Lecture 23
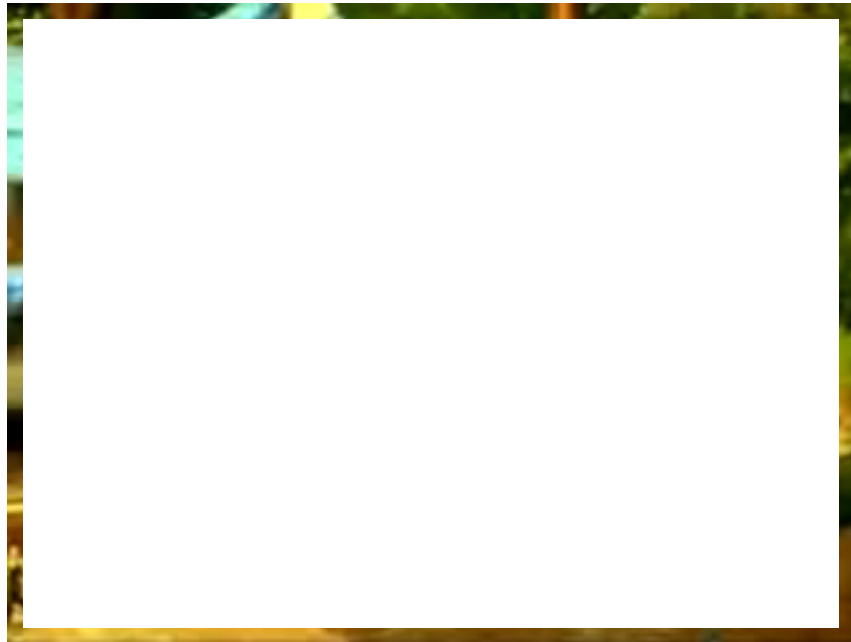
Social Communication

- **The Basic Idea**

- **"Normal" communication channels**

    - **We evolved to read faces, bodies, voices**

- **The Online Disinhibition Effect**

    - **5 factors that alter how we behave online vs. offline**

- **Notification Norms**

    - **The social rules of information transmission**

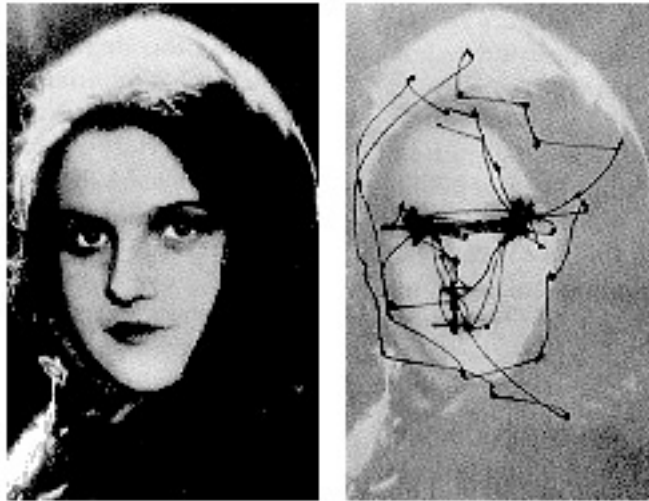   - **The idea of "meta-notification."**

The Basic Idea

From *South Park*

"Normal" Communication Channels

The eyes tell us about people

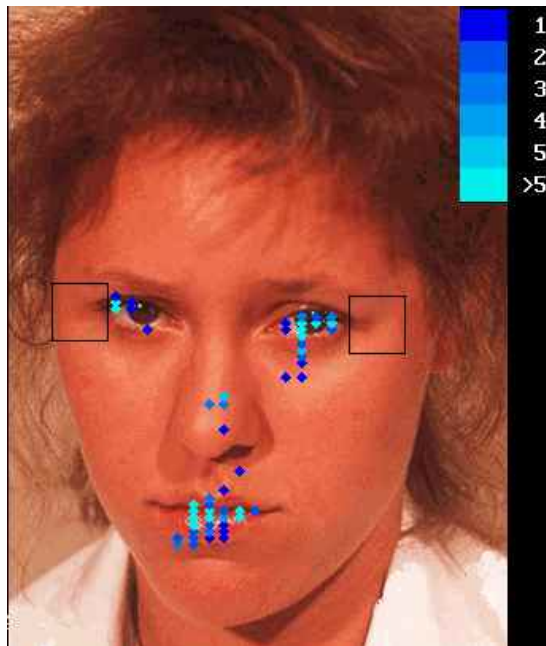## Revisiting ideas from Lectures 19 & 20
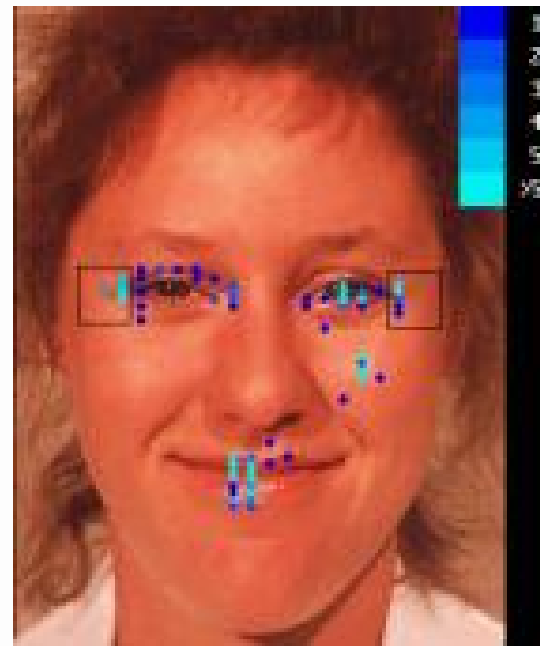
"Normal" Communication Channels

The eyes tell us about people
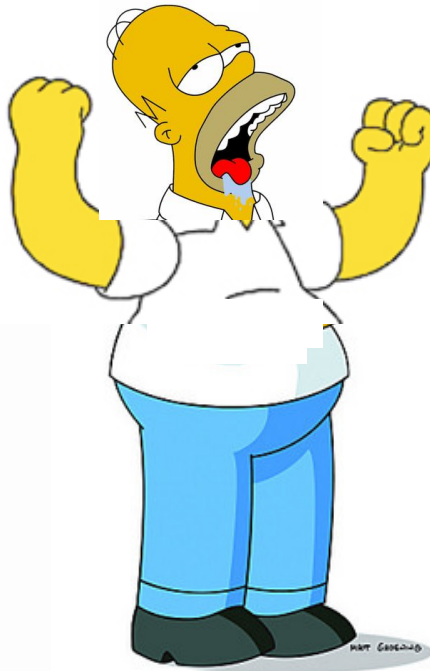
Sad face

Don't check "crowsfeet"

Happy face

Check "crowsfeet"

"Normal" Communication Channels

Emotional expression isn't just in the face

Online Disinhibition

Benign vs. Toxic Disinhibition

EVERYDAY USERS on the Internet—as well as clinicians and researchers1–7—have noted how people say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say and do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel less restrained, and express themselves more openly. So pervasive is the phenomenon that a term has surfaced for it: *the online disinhibition effect*.

This disinhibition can work in two seemingly opposing directions. Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. They show unusual acts of kindness and generosity, sometimes going out of their way to help others. We may call this *benign disinhibition*.

However, the disinhibition is not always so salutary. We witness rude language, harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats. Or people visit the dark underworld of the Internet—places of pornography, crime, and violence—territory they would never explore in the real world. We may call this *toxic disinhibition*.

Suler (2004)

Online Disinhibition

Five Primary Factors Involved

- **Dissociative Anonymity**
  - Separation of real vs. on-line self

- **Invisibility**
  - You can go places on the web without being "seen"
  - You don't have others' visible reactions (frowns, sighs, etc). to stop you

- **Asynchronicity**
  - You don't have to cope with immediate reactions from others

- **Imagination**
  - We take others' thinking to merge with our own
  - We "hear" others speaking, fantasize their thoughts.

- **Reduced Authority and Status/Power**
  - A lack of real-world social checks and balances

Suler (2004)

Review from Psych 100
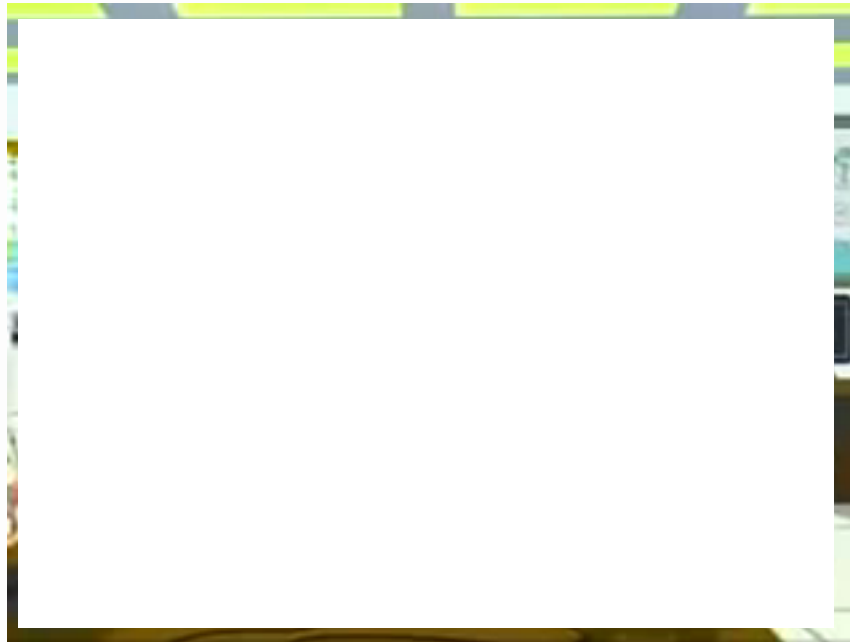
From *South Park*

Notification Norms

The Social Aspects of Passing Along Information

So much of the everyday flow of information in society is taken for granted that it is easy to overlook the degree to which it is socially regulated. With respect to modern communication technology, the persistence of information dissemination norms in the face of the removal of physical and technical barriers to communication suggests that human information processing cannot be separated from social organization.

Knowing, telling, and being told are social phenomena through and through, and social organization, from the micro and informal to the macro and formal, depends on collective forms of information control. **How does this work?**

Ryan (2006)

Notification Norms

The Basic Idea

In general, the possession of information is accompanied by a distinctly normative feeling of obligation to inform (or not inform) "appropriate" others in an "appropriate" manner at an "appropriate" time. That is, the acquisition of new information automatically triggers questions such as who else already knows this information, who should be told, and who would want to know.

I call such information-handling imperatives "notification norms." "Notification" is defined here as information transmission (or non-transmission) that is motivated by role obligations. They can be called norms because they reflect socially-learned rules akin to the hidden curriculum that specify (1) *who* should be told, (2) *when it* should be told, and (3) *how*, or in what manner, it should be told

Ryan (2006)

Notification Norms

Dictating Who Hears, When They Hear, and How They Hear

- **Who**

  - **Includes both the notifyer and the notifyee**

  - **Is the notifyer primary or secondary to the information/situation?**

  - **"Spilling the beans" and violations of who should be told**

- **When**

  - **The delay between when information is acquired and passed on.**

  - **What is the sequence of information transmission between individuals?**

  - **The issue of "sitting" on information.**

- **How**

  - **The medium of notification--face-to-face, a letter, email, radio/tv etc.**

  - **We are sensitive to the mediums we choose.**

Ryan (2006)

Notification Norms

Meta-Notification

In routine notification—telling the doctor that the pain is still there, calling one's spouse about being late, or canceling a hotel reservation—the manner in which the information is conveyed, or what I call "meta-notification," may be nothing more than a ratification of business as usual.

However, notification of other kinds of information—who is getting fired, who cheated on their partner—can convey important social information. Being notified as expected ratifies one's sense of being "in the loop," or "someone who needs to know," or "intimate enough to need to hear it in person." Prompt intra-organizational notification tells staff they are a part of the team, and CC lists demarcate the team's boundaries. Notifyees decode the tale told by a notification, and notifiers account for this when conveying information. "Meta-notification" thus refers to the wide range of information that can be extracted from a notification by those who understand a group's notification norms.

Ryan (2006)