

Project Proposal - Identity Editor

This project proposal is for Matt Lee and danah boyd. We plan to design and implement a piece called "Identity Editor."

Identity Editor will allow users to:

- create a "profile" for themselves, listing whatever they think is important, from pictures to words.
- privately and publicly mark-up other users' profiles for personal reference or public commentary

By building an understanding of a person through repeated exposure and a mental map of who they are based on previous interactions, we are able to develop a fairly deep understanding of an individual and our relationship with that individual. Elements available in real life, such as faces and context, allow us to mentally structure our memory to easily build such maps. This is not as easy online. Often, a name or email is the only actual component with which to uniquely identify an individual.

Lack of markers with which to build a mental map is one of the reasons that faces are suggested as an appropriate avatar or representation online (in IM, chatrooms, websites, etc.). While this may (or may not) work, its pretty obvious that there are other limitations to using faces to identify people online. For starters, people are uncomfortable using their actual face and often do not actually put their own image up as their representation.

Rather than finding the ideal representation that will help users build a mental model, we want to build a tool that allows users to mark up and "remember" their interactions as well as build up identifying components with which to more complexly represent themselves.

Identity Editor will be used like a Rolodex - allowing users to scan through all of the users online. They will be able to see the information that the user publicly made available as well as what was made publicly available by all others users. In addition, they will be able to see (and edit) what their personal thoughts are on this user. Users will be able to quickly drag quotes from one another into their personal markups. When new public comments appear, the visual representation of the user will have a little sticky note attached to hir, allowing users to see that there is more information elsewhere.

The Identity Editor will allow users to build up a history of their interactions, relations and thoughts about other users for future use.

Above is the first rough sketch of this idea.

We plan to develop the Identity Editor based on the infrastructure built by Matt Lee for [Chatscape](#). In addition, we will provide a series of sketches exploring this idea and a document explaining the problem, background and how we approached the problem.