The Virtual Bulletin Board: A Feminist Critique of Pinterest

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Introduction

       Today's digital age society has become completely consumed by social media. In a culture where a Smartphone connects you to everyone and anyone at any time and any place, people are becoming consumed by their online identities. As if life isn't complicated enough, people are expected to constantly be updating all six of their social media outlets. Social media has come to define this culture. According to Fiske, "by 'culture' we refer to the social circulation of meanings, values, and pleasures to the processes of forming social identities and social relationships, and to entering into relation with the larger social order in a particular way and from a particular position" (Fiske 322). Social media sites do just that; circulate text, images, and videos. Not only do these social media platforms allow a person to develop their personal identity, people are forming unique communities to share and feel a sense of belonging to something bigger than simply themselves.

       Social media websites have become the norm for generations of the 21st century. In Arthur Berger's book <u>Media Analysis Techniques</u>, he exclaims social media "refers to sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube that enable people to send messages, images, and videos that can be read or seen by large numbers of people" (Berger 204). Although Berger's definition is correct, his list of social media channels is limited. Numerous social media sites have exploded all over the Internet and have users captivated and enthusiastic. One of the newest sites, Pinterest, has become an obsession for bloggers and organizations alike. Pinterest is a social media site that allows users to collect and store their favorite things and share their ideas and creativity with friends and other Pinterest bloggers or as Pinterest users call themselves, "pinners."

Since its launch in December of 2009, Pinterest has their users mesmerized and show no signs of slowing down in popularity. The Pinterest mission statement is, "to connect everyone in the world through the 'things' they find interesting" (Silbermann and Sharp). Pinterest was created by a Silicon Valley company named Cold Brew Labs, which was founded by Ben Silbermann, Evan Sharp, and Paul Sciarra. Each of the founders was previously a specialist working on other sites including Google and Facebook. The initial aim of the site was for online shopping, however the trio channeled their focus in a different direction toward categorization of interests and thereby coined the term "social cataloging." With the site gaining more and more popularity, *TIME Magazine* awarded Pinterest one of the "50 Best Websites of 2011" (Miller 5).

With outstanding reviews from TIME Magazine and more than satisfied users, Pinterest began to generate an immense amount of traffic. ComScore discovered remarkable findings by reporting that from June 2011 to January 2012 Pinterest grew from a mere half million users to 11.7 million users. In his book My Pinterest, author Michael Miller explains that, "Pinterest had become the fastest site in history to break through the 10 million user mark—despite remaining in a public testing phase with membership via invitation only" (Miller 5). CNBC went on to report that Pinterest "was the third most popular social networking site behind Facebook and Twitter in the U.S." The site is continuing to gain followers at a rapid rate. The Pinterest Smartphone application also allows pinners to monitor their page and search their friend's most recent updates, when they are away from their computer. Pinterest is within a blogger's constant reach whether it is a computer or phone allowing users to generate more and more activity on the site.

To some, Pinterest may seem just like another social media site. However, this network is more visually oriented with a community created by a flood of pictures and smaller comments.

The communication between users is limited to "liking" of a photo or a comment. In opposition, other social media sites are primarily about networking and forming bonds, Pinterest is more about sharing ideas, photos, and interests with others.

Social media users and Pinterest's targeted audience in particular is especially intriguing. By simply observing the Pinterest website a viewer can see the content of the site is mostly dominated by traditionally feminine interests. Likewise, the site seems to be most popular among women. In general women utilize social media outlets more than men and are frequently more active online. In a magazine article examining social media as a feminist tool, the article reports that, "According to statistics compiled by Cisco's Ayelet Baron, 'women spend about eight percent more time online [than men]. In 2010, 76 percent of women visited a social networking site, compared to 70 percent of men. Specifically in North America, the social networking reach is 91 percent of women and 87.5 percent of males'" (Crane 14). These large percentages are no different than the reports from the Pinterest site itself. Miller claims that Pinterest is "primarily a woman's world," with about 80% of users being female between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four years old creating a demographic categorized as a "mommy blogger." Today, Pinterest users log about ninety-eight minutes a month browsing the site while in comparison Twitter users are only tweeting on average twenty-four minutes a month (see fig. 1). Although Pinterest user engagement is behind other social media blogs Facebook and Tumblr, Pinterest is climbing the ranks of the social media ladder (Miller 6).

As previously stated, with such a large percentage of online browsers being women, Pinterest seems to aim to attract women to their site by including topics and information that are predominately associated with the female stereotypical role in society. The obvious emphasis of stereotypically female interests on Pinterest is easily demonstrated by the titles of the virtual

bulletin boards. There are thirty-four boards bloggers can choose from to categorize their ideas and favorite items. Over half of the categories presented for users to use support topics, which from a stereotypical standpoint, are interests deemed to be more feminine by society. Some of these categories include Celebrities, DIY & Crafts, Food & Drink, Gardening, Hair & Beauty, Health & Fitness, Home Décor, Kids, Quotes, Travel, Weddings, and Women's Fashion to name a few. The types of categories on Pinterest suggest the possibility that the titles support an emphasis placed on women maintaining their stereotypical submissive and motherly role in society. Although there are a few stereotypically masculine categories such as Cars & Motorcycles, Geek, Science & Nature, Sports, and Technology, it seems that the Pinterest website lacks board titles typically associated with male interests in comparison to the amount of category boards provided which coincide with the stereotypical interests of women.

After researching the immense difference between male and female usage of Pinterest, I aim to dissect Pinterest through the rhetorical analysis of the feminist critique. This paper will provide the reader with an in depth description of feminism through the years and define the feminist criticism analysis. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the Pinterest site utilizing the feminist critique method to essentially analyze and determine if the labeled pin boards and the site as a whole support the gender stereotype placed on women by society and if the site is beneficial or detrimental to women.

Literature Review

About Pinterest

The website Pinterest is essentially a "visually oriented social network." The purpose of Pinterest is for users to create a page filled with their favorite things, which in turn develops their own personal online identity. Where other social media sites are more focused on

communication through words and messages, Pinterest aims for users to communicate through images and shared ideas to create an online community or a virtual space to share content (Miller 4).

Before creating a personal page on Pinterest, users must request to be a part of the site. The invite only aspect makes the site feel more exclusive and gives the users an elitist feeling. The site has users create "pin boards" which are themed bulletin boards that allow users to organize their different images into categories of their choosing. The boards are all separated by certain topics to allow users to easily search through the site for a specific category of pins. Pinners "pin" images of clothing, gadgets, food with recipe instructions, or anything that the user is interested by. The pinner is essentially pinning their interests and creating a collection of their favorite items. Once pinned, the image can be seen and commented on by all of that person's followers. The pins can also be "re-pined," which allows another user to have the image placed on their own board, causing circulation around that specific image.

An interesting function of Pinterest, is the "pin it" button, that users can add to their search engine tool bar as a bookmark. This button links any webpage to the Pinterest site, allowing users to grab any image or video from any site as a person browses the web. People create their storage place of favorite items (whether it is recipes, clothes, do it yourself crafts, or party planning) and all those pins are linked back to blogs or the direct site where those items can be found and purchased. Currently, the site requires users to sync their Facebook or Twitter account with Pinterest in order to find friends and invite their other social media followers to the site. When pinning a pin there is an option to also share that particular pin on Facebook and/or Twitter account. By converging the different social media sites into one, Pinterest has recruited social media enthusiasts to their site as well.

Pinterest is extremely user friendly, meaning it is easy to navigate throughout the site. At the top left former of the home screen, there is a small red box with three horizontal lines. By highlighting your cursor over this feature, a pinner is able to click on one of the thirty-six board categories. Next to the red box is a search bar, which allows pinners to search for friends or images on the site. By clicking the giant red Pinterest icon in the top center of the page, the home news feed will refresh allowing you to see the most recent posts. In the top right corner a pinner will see their name. By highlighting the cursor over their name the pinner is given several options which include viewing their own personal profile, adjusting their privacy settings, visiting the help center, uploading a pin from their computer, finding friends, or logging out. The final feature of the home screen is the "recent activity" scroll box on the left hand side. This box is equivalent to a notifications center seen on several other social media sites. Here, a pinner is told if they have a new follower, or if one of their pins has been re-pinned, liked, or commented on (see fig. 2). Lastly, a newer feature was added to Pinterest within the last year. Pinners can now make secret pin boards containing content that only the owner of the page can view (see fig. 3).

As previously mentioned, the initial creation of Pinterest was intended for online shopping. Although the site has moved away from the shopping concept and towards a collection of ideas, there is a large shopping utility on the site. If a pinner clicks on a photo of an item Pinterest will automatically link you to a second website in a new window where you can purchase that item. Through Pinterest's images and links, the site has become responsible for a large amount of website sales. With their referrals, Pinterest is beginning to make a profit as a result from the strong interest in the website. Pinterest utilizes the SkimLinks software which "looks at links users post to websites, determines if there is an affiliate program to which they

can be linked, and appends a code that ensures Pinterest gets credit for (and data from) the referral" (Madrigal). Although the shopping aspect seems to be less prominent, the site has actually turned into a profitable venture for co-founders Ben Silbermann and Evan Sharp. Pinterest remains a place for people to connect and share ideas, where business are now finding the positive impact this site has for their revenue.

Pinterest is extremely easy to use whether you are on your computer or using the Smartphone application. Pinners are able to share ideas and images with friends, find new ideas, and shop with just a few clicks of the mouse. The popularity of Pinterest has grown tremendously and with new updates every few months, the site will remain a dominant social media tool.

The Three Waves of Feminism

As previously stated, in order to examine the level of patriarchal values and gender stereotypes in the Pinterest website I will utilize a feminist criticism approach. To further understand the feminist criticism approach, I must first dissect the history of the three waves of the feminist movement, how the feminist critique was established, the prominent historical figures involved in feminism's development, and the main theorists who helped to create this form of criticism. Communication theorists have studied the waves of feminism and have applied the feminist critique approach to study women's role in the blogging world.

The feminist movement began with the start of the first wave in the mid 1800s when women began to focus on equality of legal rights, specifically aiming at suffrage. The Seneca Falls Convention, in 1848, is marked as a defining moment for the beginning of the feminist movement in the United States. This was one of the first meetings of women and a few men to discuss equality for women. Susan B. Anthony is one of the most famous women associated

with this wave of feminism. She, along with Elizabeth Katie Stanton, formed the Women's

Temperance Movement and are both considered to be the leaders for female equality. In her

book Gender Communication Theories & Analyses: From Silence to Performance, author

Charlotte Krolokke explains, "Suffragists confronted stereotypes of women and, in particular,

claims of proper female behavior and talk" (Krolokke 5). Women presented their opinions and

arguments publicly in an attempt to be persuasive. They exemplified masculine qualities by

speaking out, especially since women were supposed to be quiet, compliant, subservient to their

husbands, and in many cases hold the same opinions of the influential males in her family. The

first wave of feminism concluded when women were granted the right to vote in 1920. By

gaining suffrage women believed their efforts were a success, which paved the way for a second

wave of feminism and new fight against different inequalities.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1940s and was highly influenced by World

War II. As men left to fight in the war, women took on the jobs that their husbands and brothers

had left behind. With an increased involvement of women in the workplace, the want for jobs

and economic equalities began to resonate within the feminist movement. The second wave

became a patriotic movement for women as well as a women's liberation movement.   Second

wave feminism spurred an immense amount of research, knowledge, and eventually teaching of

women's issues, which later developed into feminist studies (Krolokke 15). Organizations such

as the National Organization for Women became popular as well as many feminist writings

including The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan. These organizations and popular

publications helped mobilize and motivate women to fight inequalities. The second wave is

ongoing today and encourages women to fight for sexual and relationship equalities along with

economic equalities.

The third wave of feminism began in the early 1990s and carries on today, in the 21st century. Third wave activists have expanded the feminist movement to equalities in race, gender, and sexual orientation. With the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, there has been a tremendous focus on race inequalities. The third wave also promotes the empowerment of women, emphasizes girl power, and installs ideals of equality and urges women to continue to fight against any injustices.

Kathryn Kohrs Campbell, a prominent researcher in feminist studies, evaluates the oxymoron in feminism and feminist rhetoric. Although women make great strides to improve their role in society there is an underlying contradiction present where women are encouraged to maintain a specific physical attractiveness, a submissive attitude toward men, and uphold the role as a traditional housewife. Campbell discusses gender roles by stating, "The sex role requirements for women contradict the dominant values of American culture—self reliance, achievement, and independence. Unlike most other groups, the social status of women is defined primarily by birth, and their social position is at odds with fundamental democratic values" (Burgchardt 510).

Throughout all three waves of feminism, women aimed to promote their cause and spread their knowledge through literature. As previously mentioned during the second and third waves of feminism women began publishing literary works, which can be attributed to the very beginning of feminist studies and criticism. In early publications, female authors relinquished their authorship by being anonymous or changing their name to sound more masculine. Women became greatly concerned with politics and their place in society and critiqued their status through literature. These initial critiques allowed the feminist critique to develop as a form of rhetorical analysis.

A third wave feminist critique is exemplified in Dawn H. Currie's article entitled, "Decoding Femininity." Her empirical study aims to look at how women observe, recognize, and identify with the information being obtained and solicited to them through magazines. Currie focuses on how magazine content affects women's self esteem and stereotypical gender awareness. This article was written in 1997 preceding the immense popularity of social media however the study greatly relates to social media today. Digital media today is comparable to the popularity of print media in the late 1990's. Currie was investigating print content and the effects of gender stereotypes of women and can be applied to how virtual print messages today affect the female perspective on gender stereotypes (Currie 454).

Currie's article examines how the content in women's magazines are teaching women their place in society. The study determines that magazines are becoming more of a "social text" or a guidebook for women on how to act appropriately according to their societal role. Similarly today, women are learning from the Internet and social media blogs how to discover what it means to be a woman in today's society and ultimately how to behave and think (Currie 455). Currie goes on to describe what women are gaining from these magazines. She states, "taken at face value, the representations in women's magazines seem to imply that we become women naturally through domestic and sexual roles" (Currie 466). The typical social norm for women is to look beautiful and be domestic by keeping the household while her husband makes the decisions and plays the greater more dominant role. Currie is observing that women magazines are reinforcing the stereotypical female gender role placed on women when she claims, "women's magazines offer a meaning of femininity that is tied to the everyday activities and beliefs of women that bring this meaning into being and thereby sustain it" (Currie 466). The same concept can by applied to Internet blogs. Today, the blogosphere has replaced print media

such as magazines and newspapers. Instead of looking to magazines women are turning to Internet blogs to learn their position in society.

Today, with the popularity of blogging and social media, communication theorists have set their sights on the growing phenomena of communication through the Internet and other mediated text formats. Researchers are moving away from newspapers and magazines and focusing on the Internet and social media. In reference to social media blogs specifically, several studies and critiques have been done to discover who is blogging and why. In particular studies have focused on the amount of women who blog and the effects the social media blogs have on women and societal stereotypes.

In her study, "The Radical Act of 'Mommy Blogging': Redefining Motherhood through the Blogosphere," Lori Kido Lopez "provides an alternative to the masculine construction of the blogosphere by analyzing 'mommy bloggers' through the lenses of feminism and autobiography" (Lopez 729). Lopez inspects the structure, context, and subject matter of blogs and how women can ultimately create a positive safe community online to share with one and other where male dominance fails to exist. Many women proved to be upset that the blogging world was predominately "male-centered." With that, in 2005 a group of women banded together to create an online community entitled "BlogHer." Lopez further explains, "the mission of BlogHer was to create a network for women bloggers to draw on for exposure, education, and communication" (Lopez 736). The idea of a group of people coming together to form a community bond is no new concept. However forming bonds online is an entirely new notion for communication theorists because of the several unique aspects of online disclosure. As opposed to face-to-face communication, a person online sits behind a computer screen reviewing submitted content, which has been previously thought out to perfection for the reader to

comprehend. Also, this online interaction does not allow for any nonverbal communication to enhance the conversation. Researchers then wondered if it was possible to have a community of people with shared bonds with the absence of tactile communication, facial expression, proxemics, gestures, and other types of nonverbal communication.

Lopez recalls a case study from 2006 about a women's cooking venture called the "Julie/Julia." The study focuses on the previous inquires, whether or not a virtual environment can suffice as a nurturing community. The study explains that in order to have a community the members must have "feelings of membership, influence, emotional connection, and fulfillment of needs" (Lopez 736). The "Julie/Julia" study did not conclude that a blog about cooking specifically allows members to feel a sense of community, however, the study gave great insight into how a virtual community may function in the future (Lopez 742).

Lopez concludes her paper with two intriguing pieces of information. The 'mommy blogging' trend seems to be extremely helpful to a group of women seeking help from other women. There definitely is a form of community found on these blogs. In opposition to earlier times when women would rely on the oral tradition of the elder women passing on advice and knowledge, today women look to search engines such as Google or other technological sites for help. Lopez argues that women bloggers are creating a helpful community for each other. Secondly, Lopez recognizes that the label "mommy blogger" seems to be meant in a disgraceful way as a put-down for women (Lopez 729). However, feminists are exhibiting a symbolic reversal and changing this title to be a more positive, constructed, and celebrated term.

Method

The feminist critique method has developed with the advancements of feminism and stereotypical gender studies. Feminist criticism is essentially done in three steps. First, select an

artifact to examine. Artifacts include but are not limited to speeches, performances, and songs. Next, the critic examines both male and female portrayals in the artifact, determine if the artifact supports patriarchy or traditional gender roles. And lastly, the feminist critique aims to examine how the artifact can help improve women's lives. In this section, I will further explain Sonja K. Foss' feminist critique method and Kathryn Kohrs Campbell's stylistic features of feminist criticism. I will later apply these necessary steps and concepts to rhetorically analyze my selected artifact, Pinterest from a feminist criticism perspective.

Sonja K. Foss is a communication studies scholar, whom has published many books and journals on rhetorical criticism. She is highly recognized for her advancements to the communication field and has contributed a tremendous amount to the study of Feminist rhetorical criticism. In her paper *Implementing Feminist Pedagogy in the Rhetorical Criticism Course*, Foss outlines the method and steps to criticize an artifact from a feminist standpoint. According to Foss, the first step is to analyze the concept of gender presented in the rhetorical artifact. In her article she explains that, "Questions that will help the critic in this analysis include: (1) does the artifact describe how the world looks and feels to women or men or both? (2) How are femininity and masculinity depicted in the rhetorical artifact? And (3) What does the rhetorical artifact suggest are the behaviors, concerns, issues, values, qualities, and communication patterns of women and men apart from the society's definition of gender" (Foss 1). After outlining these questions, the critic is able to move on to the second step.

Foss' second step for a feminist critique is the discovery of the effects the artifact's conception of gender has on the audience. In this step the main focus of the critic is to see if the artifact "affirms the experiences, values, and power of men," or in other cases, "celebrate and affirm the female perspective" (Foss 1). In this second step, the critic examines how the artifact

is portraying both men and women. In other words, the critic must discover if the artifact supports or defies patriarchy. Patriarchy is an ideology of feminist criticism, which is defined as the dominance of the male perspective. If the artifact is patriarchal in nature, than the critic is to believe that the artifact does not support feminist ideals.

In Foss' third and final step, the aim of the critic is to discuss how the artifact can help improve women's lives. Foss goes on to explain that in the third step, "the critic attempts to discover how the analysis of the artifact can be used to alter the denigrating gender role assigned to women and to help them live in new ways" (Foss 1). The main goal of feminist rhetoric is to abolish oppression by focusing on gender roles in society. By taking a deeper look into the artifact and using Foss' steps the critic is able to draw conclusions on whether the artifact is supportive of patriarchy and how to combat and change the construct of societal gender roles.

Kathryn Kohrs Campbell as referenced previously, plays a prominent role in feminist studies and criticism. She developed the oxymoron of women struggling to find the balance between their societal gender role being pushed onto them and the role they wish to have in society. Campbell's contribution to feminist criticism is exemplified by her classification of three separate stylistic conditions, which illustrate the feminist critique.

The first stylistic feature of Campbell's feminist criticism is called "consciousness raising." This term refers to questioning the status quo and societal norms. Campbell is encouraging critics to be inquisitive about what is being portrayed in the artifact of study and to make your own educated judgments instead of assumptions based on the popularity of societal norms. Raising consciousness of an idea or issue is an action anyone can take part in and is unaffected by the hierarchy of societal status or expertise. To participate in raising consciousness critics utilize personal past experiences and knowledge from life events to form and conclude

their personal opinions. Campbell argues that the goal of consciousness raising is to turn personal accounts into public political issues (Burghardt 510).

The concept "risking of self" is Campbell's second concept for feminist rhetoric. Similar to any other life issue, Campbell is recognizing that the critic's ideas and conclusions may not be accepted which can cause a person to feel rejected on not only a personal level but political stage as well (Burghardt 512). By employing a feminist critique the critic is subjecting themselves and their beliefs to criticism also.

Campbell's final idea of "violating the reality structure" argues that by utilizing the second step of consciousness raising and maintaining arguments and ideas that are opposite of the status quo, the reality structure of patriarchy in society is violated (Burghardt 512). These types of arguments draw attention, awareness, and hopefully action to the problems with our patriarchal society. One of Campbell's techniques employed to violate the reality structure is what she coins as symbolic reversal. Campbell affirms, "Symbolic reversals transform devil terms society has applied to women into good terms and always exploit the power and fear lurking in these terms as potential sources of strength" (Burghardt 516). In short, women, the minority in this case, are taking negative derogatory terms and reappropriating them to be less exploitive and change the term to suggest positive meanings of endearment and women's empowerment.

In order to study the gender construction of men and women on the social networking site Pinterest, I will be evaluating the roles of women based on the types of category pin boards available for users to pin items to and the organization of the website itself. I aim to argue that Pinterest is in a constant state of struggle since the site shows evidence of being extremely patriarchal by nature, yet helps to empower women by exhibiting symbolic reversals of

stereotypical roles and terms of women along with creating a community for women to bond. I intend to use a feminist critique to analyze Pinterest by utilizing Foss' three steps and Campbell's ideologies, specifically her concept of symbolic reversal, to support my claim that although the site supports patriarchy there is a helpful aspect to women in that the site provides a space for communication and connection.

Analysis

By utilizing Foss' three steps of a feminist critique I will be able to delve deeper into an analysis of the Pinterest website. In order to eventually reach a conclusion I will use the tools described in my method to analyze Pinterest as a whole. In following my method, I must first examine how both genders are represented in the construction of the Website. Once gender stereotypes and representations are established, I then will analyze how the audience then constructs the concept of those genders on Pinterest and whether the artifact supports or deters patriarchy. Next, I will move on to Campbell's concept of re-appropriation and the term housewife to lastly conclude whether the Pinterest website is supportive of women and their wellbeing. The following analysis of the gender representation and construction of the Pinterest website, whether or not the site is patriarchal in nature, and the process of re-appropriation of the term housewife will ultimately lead to my conclusion regarding whether Pinterest will further women's place in society or hinder the well-being of women.

Construction of the Website

First I must analyze and interpret how women and men are represented on Pinterest. The representation of gender stereotypes may be seen both in the site's organization and the site's content. Investigating the organizational aspect of the website begins with considering the layout and design of the website itself in order to determine how it pertains to gender stereotyping. I

will then scrutinize the types of interest categories made available to pinners by the website. Both the website organization and the types of pin board categories provided by Pinterest to pinners have implications regarding gender stereotyping.

In terms of organizational quality, a website can either be nonlinear or linear. A linear organization is defined as being straightforward by having a single dimension and simple components ("Linear"). In comparison, a nonlinear organization is just the opposite, multi-dimensional and complex. Pinterest is a nonlinear website for several different reasons. First, the pinner can choose to organize their personal page whichever way they desire resulting in a lack of uniformity and no precise layout since the design is unique for each user. Additionally, the homepage, which filters through images pinners are pinning, displays images from various categories and in no specific order. Pinterest is multi-dimensional because of the many different categories pinners can choose from. Also, since oftentimes pins overlap into different categories, a complex circulation of material is created. For example, Pinterest has two categories that represent the epitome of nonlinear organization. The category entitled "Popular" is a random group of pins that Pinterest considers the most prevalent since the items in this category have the greatest amount of views (see fig. 4). A second section entitled "Everything" is literally an entire group of pins that has no order and is just an intricate page of different items from all different categories (see fig. 5). The two categories are exceedingly nonlinear because they lack any uniform order and are considerably disorganized. Linearity can also be examined biologically where research scholars believe gender plays a key component in mental functioning and specifically in regards to linear processing.

Dr. Stephen Bavolek is internationally recognized for his work with psychology and child development. Bavolek is known for his books and conducting seminars on how to be a nurturing

parent. In one of his presentations he explains the biological differences in male and female brain functioning and how this leads to gender stereotypes. Bavolek describes that, traditionally a nonlinear or disorganized layout is attributed to feminine characteristics while a more linear and systematic organization is considered to be more masculine. He attributes this to the two hemispheres of the brain and the dominant characteristics that go along with functioning as a left sided or right-sided individual. The left side is considered to be more masculine, linear, and rational while the right is feminine, nonlinear, and more intuitive (Bavolek). These traits carry over to how we stereotypically believe women and men should behave. Men are believed to be critical thinkers and rely on logical reasoning which are all traits of left brain dominance while women are recognized as being less systematic, more sensitive, more creative, and better at expressing emotions which are all characteristics of a right minded individual (Cherry). With Bavolek's assertion in mind, we can now relate the idea of males being associated with linearity and logic and females associated with nonlinearity and sensitivity to the organization of the Pinterest website. Bavolek's declaration presents an issue since in utilizing his ideology Pinterest can now potentially design their site in a way that will target women and contribute to stereotypical societal gender roles.

As previously stated, nonlinearity suggests disorganization and lack of clarity, which are believed to be feminine characteristics. One may now argue and make the implicit assumption that since the construction of Pinterest is nonlinear in nature, it appeals towards a woman's brain and interest rather than a man's interest. Pinterest is designed towards women with the belief that a nonlinear organization will be appealing to women since nonlinearity is thought to be such a feminine feature. Therefore, I now make the argument that Pinterest has been constructed in a disorganized chaotic way because the site believes women are stereotypically less concise,

focused, and rational. This assumption is problematic toward gender stereotyping because the belief that the site was created in a disorganized way to specifically captivate women rather than men further generates a negative view of women and the dominance of the male perspective.

Although the website construction is nonlinear, the site is improving its organization and attempting to make navigation of the site clearer and more orderly. The main methodical aspect to the site are the pin boards which are separated into thirty six separate categories: Popular, Everything, Gifts, Videos, Animals, Architecture, Art, Cars & Motorcycles, Celebrities, DIY & Crafts, Design, Education, Film, Music, & Books, Food & Drink, Gardening, Geek, Hair & Beauty, Health & Fitness, History, Holidays & Events, Home Décor, Humor, Illustrations & Posters, Kids, Men's Fashion, Outdoors, Photography, Products, Quotes, Science & Nature, Sports, Tattoos, Technology, Travel, Weddings, and Women's Fashion. Masculinity is represented by several of the Pinterest boards including "Cars & Motorcycles," "Men's Fashion," "Outdoors," and "Sports." Although there are several stereotypically masculine categories and gender shared categories, a large majority of the Pinterest board categories are conventionally of interest to women.

To analyze Pinterest from a feminist perspective I will select three of what seem to be the most popular categories. After viewing the "Popular" page on Pinterest, the three categories which had the most pins were "DIY & Crafts," "Food & Drink," and "Hair & Beauty." Interestingly enough these three categories are what society would determine as stereotypically feminine. Although these sections are of interest to women, I will further examine if these categories put women's interests in a positive or negative light.

Patriarchy

After analyzing and defining how both male and female genders are represented in the

construction of the Pinterest website and naming of categories, I will move to the second step of

a feminist criticism, which requires the assessment of how the representation of these genders

actually affects the audience. The affect on the audience is measured based on how the audience,

or pinners, personally participate on the website by determining which category boards are used

most often and the stereotypical implications placed on using certain categories. In the second

step of this critique the critic endeavors to analyze how the audience interprets the gender

assignment within the artifact and the value placed on patriarchy by the artifact. In review,

patriarchy refers to the male dominated perspective. This perspective includes the power of men

to oppress, exploit, misuse, and dominate women. In order to entirely understand the

examination of patriarchy of Pinterest, I will apply the defined concept to the category pin boards

and demonstrate how the actual content of Pinterest, the pin boards and pins, support a

patriarchal system and further provide women with examples on how to live their life within the

confines of their ideological stereotype.

      While one can argue that several of the above listed categories may be gender neutral or

even masculine, the majority of the boards and specifically the top three most popular categories

exhibit feminine characteristics. The pin board categories further enhance the belief that the

Pinterest site is dominated by women, their feminine interests, and simultaneously functioning to

define those gender-specific interests and stereotypes. The "DIY & Crafts" category is filled with

images of creative ways on how to enhance home décor and furnishings or how to make party

decorations and fun games for children. "DIY" or "do it yourself" crafts are what a stereotypical

stay at home mother would have time to do while her husband was at work. The pins in this

category range from household decorating tips on a budget to improve a home's aesthetic to

making children's Halloween costumes (see fig. 6). In society, the patriarchal perspective

includes women staying at home and taking care of the household and children. Crafting and "DIY" activities seem to limit women's work and personal worth to simple, safe, and inside the household projects. The "DIY & Crafts" category seems to suggest that a women's work ethic and skills are limited to crafting and ultimately making women seem incapable of the harder more diligent and tedious tasks of men. This category of Pinterest supports the stereotypical notion that women are the homemakers, subjected to a home doing feminine crafts, which in turn supports the patriarchal view of a woman's place being in the household.

The next popular category is "Food & Drink." This category ranges from every type of meal and drink imaginable. There are pins of seven course meal ideas, on-the-go lunches, healthy snack recipes, fancy drinks, delicious desserts, and even recipes from your favorite restaurants and chefs (see fig. 7). In this section, pinners share their favorite meals and drinks and the steps on how to perfect the recipe. Some of the food and drink pins are even linked to other culinary websites where a pinner can find an even greater plethora of recipes and ideas. In a traditional society, women are expected to be excellent cooks and provide their family with mouth-watering meals daily. Two common patriarchal phrases, which come to mind, "A women's place is in the kitchen," and "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach," certainly apply to this Pinterest category. Historically, women have been confined to their own household. While the husbands are away the wives are responsible for keeping the house clean and husband full and happy with scrumptious meals. Women have been taught that a way to find and keep a husband is by obtaining the skills of a perfect housewife by learning how to nurture a husband, children, and a home. Amongst other qualities, stereotypically, these nurturing skills often include being a phenomenal chef. With these concepts and stereotypical phrases, the "Food & Drink," category on Pinterest seems to support the male dominant perspective of a woman's

role in the household and furthermore provide women with the knowledge on how to maintain that role in society.

"Hair & Beauty" is another popular section on Pinterest. In this category pinners will find commercial beauty products and self-made potions which claim if used will make you appear young, healthy, and beautiful. The "Hair & Beauty" category is not to be confused with the "Fitness" category on Pinterest. The "Hair & Beauty" section is meant to emphasize a woman's appearance and image rather than placing the importance on a healthy lifestyle. Pinners will find this category to provide several different products that can help enhance their enticing features, ways to eliminate their less appealing ones, and even homemade remedies to alter and improve appearance (see fig. 8). The fact that women are expected to maintain an image of perfection and beauty has not changed for decades. In the past women believed that in order to find a husband and receive what she wanted out of life, she had to be beautiful and alluring to do it. Many of these beauty standards have been placed on women by society and pressure women to be skinny with large breasts and buttocks, appear healthy and young, have smooth tan skin and white teeth, and portray the unattainable Barbie girl image.

Women are constantly scrutinized for their appearance in today's society as well as leading to women lacking confidence and increased self-esteem and self-image issues. Elizabeth Heubeck, a health and wellness writer who has dedicated much of her time and writings to children's health has commented that, "much of the blame for the epidemic of poor body image among young girls should be directed at over-aggressive media images" ("Teen Eating Disorders"). In a society where beauty is largely associated with physical appearance, it comes as no surprise that "seventy-eight percent of eighteen year old girls report being unhappy with their bodies" ("Teen Eating Disorders"). Often times these appearance issues surface during a

woman's teenage years, but even with age, rarely disappear. Heubeck goes on to comment that, "it doesn't help that real-life role models, mothers in particular, too often openly obsess about their own weight; that male role models, like dads and older brothers, make clear their preference for thinner women" ("Teen Eating Disorders"). Unfortunately, today's culture is very much involved with the Internet and blogging, which connects being thin with being beautiful and desired. The emphasis both genders place on the yearning for women to be the unattainable shape of skinny perfection supports a patriarchal view. The perfect women in the eyes of men are what women strive to be. With the "Hair & Beauty" category on Pinterest women are sharing tips on how to be that ideal woman which every woman wants to be and every man wants to be with. Women have often become symbols of sexuality and desire and this site is helping women to attempt to obtain that image suggested by society. The "Hair & Beauty" section is absolutely contributing to the patriarchal view that women must maintain this perfected image of beauty at all times because that is what the male perspective expects of them.

Simply by analyzing these three categories the male dominated perspective is apparent. Furthermore, I argue that Pinterest is offering a place for women to develop themselves into that stereotypical role of a beautiful, doting, obedient housewife. Pinterest is essentially a "how-to" guide for women to learn to be the best housewives possible by developing ways to keep a household, perfect their skills in the kitchen, and be the beautiful trophy wife that a man in our patriarchal society wishes to have.

Symbolic reversal of "Housewife"

After examining how gender roles are portrayed on Pinterest, the patriarchal nature of Pinterest, and discovering the ways in which Pinterest encourages and facilitates women to mold into the perfect housewife symbol, I began to examine the reappropriation, or symbolic reversal,

of the term. In today's society "housewife" has become integrated into our popular culture, suggesting that the term no longer has the negative connotation it once had. According to Campbell a way to violate the patriarchal structure is to utilize the technique called symbolic reversal. Symbolic reversal or reappropriation of a term takes place when the minority group takes back a term that was used in a derogatory way towards them by the majority group. By definition, the term "housewife" is defined as "a married woman in charge of a household" ("Housewife"). In the past "housewife" was looked at negatively by feminists because it placed women in society below men. Although the term seems to subject women to a stereotype, which feminists have been combating for years, women are now using the term in a positive light as something they aspire to be.

Several other media outlets have aided to the popularization of the "housewife" image and attempt to use the term "housewife" in a positive light. ABC Studios' hit television show Desperate Housewives was on the air for twelve consecutive years and paved the way for the "housewife" term in several other media channels. The Bravo television network has aired several successful series about housewives. In these reality shows, cameras follow housewives from affluent neighborhoods and show audiences the daily lives of these women. Bravo originally focused on the city of Orange County, California but has expanded the television show to Beverly Hills, Atlanta, New York City, Miami, Washington DC, and New Jersey. The popularity of these series shows just how fascinated audiences are by housewives and perhaps influences several young women viewers to aspire to be like them. Likewise, male viewers now want women similar to the wealthy beautiful housewives portrayed on television.

Similar to television, it seems as though websites and blogs, specifically Pinterest, have adopted this new positive housewife mentality and have been popularizing the term. By simply

searching "housewife" in the search engine of Pinterest several personal accounts emerge with pin boards dedicated to crafts, cooking, baking, clothing, jewelry, relationships, and children; all of which are ideas and images in support of the stereotypical women's role in the household. Not only do the types of categories on Pinterest support the idea of women transforming themselves into the ideal "housewife" and support stereotypical gender roles, there are even Pinterest accounts which seem to be defined by the "housewife" mentality (see fig. 9). Although, the "housewife" term is supporting patriarchy, women are capitalizing on the term and using Pinterest to develop themselves into the best "housewife" possible.

In today's society, whether women are influenced by media or not, they are choosing to be housewives. One can argue that a woman's personal Pinterest page and her collection of "housewife" pins gives her the knowledge she is seeking on how to become a perfect "housewife." Female pinners are taking advantage of the patriarchal emphasis placed on Pinterest. Since women are accepting the "housewife" lifestyle and making it seem like a chosen and positive way of life, women are reappropriating the term. Women are making the term positive by having Pinterest boards, which embody all the characteristics of a great housewife (how to cook, clean, craft, and maintain the perfect appearance and household). The term "housewife" exemplifies a symbolic reversal because women are taking the once negative term and developing the word into a name that women strive to be called. Pinterest is relevant in the symbolic reversal of the term because women are using pins from the Pinterest website to construct their perfect "housewife" persona.

This analysis has completed two of Foss' feminist critique steps and Campbell's idea of symbolic reversal. I have reviewed and analyzed the gender construction in the organization of the Pinterest website, the major role patriarchy plays on Pinterest, and how the term "housewife"

is exhibiting a symbolic reversal and women are using Pinterest to aid in the term's

reappropriation. Lastly, the third and final step of the feminist critique of whether or not Pinterest

is beneficial to the advancement of women in society will be addressed with the concluding

remarks of this paper.

Conclusion

Several pieces of literature have recognized the evolving and progressing role of women

in society. Women have developed from the subservient housewife, to the independent minded

career women paving her way through the workforce, and back again to become the obedient

housewife, however, perhaps by choice this time. After researching the three waves of feminism

women have worked tirelessly since the mid 1800s to gain women's suffrage, economic and

social equalities, and then racial and sexual orientation equalities. Although the feminist

movement has made great strides to develop their presence amongst men, women are altering

back to the ideal "housewife" mold, which men so desire. However, in the 21st century

"housewife" differs from what used to be known as the homemaker role since women are

choosing to be this "housewife" character. Today, modern women are utilizing their connections

such as social media and specifically Pinterest to obtain and maintain the role of the proper,

beautiful, and traditional "housewife." Women have successfully reappropriated the term

housewife and are now exploiting it to their benefit.

The framework of steps for a feminist critique outlined by Foss allowed me to interpret

the Pinterest website. In review Foss' first step was to analyze the perception of gender presented

in the artifact and how the masculine and feminine issues are portrayed and represented. Once

defining the qualities of both genders characterized by Pinterest the second step was to examine

the effect the artifact has on the audience. This second step is extremely important in that the

critic discovers if the artifact is patriarchal in nature or encouraging of feminist principles. After the first two steps I reported how women and men were depicted, discovering that although women's interests seem to be over represented on Pinterest compared to male interests, women were being subjected to the traditional female stereotype of interests such as cooking, cleaning, and the importance of image and appearance. Next, I concluded that Pinterest is contributing to the encouragement of men putting women in the stereotypical housewife role and also women attempting to be what men want therefore sculpting themselves into the traditional societal female stereotype of submissive housewife. With the term housewife being so relevant throughout my research, I found the evolution of the term to be remarkable. Although looked at so negatively during the first and second waves of feminism, women have utilized Campbell's philosophy of reappropriation and developed the term into a positive one.

After analyzing the concept of both male and female genders represented in Pinterest and how Pinterest is fueled by patriarchal ideals, I am now able to conclude the final step, step three of Foss' feminist critique on how the artifact helps to improve women's lives. While the site seems to promote patriarchy and the objectification of women it seems to be a healthy and safe environment for women to share ideas and insight. Although the site may push women into that stereotypical role of a "housewife," in today's society it seems most women are taking it upon themselves to be that role and want help on how to perfect it. Today, not all women are forced to be housewives yet some choose to be and Pinterest is creating a community for these housewives to learn from each other and discover new ways to adopt that stereotype they are desperately searching for. Pinterest fails to alter the demeaning gender role placed on women in society and eradicate oppressive views since Pinterest is so fundamentally patriarchal. However, in regards to improving women's lives, Pinterest has given women an outlet to gain interests, ideas,

followers, potential social media connections, and ultimately a sisterhood bond. The negativity being produced by Pinterest with the emphasis placed on patriarchal values, the positive effect of the site is that women have created a space for themselves to enhance their ideas and stimulate their interests, which is in fact beneficial to women.

After analyzing Pinterest with a feminist critique I now refer back to the literature I researched and conclude that my discovery of Pinterest further supports the theories and analyses other authors have concluded. Lopez reviewed the new craze of "mommy blogging" in her study and decided that although the term was negative there are positive aspects emerging from the female blogging trend. My research has further supported Lopez's claim that women are forming bonds on the Internet and a helpful community of women to support one and other as a result. Similar to a sisterhood, Pinterest and other social media websites are encouraging the bond of women, which is promoting feminism. Although Pinterest is patriarchal the idea of a connected community of women with strong, supportive, and helpful bonds where women are encouraged to talk freely is a concept that is beneficial to the advancement of women.

Currie looked into print media and theorized that print media such as newspapers and magazines are teaching women their place in society and how to behave. I have applied this thought to the updated version of print media, social media. Pinterest as a social media website provides women with a "how-to guide" and directions on how to act as women and housewives in today's society. Just as Currie analyzed magazines in the mid 1990s, I have analyzed social media and specifically Pinterest more than fifteen years later and have been faced with a similar conclusion. Women are learning their societal norms from online media and are proving to be influenced by what social media sites are promoting as the ideal woman. My research of social

media and Pinterest continues to support the theories, ideas, and conclusions of previous literature and I report notably similar conclusions as both Lopez and Currie have discovered.

As a result, I conclude in an odd struggle between Pinterest sustaining patriarchal ideals however defying patriarchy with the re-appropriation of the term "housewife" and creating a useful community for women. While the site supports patriarchy, which by definition implies that it is against feminism and any ideals which are beneficial to women, the site has provided a place for women to bond and find new confidants and interests that weren't made available to them in the past. This ideology is consequently very feminist, a group of women getting together to share ideas and promote their interests. Pinterest is generating a shared community for women, yet allowing women to create their own identities through their personal pages and boards. In opposition these individual identities are considerably similar because they are all in support of the "housewife" stereotype, which leads to a contradiction. The lack of individualism and the molding of women into a role that is stereotypically supported by men and detested by the traditional feminist is why Pinterest is so patriarchal. A main aim of the feminist critique is to combat the gender roles placed on women in society. After analyzing the gender roles portrayed by the Pinterest website I have concluded that the site supports the oppression of women by objectifying them to the role of "housewife" but is supportive of the advancement of women in that the site has become a community of women promoting shared interests.

Ultimately, I defined the gender roles portrayed in the website, I analyzed the construction of the site, how patriarchy is being represented, and the re-appropriation of the term "housewife." I now conclude that although Pinterest does not seem in support of women it is a helpful tool for women who aim to be a stereotypical "housewife" which is becoming more and more accepted by society. The layout and design of Pinterest is highly anti-feminist, however,

women are choosing to utilize the site for it's anti-feminist qualities and support the modern day women's fascination with being a beautiful subservient housewife. Pinterest can improve women's lives because it creates a space for women to share information without restraint, however, the site is fundamentally patriarchal and anti-feminist in nature. After defining key characteristics of the Pinterest site and utilizing a feminist critique I can observe the tension between pinners wanting to break away from the patriarchal forces at work and the want for what the site has to offer.

Appendix
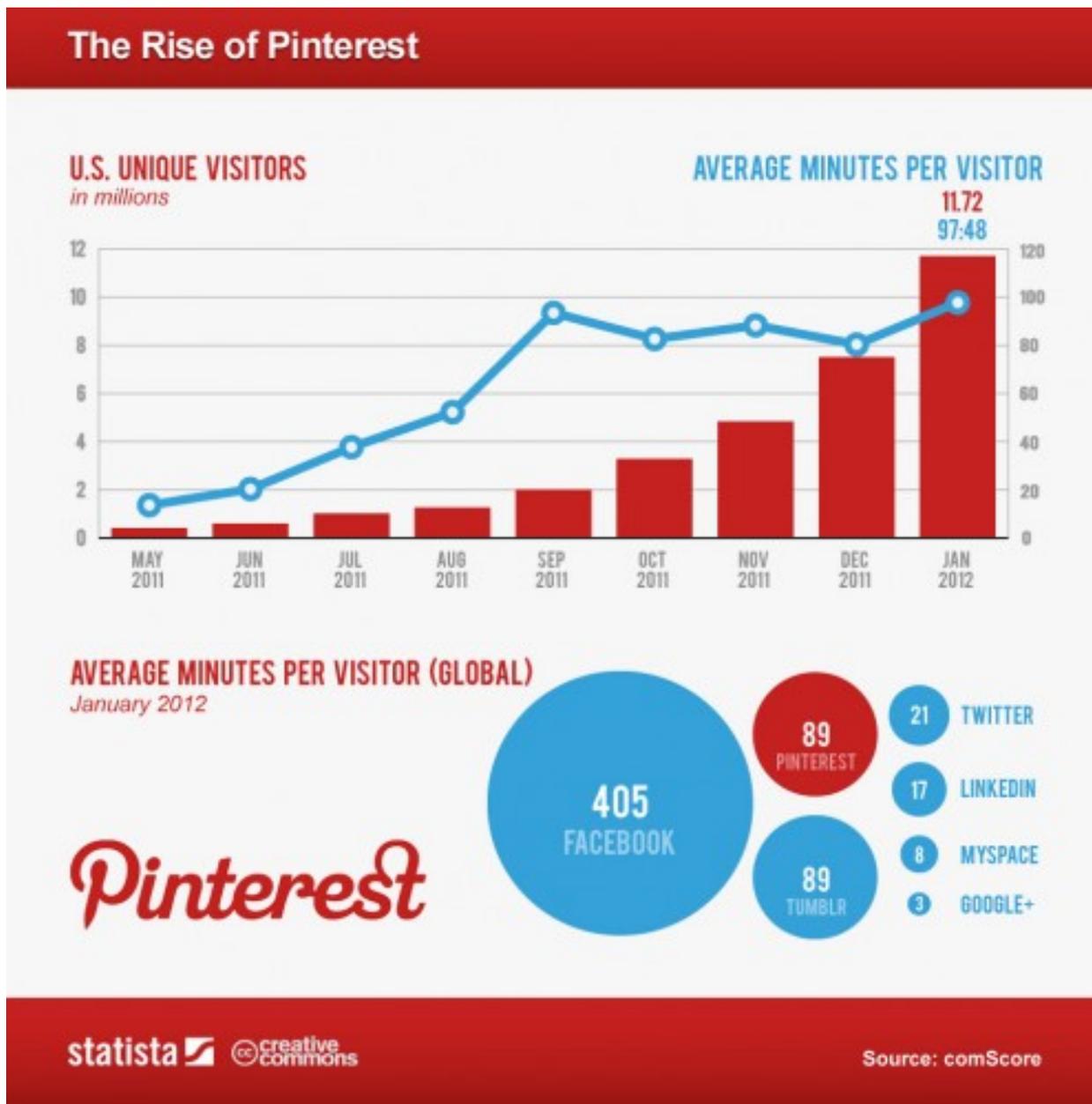
Figure 1. The Rise of Pinterest Graph – Displays the popularity of Pinterest among other social media outlets and the growth of Pinterest between May 2011 and January 2012.
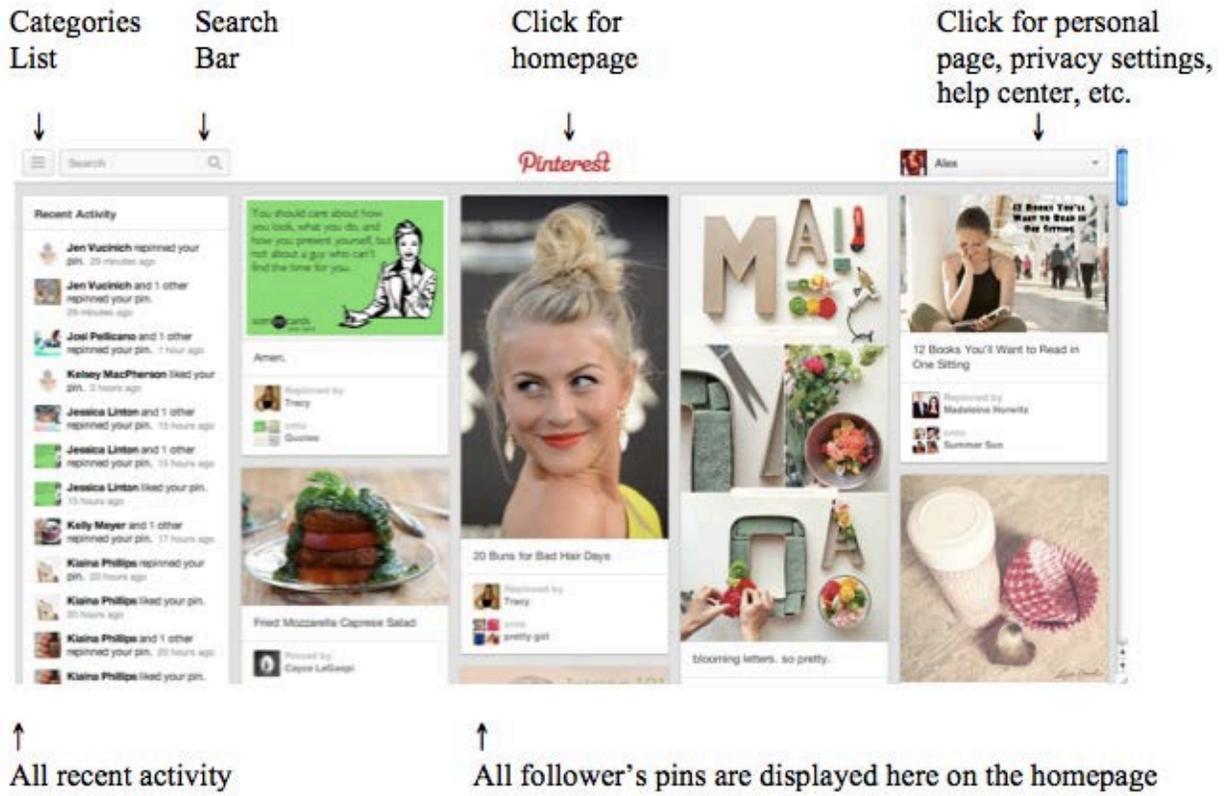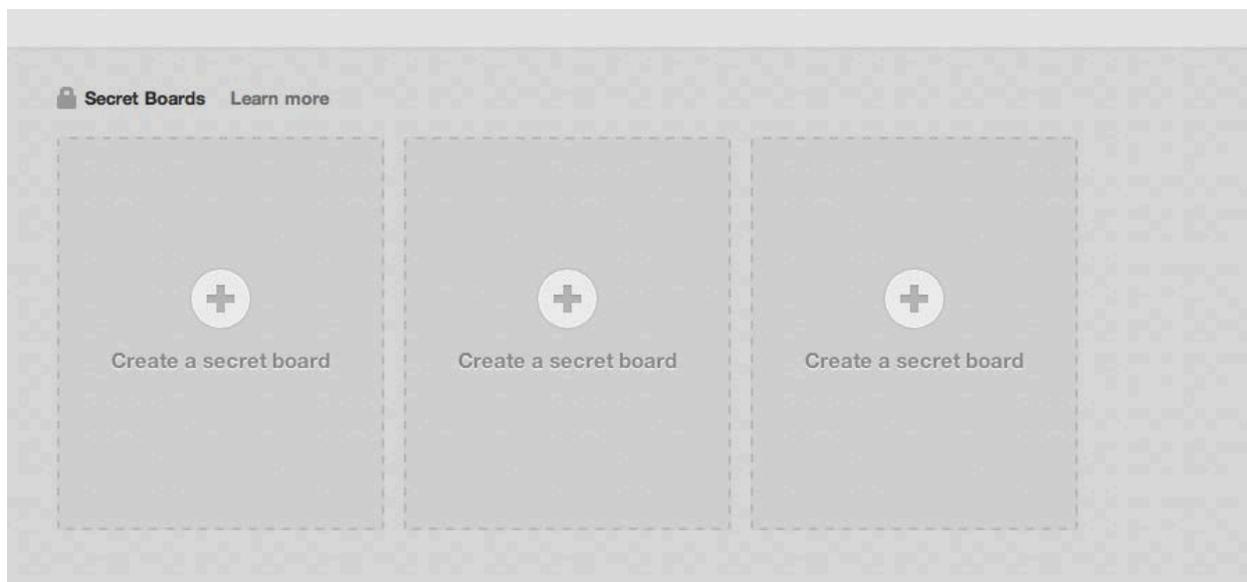
Figure 2. Pinterest Homepage

Figure 3. Sample of Secret Pin Boards – A Pinterest user would drop their pin into these secret boards for their private viewing.
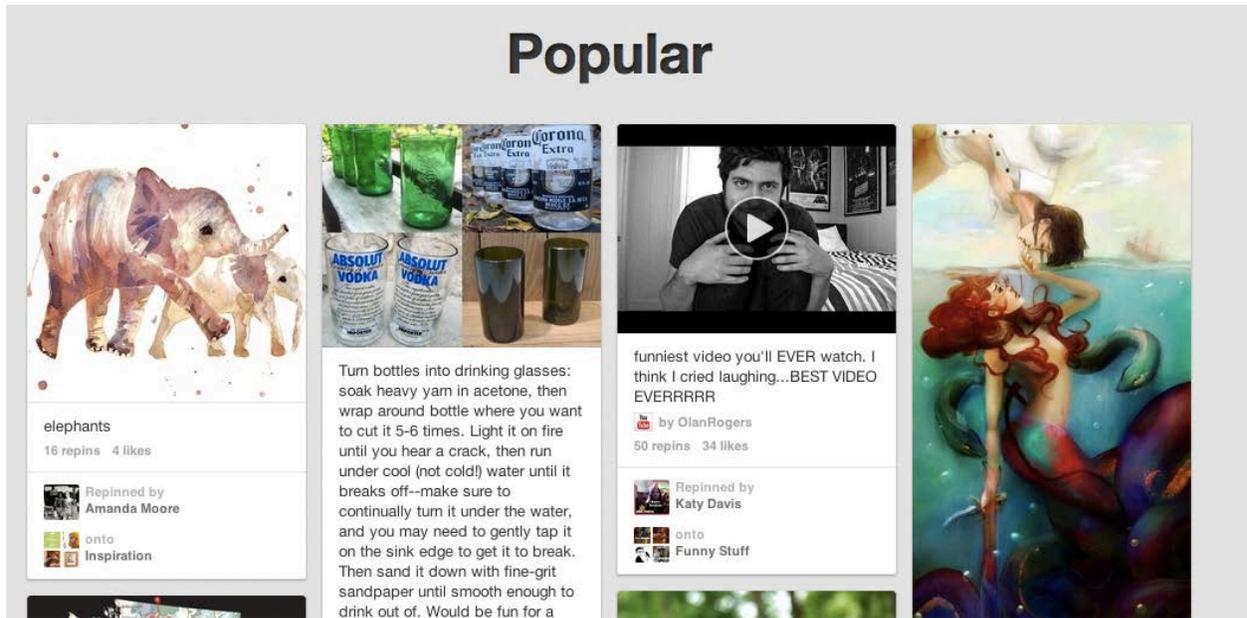
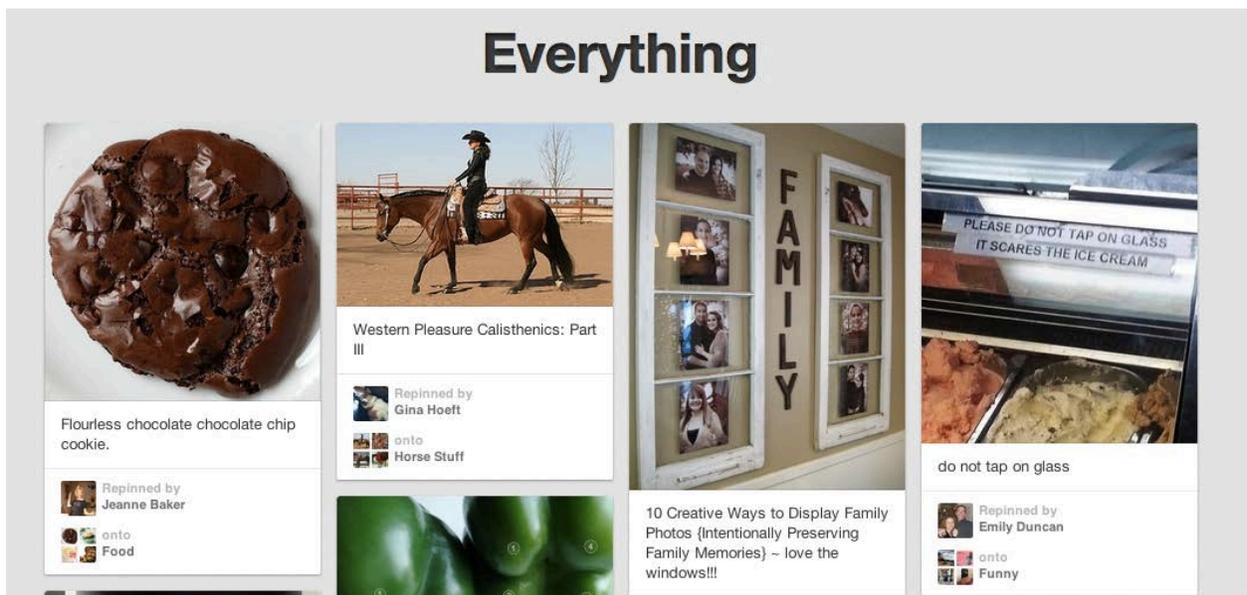Figure 4. Sample Popular Pins Page
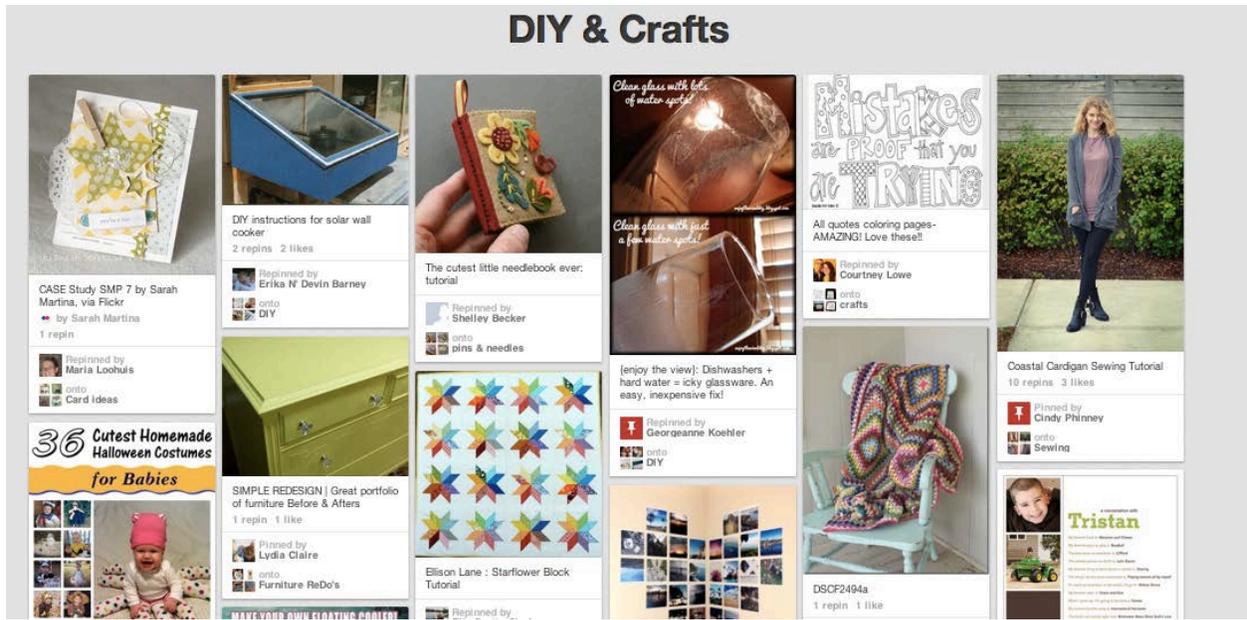

Figure 5. Sample Everything Pins Page
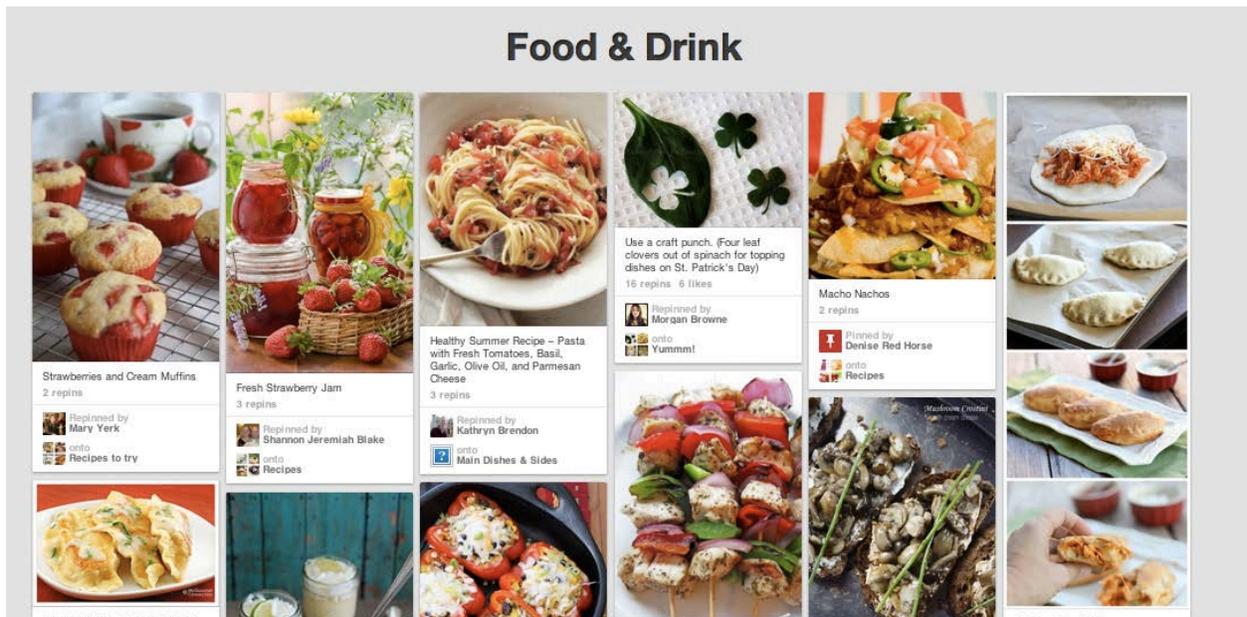
Figure 6. Sample DIY & Crafts Pins Page.

Figure 7. Sample Food & Drink Pins Page

Figure 8. Sample Hair & Beauty Pins Page

Figure 9. Housewife Search Bar – Above are the results a pinner would find after typing "housewife" into the search bar. In the background *The Housewife*'s account is being displayed.

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