my own experiences participating with the online video game *Counter-Strike.* The server administrators, commonly referred to as "admins", create rules for the cybercommunities. Using Nancy White's member types, admins are closely related to *untouchable elders*.

These rules are in place to allow for a better overall community experience for the gamers, as they play a very important role in creating the social structure of its members. They also reflect the overall conscientiousness of the gaming community. These administrative rules mirror the strongest social norms of the community, but others also exist. Although not formally a rule, members look down upon spamming, and if someone does attempt to spam, numerous members scold them simultaneously in attempt to alter the offender's behavior. This *member scolding* is the way in which community norms are reinforced. If the offender does not change his/her behavior, measures that are more drastic are taken (booting, or even banning, are two examples).

Because of its solely textual communication methods, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has also evolved unprecedented aspects of language. CMC is constrained only by "computer screen size, average typing speed and skill, minimal response times and by participant competition for attention." (Werry, 1996) Because of this highly interactive medium, CMC has seen an "incessant drive to reduce the number of required keystrokes to the absolute minimum." (Werry, 1996) The unique characteristics of CMC have led to a mode of communication where a minimum of words is used to convey meaning in the text and little attention is paid to the formalities of spelling and punctuation. In a growing

number of cybercommunities, this trend has resulted in the creation of a new written text known as "l33t" used exclusively online.

While studying cybercommunities, cyberanthropologists have many new challenging questions to ask and many traditional anthropologists to answer to. Researchers now have the option of studying "social spaces in which people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of both "meet" and "face." (Stone, 1991) Cyberanthropologists have begun to challenge the conventional notions of *culture*, *society*, *community*, and *communication* while researching online cultures, and must continue to do so if anthropology wishes to grow as a discipline. If cyberanthropology wishes to mature as a terrain of specialization, we must foster these new and creative ways for us to apply our anthropological understandings of the social construction of cultural difference to the arena of cyberspace and cyberculture.

We must go beyond approaching the Internet as a mere collection of hardware and software and begin understanding the developing communication technology as a hybrid of technology, economy, discourse, influence, and culture.

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Visit the NEAA website for information on the conference, on field schools, and on becoming a member: www. neaa.org.

The Beloit College Mindset List® Class of 2008

1. Most students entering college this fall were born in 1986.
2. Desi Arnaz, Orson Welles, Roy Orbison, Ted Bundy, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Cary Grant have always been dead.
3. Heeeere's Johnny! is a scary greeting from Jack Nicholson, not a warm welcome from Ed McMahon.
4. The Energizer bunny has always been going, and going, and going.
5. Large fine-print ads for prescription drugs have always appeared in magazines.
6. Photographs have always been processed in an hour or less.
7. They never got a chance to drink 7-Up Gold, Crystal Pepsi, or Apple Slice.
8. Baby Jessica could be a classmate.
9. Parents may have been reading The Bourne Supremacy or "It" as they rocked them in their cradles.
10. Alan Greenspan has always been setting the nation's financial direction.
11. The U.S. has always been a Prozac nation.
12. They have always enjoyed the comfort of pleather.
13. Harry has always known Sally.
14. They never saw Roseanne Roseannadanna live on Saturday Night.
15. There has always been a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
16. They never ate a McSub at McD's.
17. There has always been a Comedy Channel.
18. Bill and Ted have always been on an excellent adventure.
19. They were never tempted by smokeless cigarettes.
20. Robert Downey, Jr. has always been in trouble.
21. Martha Stewart has always been cooking up something with someone.
22. They have always been comfortable with gay characters on television.
23. Mike Tyson has always been a contender.
24. The government has always been proposing we go to Mars, and it has always been deemed too expensive.
25. They have never been to any Playboy Clubs.
26. There have always been night games at Wrigley Field.
27. Rogaine has always been available for the follicularly challenged.
28. They never saw USA Today or the Christian Science Monitor as a TV news program.
29. Computers have always suffered from viruses.
30. We have always been mapping the human genome.
31. Politicians have always used rock music for theme songs.
32. Network television has always struggled to keep up with cable.
33. O'Hare has always been the most delay-plagued airport in the U.S.
34. Ivan Boesky has never sold stock.
35. Toll free 800 phone numbers have always spelled out catchy phrases.
36. Bethlehem has never been a place of peace at Christmas.
37. Episcopal women bishops have always threatened the foundation of the Anglican Church.
38. Svelte Oprah has always dominated afternoon television; who was Phil Donahue anyway?
39. They never flew on People Express.
40. AZT has always been used to treat AIDS.
41. The international community has always been installing or removing the leader of Haiti.
42. Oliver North has always been a talk show host and news commentator.
43. They have suffered through airport security systems since they were in strollers.
44. They have done most of their search for the right college online.
45. Aspirin has always been used to reduce the risk of a heart attack.
46. They were spared the TV ads for Zamfir and his panpipes.
47. Castro has always been an aging politician in a suit.
48. There have always been non-stop flights around the world without refueling.
49. Cher hasn't aged a day.
50. M.A.S.H. was a game: Mansion, Apartment, Shelter, House.

Everyone is going to be there
Faut s'y rendre pour être branché
Todos van a estar allí
Akwé:Tasewe

Northeastern Anthropological Association's

45TH ANNUAL MEETINGS
April 3-6, 2005
Hilton Resort
Lake Placid, New York

GLOBAL TRENDS, REGIONAL CULTURES

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Watch for the Call for Proposals in the Winter 2004 newsletter
Or visit www.neaa.org

   --Canadian funds accepted at par
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   --Big poster session
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   --Rooms for students for as little as $15/night per student (four people, three nights' occupancy)
   --Rooms for professionals beginning at $68/ night (single; three nights' occupancy)

News on the Video Front

Nominations and videos solicited for the next NEAA Film and Video Festival. For the Lake Placid Meetings we are inviting nominations and videos to be screened that are of local relevance or made by local film-makers. If you have any suggestions how we might incorporate local videos at the meetings please contact the film Festival Organizers, Robert Gordon <rgordon@uvm.edu> and/or jason Price <jasonpprice@nyu.edu> at your earliest convenience. Many thanks!

YOUR INVITATION TO JOIN THE NEAA!!

TO JOIN THE **NEAA** SEND this form and the membership dues to:

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