PART 1

1.) In "Prestige and intimacy", what are the costs to the women of incorrectly interpreting the men's signals? Of believing deceptive signals? What are the benefits to the women of signaling deceptively? The costs?

In “Prestige and Intimacy”, one of the costs that the women pay in incorrectly interpreting the men’s signals is that of lowering their prestige. For example, in one of the given scenarios, a woman discloses her attraction to a particular man, and she invites several friends to a party where she knows this man will be present. But then he proceeds to ignore her at the party, in favor of talking to other “higher prestige” females. In doing so, he has effectively lowered her prestige, and has shown her to be less attractive than the other women to whom he devotes attention.

Women also pay costs by believing deceptive signals. For instance, a man may treat a woman very well in order to earn her affection. He may do this with the intention of motivating her to become intimate with him. However, he may only crave intimacy with the woman because of an increased sexual appetite, and not because he has any real affection for her. However, the woman is misled to believe that he does legitimately care for her, beyond his desire to sleep with her, and as a result, she may pay the cost of getting hurt if she develops real feelings for him that are not returned.

Women can also benefit by signaling deceptively, and thus raise their prestige or perceived attractiveness. For example, a woman may purposefully plan to not be home when she suspects that a man she is dating will call her. This will give him the impression that she has a busy social life, and that her prestige is high. Consequently, it will deter the man from taking her for granted. If this signal is given too often, however, the man may conclude that the woman is generally very unavailable, and he may lose interest in her altogether, as a result. This could leave the woman with less prestige than she started out with initially, which is one potential cost of the deceptive signal.

It is true that most online signals are conventional – online communication is largely text-based, and there is no essential characteristic of the text that is typed that can enable the receiver of the signal to assess its reliability. For the most part, the members of an online community must assume that the other members are signaling honestly, but there is no way for them to be assured of the honesty of the signals; thus the signals are conventional.

However, in some cases, there are limited assessment aspects to text-based online communication. For example, it is possible to assess from reading another’s messages whether that person is a good writer, or possesses a strong vocabulary. A person’s ability...
to express him/herself verbally is conveyed through how well s/he writes, and this can be reliably assessed from the content of his/her message postings. In the Jacobson article, the “Alice” character had an impressive vocabulary and a quick wit online. When the informant met her offline, she continued to exhibit her aptitude with language and her sharp wit in person. If she didn’t actually possess such extraordinary language skills, it would be highly unlikely that she would be able to deceptively signal having these skills in an online community.

PART 2
Done in cooperation with Jacob Faber and Omar Lyles

1.) Observations of a person in Au Bon Pain in Harvard Square:

He’s sitting by himself at the Au Bon Pain in Harvard Square, typing away on a black Dell laptop. He is wearing black leather shoes, jeans, and a black leather jacket. He’s in his late 20’s or early 30’s. He is listening to headphones, and sipping alternately from a coffee cup and a larger cup (containing water, perhaps); both cups are from Au Bon Pain. He wears stylish glasses. His foot gently and sporadically moves up and down, perhaps to the beat of the music he is listening to. There is a pair of black gloves on the chair beside him, but at one point he moves them to the bag at his feet.

The laptop and the glasses suggest he may be some sort of intellectual, or grad student, working on a Sunday afternoon. His clothing is casual, yet stylish; the leather jacket and leather shoes suggest that he is at least fairly well-off. But he’s also wearing white socks with the black shoes, which could be considered a fashion faux-pas. Perhaps all of his black socks were dirty, and this signal of his lack of fashion sense is unintended. By keeping his jacket on, rather than taking it off and putting it on the chair, he gives the impression that he might be leaving at any minute, though he keeps working steadily on the laptop. At one point, he gets up from his chair and swaps it with the empty chair beside him. Perhaps he is very particular about where he sits, or maybe the chair had a loose leg? But clearly it was enough to bother him that he switched seats.

Wearing the headphones gives the impression that he does not want to be disturbed, though this is contradicted by the fact that he keeps looking around. Perhaps, he too, is observing others in the café. He seems to be looking around a lot as he types; he is not concentrating too intently on his work on the laptop, but he keeps looking up at the people moving around him. Maybe he is expecting someone? Each time someone new appears in his line of vision, he quickly glances at him/her.

He gets up and peers around the corner of his table at least a couple of times – this definitely gives the impression that he is looking for someone, or expecting someone. Perhaps he is uncomfortable sitting by himself in the café and wants to give off the impression that he is, in fact, waiting for a friend.

Similar Impressions:

Omar and I both pointed out the fashion sin committed by wearing white socks with black shoes. We also agreed that the fact that he switched chairs indicated his particularity with where he sits. Omar and I both thought he might be a grad student and
agreed on his probable age. Omar, Jacob and I all pointed out that he looked as though he might be expecting someone.

Divergent Impression:
Jacob said he looks as though he might be staying a while since the power cord to his laptop was plugged in. I said he looked as though he might be leaving at any minute, since he didn’t bother to take off his jacket. Jacob thought he wanted to portray himself as someone very high-tech. I thought he was trying to portray himself as an intellectual, based on both his choice of café (across the street from Harvard) and the glasses and laptop. Jacob said he is unconcerned with his surroundings and seems to be concentrating pretty intently. Omar also thought he was concentrating intently. I thought he was more easily distracted.

Additional Info:
After our observation was complete, Omar approached the man and asked where he got his shoes. He replied that he had purchased them at DSW, and interestingly he spoke with an accent. His accent sounded Irish, or British. None of us had concluded from his appearance that this man might not be an American.

2.) Observations of a female on matchup.mit.edu, with the screenname of SereneOceanBreez:

This girl has put up seven pictures of herself, so clearly she is comfortable with her appearance, or wants to show herself in many different settings. At the very least, she is not camera-shy. Four of the pictures are taken in tropical climates (i.e. by a beach or ocean), which complement her chosen screen name.

In addition to all the tropical pictures, SereneOceanBreez also mentions that she loves to go to Europe, particularly Spain, Italy and Switzerland. Her favorite museum is one in Paris. She is demonstrating that she is well traveled, and also gives off the impression that she is financially very well off, to have been able to afford all these visits to Europe and tropical excursions. Given that she is a 22-year old graduate student studying education, it is probably safe to presume that she did not earn the money for these trips herself. This suggests that she comes from a wealthy family. Perhaps she is spoiled, having had the luxury to go on all these trips, but not having the means to afford them herself. She may like people who provide for her, and be accustomed to a comfortable lifestyle.

She seems somewhat concerned by outward appearances, evidenced by the fact that she specifically states that she is looking for someone 5’10’’ or taller. She also wants to find someone responsible and focused on his goals and priorities. This could be a further clue that she is seeking someone who may one day have a lot of earning potential, and will be able to provide for her, so that she can continue to go on exotic vacations. I doubt, however, that this is the impression she intended to give off. The rest of the stuff she says is fairly generic – she likes movies, though she doesn’t mention which ones in particular, she likes cooking, though she doesn’t state a favorite cuisine, and she likes going on walks. She is not particularly creative or quirky.
Similar Impressions:

We all concluded that she was, to an extent, demanding and/or needy, either emotionally or financially. We all alluded to the fact that she likely comes from a wealthy family.

Divergent Impressions:

I said she was concerned with outward appearances. Omar and Jacob said she was likely not terribly concerned with appearance, since being over 5’10’ was her only stated physical criterion for a mate. I did not mention her likely intelligence (which was assumed since she is a grad student at Harvard) though Omar and Jacob both pointed this out. I am the only one who mentioned that she was probably not extremely creative, based upon some of her fairly generic interests.