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Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World

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JORGE IS A 25-year old Puerto Rican New Yorker who lives in the NYCHA public housing projects. Smart and motivated, he has a sophisticated understanding of how other people judge him online:

They [privileged people] kind of dictate what's good to say because we're trying to appeal to them. Because they're the ones who have the jobs, and they're the ones who have the money to give us jobs, so we don't want to say anything that would ... make us seem lesser in their eyes. I mean in a lot of ways we don't really care, but we have to pretend that we do. And that's kind of what I think Facebook is, it's the performance of, "No look, I'm viable for this, I'm viable for that. I'm vanilla enough so everyone enjoys me."

To Jorge, social status and class limit his ability to express himself online. To seem acceptable to the economically privileged, he and his friends must perform staid, conservative selves online: what he calls "vanilla." Otherwise, their educational and economic opportunities may be limited....

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["Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World"](#) (Mikaela Pitcan, Alice E. Marwick, and danah boyd, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 23, no. 3, May 2018)

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