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Hanging out with offline friends in an online context:
How the experience of “partial anonymity” impacts on
identity management

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Science in Psychology
At Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2005

Abstract

Instant Messaging has increased in popularity since 1999 and is now often used by adolescents to communicate with friends already known in their offline social networks. Instant Messaging can be thought of as a hybrid between chat rooms and email. Chat rooms are conducted in “real time” but are an open network in that anyone can have access to interacting with one another. Email is asynchronous and yet it is also a more personal, “closed network” where communicators must generally exchange addresses before they can communicate. When email is used for social reasons communicators generally know each other offline already. Instant Messaging is both synchronous like chat rooms, and can be used as a closed social network, like email. One of the distinguishing characteristics of MSN Instant Messenger (IM) when used between friends is the experience of knowing the other communicator both offline and online. This situation offers the anonymity traditionally experienced online while acknowledging that communicators bring offline knowledge of each other to their online interaction. Thus, the overall relationship is not conducted under conditions of anonymity like that experienced with chat rooms, MUD’s and newsgroups. Online anonymity, in these forums, has been implicated in negative behaviours such as “flaming” and deception which are largely attributed to deindividuation. This research investigates how offline knowledge, which presumably acknowledges the other communicator as an individual, impacts on the experience of hanging out online. Adolescent girls construct identity through friendships and this research is concerned with identity constructions when friendships are maintained between both online and offline contexts.

The research design was based on an ethnographic approach to the study of the Internet. Eight adolescent girls (aged 13-17) were interviewed both online through IM and in a more traditional face-to-face context. Data analysis was informed by positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) to provide a coherent understanding around how identities are continuously constructed and transformed by contextual criterion.

Analysis revealed that IM fulfils adolescent motivations toward social connection and expressing personal autonomy which are both important in the process of identity formation. Instant Messaging is constructed as a space which allows the girls to balance

these motivations in a way which helps them to maintain a positive self-image. The anonymity experienced online is tempered by offline knowledge of each other. This produces an environment of “partial anonymity”. This study examines the experience of partial anonymity and the distinct advantages arising from the lack of online social cues. Control and protection are integral advantages which allow the girls to balance teenage motivations, thus informing their sense of self in largely positive ways. This becomes evident in how they demonstrate commitment to their friendships and negotiate disclosure, trust and risk.

Findings are discussed in relation to contemporary social identity theories which have been applied to computer-mediated communication. Partial anonymity changes how adolescents use technology to construct and preserve a positive self-image. Adolescents understand the flow between contexts and the resulting negotiations around evolving socialisation standards.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my partner, Campbell Woollams, for the many ways in which he has supported my decision to take time out to write this thesis.

Thank you to my advisor, Kerry Chamberlain, for his thorough reading of each draft, honest critiques and consistently approachable demeanour. It has been a joy to work with you.

Thank you to my lovely group of friends from the Glenfield gym who have endeavoured to keep me in the social loop even when I had to say “maybe next time” so often. I will cash in on all those rainchecks now!

I would also like to thank the eight girls who participated in this study. I have appreciated your openness and honesty toward the interview process. I wish you all the best as you continue discovering what makes you unique in this world.

Thank you, Cathy Whyte (Cat), for introducing me to Instant Messaging and in the process planting the seed which led me to this point. I think are one truly amazing and beautiful person and I value our friendship immensely.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to my Mom. Nothing concrete regarding this thesis comes to mind, but it is not often that I have the opportunity to put in writing just how grateful I am for my Mom. Thank you, Mom, for showing enthusiasm, pride and confidence in my every achievement.

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Chapter One

Introduction

New communication technologies like the Internet have rapidly become commonplace, particularly in the last decade. The World Wide Web as we know it today is just ten years old. It was 1994 when the Internet was publicly opened with just a few thousand sites. For so many Western adults, computers and the Internet have since become an integral part of daily life and for anyone under 20 years old it is probably difficult to remember a time before the Internet. The Internet seems taken for granted as a cornerstone of information dissemination. With the advent of user-friendly software like Internet Explorer and Netscape, cheaper prices of home computers, and cheaper broadband capability the number of people going online has increased exponentially. The Internet, however, is not only for information dissemination. One of the biggest motivations for going online is the seemingly endless communicative sites that can be accessed. The Internet has transformed the way we interact with each other and made us more aware of our larger social networks. In the early days of the Internet there were online gaming societies like MUD's (Multi-user dungeons, a fantasy play context), and chat rooms. These were generally used by the technologically savvy to interact with people who they knew only online or perhaps knew only as the character portrayed. Despite these online communicative avenues, email use has consistently remained the primary online social tool for communicating (Shiu & Lenhart, 2004). While email is primarily used for contacting family and friends across distances, MUD's and chat room are generally used for contacting people only online. The popularity of email demonstrates that when there is an avenue with which to communicate with known offline contacts, people choose to do so and use that format more often.

The Early Research

Many people have commented on the "potential" of Internet use and its rapid infiltration into our daily lives. In America and Britain, the Internet has been viewed as a vital instrument for education and Internet competency has been recognised as a necessary skill for the future. Prime Minister Tony Blair has implemented a programme (BBC News, 11 September 2000) whereby every school in Britain would be connected to broadband Internet. Similarly he provided lap-top computers for every school

headmaster (BBC News, 22 October 1999). This sense of urgency demonstrates the importance with which this technology has been regarded.

However, just as governments mobilised to put all children online, researchers and policy-makers scrambled to gain a picture of the potential dangers children might encounter online. Pornography and paedophiles seemed to highlight the difficulties in regulating such an expansive network. At the same time, concerns were voiced that people who spent considerable amounts of time on line were in danger of becoming sad and lonely. Time spent online, it was argued, took time away from their real relationships. Indeed, this is exactly what some early researchers found. Kraut et al. (Kraut et al., 2002; Kraut et al., 1998) have published some interesting longitudinal research looking at Internet use, social networks and psychological wellbeing. In 1996 (the relatively early days of public Internet access) they gave participating families a computer and Internet connection and then monitored where they went, how much time they spent online and asked families to fill in self-reports about their social network and their stress levels. The initial study (Kraut et al., 1998) indicated that Internet use was associated with “declines in communication with family members, declines in social circles and increased loneliness and depression.” They concluded the Internet had a negative consequence because it takes time away from our stronger offline ties resulting in less satisfying relationships which contribute to feelings of loneliness and depression. However, the follow-up research (Kraut et al., 2002) showed some important differences. Most of the negative outcomes had subsided and they concluded that it could be due to the increased popularity of the Internet during their follow-up time period along with the advent of group-oriented software like instant messaging services. In the initial study, only e-mail, chat rooms and MUD’s were available for social interaction. Of these, only e-mail contact would have been with people already known in their offline social network. Chat rooms and MUD’s were much more likely to be with friends met *only* online. Additionally, increased Internet usage in the general population could have been a crucial change from their initial study. Kraut et al. gave computers and Internet connections to their participants, but unless their extended network of family and friends were also online they would have had reduced opportunities to use this medium for maintaining those stronger connections. Likewise, without the group-oriented software (like MSN instant messenger, Yahoo! and ICQ) as a way to extend those relationships into the online realm, their use of the Internet would

equate with “time away” from their social network instead of “time online” with that same network. From this vantage point, it seems understandable that these families felt disconnected from their social network and reported feelings of loneliness and depression. Research from these early years produced a grim picture of who socialises online and how online interactions effect offline relationships.

Synchronous Real-Time Chat

In the late the 1990’s, software was developed which allowed real time synchronous communication called Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Seemingly overnight several software packages of this type (Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, ICQ “I Seek You”) gained popularity, predominantly by teenagers. MSN Instant Messenger, one of the well-known computer-mediated communication technologies, opened in 1999 and has since grown to over 17 million users. Along with other popular Instant Messenger services (AOL, Yahoo!, ICQ), there are a total of at least 53 million users worldwide (Shiu & Lenhart, 2004). This software was a departure from the chat room scene and an improvement on email interaction. It allows users to maintain a selected group of participants, much like email. However, unlike email, IM participation is much more exclusive. (Everyone is familiar with sorting through an email box of unwanted, unauthorised spam.) With this new Instant Messaging (IM) software participants must know each other’s address and ask permission to be added to someone’s address book. Only those people admitted to an address book are allowed to interact with that person. Once added to someone’s address book both parties can see when each other are online and available for a conversation. In larger chat rooms anyone can access the web address and participate in a conversation. In this way the IM software is a closed network with exclusive access, whereas chat rooms can be seen as an open network accessible to anyone. Of course, someone can first go to an open chat room, meet someone and then exchange personal online addresses. When interacting with someone through IM it does not automatically mean they are physically known in an offline context but it does mean they have some control over who is added to their address book.

Instant Messaging is a text-based tool that allows real-time synchronous communication between “buddies”. Synchronicity is an improvement over basic Email. Email can be thought of as the online equivalent of writing a letter. Real-time synchronous

communication (MSN Instant Messenger) is the online equivalent of a conversation minus the visual cues. Leung (2002) reports that in Hong Kong it was so fashionable to use ICQ (one of the IM software brands) that students would send a message to a friend in the same room instead of walking over to tell them face-to-face. Current research, like that of Leung is acknowledging that not all communication on the Internet serves to distance people from offline relationships or leads to lonely and sad lives, as Kraut et al. (1998) initially found.

One of the biggest difficulties in comparing research in this field has been the rapid pace of technological upgrades. An online context which might have been explored last year may then change a few months later as newer technology is integrated (as happened in Kraut et al's study). For example, early forms of IRC were solely text-based. Successive upgrades have included a picture of the communicators (or a photo of choice to represent the person), file-sharing capability, collaborative games, profiles of the person so other's can learn about them, "smilies" or "emoticon" which can represent various emotions, web cameras, voice capability and collaborative web surfing capability. Each of these technological advances alters the context and therefore the goalpost keeps shifting.

Changes in communication software have been toward integrating our online/offline social networks as more people have come online and embraced these new social spaces. Psychological and communication researchers are now asking how we might integrate these two worlds. What are the socially limiting factors online? What do we need from software in order to feel satisfied with online interaction (Boyd, 2001)? What effect does visual anonymity (presumed to be one of the socially limiting factors) have on interaction (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & de Groot, 2001; Riva, 2002; Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell, 2001)? Visually anonymity is also one area software developers have expended the most energy into, continually upgrading to make the online environment more intimate and "rich", meaning technology which has attributes approximating the traditional face-to-face environment. Being visually anonymous is one of the characteristics which most differentiates online from face-to-face communication. Walther (2001), however, has suggested this overlooks the advantages that text-only software brings to communication that the face-to-face environment cannot offer. Maybe 'separate but equal' ought not to be the goal for software development. Maybe

the question should be what does the online context offer that the face-to-face context cannot? In what ways does each context enrich the overall relationship? Now that it is evident the Internet is here to stay these questions must be investigated within this new context.

Visual Anonymity

Much research has stemmed from the observed lack of immediate social cues present when two people interact online. Visual anonymity has been explored for its effects on impression formation (Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Tanis & Postmes, 2003), disclosure (Joinson, 2001; Suler, 2004; Tidwell & Walther, 2002), and self-presentation (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Turkle, 1995; Walther et al., 2001) and is the central focus of several theoretical perspectives on computer-mediated communication.

The first theory put forth to explain the effect which visual anonymity might have on communicating through computers was the cues filtered out (CFO) perspective (Walther, Anderson, & Park, 1994). Social cues like tone of voice, posture, gestures, eye gaze, and facial expressions, which are present during face-to-face communication, are all absent in CMC. It is the relative lack of social cues available with CMC that produces the anonymity experienced during Instant Messaging. In daily communication we rely on social cues so we can communicate effectively. Social cues tell us not only if someone is happy or sad, but the degree to which they feel that emotion. If someone says, "Yeah, I'm fine," the supporting social cues will add to that statement. "Yeah, I'm fine," with downcast eyes and weight shifting from one foot to the other and a low monotone tone of voice tells us that our friend is not really fine but just trying to put on a brave face. We can then react accordingly. "Yeah, I'm fine," with direct eye contact, a reassuring emphasis on the word "fine" and a nod of the head tell us that our friend is indeed okay. Without social cues to provide this sort of additional feedback, the environment is thought to be deficient. Surely we cannot effectively interpret how our friend is feeling without those extraneous cues. The research around anonymity has sought to explore the social ramifications of this deficiency. The cues filtered out perspective suggested that computer-mediated communication was best suited for impersonal and task-oriented needs because of its tendency to inhibit interpersonal relations.

The Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) (Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995) has also attempted to explain online social behaviour observed under anonymous conditions. The SIDE model grew out of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and extends the CFO approach. The CFO perspective is extended by incorporating the social identity motivations of the communicators and the cognitive processes which are invoked in the absence of identifying information. As humans we strive to understand others and place ourselves in relation to them. In a context with few socially identifying cues available communicators will grant greater importance to any remaining information, even if this is minimal. Relying on a small amount of information is said to diminish the individuality of the person and instead constructs them according to whichever broader social group might be associated with the minimal cues available. This process has been referred to as deindividuation and has spawned a growing body of research concerned with online behaviour. Tanis and Postmes (2003) examined the presence of social cues and presumed group membership and the impact these two bits of information have on forming impressions of the other person online. When social cues like a photo or short biography are present online, the individual self becomes more visible which leaves a person's group affiliation as less important in forming a positive impression. When social cues are absent, as is often the case in computer-mediated communication, impressions are formed by default based on the how strongly a person identifies with the particular social group to which the other person is presumed to belong.

High group cohesion, the presence of a large number of people and a focus on external events or goals are some of the social identity motivations and cognitive processes which have also been shown to encourage deindividuation (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). In this state, a person may be less able to regulate their behaviour and therefore may react impulsively, based on their emotion. A person may be less aware of the effect their behaviour is having on other people and may not actually care at that moment (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). The effects of deindividuation have been implicated in negative online behaviour like flaming (aggressive verbal attacks online), although other researchers (Coleman, Paternite, & Sherman, 1999) have questioned whether being in a deindividuated state could be solely responsible for these behaviours.

Chat rooms, newsgroups, MUD's are all relatively anonymous, possess a large number of people and can focus a person on external events. It is reasonable then to assume the conditions of these online contexts could produce deindividuated reactions and effects. Instant messaging, however, is different. Interactions are generally either dyadic or in small groups, they are generally not task or topic oriented as newsgroups and MUD's often are, and they are not necessarily always anonymous. Today it is common for adolescents to use IM as yet one more way to interact with their offline friends. While not completely anonymous in this context of known offline friends, the immediate IM environment is still deficient in visual social cues. The fact that IM is now a popular way for offline friends to extend that friendship into an online context would presume a high level of group cohesion. To review thus far, anonymity, it is said, can produce a state of deindividuation. Deindividuation has been associated with generally undesirable behaviour. It is this behaviour that early researchers encountered. Today, technology has evolved and adolescents have embraced IM which has distinct features that differentiate it from these previous online environments. All of these differences point to the creation of a unique context which does not appear to have many of the necessary components to stimulate a deindividuated state. It therefore can be deduced that many of the undesirable behaviours brought about through deindividuation may not be present in an IM environment. However, IM has been essentially unexplored and it is not known what features of IM may protect against deindividuated behaviours. Now that more people are online it is often the case that adolescents choose to IM with known people rather than joining chat rooms full of anonymous others. It is this group of adolescents who commonly use IM as a way of maintaining ties with their offline friends that the current research is concerned with.

Partial Anonymity

When people interact online with known offline contacts the communicators bring with them a certain amount of knowledge of each other which means the interaction cannot be truly anonymous. I will refer to this as a state of partial anonymity. Friends are immediately aware of who is online and can imagine their friend at their own computer. However, the two friends cannot actually see each other as they type. Anonymity in this context is therefore partial because the two communicators will likely see each other tomorrow at school. As a partially anonymous context, IM offers situational anonymity but the relationship overall is not conducted under anonymous conditions.

Anonymity has been discussed in terms of reduced feelings of accountability. How does the partial anonymity afforded in the online context impact on accountability to those friends in the offline context? Joinson (2001) found that disclosure within dyads was higher when they were visually anonymous. With cameras added so that the communicator thought the recipient could see them, disclosure lowered. Joinson concluded that when communicators become more aware of their public image they feel more accountable for what they say and this reduces the amount they are willing to disclose. It is reasonable to assume that if a person is in a state where they are emotional and impulsive and also do not feel accountable to the other person (they are never going to meet the person), then it would be easier to verbally abuse (flame) without direct social ramifications. However, it is common sense to expect social ramifications if one is verbally offensive to someone they see on a regular basis. The partial anonymity of the IM context may impact on accountability in a way that is different from existing research which focuses on contexts of complete anonymity.

As well as some of the negative effects stemming from a state of deindividuation, discussed earlier, there have also been very positive outcomes associated with anonymity. Greater self-awareness, lack of disinhibition, and increased attractiveness to the other person have all been reported. How is self-awareness shifted when the context is one of partial anonymity? The SIDE model proposes that group salience and self-awareness are both important factors for understanding the effects observed under visual anonymity. Instead of the assumption that anonymity and deindividuation produce a *loss* in self-awareness, the SIDE model suggests that self-awareness can *shift* emphasis from personal to group identity. This means a person may become more aware of their “self” as part of a group rather than being rooted in their sense of personal uniqueness. When “group membership” is prominent, this “group self” is enacted and online behaviour may serve to strengthen that group association under anonymous conditions. When group membership is not as prominent, anonymity promotes a shift to personal identity, which can promote behaviour related to personal goals. The current study investigates identity formation when offline friendships (groups) are maintained across two contexts. It is therefore assumed that group membership is significant to the participants. Under what conditions might partial anonymity invoke the “group self” or the “individual self”?

With research to date it has often been observed that in an online context offering complete anonymity, participants are able to present a 'false' identity. In MUD's this is to be expected because of the emphasis on fantasy in that context, however it has been discussed as a cause for concern in newsgroup and chat environments. The present study is concerned with the partially anonymous IM context and how identity can be presented in this context. It has been suggested that negative behaviours, self-awareness, disinhibition, and accountability might all change under this condition. If this is the case, it is argued there will be implications for how a person is able to experience and gain personal knowledge about their self.

Identity and Adolescence

Fitting in, connecting with others, a sense of belonging whilst acknowledging uniqueness, have all been put forth as important to self-discovery and identity formation (Adams & Marshall, 1996). Scholars have long agreed that social relationships and secure attachments are the most important things for healthy identity formation. Although this is a life-long pursuit, most scholars agree there is a noticeable intensity around this issue during our adolescent years (Cotterell, 1996; Grotevant, 1992; Kroger, 1996b). Research on identity formation has historically explored biological, emotional or behavioural aspects. Recently researchers have begun to take context into account (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Brown, Dykers, Steele, & White, 1994; Danielsen, Lorem, & Kroger, 2000). If we begin with the understanding that identity is a social process then it follows that these interactions take place within a social context. For adolescents, social contexts are often groups. Adolescents gain a sense of belonging, trust, camaraderie, and respect from group membership (Cotterell, 1996). How a person internalises feelings and emotions and makes meaning from these experiences informs one's sense of identity. How a person experiences themselves is the essence of "who am I and how do I fit in?"

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978) has been particularly useful in explaining how group membership can affect one's personal sense of identity. A person can belong to many groups simultaneously (ethnic, socio-economic, a sport team, a religious group, volunteer groups, achievement-based groups, political organisations). According to SIT, how strongly we identify with a group will determine the effect

which that particular membership will have on personal identity formation. It is proposed that as a person comes to understand the many groups in their larger network there is a need to negotiate incompatibilities, which conflicting memberships may present. Identity, according to SIT, is derived from both comparing oneself to others within a group and by comparing the in-group with the out-group. In this process one can negotiate attachments with new groups, and re-negotiate existing attachments like offline friend and family relationships.

Social Network Analysis (Moreno, 1934) is another helpful way to conceptualise “who am I and how do I fit in?” A network can be thought of as a web of interpersonal connections. Some strands of the web are stronger than others. Some points on the web are directly connected to another point and others only indirectly connected. Social Network Analysis proposes that social influence from one part of the network is related to the strength and intimacy of that connection. When people look at their entire web of connections they start to understand where they fit in, where their boundaries are, and which connections are more valuable. Taken as a whole, Social Network Analysis proposes that this is where a person gains a sense of personal identity. Both Social Identity Theory and Social Network Analysis view our associations as a way to experience our “self-in-relation”. The current study is concerned with how a social network spanning two context will impact on identity formation. How is group membership constructed? How and when does negotiation take place within this sort of network?

When we interact with people and groups in our network, we do so using spoken, written or body language. Our language can be quite different within the various group contexts we fit into because each group has its own rules of what is acceptable or normal. Identity is actively created via the language we use as we interact. It is the language inherent in the online context and its role in shaping that interaction which has been largely neglected by researchers. By analysing how language orients an understanding of how we fit into various contexts, we might better understand how it shapes ones experience of their self in that particular context. With the advent of the Internet, many researchers (Cote & Schwartz, 2002; Livingstone, 2002; Riva, 2001) are renewing the call for contextual identity research. Perhaps the findings from the early days of socialisation on the Internet showed that this context is so different that identity

presentation online can be wildly different from that which is presented offline. A businessman by day may be a heroic dragon-slaying knight with magic powers by night. In the early days of the internet the people who went online participated in one of the few online socialisation venues, MUD's (Multi-user dungeons). This sort of identity play is common still today, however, there are other software avenues now available for online interactions. How will different socialisation software impact on what can be presented online? When relationships span both online and offline contexts how is identity presentation negotiated? Researchers have acknowledged that context plays a role in identity development and it is expected that new socialisation software like MSN Instant Messenger will change self-presentation.

Adolescent Use of Technology

Given the developmental task of understanding how one fits into the larger society, adolescents may be particularly affected by the tide of technological changes affecting socialisation. During the 1990's researchers worried about the Internet promoting isolation, taking time away from face-to-face social interaction (Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis, 2001; Turrow, 1999). However, recent research (Pew Internet & American Life, 2001; Riva, 2002; Spears, Postmes, Lea, & Wolbert, 2002) suggests just the opposite – that adolescents are making use of those Internet functions which allow for interpersonal connection and conversation. Email is now the most common reason for going online and 53 million people use the Internet for instant messaging – both of these being social functions. Instead of it changing them into socially reclusive personalities, they have accessed the software which will promote socialisation and group entertainment. Adolescents are transferring their need for social belonging to the Internet. The Internet has been called a contemporary space which is becoming increasingly embedded into daily routine and is increasingly a way of connecting with our network of offline family and friends (Kraut et al., 2002; Pew Internet & American Life, 2000, 2001). As we are realising that the Internet does not necessarily reduce the quality of offline socialisation there has now been a move toward understanding the nature of this online context. How are adolescents able to make a functional distinction between contextually acceptable behaviours (Thurlow & McKay, 2003)? Researchers are recognising the need to take into account the important role of peer groups in the context (Brown & Cantor, 2000). How do adolescents integrate online and offline relationships (Slater, 2002; Valentine & Holloway, 2002)? Some scholars have said

that girls use the Internet differently than boys; boys focus on the technology itself whereas girls are more interested in what the technology is able to do for their relationships (Lenhart et al., 2001). Other research shows that while this may generally be true for Internet use, for MSN instant messaging this is not the case and reasons for use appear equally distributed (Pew Internet & American Life, 2001). The present study is concerned with how young women construct identity within the context of new technology.

Scholars agree that the Internet has the potential for psychological benefit or detriment depending on whether it expands opportunities for connection with an offline social network or is a substitute for those offline relationships. Early research on CMC painted a grim picture of the impact online interactions would have on offline relationships. However, more recent research has refuted that. As pointed out earlier, the social influence from one part of our network is related to the strength and intimacy of that connection. It is therefore necessary to take into account the motivations of the actors in using the internet. Haythornthwaite (2001) says that the effects of text only communication will depend on the strength of the tie between communicators more so than the medium itself. Those with stronger connections will seek out multiple avenues for communicating. Gross et al. (2002) found that it was not so much quantity of time spent online but *with whom* that time was spent that mattered. Spending time online to strengthen offline connections was something socially confident adolescents did. Joining chat rooms to talk with strangers was something socially anxious adolescents did to avoid loneliness. Instant Messaging is often between people already connected in some way offline. (While contacting strangers is possible, the software requires both parties to give approval before contact can be made.) These researchers show contextually based research should extend beyond just the medium to include the communicators and take into account the strength of their connection.

Preparation for the 21st Century

A few researchers (Call et al., 2002; Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002) have reviewed changing trends in how we structure our daily lives and asked how these trends will alter what adolescents need to learn in order to become well functioning adults? Larson et al. (2002) sees the ability to work within an “ambiguous” online environment, and interact successfully, as a valuable skill in an increasingly

online world. Larson also argued that the ease or informality of interactions on the Internet could soften the boundaries between groups within our network rendering them “semi-permeable”. Negotiating ambiguity across these “semi-permeable” boundaries will increasingly become an important skill in the 21st century. Call et al. (2002) view the Internet as a context which has the potential to link adolescents to resources so they can actively make decisions, while also expanding their supportive network, both necessary components in maintaining health and well-being in a constantly shifting global society. Wellman (2001) describes a future heavily influenced by technology which serves to network individuals in many positive ways transforming the vague notion of *cyberspace* into concrete *cyberplaces*. The boundaries indicating how we know someone and where we can interact with them will continue to become blurred and we must learn to switch roles adeptly regardless of the physical context we find ourselves currently in. Our ways of interacting increasingly involve new technology and adolescent advocates are heralding these opportunities afforded by the Internet as essential preparation for 21st century adulthood. We are only now beginning to look at the pervasive effects this new technology might have on our relationships with each other. The trends highlighted show that some of the skills adolescents may need in order to function as adults of the future can be found within online socialisation. These skills are related to ambiguity, anonymity and boundary negotiation issues that the Internet produces. As these are also issues of importance for identity formation it is argued that online socialisation could be important for understanding psychological health and well being for the 21st century.

Summary

The Internet has been publicly available for just one decade and in the most recent years it has become a much more integral part of daily life. The Internet is increasingly being employed for the communicative avenues it offers. As we interact within these new environments we are privy to new ways of experiencing our friends and our self, which may not be available to us when we interact in other contexts. In this way it can be seen as a contemporary social hang-out where we are able to experience our “self-in-relation”. In the early days of the Internet there were concerns around people presenting online identities that were radically different to their offline identities. It was the complete anonymity offered in the online context that supported such polar identities.

This presented concerns for the safety of the Internet and concerns around the impact this sort of interaction would have on offline psychological health and relationships.

Instant Messaging is a technology that is different from earlier online communication mediums. Since more people are now online, this current generation of adolescents is one of the first to use these online contexts in order to extend already established offline social ties. This produces a position of partial anonymity. It is argued in this thesis that partial anonymity will impact on identity formation in a way that alters previous research findings around internet communication and behaviour. Adolescent motivations are toward developing and maintaining a positive self-image, balancing social desires with autonomy expression and this is typically done through friendship circles. In the process of exploring this larger question this thesis looks at how commitment, self-disclosure, miscommunication and trust are performed and negotiated in a context of partial anonymity. These four factors have all been said to impact on identity formation and it is therefore assumed that as they perform and negotiate, adolescent girls are doing the work of identity development and maintenance.

Chapter 3 is about balancing social and autonomous selves through a performance of commitment to relationships. Chapter 4 is about the performance of identity through self disclosures like opinion, status, and mood states. Chapters 5 and 6 are about the negotiation of trust and risk which are precursors to confident and safe disclosure. All chapters discuss the ways in which adolescent girls capitalize on features of IM to use computer-mediated communication in friendships as they strive toward their identity development goals. Instead of viewing an online context as disconnected but related to an offline social context, it is suggested that the partially anonymous characteristic gives rise to an independent social context. This thesis seeks to understand adolescent identity formation within a partially anonymous and computer-mediated social context.

Chapter Two

Methods

Participants

Participants were eight young women aged between 13-17 years and were recruited from two towns in New Zealand. All participants used MSN Instant Messenger to keep in touch with their friends out of school hours at least three times per week and had been using Instant Messenger for at least six months prior to participation in this study. Some participants knew each other because they were recruited through friendship circles.

Methodology and Research Design

An ethnographic approach

The aim of this research is to explore identity constructions when friendships traverse both online and offline contexts. My instinct was that each environment would have its own values and rules of conduct and therefore what a person could know about their self in each context would vary. It was presumed that the level of anonymity in an IM environment is somewhere between an online context of total anonymity and an offline context representing no anonymity at all. For this reason, I chose a research design which would mirror this interaction. Although not expressly investigated in this thesis, I assumed that my online interaction with a participant in our third interview would be different than our interaction in the first interview because by that point we would have built up some history together. During our first online interview the participant and researcher did not know each other. This mirrors the total anonymity experienced when two people meet each other online and only know one another in cyberspace. The second interview was face-to-face which dissolved any anonymity. By the time we had the third interview (which was again online) the researcher and the participant had built up a history (albeit a short history) both online and offline. This “sandwiching” format was intended to mirror the participants’ experience of knowing their friends in two contexts. However, for the participants, the flow is often reversed. Their relationships will many times begin with knowing each other offline (at school) and then experiencing each other online. Nevertheless, this “sandwiching” of interviews was intended to replicate experiencing a person and a relationship in two contexts.

The researcher's history

I was first introduced to IM by a close friend. The first time I interacted with an adolescent friend of mine, I experienced her as very different online than I had come to know her offline. She obviously felt she could represent herself differently online. This led me to wonder what effect IM software might have on one's sense of identity if a person was interacting by way of technology on a regular basis. My beginning as an IM user coincided with beginning this research. For this reason the current research might be considered an ethnographic approach to studying online interactions. I was a participant observer because I met and interviewed participants in two spaces. Just as they interact across two domains, the research was conducted in two domains. I was also a participant observer in that aside from interviewing this group of research participants, I interacted through IM with my own group of friends. Traditional ethnographic approaches are usually immersive in the cultural object of study. However, while the ethnographic approach taken with this present research does not initially appear to do this, it does in fact mirror how the participants used IM. As mentioned in the previous chapter, IM can be viewed as a more "closed" network like email because all contacts must be pre-approved. Just as the girls interacted and experienced their own group of friends in a different light, I was able to interact with my own network of friends and similarly experience established offline "friendships" in a different light. In addition to inquiring how particular features of IM affected their relationships, I was able to experience for myself things like the paucity of non-verbal cues when online. While my own IM history has given me an insider's view on this technology, I wanted to ensure that the girls' experience remained the focus of study. For this reason I felt it was especially important to use interview responses liberally in my analysis.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews

Analyses presented in this thesis are based upon semi-structured interviews with eight adolescent girls between the ages of 13-17. Initial contact with potential participants was then made by friends of the researcher who knew of young women using Instant Messenger after school. Originally it was intended that the first few girls contacted early on in the recruitment process would disseminate an information sheet with a "consent to be contacted" form to other friends in school, creating a snowball effect.

Those interested in participating would send back the form with their phone number and a convenient time to phone. However, this proved to yield few results and it became apparent that the target group was not comfortable with this traditional mail method. The information sheet was modified to include an e-mail address as the way for potential participants to make contact. Those who were not interested simply did nothing. Unless the researcher was contacted by a participant there was no way of knowing who had been given information sheets. This method quickly produced participants. The snowball strategy to recruitment was then used.

All email responses indicating interest were then replied to through e-mail thanking them for their interest and asking for their phone number. The need to discuss the research and answer any questions over the phone was explained. Parental consent was sought for any informants under the age of sixteen. Five participants were under sixteen years old. In these cases the parent/guardian was talked with over the phone so any queries regarding the research process and topic questions could be answered. It was made clear in the "Information sheet" and again highlighted during our phone conversation that parents would not be privy to the specific content of our interviews. If both the participant and a parent/guardian were happy with this process then a "Consent form" was mailed out and a time for the first online interview was arranged. A few of the participants had not actually seen the information sheet and just knew of the e-mail address. Therefore I attached an electronic information sheet for them and provided them with a printed copy through the mail. Participants were given a \$25.00 gift voucher for a music store as recognition of the time investment required.

Participants were interviewed three times each. Some of the participants knew each other and were therefore asked not to discuss the interviews with their friends until all three interviews were completed. The first interview was conducted over the Internet via MSN Instant Messenger. This was followed by a more traditional face-to-face interview in the participant's home. A third interview was again conducted over the Internet via MSN Instant Messenger. Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately one hour. The online interviews typically went longer and lasted approximately 1 ½ hours. Prior to the online interviews the participants and the researcher had to follow formal MSN Instant Messaging protocol in order to have access to each other online. This protocol involved exchanging email addresses and asking formal permission to be

admitted to each other's buddy list. During online interviews both the participant and the researcher were at their respective homes but had agreed on a time to "chat" online together.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the participant's home. All interviews were audiotaped. It was made clear in the Information Sheet, Consent form and verbally at the time of the interview that the tape could be turned off at any point if the participant wished and that she did not have to discuss anything she did not wish to discuss. The confidentiality of interviews was again pointed out before starting the audiotape as were the limitations to that confidentiality. Participants were told they would be asked questions about how they use Instant Messenger to keep in touch with their friends after school. A list of interview topics is provided in the Appendix. None of the participants asked for the tape to be turned off and all interview questions were answered willingly.

Literature review strategy

My research question dictated my literature review strategy rather than first looking for a gap in the research and then developing a question. Instant Messaging was rapidly becoming a common way for teenagers to "hang out" with their friends. I felt instinctively that because this interaction was so new that surely there was a gap in the research about psychological aspects of communicating in this way. Therefore, I did a historical literature review of the social issues surrounding the internet and in particular ways of communication via the internet. From this historical review I learned that anonymity was one of the most hotly debated issues and was also the major distinguishing factor of Instant Messaging. I also learned that the more recent research was showing that the psychological impacts of internet use were not clear cut. I suspected partial anonymity would play an important role in computer-mediated interactions. I stopped my literature search at this point and moved on to data collection. It was while analysing the data that I returned to gathering research, this time much more focussed on the themes which were emerging out of the data. This is when I came across several important articles about the SIDE theory and Haythornthwaite's work on the importance of tie strength.

Transcription of interviews

The face-to-face interviews were audiotape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Although the written transcripts were the focus of analysis, the audiotapes were continually consulted. Online interviews did not need to be transcribed. The conversation was simply saved to disk and was ready to be printed out. However, because of the disjointed talking turns and the fact that often one response to a question is spread over several talking turns, I developed a format for altering IM transcripts to fit into a more traditional presentation of text. When compiling responses for use in writing up the analysis, I have used ellipses to show that the response was not continuous. When the informant started her next talk turn with “and”, I have connected the talk turns directly instead of using ellipses. For ease of reading I have formatted responses into single paragraphs. Spelling was left unchanged when presenting MSN transcripts. Occasionally I have “translated” a word or abbreviation for easier understanding by the reader and these are represented with brackets. Two examples are provided below:

Katie Says:

What's appealing about Instant Messaging?

Gertrude Says:

it is instant, and u can do ther things at da same time

Gertrude Says:

and if u have nothin 2 say u can just ignore dem 4 a while

Gertrude Says:

whereas on da phone deres dis awkward silence

This online text was formatted into the thesis as follows:

Gertrude: it is instant, and u can do ther [other] things at da same time and if u have nothin 2 say u can just ignore dem [them] 4 a while...whereas on da phone deres dis [there is this] awkward silence

Katie Says:

Can you tell me about a friend's log-in name?

princess of viitakangas..... says:

rotatating_pulsating auxz stylez,i can make u a celebritie, just come 4 a cruze wit me, B-M-W stylez

princess of viitakangas..... says:

thats one of my mates

princess of viitakangas..... says:

he loves cars

princess of viitakangas..... says:
and thinks if you go for a ride with him youd be so popular
princess of viitakangas..... says:
hes got a nice car

This online text was formatted for the thesis as follows:

Paris: rotatating_pulsating auxz stylez,i can make u a celebritie, just come
4 a cruze wit me, B-M-W stylez...thats one of my mates...he loves
cars and thinks if you go for a ride with him youd be so
popular...hes got a nice car

Method of Analysis

The aim of this research was to understand the ways in which participants construct identity when their friendships are maintained through two contexts: the online format of Instant Messenger and in the traditional face-to-face context. The focus of analysis was the identification of thematic constructions and the resources the participants drew from when constructing identities. In the interest of remaining grounded in the data I use participants own accounts liberally for illustration. However, I also acknowledge that as a researcher my own voice will remain present in this research process. Although interviews were semi-structured, leaving space for the informants to respond however they wanted, I acknowledge my role in the process of an interview. An interview becomes co-constructed as interviewer and participant react to each other, and the path, along which the line of questioning proceeds, is mutually decided. Likewise, in gathering and analysing data I had to make choices like how to compose results and which themes to concentrate on. There are many stories with adolescents and online interactions that are yet to be acknowledged and it is just simply beyond the scope of this research to honour them all.

Initially I gathered responses according to sixteen broad topics covered during the interviews (e.g. arguing online, how friends present themselves online, advantages of each context, various comparisons with contexts, etc.). Then I read all the responses in one topic area to see if they had a similar thematic undercurrent across the participants. I then collapsed together those topic areas which produced similar themes. This generated a second tier of analysis consisting of several themes. At this point two strategies were employed. One, within each thematic grouping I thought about the relationships at work between the individual topics related to that theme and also how

each topic related to other topics under that theme. The second strategy emerging from this process was to look for another, even more broad construction which might encompass the various (seemingly diverse) themes. What eventually resulted were three dominant narratives: Performing commitment, performing disclosure and the balance between risk and trust.

MSN Instant Messenger

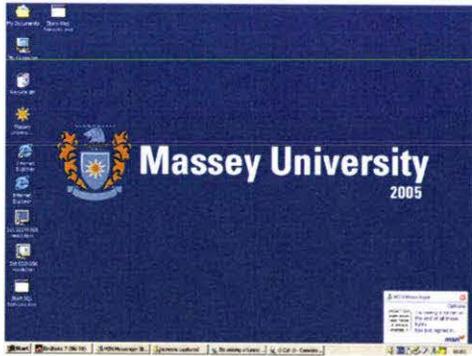
MSN Instant Messenger requires users to be “accepted” into a “buddies” address book before two people can chat online. Instant Messenger is free software easily downloaded from the MSN website. If one person initiates the exchange of addresses



and the other person accepts then both addresses are exchanged. When a user is at their computer they need to “log-in” to Instant Messenger to start the application before they can chat to their buddies. There is a summary window showing who is currently online or offline. Friends who are online are represented with green icons and those who are offline and therefore unavailable are represented with a red icon. There are also ways of representing if someone is technically online but away from their computer at the moment. From the “buddy list” shown here there are two friends who have a clock icon next to their green icon. This means they are “away” from their computers. You can still interact with that buddy but they may take longer to answer

because they may not see what has been written to them.

Users are alerted when anyone on their “buddy list” (address book) comes online. A notice is sent to everyone on her “buddy list” that she is now available for interaction. This notification is a small box which appears for a short amount of time in the right bottom corner of the computer screen for those buddies who are currently logged in to Instant Messaging. Even if other applications are open and active on the screen this box appears on top of them momentarily.



A user can also set their “status” to convey their level of availability. For example, a user may technically be online but may set her status to “Away”, “Busy”, “Out to lunch” or even “Offline” if she wishes not be interacted with at that moment. This status can be altered at any time. All of the various statuses, except “appear offline”, still allows “buddies” to contact the user. Changing the status is simply a way to keep each other informed about momentary availability. If the “appear offline” status is selected then the user can neither send nor receive messages.



The conversation is conducted within a large dialogue box which is divided into two spaces. The top portion of the dialogue box is shared and will show a complete record of the conversation. Messages are typed into the lower portion which is a small personal dialogue box. One user types a message and presses enter and that message is posted onto the shared screen for both her and the buddy she is currently talking with to see. Whoever types the next message will be posted next. If one user is a faster typist, has more to say, or presses enter after shorter entries then it is common for one communicator to have several talking turns in a row. Conversely, after a talk turn, the

user can simply wait until her buddy has had a chance to type a response. The personal dialogue box will show when the buddy is busy typing a message.



As the dialogue box above shows, the alert, “choopug is writing a message” is visible in the bottom left corner of the personal dialogue box. This allows Choopug’s buddy to either wait for the response or decide to continue talking. Both people can type at the same time but whoever presses “enter” first gets posted to the shared dialogue box first. This feature can lead to a disjointed looking conversation in the shared dialogue box. When more talking turns have been posted than actually fit on the screen, a scroll bar appears on the right side of the screen. An entire conversation can be scrolled through at once.

There are a number of features available designed around customising online interaction including: emoticons (faces 😞 😡 😎 😟 😢 and icons 🕒 ❤️ 📱 🎂 🍷 to convey a range of moods), backgrounds, profile sharing, games and log-in names. Profile sharing is a way to publicly display personal information. Users fill out a public profile for other users to view. This profile can be made available to those on her “buddy list” only or to the wider MSN audience. Information on the public profile can include age, hobbies and occupation, email addresses and other contact information, personal photos, favourite quotes, and links to favourite websites. Users are free to choose as much or as

little to reveal about themselves and can also choose to leave it completely blank. A personal profile is not mandatory for participation in instant messaging and is generally available as an optional online identity management service.

A log-in name is the name displayed on the buddy list to represent who is online. It is separate from the email address. A name can be changed as many times as you like and will not effect the email address. Some people choose to change their name several times during one conversation, others less often, and some people seldom change their name. A name can be one word or an entire line of poetry. If a name is changed then it will automatically be changed on every buddy list to which that person belongs.

Chapter Three

Performing Commitment

Gertrude: when ur a teenager your friends are miles more important than ur family, u cnt go anywhere or do anything without them.

“Hanging out” is one of the ways adolescents learn about how they fit into their wider social circle. Instant Messenger can be seen as a contemporary social hangout which provides the girls with ready access to their friends. This chapter is about an adolescent drive to extend social networks and how IM is constructed as a means to show commitment to the new social connections they make in that process. In addition to a social motivation, adolescents also desire to experience themselves as unique in the world, able to make individual choices. In connecting with a wider network IM allows them space to balance both of these motivations.

Previous research has involved online interactions which are largely anonymous until communicators chose to meet. Extending offline networks through hanging out online is different because of the partially anonymous nature involved. In previous research it was thought that seeking online relationships was a way to avoid ‘more beneficial’ ties to people offline. Therefore, the people who chose to interact in this way were often viewed as socially inept or lonely. Instant messaging, however, very often involves communicating with people already known offline and therefore, the partial anonymity of IM will highlight different motivations for online interactions than those which were reported in contexts of complete anonymity. Instead of lonely people connecting with others under the cloak of anonymity, the girls in this study position themselves as socially skilled offline and merely incorporating IM as just one more way to be connected to their friends, while also capitalizing on the opportunity to further expand their social network.

Extending Social Networks and the Status of Friends

When asked what was appealing about IM the answer was that the girls want constant access to their social networks. Quantity of time spent with friends equates to

connectedness, whether it is with their best friends or those people they don't necessarily talk to every day.

Vanessa: You can keep your friendships up with people even if you don't see them...like you talk to them on MSN so you know you're still mates.

Christy: You know your friendships might not even happen if you don't keep up with people and MSN is quite regular...it [the relationship] just would have petered out because the only other way of doing it is phone numbers and when you call someone it's almost like you need a reason, where if you're MSNing you're just ON at the same time that's basically WHY you're talking to them.

Instant Messaging provides a way to reaffirm the status of "friends", even if this interaction does not necessarily lead to increased commitment in seeing each other regularly. Online contact may just mean the two communicators are more comfortable when they see each other again but it is not imperative that they meet up very soon. Online conversations function to maintain the friendship just by the fact that online contact is kept regular. Along this same vein, regardless of depth of conversation, mere presence is constructed as satisfying.

Christy: Like you're more friendly with that person, but it's not because of anything that you said, it was just the fact that you said SOMETHING, the fact that you talked to them, rather than the fact that you shared something with them. Like you're not close because of that one piece of information you're just close because you talked to them.

In the next chapter, mere presence is constructed as insufficient in promoting satisfying disclosure. While this appears to be contradictory, perhaps IM holds the door open to the possibility of a deeper friendship between two people and therefore the mere presence of other people satisfies the adolescent drive to extend social networks. With regard to identity exploration, a larger or more diverse network of friends would provide additional opportunities for gathering information about oneself. Indeed, some of the girls said that when they were younger they wanted to have a large number of online contacts because it made them feel like they had a lot of friends. Now that they are older they are more satisfied by their stronger connections and have lost interest in interacting with unknown people. Quality takes over from quantity. Central to identity

exploration is disclosure amongst friends. In the next chapter satisfying disclosure requires quality of presence. The network may be large but to whom one discloses is dependent on more than mere presence.

Just because IM serves to connect does not mean it necessarily equalizes all relationships. In some early internet research the anonymity experienced online was thought to make it a more democratic space. However, partial anonymity changes that. Mantovani (1994) found that in contexts of partial anonymity, where communicators were aware of the offline hierarchical status of each other, such knowledge actually reinforced this status in online interactions. Adolescent life is generally filled with social cliques and understandings around what constitutes an in-group and an out-group, and it is reasonable that these school-based statuses may be reconstituted online. In the present context of partial anonymity then, it is important to recognize this knowledge that communicators bring to the situation and how the meaning of “connection” might change from one person to another.

Paris: The people on MSN are people from school that I talk to but they're not like my close friends. My close friends I text.

Vanessa: I don't know, calling them up, they're not THAT GREAT of friend, I call people that are my good friends. But for other people I just want to chat with them like on the Internet but you still got that friendship going on with them, you still feel like they're your friend. But if you call them up, sometimes they might think, “okay??”

Jane: ...i didnt really talk to them before, but then we started up a convo [conversation] on msn and yeah.... cos at skool u dont really have time 2 talk 2 evry1 [everyone] u dont know but u can just start randomly chattin 2 them sumtimes on msn...it basically allows you 2 talk 2 people u sumtimes wudnt normally chat with.

Donna: yea if you know them, you have to be niceish, if theyr your mates you try to be real nice, if you only kinda know them then it doesn't really matter...lol [laughing out loud] because they are my mates, i respect them more than some random.

These quotes illuminate many levels of commitment related to offline social boundaries. Haythornthwaite (2001) proposes that the strength of the tie between the two communicators is crucial, and is actually a much better indicator of the ways in which a

medium is used than any particular characteristics which the medium itself has to offer. According to this idea, stronger ties incorporate more ways of keeping in touch regardless of whether that relationship started online or offline. A strongly connected dyad will alter the medium to suit its own motivations for supporting that relationship. The above quotes construct an expectation that different commitment levels can be shown dependent upon the strength of the tie. For example, showing commitment to “best friends” requires school, IM and texting and each of these contexts would be tailored to suit the level of intimacy and disclosure between that pair of friends. Showing commitment to friends who they don’t see as often anymore, simply requires IM contact which serves to say, “I’m still thinking about you even though we haven’t seen each other for ages.” To those “people” (not yet called “friends”) whom they rarely talk to at school, showing commitment requires only that a person is willing to keep that door of possibility open and therefore be willing to make contact through IM. Even this latter group is shown more respect than mere “randoms”. “Random” is a term used to denote people who are not known offline and are generally people who are interacted with for a much shorter period of time. In these quotes, the strength of the tie is shown to be a dominant force in how commitment is shown online.

Autonomy and Managing the Flow between Contexts

An additional way in which the strength of the tie is influential is in how it impacts on the flow between contexts. Softer, more permeable, online boundaries did not necessarily alter the positioning of offline boundaries. There appears to be a uni-directional flow. For instance, a relationship with an acquaintance which becomes strengthened online may not necessarily transition to the offline setting of the school as a “friendship”. However, a relationship initially strengthened offline will usually transition easily to the online context.

Paris: well the groups at school are quite set on whos in which group and its very rarely that someone moves groups...altho most of us are all friends we still have our set friendship groups...like with nick (the guy that i talk to) he hangs out with ppl who i would consider extremely immature thats why i dont associate with them

Katie: ok, so your friendship with Nick only really exists online....because offline he goes back to being part of a group which you wouldn't associate with...is that right?

Paris: yah...yah well like with Anna [good offline friend] i can talk to her at school and talk to her online but with nick i can only talk to him online because i just dont talk to him offline

Relationships which are strengthened online are thought of as good *online* friends but such a relationship may then be exclusively maintained within the online setting. Those relationships strengthened offline, however, are considered to be good friends without any qualifying (“online”) status. Perhaps partial anonymity restricts the flow of interaction in the online-to-offline direction because of the social boundaries in place offline. Without resolving boundary issues relevant to offline expectations (such as one person “moving groups”), such a friendship cannot be supported offline. These relationships are able to be comfortably maintained online but do not necessarily need to be brought offline to complete the relationship. In this way IM is considered a satisfactory context for supporting weakly tied, yet important relationships for “connectivity”.

Existing offline social boundaries, like the various ties discussed above, may be replicated at the early stage of online interactions, but IM then allows those boundaries between social cliques to soften while online. It seems that extending networks in this way is a gesture of commitment to remaining open to getting to know others in a deeper way. Making the effort to know people on an individual basis is seen as an important resource which IM supplies. However, negotiating different levels of commitment amongst these boundaries takes a bit of finesse.

Gertrude: you can talk to multiple groups of friends without them standing there giving each other evil looks.

Finessing a situation like this allows the girls to express autonomy of choice in who they show commitment to. Although multiple groups may not be compatible offline, they can each be maintained online because of these softer boundaries. However, this quote highlights that the girls are actually finessing the flow between the online and offline spaces, rather than simply keeping the peace between various social cliques. They would not necessarily talk to all of these groups offline because of the social stigma. The girls understand the balance between socially extending themselves and

expressing autonomy. Adolescents use social groups to compare themselves and therefore IM provides more opportunities for them to address their self-in-relation.

The girls are motivated to finesse the flow between online and offline interactions because they are not always comfortable with the more traditional ways of keeping in touch. Their comfort level is tied to the casual nature of IM. Casual exposure to each other allows control over the intensity of commitment shown. Instant Messenger serves them by satisfying their desire to have constant access and yet also allowing some autonomy over the level of intimacy expressed with an individual person. With IM, one can still show their commitment to the relationship, but in a more casual way which does not jeopardize whatever persona they are portraying.

Donna: like it may take me hours to catch up wiv [with] all my mates on the phone, whereas i can just send them a quick "how r ya?" and i am still making the effort...and i can do other things at the same time. for 7th formers, time is scarce, so i am doing an assignment at the same time.

Jane: Some of my friends on MSN are my good friends but I couldn't imagine ringing them up and like talking to them. It would be weird.

Donna: Normally if I ring people it's for a purpose, whereas if I go online, I get to say hello for no real reason.

Phoning is a big commitment step. As Vanessa said earlier, she phones her really good friends. In the next chapter, contact incorporating "voice" is very intimate and used primarily with good friends as a strategic way to show deeper commitment. However, "voice" is not required for most interactions and outside of very close same sex friendship it can actually create an uncomfortable level of intimacy. If the current motivation is simply to feel connected widely then IM serves this purpose in a casual and comfortable way. The girls exercise autonomy over the intensity of interactions by using IM as a way to show commitment without the required depth of really close friendships. For example, phoning a guy is even more intimidating than phoning other friends.

Vanessa: Oh my God, phoning a guy is like asking him out on a date, it practically is! With MSN it's like you're online, I'm online, sweet. It's also a way of like, securing yourself so if you're talking to a

guy, you're not CALLING them, where they can feel kind of intimidated by you calling them, you can just casually chat to them. But if you call them then it's like, YOU CALLED THEM.

The more traditional modes of communication like talking on the telephone or face-to-face are positioned as leaving them feeling exposed. The adolescent years see a large swing from hesitation with the opposite sex to more confident interactions. Perhaps IM allows this process to unfold in a more controlled manner because IM allows the social contact without the intense or intimate commitment brought on by "voice". Instant Messaging serves as a vehicle for negotiating the tensions inherent in interactions with the opposite sex. Perhaps it is easier to establish commitment online first, and then, if the relationship deepens online, an increased level of commitment may transfer to the offline environment. Online commitment has a more transient understanding that makes the experience more comfortable for newer connections. It is beyond the scope of this study, but there has been a lot of research around the development of romantic relationships which begin online and then carry over to the offline context.

This analysis brings to the foreground two motivations inherent in online interactions. The girls are motivated toward interacting socially and yet expressing autonomy. Instant Messenger is viewed as a place which allows them to balance their social self with autonomy at a comfortable level.

Maturity, Texting and the Future of IM

Although texting was not the focus of the interviews, texting was often brought up in comparison to IM. In terms of level of commitment being demonstrated, the comparison with texting can highlight some important advantages which the girls see in each medium. The second part of this chapter focuses on the future of IM for these girls with regards to new technologies. Will newer technologies displace IM? Does the normal maturational process mean adolescents may grow out of IM?

As discussed earlier, both communicators are aware that the most likely reason for chatting is simply because both people are there at the same time. Mere presence, while satisfying the need for connection, is not, however, a good indicator of the depth of friendship. Mobile phone texting appears to indicate the depth of a friendship.

Receiving a text message often seems “out-of-the-blue” and is therefore considered to involve more deliberate thought.

Christy: When you're talking to someone on MSN you've usually talked to them so it's not usually out of the blue when they talk back. You know that they're on the Internet. Whereas if you text someone, you don't know what they're doing or where they are and if they text back or if they text you randomly it's quite a buzz.

Donna: if ur waiting for a txbk then it feels good. Or if its just random, u feel like some1[someone] cares. yeah, that some1 luvs ya.

Deliberate thought translates to showing more commitment to the relationship. Therefore to receive a text stimulates a feeling of camaraderie that is perhaps “fast-tracked” more so than with IM.

Vanessa: if you get a text you know that you've been thought about...so you know that someone's...if they're thinking about you then you know they're your friend.

Earlier it was mentioned that texting was something reserved for closer friends and to send a text to a mere acquaintance would be weird. In this way texting maintains offline boundaries and does not serve to soften boundaries. This may be why a text carries more weight. The text received is probably from someone already established as a good friend offline and texting simply serves to reaffirm that status. With IM initial online interactions are just a foot in the door. It is the work of disclosure which serves to deepen the friendship.

Teenagers appear to readily embrace the up and coming new technologies and, if possible, they use them to show their commitment to friendships. Will this mean that the newer technology of texting might displace IM? Not necessarily. There are important limitations to the texting technologies at the moment which do not cater to the other motivations adolescents have in being connected.

Vanessa: [With MSN] you can have a full on conversation. And with text I'm just like...talk to you later...

With IM, a person can have a full conversation and with texting it is just really setting up the next time to meet up. So while texting can demonstrate deeper commitment, the

girls also value the breadth of commitment which IM allows for. While texting is often used with stronger ties, it is IM which supports their desire to investigate those weaker ties to see if there is a possibility of deeper friendship. Interestingly, some of the older girls interviewed mentioned that they were beginning to now use texting more often and rely on IM less often. It may be that this shows a natural progression from IM to texting as they change developmentally and become more social and mobile themselves.

Vanessa: I've been using MSN since I was, since I moved to Kerikeri which was about 12 years old, around there. And once, it's just kind of, because I'm texting and because I'm meeting people in real life and talking to them, MSN is just starting to just like...I'd rather talk to people in real life and I'd rather text them and I'd rather phone call them than talk on MSN.

As they mature and gain more confidence, the concept of "voice" may not be quite so intimidating. As they begin to drive, get a job and generally have access to a wider and more diverse network of friends offline, it may be that they do not need to work so hard to demonstrate commitment online. Interestingly, as the girls talked about using IM when they are older it was always framed as a way to keep in touch with strong ties which are not geographically close.

Katie: And do you think you'll still use IM when you go to Otago?
Donna: yeah, yep. I'm hoping to because it will just be easier to keep in contact with those mates that stayed up here or went overseas or went anywhere. Yeah, and I've checked out heaps of the halls already and most of them had internet access for free so that'll be cool, and it's cheaper than a phone call.

So it may be that IM serves a purpose for the early adolescent need for connectivity, but as the girls mature new motivations come into play and adolescents therefore alter how they interact with the IM software.

Summary

This chapter highlighted how the girls balance their social motivation with their desire to show autonomy as they demonstrate commitment in their friendships. Expanding a social network means reaching out to tap a previously uncharted resource. In this case, that means other social groups at school. Instant Messaging extends social networks by holding the door open to the possibility of a deeper friendship. Instant Messaging also

provides a casual forum in which the girls have control over the flow of interactions between the two contexts. This allows them the opportunity to experience themselves in relationships with a broader group.

From this analysis, it certainly seems this group capitalizes on what each context can offer in terms of their desire for connection. Instant Messaging allows this group of adolescent girls to connect to people in other social groups whom they would normally not talk with. However, it is not reasonable to become close friends overnight and therefore there is a tension which needs to be worked through as they open themselves to learning about each other. The following chapters are about working through that tension with regard to disclosure, trust, miscommunication, and the risk associated with different types of connection. I believe the partial anonymity afforded through IM moderates how this tension is resolved with each of these variables.

Chapter Four

Privacy and Disclosure

Vanessa: even if they're like your best friends...as soon as there's more than one person it's not private anymore so it's just like on the school playground...what you say could be remembered by three people, ya know.

In the previous chapter, connectivity was constructed as a primary way to show commitment to friendships and mobility was cited as a huge factor in the popularity of texting. Compared to texting, however, the big advantage in Instant Messaging was in having a “proper” conversation. In the previous chapter, partial anonymity served as a bridge supporting weaker social ties. These connections were viewed as a foot in the door, effectively saying, “I am willing to learn more about you”. This chapter is about the “proper conversations” which take place online and how the experience of partial anonymity plays a role in identity exploration.

Social comparisons between members of the in-group and between characteristics of the in-group and the out-group are important ways to establish personal boundaries regarding where a person fits into a larger social network. Gossip, the most common online topic, is replete with disclosures of opinions, social comparisons, judgments, and secrets.

Katie: What do you talk about online?

Suzie: um like peopl i might have a crush on that sorta thing...because in person i dunno i feel sorta embarased but im all good when you dont have to see the person

Vanessa: the main reason msn is better than talking in real life is u can say things that you may be to shy to say in person... thats mainly i found with gossip and things... plus msn is kinda funner, easier and makes u less vulnerable, especially when talking to guys.

Donna: like... u think that u may tell a person u like them, and not feel so shamed out about it...

Gossip is discussed in conjunction with complex emotions and it is proposed in this chapter that the online space serves a deeper purpose if the feelings attached are those of shame, embarrassment and vulnerability. In the previous chapter having online access to friends was a valued way to show commitment. Once online, learning secrets and disclosing through gossip is also valued.

Donna: It's sort of allowed me to get closer to my mates, and, you know, get to know their feelings a bit more...yeah, like there's a couple of mates that have told me stuff on IM that they probably wouldn't tell me face-to-face.

Vanessa: the ppl i talk to are mainly friends from skool, so they know my background and all that...we mainly talk about friends, wots up, gossip, things like that yea...because of online chat i've learnt some pretty deep stuff about my friends.

Instant Messaging adds another dimension to friendship by disclosing feelings and information that might not have happened outside of the IM context. The very fact that they learn "deep stuff" and feel they know their friends "properly" is attributed to their online contact. Instant Messaging "allows" these disclosures, even amongst friends which they know from school and who already know their background. This is the distinguishing feature from other online mediated communication formats like chat rooms and newsgroups. Instant Messenger disclosures are between known offline friends and the expectation, in this research, is that when the context is partially anonymous, disclosures may play a different role in the construction of identity.

Self-disclosing involves sharing information with others that could not readily be known without social interaction. Disclosure, in the psychological literature, has often been likened to the layers of an onion (Altman & Taylor, 1973). On the outside are those attributes that anyone can know simply by observing a person (gender, race, hair colour, height, clues to social status). Successive layers hold more personal information. Such disclosures could be opinions, ideas, desires, fears, wishes, personal history, mood, etc. People do not typically disclose those more personal layers for the first time in large groups. Typically, disclosures happen in either small groups of close friends or in a more personal one-on-one setting. It has been said that disclosing can be very personal and when personal disclosure is reciprocated it can serve to deepen the

friendship (Jourard, 1971). Self-disclosure is often associated with more satisfying relationships by creating a feeling of mutual understanding.

Proactive Portrayal of Identity

In exploring the purpose IM disclosures serve in identity formation, the texts were analysed for the ways in which the girls construct online and offline contexts differently. How and when disclosure happens and how they reconcile sometimes radically different behaviour in the two contexts has implications for self-knowledge. Bargh et al. (2002) found that ones 'true self' (if there is such a trait) was able to be more actively presented in the online context. Before interactions, participants listed traits about themselves which they believed that they actually possessed and actually expressed to others. They also made a list of "those traits they possess and *would like to* but are usually not able to express". After constructing these lists, it was found that in a computer-mediated context participants were able to proactively portray those traits they desired to portray. Those in a face-to-face context, however, were not able to portray their desired traits and convey that part of their self. Judging by the rapid increase in number of adolescents using IM, it is presumably a highly satisfying mode of interaction. Recent research suggests that self-disclosure is significantly higher via computer-mediated communication than via face-to-face contact (Joinson, 2001; Parks & Floyd, 1996). It has also been suggested that people tend to provide more personal disclosures earlier in the relationship creating a sense of intimacy more quickly than in face-to-face relationships (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Exploration around disclosure in each context highlights the distinguishing factors involved with such a proactive portrayal of identity.

Incongruence

Under anonymous conditions, like chat rooms and newsgroups, presenting oneself differently might be common because who would ever know? However, when a person is also known offline, how is incongruence construed? The girls in the present study said many people were similar in both contexts, but nearly everyone had an example of friends who could show radically different online and offline behaviour. Interestingly, incongruent social identities are positioned as understandable rather than contradictory.

Vanessa: um...well, Fiona, at school, she's quite calm...and then when she's online it's like her alter ego comes out. Like she's a

complete gansta girl...you know it's all the lingo...what's up dude...and all that. Some people are nicer online, some people are less angry online. I think that it's because when you're online they can be less...they don't act as though they have to be like different because there are like heaps of other people watching them. The only person they're talking to is you. So they like kind of relax or they can be more something that they want to be...like they are being someone different in front of a crowd. Robyn would be the opposite of that. Online she's like calm and collected and then at school she's all...random.

Vanessa's story is an effort to explain *why they can* display an "alter ego" online. Interestingly, it is the offline context in which the person is considered to be expressing a "different" part of their self. For Vanessa, IM allows her to relax and to be what she "wants" to be rather than what she "has" to be. The 'true' self is situated online, where self-portrayal is chosen rather than limited. The girls do not have to act the same as they do offline. Understandable incongruence is the first contextual factor involved in proactive portrayal of identity.

Vanessa's story begins to highlight the private nature of IM as another factor in proactive portrayal of identity. The offline space is likened to a "crowd". When "heaps of people" are watching, Vanessa feels that she is limited in how she can act. When someone presents themselves differently online, this incongruence is seen as a direct result of being able to relax because the crowd is not watching.

Donna: You can talk to that person and only that person without everyone else around and all their influences on your conversation, sort of thing.

Paris: theyre just normal online they dont have to impress anyone they just tell you the truth and stuff like that.

There is an experience of privacy online which frees a person from everyone else's influences. In the following texts, this experience of privacy emerges as part of a rationalization for using each context differently.

Vanessa: It's a completely different playing field [online], because when you're at school you're constantly having to think people could be watching you...you have to...be presentable, act cool, ya know, you can't get too over the top about something, but at

home if they say something, you can be like, “Oh, MY GOD!!!!” Ya know.

Jane: on MSN there is way way WAY less peer pressure than at skool...its more 1 on 1, so theres no pressure 2 act "kool" infront of ure [your] frends or nething [anything]...offline there's i dunno [don't know]...a certain way certain ppl [people] think u shud act, if u dont they dis u...but bcos ure [because you are] on msn those ppl rnt [are not] there, so u dont need 2 obey their rules.

The private nature of IM serves to protect the girls from unfavorable judgments. When they are liberated from everyone else's influence they can be more open with disclosure or let an “alter ego” come out. However, at school, speech, dress and demeanor all fall under a perceived expectation coming from the crowd. Privacy, then, is a crucial component in understanding why a person is allowed to be different when they are online.

Odette: online id say theres less peer pressure because you dont have to worry about what youre wearing or anything...you can b tkin [be talking] on the net in your pajamas and no one would no.

Katie: *and at school? What is the peer pressure like at school?*

Odette: well you kinda have to look right, act normal, speak right (the right language)...stuff like that (be perfect in other words)...dont really feel peer pressure online...probably some but none that ive noticed.

Odette: well [at school]...i spose you bow down and do what you have to do to be cool...

To prevent judgment the girls must conform to the ‘right’ behaviors. You must “act a certain way”, “be presentable”, “look right”, “speak right”, and “be perfect”. However, online, “those people aren’t there”, “you don’t need to obey their rules”, “there’s no pressure” and it is okay to wear pajamas because “no one would no [know]”. Coming from this perspective then, IM is positioned as refreshingly unrestricting. This does not mean that people are never able to choose how to present themselves in an offline context, but the privacy felt and the way in which judgment is diminished by that privacy are contextual features of IM that make it easier to be proactive with self-presentation.

Experiencing oneself as both an autonomous person and able to fit into the social scene is one of the central concerns for adolescents (Allison & Schultz, 2001; Cotterell, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2003; Newman & Newman, 1976; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). It is this balance between self and other which is said to be healthy (Kroger, 1996b). A balance allows a person to see where their personal boundaries are and how those boundaries overlap and fit in with others. These texts suggest that the girls recognise this and have been able to make sense out of the functional distinctions of each context. I suggest this may be why teenagers gravitate toward IM. Instant messaging allows them to build a chosen self-image and this serves the motivation inherent in adolescence toward exploring one's identity. The next section further investigates how teenage girls capitalise on the distinctiveness between contexts and use IM as a tool for active identity exploration. The private nature of IM allows them to relax around what they can say and who they can talk to, and around interactions with boys. The way judgment is diminished offers opportunities in protecting themselves against negative feedback regarding that chosen self-image. Judgment will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter as it is a central issue in the construction of 'truth'.

Personal Autonomy

As mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons for going online is self-disclosure through "gossip" and telling things they don't always feel comfortable revealing face-to-face. Instant Messaging allows protection from the risks that are seen as ingrained in offline interactions. The following discussion demonstrates how the privacy experienced online is capitalized on during three different online situations: expressing freedoms with speech, flirting and crossing barriers between social cliques.

The girls capitalize on privacy as they push boundaries and explore identities. The girls talk about choosing their own speech patterns and personality characteristics (louder, random, angry, etc). Although the two friends may know each other, the situational anonymity (not being able to see each other's face in the moment) and the privacy component serve to disinhibit online behaviour. The girls talk about being able to show a more intense side of their personality.

Jane: I put out my loud side. I let off steam about something but I'll say it a bit differently to how I'd normally say it. Like in capital letters and bold and be like really angry or something.

Gertrude: I'd be more opinionated. Like if I disagreed with something I'd probably disagree more strongly than I would in real life.

Odette: you just feel more confident online and type whatever you feel like pretty much...i dont care what people think of me online...i wouldnt say stink stuff, but i wouldnt care about being cool and saying cool stuff.

Previously, this sort of behaviour with known friends was constructed as risky because in a face-to-face environment the overt judgment would make a person feel "stink". Extreme behaviour is owned and rationalized through the acceptance of incongruence. The freedom to be incongruent and to play with aspects of one's identity extends to flirtations with the opposite sex. Many of the girls talked about how it is easier to talk with boys online. By being flirtatious, the girls are able to demonstrate a relaxed approach to interactions. It is more difficult to appear relaxed and confident face-to-face where their nervousness might betray them.

Vanessa: Because you are not having to look at them, you can say things that generally you'd rather DIE than say because there's like other people around. Like sometimes at home it's like "Oh, man it is soooo HOT." And they'll be like, "And whatcha doing?????" things like that and I mean if you're at school you can't say, "oh, Whatcha do..." coz you know, so there's that certain... oh, you can be kinky but you don't feel intim...I can't find the right word for it but you can say, you can kinda flirt but you're not really vulnerable.

Paris: Um...just like....when you open a window and say "Hi" they're like, "Hi Baby". Well, I consider that flirtatious and then like at the end of a conversation and you just say, "See ya", they're like, "Oh, see ya babe" and like you know its stuff like that and I'm like, "Oookay, are you alright." I don't know whether they'd do it face-to-face. I don't think they'd have the guts, but whereas online it's easier.

Flirting is positioned as allowable because the anonymity ("you are not having to look at them") protects a person from feeling vulnerable to judgment. It is not clear if vulnerability in Vanessa's story is related to cross-sex judgment or judgment from other observers. Either way, she is protected by both the ambiguity of online comments and the justification of incongruence. Paris, on the receiving end of this sort of flirting, is aware that it is just easier to say those things online and the person who is flirting

probably would not have the guts face-to-face. These texts show how this understanding is co-constructed. Both communicators must be aware of this rationalization process in order for the person flirting to be protected from feeling vulnerable.

All of these contextual differences point to the role which situational anonymity plays during online communication. However, these participants are actually interacting with people they have offline knowledge about. The next section highlights this aspect of interactions, which position privacy as paramount. While situational anonymity allows more overt, intense behaviours to surface, the privacy felt online is a key factor which allows this behaviour to happen with people known offline. All of the previously discussed behaviours have been experienced in other contexts which might be totally anonymous. Privacy is important in a partially anonymous context. A context of total anonymity may serve their motivation toward socialization, but the next section highlights that privacy is particularly crucial for IM to support their motivation toward expressing personal autonomy.

Adolescent peer groups can often be distinguished by rigid membership. The privacy felt online, however, reduces the interaction to just the two people. As Donna said earlier, “You can talk to that person and that person only, without everyone else around and all their influences on your conversation”. Making the connection with another person based on personal choice rather than social stigmas makes the boundaries between school cliques a little more permeable. Incongruence, in terms of allowable behavior, supports autonomy and this appears to extend beyond disclosures like ‘risky’ language. Autonomy extends to whom a person is able to talk with. Invoking the rationalization around incongruence can render risky connections safer.

Gertrude: well in high school, there are a number of groups...u r judged by which group u belong 2, how many ppl in it, what theyre all known 4 etc...ppl tend 2 b [people tend to be] more loud & open online.

Donna: 7th form doesn't really have its groups so much anymore coz everyone's like, “Come on, we're in 7th form we don't want to have the distinction anymore.” But there still is. A few of them, coz I have quite a few mates from all different levels anyway and I just talk to them online and it doesn't matter to

me where they are. I have...mm...yeah, most of them would probably be from my group. There's a couple that I sort of talk to that are maybe, I don't know how you would say it, a bit, um...um...socially impaired. MSN sort of breaks down that barrier. I think it is real good for them... like I have this mate Steve. He's not in the cool group but he's not in the nerd group and it IS cool when I talk to him because he sort of comes out of his shell and he sort of say things, quirky things that don't really matter.

In the offline context of school, social status is actively maintained through the upholding of social barriers between groups. On IM, interactions between people of different groups are viewed as personal choice and therefore the online context is able to break down that socially distinguishing barrier. For Donna, this aspect legitimates her personal control in choosing to interact with someone who is "socially impaired" and from another group. This works to Steve's advantage as well. For Steve, IM enables him to "come out of his shell" and "be himself" when that barrier is removed. At school Steve is judged as "socially impaired", but online he can be judged as "cool". Dual judgment emerges from the understanding that people are necessarily different offline. Dual judgment is not framed as contradictory at all, but rather, as perfectly natural because of what each context communicates. It is conceivable to both Steve and Donna that there is another side to him and therefore on IM, aspects of his identity which he finds desirable and chooses to portray are able to show through. Steve and Donna both have offline knowledge regarding the social status of the other person. Online, this boundary is softened. The privacy which is experienced allows them to concentrate on building a relationship. This emerges out of autonomy and despite offline social status. Situations of crossing boundaries to interact with people from other groups were common in the texts.

Paris: umm yup theres a guy on my list who i quite often talk to but have never spoken to him at school ever...hes good to talk to online but at school he hangs out with a different crowd compared to me- he hangs with people that are weird...they do stupid immature things...hes not around them so he doesnt have to impress anyone so yah hes just normal online.

Jane: Sometimes the cool people will talk to you because there's no one there to see them...And then sometimes you'll talk to the library people because they're not as nervous. The cool people have to try to act cool in front of their friends but on MSN

there's no pressure so they can just act like they really are. So if they're really like too cool then they won't talk to you but if they're like just tagging along with that then they'll talk to you because there's no one there to say like, "Did you see who she was talking to?"

Katie: *And the library people?*

Jane: They'll actually talk because like if you want to talk to them at school, they'll just be like kinda scared like coz they'll think you're just being mean or something, but I don't know, online they seem more confident and they'll just talk to you.

People on MSN are regarded as "normal" and are able to "just act like they really are". The cool people are allowed to talk because no one can see them and the library people are able to talk without being nervous. Through these texts IM is framed as a testing site. If the "cool person" is 'really' above everyone else then they wouldn't bother being any different online. However, the possibility is kept open that the person may just be "tagging along with it" while in the context of the offline crowd. If they are just "tagging along" then that person might act more approachable online where it is understood that they are able to choose how and with whom to interact.

It appears that privacy and acceptance around incongruence, which both distinguish IM, protect communicators from fear of criticism. The private nature of IM legitimates a sense of personal control over their own behaviour allowing them to perform different aspects of their identity and opening them up to accept differences in other's behaviour. These texts demonstrate that different contexts communicate different messages and that by capitalizing on these messages, the girls are able to use IM as a tool for exploring their own personal boundaries around risky speech, behaviour with the opposite sex and other social groups.

The Interaction between Privacy and Context

In the previous section, the situational anonymity of IM served to protect communicators from unfavorable judgments and allow a person to express autonomy as they disclose personal boundaries. This section further highlights the importance of privacy by looking at what happens online and offline when the level of privacy is altered. If privacy is the key ingredient then what will happen if the online context, usually presumed to be private, is no longer private? How is disclosure affected? What happens to the offline context, usually associated with the watchful "crowd", if the level

of offline privacy is increased? These alterations are discussed with important consequences for disclosure, and are considered important indications of how both contexts are utilized in the formation and maintenance of a positive self-image.

Even though IM has the capacity for a group conversation, similar to chat rooms, they are often bypassed in favour of several separate conversations going at once. Many times the friends in each private conversation are from the same offline social network. Why then would the girls be motivated toward maintaining several separate conversations at once, when the opportunity is present for showing commitment to a group of friends with just one conversation? The answer is that it is the assumed one-on-one privacy of IM which makes it an appealing space for disclosing. With a reduced level of privacy, even discussions with best friends are socially altered to resemble interactions reminiscent of “the school playground.”

Vanessa: ...it's not just one-on-one anymore, there are other people, so you'll be talking about something and as soon as someone else, even if they're like your best friends, even if it was Laura, Brenda, Me, and Toni...as soon as there's more than one person it's not private anymore so it's just like on the school playground...what you say could be remembered by three people, ya know.

Joinson (2001) found that disclosure within dyads was higher when they were visually anonymous. With cameras added so that the communicator thought the recipient could see them, disclosure lowered. Joinson (2001) concluded that when communicators become more aware of their public image they feel more accountable for what they say and this reduces the amount they are willing to disclose. When the “crowd” (normally encountered in the offline context) is transplanted into the IM context, the communicators become publicly self-aware and are more accountable for what they say, reducing disclosure. Without privacy, freedom of self-portrayal disintegrates and the online “crowd” context can be rendered as limiting as the offline “crowd” context, full of expectations and judgments.

Donna: You can actually invite a person into your conversation, but like, ah, I did that the other day with Steve actually and he just went quieter, he didn't really say a lot...and I was just like, “Steve, pipe up, be yourself” but I spose...

Katie: *What do you think was going through his head?*

Donna: Ah, "Should I try and act cooler because there are more people around?" Um, because he knows that I don't really care and that I'm just mates with him because I think he's cool and it doesn't really matter what anyone else says and he knows that. And then when another person jumps in, I suppose, it's just a bit of a threat maybe.

The barrier mentioned earlier is reconstituted as soon as the "crowd" atmosphere is transplanted into the IM context. Peer "influences" render Steve vulnerable to expectations which then hinders him from 'being himself'. When interacting with one other person the social status can be pushed into the background, but when there are more than two communicators, the offline status becomes apparent. The assumed privacy of the online atmosphere legitimated proactive self-portrayal and without it, Instant Messenger is repositioned as constraining. The next two sections further highlight the interaction between context and level of privacy and the impact any alterations have on disclosure.

Repositioning of Privacy

One major question researchers have grappled with has been the functional distinction between online and offline contexts (Cummings, Butler, & Kraut, 2002; Cummings, Sproull, & Kiesler, 2002; Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Joinson, 2004; Leander & McKim, 2003; Stritzke, Nguyen, & Durkin, 2004; Tanis & Postmes, 2003; Thurlow & McKay, 2003; Walther, 1994). In the present study, there were instances when a conversation would begin in the IM context and would be carried into the offline context for disclosure to be satisfying. Exploration around this is valuable because the present study is interested in how personal identity is experienced when friendships unfold and evolve within two contextual ways of knowing one another. Therefore, the moment at which one context must take over from another, or add qualitatively to this experience, is important. It illuminates what can be known about the other person and what can be conveyed about oneself in each context. It can highlight the importance of context in shaping the relationship and the importance of social motivations in shaping the use of context. Birnie & Horvath (2002) compared face-to-face and computer mediated communication on a number of variables using questionnaires. They found that although the gap between communication online and traditional modes may be closing, the two contexts were functionally distinct in terms of satisfying intimacy and socializing needs. In line with this finding, the following quotes cite emotional content

or very personal relationship issues as a critical moment where the IM context is not supportive enough.

Christy: Yeah, like if the person's like, I don't know, upset about something you definitely want to talk about it face-to-face.

Donna: Probably because I actually like Eli and um...(laughing) and phoning me was more like a comfort thing. Kira rang up and she was like, "you okay?" and I'm like, "Yeah, that's cool." I don't know it's something; MSN isn't that, it's not as personal as a phone call.

In earlier discussions, the offline setting was constructed as a "crowded" space and therefore *less private* and less capable of supporting safe disclosure. However, in these texts the offline setting is repositioned as a one-to-one private setting. This repositioning in the level of privacy is the crucial difference because it gives the offline context some of the supportive characteristics which are typically encountered through IM.

In addition to the privacy component, there is another story behind the desire to disclose emotion in the face-to-face context. It is at this vulnerable moment that the amount of intimacy afforded in the IM context is not enough.

Vanessa: If I was online and I was talking to Beth, or Laura or even Robyn and they said they were feeling really down I would run to their house, you know, and I'd like sit down with them and talk to them in person. It's just there's something about MSN and definitely texting, which just because you can't... I think it is "VOICE"... it must be voice because there's no tone [online].

The private offline setting qualitatively adds to the disclosure through the addition of a person's "voice", which embodies intimacy. To hear someone's emotion through the tone of their voice intensifies feeling comforted by that friend. According to Jourard (1971), disclosure is a healthy way to gain validating feedback that can lead to self-acceptance. What the girls are saying here is that emotional disclosures invoke the need to respond with increased socio-emotional feedback. It is not easy to do that through the IM context because those socio-emotional cues are largely missing. Vanessa's instinct is to physically be with her friend so she can express through her "voice" the

level of support she would like to give. This sort of interaction deepens the friendship bond by telling the other person, "I understand how upset you are and you are safe to share this with me". Voice-activated intimacy is also created in a telephone call context where it brings the emotional comfort needed at this critical point.

Paris: Yeah and like tone of voice...and there is just more emotion and the mental side of it into the phone call.

Context per se is not the crucial component, but rather it is the intimacy that is generated around tone of voice which then promotes safety in emotional disclosures. Neither online nor offline contexts are constructed as perfect. Up until this point, the offline context was constructed as a public space lacking privacy, even though tone of voice is obviously presented face-to-face. Instant Messaging can support the desire for a private space but the text-only format is not able to support emotional moments because IM lacks tone of voice. The repositioning of the offline context, which incorporates privacy, produces the best of both worlds.

Vanessa: With my friend lizzy, since she's grounded off the net, we talk in private when we go for runs at night time...thats a good time for alone talk...and can be so much more "deeper" then msn. even tho on msn u can say stuff and feel safer, its still can be annoying, so if things are mentioned like family problems then when we meet up in real life she can talk to me properly about it. more emotional talkin cant be done on msn.

The critical point of departure from the online context highlights how the offline context adds qualitatively to disclosure. The absence of socio-emotional cues has been the single most discussed aspect of computer-mediated communication. It was initially thought that without these cues this medium would be unable to support anything more than superficial relationships. It appears that within relationships traversing two contexts that when emotional support is needed the girls look toward offline contexts for fulfillment. In the present research, the offline context consists of the same people. There is no way of knowing from this analysis what other strategies would be employed if pursuing the offline context were not an option. For this group it seems they are able to use the online context satisfactorily until this point and then switch to an offline way of relating when needed. Partial anonymity is an advantage because they can utilize both contexts to gain a broader experience of themselves in relationships.

Christy's Story-Boys and the Critical Point of Departure

Many participants pointed to the fact that communication with the opposite sex was easier online. Certainly they are more confident with flirting as noted earlier, but they have also said that boys are able to present a different side to themselves when they chat online.

Christy: They [guys] probably tone down. They tend to probably open up to you. Like I've had someone, a guy, talking about a girlfriend and stuff and what was going on with her. He sounded pretty hurt and stuff. I was kinda being his friend and never really talked to him a huge amount at school or anything. So they loosen up I think a bit more coz there's noone watching them or noone judging them.

Katie: *So this friend that opened up to you online or sounded quite hurt, did you talk to him at school the next day and say, what about that MSN conversation? What was it like the next day?*

Christy: Um...it didn't actually change much. Like we're always civil and nice but afterwards yeah I guess we brought it up a bit. Like I'd say, "Oh, how's it going?" he's like, "Oh, yeah, fine." Or I'd see her come over or do something and I'd give him just the look like, "AH...", so you know, but nothing like too pushy, like, "Oh, remember when we talked about this or how are feeling about this". Even though he probably opened up you don't want to take advantage of that, you wait for him to open up again.

Christy's story highlights some ways in which social norms around gender are altered online. Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor (2002) polled a national sample of internet users and found that 71% of online relationships crossed gender lines. Wolak et al. (2002) also note that this finding may highlight a unique quality which socialization over the internet may provide for adolescents; boys in particular. Throughout adolescent years it is much more common to experience same-sex relationships, particularly among close supportive friends (Cotterell, 1996; Hartup, 1983). Therefore, the figure of 71% of cross-sex relationships seems quite substantial. It may be that the internet is able to provide a forum for boys to present a more sensitive side. The girls have mentioned that IM is good for providing emotional support. Christy's story positions IM as a place which allows boys to reach out for this support as well. Gould, Munfakh, Lubell, Kleinman & Parker (2002) assessed internet help-seeking behaviours of adolescents and found no difference between the percentage of boys and girls who sought emotional

help. It is common sense that boys should need emotional support as much as girls do but a possibility that they are not always encouraged to show this. The understanding around incongruity in the two contexts, discussed earlier, may support boys' presenting this more vulnerable side when they are online. This conjecture is further derived from how Christy talks about their interactions the following day at school. She positions herself as being able to appreciate his openness without taking advantage of it by exposing him in an environment which would not be supportive of such vulnerability shown by a male. Instead, "You wait until he opens up again."

Another layer to Christy's story is how it relates to the critical moment discussed earlier. Intimate personal disclosure (much like the content in Christy's story) was something which revealed the critical moment where one context necessarily takes over from the other and adds qualitatively to it. For mixed-sex friendships, the critical moment might be different from that of same-sex friends. The intimacy created through "voice" is constructed in a similar way but is reacted to differently. Instead of adding a depth which increases comfort in the relationship, "voice" is positioned as almost too much intimacy for a mixed-sex friendship.

Vanessa: Oh my God, phoning a guy is like asking him out on a date. It practically is.

In Christy's story she does not talk about making a shift to the phone or a face-to-face environment in order to create a sense of being there for her friend. Perhaps for girls it is felt to be necessary or expected but for mixed-sex friends it may be understood that the addition of "voice" would make both friends uncomfortable. The critical point of departure has demonstrated that adolescents are adept at using the context for distinct functions and doing it quite subtly. For girls it is the non-anonymous quality which is utilized for supportive functions. For boys, anonymity is utilized for the same function. This is a strong indication of the way personal (or gender specific) motivations interact with contextual advantages.

Who am I and how do I fit in?

In addition to experiencing oneself in many different ways, partial anonymity allows exposure to a variety of other people. In a later chapter I will analyze some texts around meeting friends through friends, in essence establishing "second-degree"

friendships. Physically meeting second degree friends is common and therefore I have considered these relationships to be partially anonymous. Even if they never meet directly, there is always the possibility that their common friend can share additional offline information about the two people and in this way all communicators can be thought of as partially anonymous. This is discussed in more depth later. However, at this point, meeting people online through friends is constructed as a valuable opportunity which IM offers. Instant Messaging provides access to new ways of thinking and acting which stirs their interest.

Christy: Actually you tend to meet a huge range of people. You find attributes in them that you have...and you think, "Oh, maybe I am like this person a little bit" and you figure out what about them that you're like. And um... even almost subconsciously, yeah, you find out what you're NOT like them in a way. You'll be like, "What is this person on about, seriously" or "Why do they do that?" So you find something about yourself. You're just going, "Okay, I don't agree with that." Because the only way you learn about yourself is how you relate to other people so I figure by talking to a range of people you're relating to them. And so you figure it out.

Learning about oneself is directly aligned with the opportunity to be exposed to a range of people. People who are different are constructed as thought-provoking. By learning about people and their motivations they "subconsciously" are learning about themselves. In addition to exposure to people, meeting them online is qualitatively different than meeting people offline.

Donna: Um. I suppose it just helps in meeting people. It's just like going out to a club and meeting all these new people I suppose, but you have more time to actually talk about proper things, like talk about stuff instead of being drunk, and you know, just going along with it. Yeah, it's really good to get to know people with because you can do other things at the same time.

Christy: Maybe they might ask more questions than they would face-to-face. Coz if you're face-to-face and you're asking lots of questions it's like you're interrogating someone rather than you're just trying to learn about them.

The girls position IM as a useful way to interact with new people because they can learn about them in a more focused way without the awkward situation of interrogating

someone. “Just going along with it” would keep the relationship at a superficial level and IM is constructed as being able to bring a certain depth to the new friendship. In this way IM can construct an identity of being interested and eager to learn about other people in a relaxed atmosphere, rather than interrogating the person or just cruising along in a superficial way without feeling like an effort has been made.

The effort to learn about new people and in the process learn about oneself bespeaks a continual and fluid nature for identity formation. Every exposure to another person allows a person to re-evaluate their own individuality and how they fit into a larger group. Instant Messenger as a social space is constructed as one which is able to foster an active exploration around “who am I and how do I fit in?” While it has become evident that identity is performed differently in the two contexts there is also an undercurrent of integration between what is learned about oneself in each context.

Jane: Yeah, because like if you’re really quiet at school or something and then you go online and you’re completely different, well you just show another side of you, you’re just louder or more outgoing or something and then you can say, “Well, I want to be like all of the time” because yeah, it gives you an opportunity to try different things and decide if you want to be like that I guess.

Exposure (to others and to other parts of oneself) is situated as presenting choices. Jane positions herself as an active choice-maker whose goal is how she wants to be “all of the time”. This does not necessarily mean a one-time decision to define oneself. If the IM structure is one which enables active identity exploration then continued exposure to variety should perpetuate a fluid process of renewal. Many researchers have discussed worries around people developing online identities that are not incorporated into their offline lives and the ramifications of this polar living (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993). By contrast, integration of the many aspects of our personalities has been a long-discussed hallmark of psychological health (Erikson, 1968; Grotevant, 1993; Hetherington & Stoppard, 2002; James, 1892; Phinney, 1993). The word “Identity” comes from the Latin word “Identidem” meaning, “again and again, repeatedly” (Kim, 1998). This definition highlights a sense that one can negotiate inconsistencies in behaviour and emotions and integrate them in a meaningful way. This definition allows an ongoing, even situational nature to identity formation while keeping in mind some connected meaning that can be made out of actions.

Summary

To summarize, the increased level of privacy and anonymity constructed online protects communicators from public judgment allowing them to perform parts of their self through disclosures which may be considered risky in the offline context. Risky disclosures include using an alternative style of language, overtly flirting with the opposite sex and connecting with other social groups. It is understandable to disclose different choices online because of the protection afforded by the understanding around incongruence. The critical point of departure from the online context highlights how the offline context can add qualitatively to disclosure. Emotional support seeks something more than that which text-based communication can provide. The anonymity encountered through IM enables many ways of experiencing oneself. However, it is the non-anonymous quality of IM with friends which is invoked for emotional support. A necessary repositioning of the offline context as private and intimate happens in order to allow emotional support through the addition of “voice”. This, however, may be specific to same-sex support. The IM context was positioned as one which allows boys a venue for emotional support that may be considered weak or taboo in the offline context. The addition of “voice” was not constructed with the same positive view as it was for same-sex friends. For mixed-sex friendships the “voice” component stimulated anxiety around being too intimate. Therefore the partial anonymity encountered through IM moderates the relationship between disclosure and intimacy and allows communicators to experience their self-in-relation in a variety of ways because multiple contexts are available. Instant Messaging is constructed as a place which offers opportunities for exposure which can stimulate active identity exploration with integration framed as a goal for a deeper understanding of oneself.

This chapter has established that adolescents capitalize on features of IM as a way to use disclosure for desirable self-portrayal, much the same way a performance of commitment served them in balancing a portrayal of their social and autonomous selves. The next chapter explores the negotiation of ‘truth’ within these disclosures.

Chapter Five

Truth and Disclosure

Suzie: I don't know...you don't really have to see the person so it doesn't matter what you say...not really...coz you could cover it up.

This chapter investigates how 'truth' within disclosure is constructed and negotiated in a context of partial anonymity. How do the girls define 'truth', seek it out, and defend against judgment? Truth is particularly important in a context of partial anonymity because truthful disclosures are understood to be representative of the person and help to build a stronger bond between the communicators. When the person disclosing feels that her persona being projected is believed and accepted by others as 'true', she is able to integrate that acceptance into her identity. Integration was positioned as an important goal for this group of girls. Therefore understanding how a construction of 'truth' emerges will add to our understanding of why adolescent girls are interested in IM and how IM effects their identity development.

The previous chapter demonstrated that proactive portrayal of identity was related to the privacy experienced online. Privacy is one distinctive feature of IM which the girls capitalize on to meet their larger goals of building and protecting a positive self-image. Ambiguity is another distinctive feature of online interactions which serves the girls in a very similar way. Both privacy and ambiguity make possible proactive efforts in identity exploration while simultaneously serving to protect communicators from judgment. The difference lies in the nature of the judgment they are protected from. In the previous chapter, judgment was predominantly associated with the offline context. Online judgment was only encountered when the level of online privacy was reduced. This chapter discusses judgment specific to online interactions, even when the context is one of privacy. However, online judgment occurs differently depending on whether the disclosure is 'verbal' or 'non-verbal'. Therefore, this chapter is divided between verbal and non-verbal disclosures with a final section investigating how 'truth' is constructed and negotiated in light of these differences.

First I will discuss verbal disclosure. Verbal disclosure is taken to represent the text which is typed during an online conversation. The typed text can be equated to spoken conversation in a face-to-face environment. It takes place in real time and is based on taking turns. Similar to a face-to-face conversation these turns are not always equally distributed. The main difference with a text only conversation is that there is an obvious lack of social cues available for feedback. This creates anonymity, ambiguity and emotional distance in the conversation. How does a person judge truthfulness based on an incomplete feedback system?

Non-Verbal disclosures are considered those aspects of IM which are supportive of the text conversation and which promote an individuating/personal space. Non-Verbal disclosures include the log-in name, photo, personal profile, decorative screen backgrounds, font and color of the text and emoticons used. Only the log-in name will be used for illustration.

Verbal Disclosure

The language used in communication (verbal, nonverbal and body language) acts as a feedback system which helps us to understand and give meaning to our interactions. With IM, this feedback system is often thought to be deficient. Lack of social cues creates ambiguity which can make it difficult to accurately interpret meaning from online communications, effectively causing a breakdown in the feedback system. Without the feedback system communicators “can’t read emotion” and “can’t show emotion” and this ambiguity is often blamed for arguments and awkward moments.

Vanessa: u cant hear the voice or dont see them in person, because they say body language makes wot is it 70 % of communication so becasue their isnt that...u cant read how ppl [people] react to wot u've said.

Donna: Some things u may say back might sound wierd. Because u cant really show emotion, like people don't know wether you are joking or not, unless u tell them, whereas face-face they can just tell.

Vanessa: You may want to sound sympathetic and come off sounding really arrogant or like you don't care but you do.

Scholars (Anolli, 2002; Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, & Gallois, 1998; Riva, 2002) have dubbed this “miscommunication” and wondered how is it that communicators online work around this problem to engage in a satisfying way. However, ambiguity has also been framed as an advantage (Anolli, 2002) because it may open up opportunities which are only possible through ambiguous communication. This section highlights the strategies and rationalizations the girls employ to work around miscommunication.

It is common to shorten words or use an emoticon in place of a word when talking online. Many of the truncations can have dual meanings. While this can make it difficult to decipher the intended meaning, the girls frame it as an advantage when they want to deliberately be ambiguous.

Vanessa: i can also twist words, because many ppl save convo's [conversations] and if they ever bring it back i can say i didnt mean that i meant another thing...once this guy said he LOVED me, i replied i (l) u...u see when they read it it means the same but if i was ever confrunted i could twist it because (l) can also mean “like”, its kinda teen lingo.

The girls capitalise on ambiguity by retracting, twisting and rejecting comments to protect themselves from embarrassment. When experimenting with self-presentations, an element of risk is always present. Twisting words protects the girls from vulnerability when they flirt. If one person were to confront their flirtatious friend, then an understanding around the online miscommunication possibilities may be invoked as protection from that scrutiny. Miscommunication allows the girls to experiment, feeling safe in the knowledge that should the other person challenge or question them, they will have a way to save face.

The lack of social cues also creates an emotional distance between communicators. Emotional connection, in the previous chapter, was an important factor in disclosing with friends and was constructed differently dependent upon whether the communicators were the same sex or not. In this chapter, emotional distance, like ambiguity, has been turned into an advantage and is sometimes capitalized on as a way of preserving a positive self image.

The lack of social cues reduces the sender's responsibility for the effects which words might have on the receiver. This does not mean the girls are completely unaware of the other person when they are online, just that the potential for miscommunication dispels much of their responsibility to that other person.

Jane: Well, you can be more angry because like you can't feel sad for saying what you say, just go for it...You can't see the person and what they're feeling sorta thing...I know they're reacting I just don't feel sad for it because I can't see HOW they're reacting.

The effect on Jane's friends is positioned as known or at least suspected, but anonymity shields her from witnessing firsthand the immediate reactive feedback from her friend. This allows Jane to build an identity that says she can show extremes in her emotions and experience selfish disregard for others. Selfish disregard for others is not generally thought of as a desirable quality and is perhaps not something Jane would practice offline as easily. Instant Messaging, because of the online situational anonymity allows her protection from knowing the impact that this sort of behaviour has on the other person. On some level she understands that the person is reacting but the emotional distance created by situational anonymity protects her from having to integrate into her self-concept the negative ramifications of her actions. Emotional distance is also used strategically for imparting opinions and honesty that is sure to elicit strong reactions.

Donna: u could be more honest with your mates, because you think that it might not hurt them as much if u say something mean, as it is only typing.

Paris: She asked for my opinion so i told her the truth...i told her the truth because i didnt have to see what shed do whether shed get angry with me or whatever but if it was normal face to face i wouldnt have had the guts to tell her what i thought...that she mucked around these guys...

So whether the comments are intentional or not, emotional distance can be capitalized on to rebuff responsibility for the effects which their words might have on the other person. "Flaming" is a term which describes aggressive verbal attacks online. However, the present discussion is not quite at that level. Although the girls talk about being more honest or extreme, they have not completely abandoned any accountability to their friendships. In fact, it is the group identity of "friends" which is brought into the foreground as a rationalization for this

behaviour.

Donna: Normally when I'm joking around with my friends and stuff I just sorta scroll back and think, "Oh, I'm so mean." [laughing] But I know I'm only kidding and so do my mates but sometimes, I don't know, it might HURT them a bit.

The assumption is that a friend should understand that the person is just kidding. The girls want to hold the offline relationship in a protective place while acknowledging the identity exploration that is justifiable in the online context. The incongruence explanation discussed earlier creates an understanding around more extreme behaviours. The sender expects the receiver to activate this incongruence explanation and therefore not take offence to what initially looks like a mean-spirited comment. So what is it like on the receiving end of these comments?

Suzie: I no [know] that they say stuff that seem mean but they'll just be playing round having a joke as well.

Donna: Maybe it wouldn't INSTANTLY hurt you so much...Um...because it's a bit vague, the computer, I don't know, you know it's a person, but it doesn't actually seem like you're talking to a person...I spose it just doesn't cut so deep when you're on the computer.

In a context of situational anonymity, the receiver cannot always accurately interpret the intended sentiment with which the comment is made. Both the sender and receiver know this. There are a series of rationalizations which are depended upon for risky, opinionated, confrontational behaviour to be considered acceptable online. The sender expects the receiver to activate the understanding around incongruence and therefore grant the sender the benefit of the doubt. The receiver does exactly that in a bid to rationalise these hurtful comments coming from a friend. It is precisely this offline friendship which drives both friends through the rationalisation process. The receiver often expects the sender to apologise, as one way to verify this rationalisation.

Suzie: Yeah, usually they say something mean and say, "nah, just joking" but then sometimes I don't think they are...Ah, if they didn't say that um...well people probably think they're mean but if they say "Ah, I'm just joking" then it's to keep like a friend.

Paris: You can say LOL- Laugh out Loud but you're probably not even laughing out loud on MSN.

The girls want to maintain the offline friendship and so they construct ways to get around the miscommunication pitfalls which would otherwise have adverse effects. Apologies serve a different purpose than simply showing regret for the comment. Apologies are constructed as a way to convey the intention of the comment. So when a friend says, "I'm just joking" what she is conveying is, "Don't take offense" or "Don't take that comment too seriously because we're still friends." Likewise, reacting to a mean comment with "lol" dismisses the comment and let's the sender know that offense has not been taken. Suzie does not really believe her friend is "just joking", but rationalizes that her friend is allowed to present another image (the mean/sarcastic/ironic image) in the IM context and has also made the effort to expunge the offending remark. She therefore does not dramatize the moment.

For these rationalizations to lead to satisfying interactions, both communicators must cooperate. What if the sender would fail to put a smiley face or fail to say, "Ah, I'm just joking"? The comment may be taken seriously. What if the recipient ignored the smiley face or the amending phrase and takes offense anyway? What if the recipient fails to dismiss the comment with "lol"? Would the sender feel terrible about the original remark? All of these could lead to a breaking down of the online relationship. Instant messaging has previously been discussed as a place of flexibility and validation, not a place to purposely instigate arguments. A lot of work goes into managing miscommunication to avoid arguments and harsh criticism. It is in both parties interest to keep it agreeable instead of destabilizing the goodness which motivates them to go online in the first place.

Another way in which the receiver experiences this emotional distance is by being thankful that the sender cannot see any actual hurt being experienced. This is a protective response to comments that would otherwise be taken seriously. Anonymity is an advantage in this circumstance because it allows the receiver to preserve their self pride.

Donna: ...I spose it helps you keep your pride. Like if you said to someone that you like them or whatever and they said, "Aw, I

don't think it will work," and you're actually crying about it but you didn't want them to know then you didn't have to tell them and they wouldn't notice...you want to keep your self-esteem up I spose. Because if you get down, then you get DOWN. And you don't really want that right. So yeah, it's good to hold your head high and not let those things get to you and if they do then sorta don't let anyone know unless you want them to know, like you're close friends.

The girls seem to be lenient in the face of miscommunication invoking a narrative of the good-friend-just-taking-advantage-of-the-context-and-not-intending-to-hurt-my-feelings. This pardon serves to establish and preserve an accepting atmosphere which helps facilitate disclosure. The lack of social cues available online produces ambiguity and miscommunication is often the result. Therefore, it is difficult to form accurate impressions. SIDE theory (Spears & Lea, 1992) predicts people will default to a reliance on social identities when it is difficult to form accurate impressions. This analysis shows that relying on the "friends" status is one strategy they employ. Miscommunication can leave the girls doubting the sincerity or meaning of comments. In the face of doubt the girls rely on the importance of the offline friendship.

The girls understand the potential for miscommunication and use this as the basis for strategies aimed at protecting their self pride. This section has targeted those strategies the girls employ in protecting themselves from online judgments arising from verbal disclosure. The next section targets non-verbal disclosure. The strategies discussed in protecting oneself when verbally disclosing are primarily connected to the experience of online anonymity. In the next section negotiation around judgment is primarily connected to the experience of knowing the other person offline. Together these analyses represent the context of partial anonymity.

Non-Verbal Disclosure

Disclosure is not always verbal. We disclose things about ourselves all the time without necessarily being aware of it. Our hairstyle and hair color, our clothes, piercing, tattoos, posture, whether we wear make-up or jewelry, all of these reveal whether we belong to a distinct social group, our socioeconomic status and maybe even our political orientation. How are non-verbal disclosures constructed in Instant Messaging?

Instant Messenger has some inbuilt features that promote non-verbal self-presentation. One of the first choices when going online is choosing a log-in name. A log-in name is the name displayed on the buddy list to represent each person who is online at that time. If a name is changed then it will automatically be changed on every buddy list to which that person belongs. A name can be changed as many times as you like. Some people choose to change their name several times during one conversation, others less often, and some people seldom change their name. A name can be one word or an entire line of poetry. In the following texts the log-in name is cited as one of the most obvious ways in which to express a part of oneself. It is likened to a t-shirt with something written on the front and which represents a particular style and stimulates discussion.

Vanessa: My friend's MSN name once was this whole line of Italian... and I asked her what it meant and it was like a whole line of this really really course language... and that was funny and that brought up talking. It's an ice-breaker. If you're in person and you see someone, it's harder at school because we're in uniform, but you could have a t-shirt and your t-shirt could have something written on it and you can talk about the t-shirt. On MSN you talk about the login name. And style. It's also you're style. Like, um, your dress, your clothes in person. On MSN your MSN name is how you can be known as...Also it can be like your mood like, "friends aren't supposed to be backstabbers." Then you know that that's their mood and that something has happened there.

Vanessa: Like at one stage I bought a new bikini and it was only after I got it that I read the tag about how to wash it and it said, "May become semi-transparent when wet" so my MSN name for a long time was, "Billabong are perverted". And that started off a lot of conversations.

Many times the main reason the two friends are chatting online is simply that they are both there at the same time. For this reason, it is important to have something to talk about at the start of the interaction. A log-in name provides this ice-breaker. Log-in names are also a way to sense "what the person is like." The content is positioned as an indicator of situational mood and style which acts as a front door.

Vanessa: It's on your mood, like, "friends aren't supposed to be backstabbers."...then you know that that's their mood and that something's happened there.

Paris: Some of the guys i know try to show off and have macho names like one at the mo [moment] is "Im a warrior man".....etc...i think

you can read between the name of a person seeing what they're like and who they are... You get a sense from the name of what the person is like.

As well as representing transient moods, the log-in name is sometimes positioned as representative of stable personality traits.

Jane: well sometimes a girl has [who is]... let's say she loves to flirt would have her name as 100% naughty or something like [something like] that... it says what kind of mood they're in and what kind of person they are... cheeky or whatever, polite or flirty.

Even if the other person is known offline, the log-in name provides insight into the persona being projected. Although the content of a log-in name represents individual choice in self disclosure, there is an expectation to invest some energy into continually re-produce oneself in the online context.

Vanessa: Like if you have the name... like Amanda had the name _____ for so long... it's like, come on, be more interesting! That came out like LAST YEAR!

Christy: People say, "Change your name, it's BORING!!"

Changing your name, reinventing yourself, is considered interesting. If your mood changes, it's exciting to change your name and stimulate discussion around why you've changed it, what it means, and where you found the inspiration (song lyric, joke, or a quote from something). The log-in name is the front door to disclosing more about oneself. Representing oneself through a log-in name is expected to be an accurate portrayal. Accurate presentation has historically been the main aspect which researchers have pointed to in their investigations of internet safety. In chat rooms, where it is likely that communicators do not know each other offline, misrepresentation is relatively easy, given visual anonymity.

Vanessa: Lots of people have really random MSN names. Robyn down the road, she's as thin as a stick, but she thinks she's fat, and so her MSN name is "mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fattest of them all"... so you, every time you go online it's like, "You're NOT FAT!!!" And everyone was always telling her to change her MSN name.

Katie: *And does she change it?*

Vanessa: Yeah, she changes it sometimes but it's always to be with about how she thinks she's fat... that's how we know how she's feeling. And once again, in real life she does make it clear that she thinks she's fat. But on MSN she's MORE open about it, because she doesn't have to look someone in the face and see them go like this (smacks lips and rolls her eyes).

Robyn's name changes are always around a central theme of being fat. Offline, "In real life", she also makes this feeling clear but online she is able to be more open about it because of the private nature of IM. However, physical attributes are considered 'facts' which cannot be represented differently online. Her friends therefore judge her log-in name as an inaccurate disclosure. They feel empowered to say something about this inaccuracy and negotiate validity under these circumstances. By contrast, this next example of a log-in name is considered accurate and therefore accepted as 'truth'.

Paris: "rotatating_pulsating auxz stylez,i can make u a celebritie, just come 4 a cruze wit me, B-M-W stylez"...thats one of my mates...he loves cars and thinks if you go for a ride with him youd be so popular...hes got a nice car

Katie: and is he like that in person too?

Paris: hes a real nice person in real life...he still loves his cars tho and never stops talking about them

Even though this log-in name is elaborate or embellished, it is within the realm of accuracy. These two examples show that accurate representation is constructed as important and partial anonymity facilitates this through a negotiation process. In chat rooms it may be suspected that someone is misrepresenting their feelings but the aspect of complete anonymity negates any negotiation process.

Jane: Well, you could try to be someone else if you want to in a chat room but it was kind of lame because there were all these people with names and you knew most of them weren't probably what their name implied that they were. There's this girl at school and she's got really really low self-esteem and stuff but on the Internet she seems heaps more confident coz her name's like, "I'm sexy, I'm cute" but you know that's not actually how she feels.

Jane's comment about chat rooms positions misrepresenting oneself with a log-in name as ridiculous and unacceptable. As with IM, chat room non-verbal disclosures can be an ice-breaker which helps the participants learn whether they have common interests

and aide in forming fuller impressions of each other. Interactions mediated through chat rooms or MUD's, being much more anonymous, would not have the additional offline knowledge against which to compare whether an online social identity is adhering to these rules. The expectation of putting energy into continually reconstructing your online social identity brings a sense of fun to online interaction with known friends. However, a log-in name can bring doubt on the receiving end when the context is one of complete anonymity. With IM, the partially anonymous nature breeds a system of checks and balances that is not possible in a completely anonymous context.

Truth

Christine Hine (2000) investigated 'truth' in newsgroups and found that participants are expected to represent themselves accurately. However, to monitor such accuracy is complicated. Therefore, disclosures are accepted as 'truth' unless major inconsistencies become apparent. Misrepresentations are offensive to the other members of the newsgroup. The present analysis is very similar to Chirstine Hine's findings. 'Truth' is a precursor to confident and safe self-disclosure. However, unlike newsgroups, participants in this study are only partially anonymous. 'Truth' in this context is a balance between incongruence and accountability. This becomes clear through an analysis of the ways in which 'truth' is negotiated differently depending on whether the disclosure is verbal or non-verbal. Verbal disclosure goes through a rationalization process instead of a checks-and-balances process. Judgments are easier to make when the disclosure is non-verbal. With verbal disclosures, the persona portrayed is accepted as 'truth' even in the face of extreme behaviour. By contrast, non-verbal self-presentations undergo an assessment before being accepted as 'truth'. Essentially, non verbal disclosure is held more accountable to offline 'facts' while verbal disclosure represents identity experimentation.

There is an understanding, however, that identities are more consciously acted out online, both in chat rooms and IM, and this has to be taken into account when judging someone.

Jane: You can judge them [online], but you probably won't get what they're really like. It's just what they want you to know about them, it's not what they really are.

Paris: You can only say so much through typing. Like if you only say so much they can only judge you so much. Whereas offline you can tell who a person is...if you're just like face-to-face they can judge you as much as they like because they're like seeing you.

Paris: Just being with them you can interpret what sort of music they like, whereas online if you tell them what sort of music they could take it in different directions. Well, you can kinda tell what a person is like online but you can tell better from a person that is offline. I reckon people are more judgmental offline because they are seeing who you are and how you act around other people. Online they don't know what you're like or how you act around other people.

Odette: Offline you can see what they look like, you can see like their personality, it kinda shows more when you see them face-to-face. Are they obsessed with their make-up or do they not care sorta thing, whereas online you can't really...

“Seeing is believing” as the saying goes. Judging someone you can see is positioned as easy. Judging someone in a chat room is more difficult because of the experience of anonymity. Communicators are aware that one is able to consciously present themselves in the online context. Without the offline knowledge required for accurate judgment, the girls position themselves as temporarily skeptical. Interestingly, this sort of judgment mirrors the offline judgment they sought escape from in the first place. In the quote at the beginning of the chapter, Suzie said it doesn't matter what you say online because you can cover it up. This analysis shows that “saying” something online might not matter, but how a person represents themselves non-verbally certainly does. Perhaps the main advantage is that a person can make a ‘mistake’ and wipe the slate clean which is very difficult to do in a face-to-face environment. The memory of mistakes is shortened online. Offline, mistakes feel like they go down in history for all to recall.

Summary

The girls have said that one of the biggest motivations for going online is to discuss things which would be considered embarrassing face-to-face or would leave them feeling vulnerable. Instant Messenger provides a forum for doing this which removes them from the offline social pressures and judgments. It is shown in this chapter that although risky disclosures may be given a high level of tolerance, they are not left

unchecked. Therefore, there is a need to have strategies in place which will protect the girls from any challenges or confrontations encountered in relation to disclosure.

This discussion highlights an important way that identities are integrated and negotiated between contexts as a result of partial anonymity. It is in the negotiation of miscommunication that disclosure is deemed truthful. Partial anonymity moderates the relationship between non-verbal disclosure and judgment by way of checks and balances against offline identity. A person's online social identity is expected to be either congruent with or understandably different from a person's offline social identity. Some discrepancies in behaviours online are viewed as understandable and allowable according to contextual norms. Other behaviour is considered misrepresentative. Going back to the example of Robyn, a group of friends reassuringly chiding another friend claiming to feel "fat" is nothing new. This sort of misrepresentation stimulates a system of checks and balances because the log-in name is neither congruent with an accurate offline presentation nor justified as only enabled in the online context.

Chapter Six

Balancing Risk with Trust

Katie: And how do you meet those people online?

Suzie: I don't know, friends of friends of friends of friends...then at least you know it's a friend's friend's friend.

When asked about the primary reasons the girls use IM, the answers were to feel connected to their friends and to learn about their friends in a way which is not possible in other contexts. The disclosure which happens online was constructed as a way to deepen those friendships. Privacy and intimacy allowed the girls to construct a context of understandable incongruity in presenting a variety of identities. The previous chapters highlighted what and why they disclose and how the 'truth' of disclosure is judged. This chapter is about knowing when and if to disclose and how trust is constructed and negotiated to establish the safety of the confidant.

Trusting the Context

Safety over the internet has been a hot topic over the last decade and much of the early research concentrated on the perceived hazards. This may be the reason safety is positioned alongside trust. In the previous chapter miscommunication was viewed as an advantage most of the time. This chapter highlights the more deceptive possibilities of miscommunication. It is in the management of trust that disclosure is deemed safe. Two important components in establishing trust are the private nature of IM context and establishing confidentiality between the two communicators. Trust is determined through a risk-assessment process.

Christy: Like at sleepovers and stuff, people say, "Okay, whatever we talk about, whatever we gossip about, stays here," and it's almost expected online.

Odette: ur [you are] in a closed room and if someone comes in you can just exit out of the convo whereas face to face if you're talking about something personal its not that easy to shut it down.

Christy: It's the Internet. You can do anything on the Internet sorta thing. It might just be the environment I don't know, like if you're in a school environment, to me, if I was to say brag about smoking or

drinking it would feel weird. Like you're looking over your shoulder to make sure no one was like watching. In your home environment when you're chatting away, you don't expect someone to look over your shoulder or hear you or even read your text or anything like that. So it's just safe.

When constructed as a private space, IM is able to support personal disclosure between friends. Confidentiality between communicators is clearly established as important, even when the topic is simply for "gossip". If something is disclosed in confidence then it is trusted to remain private. Once trust is in place they feel able to disclose. One defining feature of online conversations is the tangible, written nature. When discussing trust and potential violations of trust, this aspect of IM emerges as important. Unlike a phone conversation where words are absorbed into air, IM is comparable to writing a letter.

Paris: It always seems easier to tell people stuff online. Like it's easier to type instead of making the effort and talking and explaining the whole thing in person whereas online you can only tell bits and pieces if you want to or possibly through texting or through a letter; it seems so much easier on paper.

Katie: so you're equating paper letters to MSN?

Paris: yah it's pretty much the same except this is much faster.

Vanessa: You'll talk about something and then go to something else and then come back to it and they'll be like, "What?" and you'll be like, "Oh, scroll up." Or you'll scroll up, copy, cut, and paste and so you can carry on with that, its okay; but on the telephone it's not really like that because conversations just flow. On IM you can PROVE it; that they did say something. I've had that used against me actually.

Gertrude: It's more private on MSN...but there is the thought that at the same time the person could be relaying whatever you're saying to some other person.

Katie: How would they do that?

Gertrude: Copy and paste...but normally you're talking to the same person at the same time as well, so they can tell you; it's like double backstabbing.

Here, MSN is conceptualised as a tangible record of things revealed. Its written nature means you can scroll back and prove something was said. On the telephone where the conversation "just flows", words are gone in an instant. Copying portions of a conversation deemed private is a violation of trust. The ability to prove something can

be an advantage if needed, but this can also serve as a violation of trust if it is something *you* have said that is being “proven”. While some violations of trust are conceptualised as bad there are times when violations can be excused.

Suzie: Some girls tell me who they like [online] but not in person, and like the next day they’ll be like, I didn’t tell you that. They don’t really think that you know it’s them talking...like if you tease them at school or something they’ll just say, “Ah, no, that’s my brother” or something...um...you don’t really have to see the person so it doesn’t matter what you say. Coz you could cover it up.

Suzie is aware that her friend is probably lying about her brother being the one to reveal something online. Yet, she is forgiving because it “doesn’t matter what you say” online because you’re not actually looking at the person. Interestingly, she is prepared to use this same strategy herself by blaming something on her sister.

Suzie: oh at school if i do [text] they'll probably tell sumone else and it wud get preaded [spread] around.

Katie: *Why is MSN such a safe place to tell stuff then?*

Suzie: i dunno if they decide to spread it i cud just say my sister was online and said it.

On IM, managing trust involves understanding how your words can be used against you and what your options are for getting out of it. The written nature and the ability to scroll back through a conversation means the only way to refuse responsibility for those words is through being vague, twisting the original meaning to a more acceptable one, or by blaming the original thought on someone else. The girls use this knowledge as a convenient way to backtrack on something they regret saying.

Odette: because you can go back to the old, it wasnt me, sum1 [someone] must have hacked into my account routine, or its easier for you to avoid them

This is similar to the strategies employed in managing disclosure. Making comments which were vague allowed a person to distort the meaning. To protect themselves from harsh judgments the girls capitalised on the miscommunication potential of IM. In this example the miscommunication is not centered on the meaning of the message but on the truthfulness of it. This is probably why the protective strategy focuses on refusing

responsibility for the message in the first place. The home computer is accessible to the entire household and this makes it conceivable that a sibling could “hack” into a personal IM account and assume someone’s identity online. Hacking is the online version of breaking and entering. It is basically accessing an account without permission. This can be done either by actually having access to the home computer or by obtaining the password and accessing the account from another computer. Although mobile phone texting was not the focus on inquiry in this study, many of the girls naturally brought up texting when issues of trust were being discussed. A mobile phone is not considered a shared object like the home computer; violations of trust are, therefore, constructed differently. There is no evidence of the perceived ways of “covering up” that were available on IM.

Jane: If you’ve got say a [text] message you can show it to lots of people but like with MSN it’s kinda...they’d have to print it out. It’s a lot easier to show other people if they’ve got a phone which is kinda bad.

Jane: Well, if you’ve said to them something that you don’t want anyone else to know then they can just get the message that you’ve just texted them and just take it out and give their phone to someone and show them. And even if they don’t **want** to show someone, they could just go through their phone and find it anyway, but it’s harder for someone to go through your computer and find it.

Vanessa: Like often on texting people won’t [tell secrets] because they know that texts can be kept. I’ve had a few of my texts kept and then people like forward them to other people and then before I know it I go to school and everybody knows the secret. My secret. With IM you CAN keep conversations, but it is...it’s a different world and as I said on IM you can take your words back.

The mobile phone is discussed as personal and more accessible. This makes it less conceivable that someone could pretend to be someone else. They would have to *own* responsibility for their comments made through texting because the mobile phone is always with them and this knowledge is considered more reliable evidence. The girls never talk about “hacking” into someone’s phone. The potential violation of trust through “hacking” is talked about as a nasty but rare possibility with IM.

- Jane: if u share ure [your] password it'd either b by accident or wit sum1 u really trust, which is y its pretty bad if they break ure trust and hack in2 ure account...
- Katie: *How does this happen?*
- Jane: it cud happen that person was in a hurry and sumhow didnt sign out properly, or u trust a person and need them 2 do sumthing on ure account so u tell them ure password, but then u may hav a falling out wit them or they jst decide 2 turn nasty, so they hack in2 ure acocunt, sumtimes its just 2 mesz it up 2 b mean [to mess it up to be mean], or sumtimes tha person is really bored...once ma sista found out my password and she came online and chatted 2 mi m8s [to my mates], pretending 2 b me, but she didnt really make a mess of nething [anything], she was just bored i guess.
- Katie: *on a scale of 1-10, ten being the worst thing a friend could possibly do to you, how bad is hacking into your computer?*
- Jane: well it depends wot theyre doing, if they b real nasty, mess evrything up then it wud b 7... bordering on 8, but if they just did it cos [because] they wer bored ud stll hav da [you would still have the] right 2 b mad at them, but it wudnt b as bad, pretty bad cos they decieved u or woteva (cant think of tha word) but it wont b as bad, say 4 or 5...hacking in2 sum1s account is pretty uncommon...it hardly eva happens, so the benefits, such as easier access, the fact that its free etc. outweigh the risks of being hacked.

Trust violations can clearly happen in both environments but IM is constructed as safer because there is a way to deny comments. As this section has highlighted, the girls use strategies to protect their self-image from criticism if they regret saying something. Sharing in any relationship involves trust and this certainly extends to the online aspect to friendships. Managing expectations and violations of trust on IM is vital in order to form secure relationships or extend offline relationships. The girls' position themselves as capable managers and as Jane has pointed out, the benefits of being connected outweigh the risk that trust may be violated.

Trusting the Confidant

Another way of managing their online social life involves assessing who is safe to interact with. Researchers have chosen to focus on heavily on the dangerous side of the Internet making it one of the most dominant topics during the last ten years. In September 2003 Microsoft felt obliged to shut down all of its public chat rooms after these spaces were identified as a possible haven for pedophiles (BBC News, 24 September 2003). The concern for many was that the anonymity offered through text-based socializing among strangers meant easy access for older men, posing as same age

peers, to solicit teenagers for sex. For similar reasons, in October 2004, Vodafone New Zealand closed its mobile phone texting chat rooms (Rowan, 18 October 2004). In the current study, the girls position IM as an advantage because they can reach out to cyberspace while remaining grounded in the safety of their own home. It might also be the partiality of their anonymity which prevents similar abuses of this setting.

Paris: well todays generation rely on technology... its taken for granted for the technology we have...i see instant messaging as an advantage for us coz then we dont have to go out of the comforts of our own home to talk to someone

Gertrude: wit the Internet u can meet ppl risk-free (unless u tell dem ure [them your] full name or address) and in da [the] comfort of ur own home.

On closer examination it becomes clear that what the girls construct as risk-free is grounded more in risk-assessment with regard to the confidant involved with the disclosure. Whether they decide to give out an address or other identifying information, decide to meet with someone offline or get out of an uncomfortable situation, these are all dependent on continual risk and trust assessment. Kelly and McKillop (1996) suggest that assessing the confidant for certain features is hugely beneficial in order for disclosure to feel rewarding and that the mere presence of another person is not necessarily an asset. Instant Messaging is constructed as a relatively risk-free space as long as personal anonymity is not breached until trust of the confidant has been established. Friends who are known from school or other offline contexts are granted much more trust automatically than are people they have met online only.

Odette: I'd say more chat rooms are [more dangerous] because on msn most of the time you know who you are talking to and you dont have to give out any information about yourself...i dont think there are any other ways msn can be dangerous, unless theres this person who's telling you they are someone you know and mislead you while you give them out info on where you live or something...teenagers keep themselves safe by..... being safe... i dont know...well most of my friends are smart...some are really dumb though and tell everyone their addys [addresses] and stuff.

Paris: Like you can make it dangerous by giving all your details out like phone number and stuff like that. Like you don't know who your friends are unless you know them. I don't know, you can

make it safe for yourself by not talking to people you don't know, only talking to people you DO know. It's not that... it's dangerous if you make it for yourself but it's not if you don't.

Jane: i think i've learnt how 2 b safe on msn bcos ive used it 4 ages, i wasnt really as onto it wen i was ten, but i knew not 2 giv my last name or nething lyk [anything like] that out 2 strangers, but ive learnt more by using msn 4 longer

Odette: when I was younger I used to add random people and I'd feel like special if I had lots of contacts and stuff, but now I prefer to talk just to like my friends and people I know, because talking to random people, they can get all pissed off and stuff and they can start being stink to you and they don't even know who you are.

Instant Messaging as potentially dangerous is discussed only in terms of breaching personal anonymity. If IM is dangerous, then the person using it "made" it dangerous. Only friends who are known can really be considered safe. "Random" people are positioned as "not as safe" because the risk potential is higher if anonymity were to be breached. A secure level of trust is not in place. Instant Messaging is also constructed as a safer alternative to chat rooms. Chat rooms are generally spaces for people to meet online and, in that context, talking with people you've never met in person is a very common feature. Again, this is a situation where a breach of anonymity could be risky because of the absence of trust between participants. That said, people continually meet new friends online. Similar to introducing two friends at a party, friends are regularly introduced to each other over IM. One friend from school may introduce another friend to contacts from her church network or after-school group. This is a common way of extending ones overall network of friends and was earlier constructed as a very valuable way of learning about personal identity. "Meeting" online with someone known through a lineage of friends is considered lower risk. This type of friendship is constructed much differently than mere "randoms".

Christy: Usually what happens is a friend...you give one of your friends it [MSN address] and then they pass it on to someone else. Like you would only give it to friends who you trust. Like you wouldn't give it to some random guy in your class that, ya know, who smokes dope and all that and they might give it away to some completely other random people, ya know, you just give it away to friends that you know will just pass it on to people like them.

Katie: And how do you meet those people online?

Suzie: I don't know, friends of friends of friends of friends...then at least you know it's a friend's friend's friend.

Christy: Actually some of my friends have met a lot of them [second degree friends] on MSN, like people from Auckland and stuff. A friend of mine is going out to Auckland to stay with one of them that she met on MSN. I THINK she might know what they look like or someone's friends with them, so it's not such a big risk or anything.

Vanessa: Todd is a friend of a friend...he's going out with a friend of mine, Vicki. But he lives in Auckland and so even though I've never met this guy, it's still really easy to talk to him and we talk about how things are going with them and stuff like that.

Trust extends to second degree friends only if trust is secure with a first degree friend. "Randoms" or strangers are people disconnected from that lineage. Talking to "random" people is only framed as a more dangerous activity IF personal anonymity is breached. What is also evident is a discourse of personal control. One may choose to give information out to strangers and breach personal anonymity, and therefore safety, but this decision clearly lies within personal control. Risk and trust assessment is important to staying safe; as is knowing how to get out of a situation. In positioning themselves as managers of this safety process they also reveal the foresight of a contingency plan.

Vanessa: ...and plus on MSN, my friend Beth, her favourite tool is "Block." So if someone starts to piss her off she just blocks them. And with phones you can't block someone...on MSN, block him, delete him and you'll never hear from him again.

Jane: it [MSN] had the potential 2 b [dangerous] i guess, bcos of Internet stalkers, but u can control hu [who] ure chattin wit, so that hardly eva happens, and surely if ure old enuff 2 b using MSN ure old enuff 2 understand that ppl [people] rnt [aren't] always hu they say they r, and there will b sickos out there, but u gotta learn hu 2 trust and there's lots of campaigning about that nowadays, so ppl shud b getting the message.

Paris: ah i dont say anything more after i know i dont want to talk to them...block them and they cant talk to me at all. thats the good thing you can block ppl if you dont want to talk to them if they start asking dirty questions

Suzie: so i blocked her...yeah i didnt really no [know] her. lol [laughing out loud] i dont give crap about randoms cos they dont see me and yeah i wudh'v [would have] handled it differently with a friend i wud have just sed it was a joke and i was playing around.

The “blocking” feature is given prime importance in getting out of an uncomfortable situation. Knowing this feature is available, the girls use “blocking” as their safety net. They are aware of “sicko’s” they might meet online, but argue that they can permanently deal with it by blocking them. As Vanessa confidently says, “block him, delete him and you’ll never hear from him again”. The girls appear to have developed ways to assess risky contact in relation to trust. At one end of the continuum is a friend who is known in both online and offline contexts and is trusted with very personal and private disclosures. At the opposite side of the continuum are those “random” strangers who are disconnected from an existing social network and therefore lack the required trust for secure disclosure. Somewhere in the middle are those “friends” met through a lineage of trusted friends. A certain level of trust is therefore extended; sometimes enough that the boundary around anonymity can be breached.

Donna: I spose it just helps in meeting people. It’s just like going out to a club and meeting all these new people I spose, but you have more time to actually talk about proper things, like talk about stuff instead of being drunk, and you know, just going along.

Katie: Do you think you’ll ever meet these people from _____?

Donna: yeah, maybe, yeah, you know, because there are quite a few parties that people might go to and Steve might bring them along. Yeah, and if I really liked someone as a mate or whatever, then I would make that effort to actually go visit them and meet them or whatever.

Christy: ...the ones that I have in New Zealand, one especially in Auckland that I met, yeah, I talk to her quite regularly, and um...yeah, like she comes up North quite a bit so we’re trying to get it together and stuff.

Katie: And so when she comes up here and you guys are able to get it together and meet up, what will that feel like?

Christy: Like you know the person, not like you’re BEST FRIENDS or anything like that, but it’s still like you’ve talked to them on the phone. Coz I have seen her before and um...so you’ve got an idea, a picture in your head of what they look like and you know what they’re interested in and how they...how they...their thought process and stuff as they talk on MSN and stuff so when you meet them, you KNOW them even if you might not best

friends with them you still know them. And you've got stuff in common so it's not like it's a blind date or something.

The above discussion around second degree friendships formed online highlights the strong desire to widen social networks, but as the girls also construct themselves as alert and responsible, they are only prepared to do this if this is assessed as safe. When the friend is introduced by a trusted source they may be prepared to meet up face-to-face. The fact that "someone" is friends with them renders it "not such a big risk". This is in direct contrast to the very strong comments made earlier with regard to complete strangers not always being who they say they are. These comments reflect the thought that has gone into assessing who is risky.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

This study arose out of the observation that an increasing number of teenagers go online to interact with offline friends. Interactions with known offline friends have previously been presumed to be more beneficial than those relationships built around chat rooms with people who are only known online. Rather than directly addressing this debate, the purpose of this present study has been to explore how this dual experience in interacting with friends serves identity exploration goals during teenage years. Adolescents are motivated toward feeling socially connected to a peer group while also experiencing themselves as independent in their decision making. This study found that adolescents use IM technology because it allows them to balance these two motivations in identity formation. Instead of being an unconnected and anonymous space, IM, in this study, represents an extension of offline life. This is a factor which distinguishes IM in this study from chat rooms and more anonymous interactions which have previously been researched. I have referred to this as a state of partial anonymity. Partial anonymity is made up between experiencing one's self and others as anonymous in some situations and yet having offline knowledge about each other, which means the communicators cannot remain wholly anonymous. It is the partial anonymity experienced through IM which allows the girls to balance these two motivations in a way which is difficult through other modes of communication including face-to-face, telephone and even the newer and very savvy mobile phone texting technology.

Instant Messaging is utilized for reaching out and reaching deeper. Reaching out entails a desire for wide and diverse networks and the importance of this goal is to have many more comparisons with which to orient one's self. Reaching deep entails learning about people from another perspective, imploring the girls to balance personal judgments with a fuller understanding of the person based on multiplicity (online and offline). These findings suggest that partial anonymity does indeed change the relationship between self-presentation and impressions, and that this is connected to the strength of the relationship between communicators.

Early research predicted that with many social cues filtered out, online interaction would be relegated to be useful only for task-oriented communication. Later research showed that, in actual fact, online interactions were often used to support social networks rather than merely for task-focussed communication. This present research shows that, when communicators also know each other in an offline context, it is precisely the fact that many social cues are filtered out which supports the social usefulness of software like MSN Instant Messaging. Partial anonymity, which arises out of many cues being filtered out, allows more control and protection around identity exploration. Control and protection were integral to useful MSN interactions and thought to be incomplete through other avenues such as face to face interactions, mobile phone texting, chat rooms and telephone use. When online, the girls in this study experienced more control over how they could present themselves and this feeds their need for personal autonomy during their teenage years. Partial anonymity also provides them with protection from judgement which allows them to protect their self esteem and internalize a flexible notion of identity. In utilizing these features of IM, the girls strive to balance being accepted as part of a group while also exercising personal autonomy.

Control and protection as advantages were evident in how the girls talked about intimacy and risk-taking behaviours. Judgment occurs in both contexts but it was seen as easier to protect against in the online context. When relationships are conducted in an environment of partial anonymity, online judgement can have very real offline consequences. For this reason, many of the features of IM which limit access to social cues were thought of as protective. One way in which this played out was how the absence of “voice” as a social cue was protective against an uncomfortable level of intimacy. In an ideal world one would be able to put forth exactly what one wished to convey. However, as the girls have said, sometimes non-verbal cues or their tone of voice can let them down. In a text-only environment, a person’s reaction to judgment can be scripted to express a thoughtfully chosen reply presenting an intended message which may be different from the emotion they are actually feeling at the moment. In environments where voice and other social cues are present, communicators take the chance of inadvertently revealing more information than they want to divulge. The added social cue of a person’s voice was only considered beneficial with friends who were already close. In fact, it was considered very important in acknowledging the depth of a close relationship. The experience of online anonymity meant that IM was

positioned as allowing personal control so the girls can regulate to whom they reveal their emotions through voice. They are only prepared to take that chance with the very closest of friends. With others they can take comfort in their personal control over self-presentation knowing their voice is not available to contradict their typed words or actions.

The anonymity online also softens social boundaries which allows autonomy to show by way of the social risks they take online. Boundaries between social groups at school are normally based on non-verbal, readily available information about a person and enforced by offline rules and judgement. Within a state of partial anonymity, even though the girls may have knowledge about each other tucked away in their minds, online anonymity provides control and allows portraying oneself as more open-minded and accepting of other people. Offline, the girls talked about the need to take into account peer pressure which can restrict their autonomy. Risk in this area is rewarded by being judged on behaviour in more than one context. Judgement based on more than one context was thought to empower their identity exploration. This is because partial anonymity is also made up of offline knowledge of each other. The partial anonymity of IM provides a way for friends to know each other in two contexts and this keeps them grounded in a relationship to which they are accountable. A variable level of accountability was evident in comments about “Randoms”. When the other person was not known offline, there was less accountability felt toward that relationship. The girls were then more likely to use abusive language and less likely to care about the emotional outcome from such actions. This sort of behaviour (“flaming”) is well documented in studies of more anonymous online contexts. When communicators are partially anonymous, the anonymity experienced online stimulates confidence and yet the non-anonymous quality keeps behaviour grounded through accountability. Partial anonymity forces the girls to recognize that the text scrolling down the screen represents a real person with emotions and the very real possibility of seeing that person the next day at school means IM does not become a free-for-all flame-fest. Feeling emotionally hurt online has very real effects for the offline relationship. Such radical and insensitive behaviour is not common and accountability does not appear to be viewed as a limitation. If accountability were thought of as limiting then it is unlikely the current trend of incorporating IM into existing relationships would continue to flourish. In fact, it is the accountability felt toward stronger connections which lends weight to the

personae being constructed online. Accountability highlights the importance of the offline relationship to the online experience. The strength of the offline relationship in general seemed to be reconstituted in the online environment. Even though some strengthening of weaker offline relationships can happen online, such strengthening takes time and was not found to transition readily to the offline context. It is through stronger connections that the girls were more likely to gain a sense of personal uniqueness. The judgement from these stronger ties carries more weight and allows the girls to internalise, as part of their identity, the variety which they feel able to project online. It is only when such variety is recognised by known others that a more flexible identity can be internalised. When receiving judgments, the girls always consider the source before giving weight to others' opinions.

According to the SIDE model, in a context with few socially identifying cues available communicators will grant greater importance to any remaining information, even if this is minimal. Relying on a small amount of information is said to diminish the perceived individuality of the person and instead constructs them according to whichever broader social group might be associated with the minimal cues available. The present study suggests that in a partially anonymous context the offline knowledge brought to the interaction replaces the importance of social cues when forming impressions. The girls have categorised people into "friends", "friends met through friends" (second degree friends) and "randoms". A sort of reclassification happens online. Regardless of offline group membership, when online that person becomes "someone known offline". This group is further broken down into "good friends" and "people mainly talked to online but also known offline". The contrast given to those contacts that are known offline versus those who are considered "random" highlights the importance of group membership in understanding the role which partial anonymity has on making personal judgements. For those people classified as "random", impressions were formed using minimal cues and the weakness of this social connection was an influential factor for accountability, trust and disclosure. As additional aspects of the individual self become visible online, the offline group affiliation becomes less important in forming a positive impression.

In the current study, disclosure is different between these groups. The in-group could be thought of as those people who they know from the 'real world' but whom they also

chat with online. The out-group could be thought of as “randoms” who do not deserve the same level of courtesy and forgiveness shown toward friends. When communicators cannot read the supporting non-verbal cues to accurately determine the meaning of the text, group membership becomes important for judgment/impression formation. This is evident in their rationalisation of forgiving their friends for nasty comments made. Disclosure with friends is constructed as safe even in the face of risky disclosure because they know their friends will forgive them and place “mean” behaviours within the context. Offline knowledge made forgiveness much more likely. Disclosure with “randoms”, however, follows a much more deindividuated state because this group is not as important to them and therefore they do not extend the same courtesy. Likewise, impressions made by “randoms” are not taken on board as relevant because they rationalise that it is not possible for a “random” to accurately know their personality. Therefore, this reliance on categorizing “friends” favourably because of their membership in the in-group seems to be activated. In the face of miscommunication, stronger ties are given the benefit of the doubt. With weak ties the instinctive response (to even minimally insulting comments) is to block them because trust is not securely placed without offline knowledge. Accountability, trust and disclosure were clearly weaker with the “out-group”. There were gradients of accountability, trust and disclosure within the “in-group” depending on the strength of the offline friendship. Weak offline ties capitalise on partial anonymity as a way of serving a desire for breadth of connection but using IM for this purpose did not result in the relationship strengthening in both domains. However, partial anonymity provides an important function for weak ties as these connections may be unlikely to be made without the anonymity afforded through IM. Weak offline ties may be strengthened online but the offline relationship may remain unchanged. Those people considered “random” represent such a weak relationship that they serve an almost observational role in exposing the girls to a variety of identities but are unlikely to create a feeling of being connected meaningfully.

Gone are the days where technological determinism predicted main effects of doom and gloom for the Internet’s effect on society and socialisation. McKenna and Bargh (2000) remind us that, “People use the Internet for a variety of reasons and motivations and will thus use it differently.” The relationship between partial anonymity and strength of connection highlighted how this group of teenage girls use technology to serve their

own purposes. The 21st century will likely see partially anonymous relationships reproduced in business, education and leisure interactions. Learning to interact in this context may provide the girls with valuable tools needed for socialising successfully in a society increasingly oriented around technology. Instant Messaging may provide teenagers with a more concrete understanding around how we are social actors and perform differently as the context changes. The understanding around incongruence in how one acts online and offline demonstrates an awareness of the role which context plays as we perform socially. The understanding of how anonymity provides control over intimacy and risk highlights the socio-cognitive processes at work in a partially anonymous interaction. Together, capitalising on the opportunities which partial anonymity brings can prepare the girls for smoother interactions in contexts where ambiguity and miscommunication are likely.

It is important to remember that this study present a “girls only” view of Instant Messaging. It was found that interactions with the opposite sex revealed a softer or more sensitive side to boys. It would be valuable to explore how boys construct interactions online, both same sex and cross sex. In addition to investigating a boy’s point of view, it would be valuable to further explore the difference between early adolescence and later adolescence with respect to IM interactions. There appears to be a maturational effect and it was evident in this study that as the girls mature, online interactions serve different motivations. For example, being connected widely was important for the younger participants and this meant they often talked to “randoms” in addition to offline friends from school. The older girls preferred to only talk to offline contacts and very rarely talked to “randoms”. Additionally, in the interview process some of these younger participants were not as self-aware of their motivations and not as able to compare and contrast different contexts. Therefore, further investigation of this age group would be valuable. Finally, my motivation in using a “sandwiching” format for interviews was to know my participants in two contexts, thus replicating their experience of knowing their friends in two contexts. The interviews followed an online-offline-online pattern. In reality, the participants often know their friends initially in the offline context first and therefore follow an offline-online-offline pattern. This may have impacted on rapport building for the first interview although it is impossible to say whether this impacted overall on the data gathered.

Previous studies on computer-mediated communication have used email, chat rooms, newsgroups, and MUD's to test contemporary social identity theories. Instant Messaging is a relatively recent phenomenon and hugely popular and yet there is a marked paucity of research directly investigating the nature of this type of socialisation. The present study extends this body of research by investigating a new modality in online socialisation and the interaction between the unique advantages it presents and the context within which it is being used.

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OFFICE USE ONLY

Date Received:
ALB/PN/WGTN Protocol
No:

Date First Reviewed:
Outcome:
Date Final Outcome:

Type of Project: *(mark one only)*

Staff Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	Student Research		Evaluation Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
		PhD Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	Teaching Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Master's Research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Honours Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	If Other, specify	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Undergraduate Research	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Summary of Project

(Please outline in no more than 200 words in lay language)

(Note All the information provided in the application is potentially available if a request is made under the Official Information Act. In the event that a request is made, the University, in the first instance, would endeavour to satisfy that request by providing this summary. Please ensure that the language used is comprehensible to all.)

This research aims to explore what characterises the discursive world of Instant Messaging and the implications for the formation and refinement of social identities in young women. The theoretical basis of the study is that Instant Messaging, as a social and linguistic medium, is recognised as being socially constructed, meaningful action. As such it can be understood as a form of experience that is shared between individuals who know and act toward one another based on particular points of view, which are constructed and clarified over time.

The Internet and Instant Messaging are contemporary social contexts where adolescents are increasingly seen to dwell or hang-out. Identity formation is widely recognised as a major developmental task during these years. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore the nature of their online and offline discourse with regard to opportunities for, and styles of, addressing self-development. Interviews will be held both electronically via MSN Instant Messaging and offline face-to-face. This study does not include interactions via chatrooms. The young women will be fully aware of my position as researcher during online interviews. There will be informed consent during all aspects of this study.

Send the completed application to The Secretary, Human Ethics Committee

AT Principal's Office
Albany

OR Equity & Ethics
Old Main Building
Turitea, Palmerston North

OR Principal's Office
Wellington

Please send this original (1) application plus twelve (12) copies. Application should be double-sided and stapled. Applications are due two (2) weeks prior to the meeting.

SECTION B: PROJECT INFORMATION

(Note the Committee treats all applications independently)

- 9 I/we wish the protocol to be heard in a closed meeting (Part II). Yes No
(If yes, state reason in a covering letter)
- 10 State concisely the aims of the project.
Please see summary of project already outlined
- 11 Give a brief background to the project so that the significance of the project can be assessed.
(no more than 200 words in lay language)
Please see summary of the project already outlined
- 12 Where will the project be conducted?
cyberspace via MSN Instant Messenger; face-to-face interviews will be held in Auckland, NZ
- 13 Who will actually conduct the study?
Katherine M. Krueger
- 14 Who will interact with the participants?
Katherine M. Krueger
- 15 What experience does the researcher(s) have in this type of project activity?
None, but the project will be completed under supervision and the supervisor has considerable experience of this type of research.
- 16 What are the benefits of the project to the participants?
The project will offer participants the possibility for a better understanding of themselves and of the role of new technology in shaping their sense of self.
- 17 What are the risks of the project to:
- i. Participants: None foreseeable, but see Q 40.
 - ii. Researcher(s): none foreseeable
 - iii. Groups/Communities/
Institutions: none foreseeable
 - iv. Massey University: none foreseeable
- 18 How do you propose to manage the risks for each of points ii., iii., and iv. above.
(Note Question 40 will address the management of risks to participants)
Please see Question 40
- 19 Is deception involved at any stage of the project? Yes No
If yes, justify its use and describe debriefing procedures.
- 20 Does the project include the use of participant questionnaire(s)? Yes No

(If yes, a copy of the Questionnaire(s) is to be attached to the application form)

21 Does the project include the use of focus group(s)? Yes No

22 Does the project include the use of participant interview(s)? Yes No

(If yes, a copy of the Interview Questions/Schedule is to be attached to the application form)

23 Does the project involve audio taping? Yes No

Does the project involve video taping? Yes No

(If agreement for taping is optional for participation, ensure there is explicit consent on the Consent Form)

If yes, state what will happen to the tapes at the completion of the project.

Recordings will be stored securely for a period of 5 years and then they shall be destroyed.

If audio taping is used, will the tape be transcribed? Yes No

If yes, state who will do the transcribing.

(If not the researcher, a Transcriber's Agreement is required and a copy is to be attached to the application form)

Katherine M. Krueger

24 Does the project involve recruitment through advertising? Yes No

(If yes, a copy of the Advertisement is to be attached to the application form)

25 Will consent be given in writing? Yes No

If no, state reason.

26 Does this project have any links to other approved Massey University Human Ethics Committee application(s)? Yes No

If yes, list HEC protocol number(s) and relationship(s).

27 Is approval from other ethics committees being sought for the project? Yes No

If yes, list other ethics committees.

SECTION C: FINANCIAL SUPPORT

28 Is the project to be funded in anyway from sources external to Massey University? Yes No

If yes, state source.

29 Is the project covered by a Massey University Research Services contract? Yes No

If yes, state contract reference number.

30 Is funding already available or is it awaiting decision?

31 Does the researcher(s) have a financial interest in the outcome of the project?

Yes No

If yes, explain how the conflict of interest situation will be dealt with.

SECTION D: PARTICIPANTS

32 Type of person participating:

(mark one or more)

Massey University Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hospital Patients	<input type="checkbox"/>
Massey University Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children under 7	<input type="checkbox"/>	Minors 8-15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Persons whose capacity is compromised	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Ethnic/cultural group members	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If Other, specify who.

33 What is the age range of participants?

14-17

34 Is there any professional or other relationship (e.g. employer/employee, lecturer/student, practitioner/patient, researcher/family member) to the researcher?

Yes No

If yes, describe how this conflict of interest situation will be dealt with.

35 What selection criteria will be used?

Young women, aged 14-17 years, who use MSN Instant Messenger regularly after school for keeping in touch with friends.

36 Will any potential participants be excluded?

Yes No

If yes, state the exclusion criteria.

Young women who don't use MSN on a regular basis (minimum of three or four times per week), or are outside the age range.

37 How many participants will be involved?

6-8

What is the reason for selecting this number?

(Where relevant, a copy of the Statistical Justification is to be attached to the application form)

This is deemed a manageable number of interviews and will provide sufficient data for analysis

How many participants will be in the control group?

(Where relevant)

38 **How will participants be recruited?**

Recruitment will begin with one young woman who will recommend friends and this will provide a snowball effect. The first participant will be recommended to me by a friend, and given a "Consent to contact" form, along with an Information Sheet, to hand out to her friends. If they wish to participate they will mail the "Consent to contact" form back to me, and I can then proceed with gaining written consent from both the young woman (and her parents, if underage). Following the telephone discussion with the participant (and with the parent for women under 16), during which all questions about the research can be answered, the Consent Form will be sent out by mail to be completed and mailed back. This procedure is necessary because I wish to conduct the first MSN interview before meeting the young woman face-to-face.

(If by public advertising, a copy of the Advertisement to be attached to the application form)

39 **What discomfort (physical, psychological, social), incapacity or other harm are participants likely to experience as a result of participation?**

None foreseeable

40 **What support processes does the researcher have in place to deal with adverse consequences or physical or psychological risks?**

In the unlikely event that one of the young women discloses painful and/or critical topics such as suicide, discomfort with sexuality or abuse I have access to professional psychologists in the School of Psychology at Massey who could advise about referral to appropriate services.

41 **How much time will participants have to give to the project?**

Total of 3 hours each. Three interviews will be conducted with each young woman. Two electronic interviews via MSN Instant Messenger will last approximately 1 hour each. One face-to-face interview will last approximately 1 hour.

42 **What information on the participants will be obtained from third parties?**

None

43 **Will any identifiable information on the participants be given to third parties?**

Yes No

If yes, describe how.

44 **Will any compensation/payments be given to participants?**

Yes No

If yes, describe what and how.

A set of 2 movie tickets will be given to each participant upon completion of all 3 interviews as recognition of the time investment required.

SECTION E: DATA

45 **What approach/procedures will be used for collecting data?**

(e.g. questionnaire, interview, focus group, physiological tests, analysis of blood etc)

Semi-structured interviews: two electronic interviews via MSN Instant Messenger and one face-to-face interview. After all three interviews, transcripts will be sent to the young women for approval, and they will have the opportunity to review and censor any sensitive topics covered.

46 **How will the data be analysed?**

Data gathered from interviews will be transcribed and analysed for meaning, themes and discourses.

47 **How and where will the data be stored?**

Computer files will be password protected. Physical files will be in a locked file drawer.

48 **Who will have access to the data?**

Katherine M. Krueger and Kerry Chamberlain

49 **How will data be protected from unauthorised access?**

Using Passwords and locks

50 **How will information resulting from the project be shared with participants?**

Participants will be asked for contact details if they wish to receive a summary of results.

51 **How long will the data be retained?**

(Note the Massey University Policy on Research Practice recommends that data be retained for at least five (5) years)

5 years

52 **What will happen to the data at the end of the retention period?**

(e.g. returned to participants, disposed or archived)

Data and audiotapes will be destroyed.

53 **Who will be responsible for its disposal?**

(An appropriate member of the Massey University staff should normally be responsible for the eventual disposal of data - not a student researcher)

Kerry Chamberlain

54 **Will participants be given the option of having the data archived?**

Yes No

SECTION F: CONSENT FORMS

55 **How and where will the Consent Forms be stored?**

In a locked file drawer at the researchers home.

56 **Who will have access to the Consent Forms?**

Katherine M. Krueger

57 **How will Consent Forms be protected from unauthorised access?**

locked file drawer

58 **How long will the Consent Forms be retained?**

(Note the Committee recommends that Consent Forms be stored separately from the data and retained for at least five (5) years)

5 years.

SECTION G: HUMAN REMAINS, TISSUES AND BODY FLUIDS

59 **Does the project involve human remains, tissue or body fluids?**

Yes No

(If yes, complete Section G, otherwise proceed to Section H)

60 How is the material being taken?
(e.g. operation)

61 How and where will the material be stored?

62 How long will the material be stored?

63 Will the material be destroyed? Yes No

If yes, describe how.

If no, state why.

64 Will the material be disposed of in accordance with the wishes of the relevant cultural group? Yes No

65 Will blood be collected? Yes No

If yes, state what volume and frequency at each collection.

66 Will any samples go out of New Zealand? Yes No

**SECTION H: COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRIVACY ACT 1993 AND HEALTH INFORMATION
PRIVACY CODE 1994**

The Privacy Act 1993 and the Health Information Privacy Code 1994 impose strict requirements concerning the collection, use and disclosure of personal information. These questions allow the Committee to assess compliance.

(Note that personal information is information concerning an identifiable individual)

67 Will personal information be collected directly from the individual concerned? Yes No

If yes, specify the steps that will be taken to ensure that participants are aware of:

- the fact that information is being collected,
 - the purpose for which information is being collected and its use,
 - who will receive the information,
 - the consequences, if any, of not supplying the information,
 - the individual's rights of access to and correction of personal information.
- These points should be covered in the Information Sheet.

If any of the above steps are not taken explain why.

The only information collected for data analysis will be interview and texts. No personal information is required. All of the above points are covered in the information sheet.

68 Will personal information be collected indirectly from the individual concerned? Yes No

If yes, explain why.

69 What storage and security procedures to guard against unauthorised access, use or disclosure of the personal information will be used?

70 How long will the personal information be kept?

(Note that Information Privacy Principle 9 requires that personal information be kept for no longer than is required for the purposes for which the information may lawfully be used.) As a general rule, data relating to projects should be kept in appropriate secure storage within Massey University (rather than at the home of the researcher) unless a case based on special circumstances is submitted and approval by the Committee.

71 How will it be ensured that the personal information collected is accurate, up to date, complete, relevant and not misleading?

72 How will the personal information be used?

73 Who will have access to the personal information?

74 In what form will the personal information be published?

(Massey University requires original data of published material to be archived for five (5) years after publication for possible future scrutiny)

75 Will a unique identifier be assigned to an individual? Yes No
If yes, is the unique identifier one that any other agency uses for that individual? Yes No

SECTION I: TREATY OF WAITANGI

76 Does the proposed project impact on Maori people in any way? Yes No

If yes, describe how.

Unknown whether a young Maori woman will participate

77 Are Maori the primary focus of the project? Yes No

If no, proceed to Question 82.

If yes, is the researcher competent in te reo Maori and tikanga Maori? Yes No

If no, outline the processes in place for the provision of cultural advice.

78 Identify the group(s) with whom consultation has taken place.

(Where relevant, a copy of the supporting documentation is to be attached to the application form)

79 What consultation process has been undertaken prior to this application?

- 80 Describe any ongoing involvement the group consulted has in the project.
- 81 How will information resulting from the project be shared with the group consulted?
- 82 **If Maori are not the focus of the project, outline what Maori involvement there may be and how this will be managed.**
 If a Maori woman consents to participate and if cultural issues arise then I will seek consultation with Paul Hirini, a Maori Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology at Massey, Palmerston North.

SECTION J: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

- 83 **Are there any aspects of the project which might raise specific cultural issues?** Possible but very unlikely Yes No
If yes, describe how.
 If a person from a minority ethnic group was to volunteer, and this gave rise to any specific cultural issues, I would seek consultation with the appropriate cultural groups from the community. It is difficult to specify in advance if this will be necessary, but it appears unlikely as the sample is only 6-8 participants.
- 84 **Is ethnicity data being collected as part of the project?** Yes No
If yes, explain why.
- 85 **What ethnic or social group(s) other than Maori does the project involve?**
- 86 **Do the participants have English as a first-language?** Yes No
If no, will Information Sheets and Consent Forms be translated into the participants' first-language? Yes No
(If yes, copies of the Information Sheet and Consent Form are to be attached to the application form)
- 87 **What consultation process has been undertaken with the group(s) prior to this application?**
 None

- 88 **Identify the group(s) with whom consultation has taken place.**
(Where relevant, a copy of the supporting documentation is to be attached to the application form)
 None

- 89 Describe any ongoing involvement the group consulted has in the project.
- 90 How will information resulting from the project be shared with the group consulted?

SECTION K: RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN OVERSEAS

- 91 **Do the participants have English as a first-language?** Yes No
If no, will Information Sheets and Consent Forms be translated into the participants' first-language? Yes No
(If yes, copies of the Information Sheet and Consent Form are to be attached to the application form)
- 92 **Describe local committees, groups or persons from whom the researcher has or will obtain permission to undertake the project.**

(Where relevant, copies of Approval Letters are to be attached to the application form)

- 93 Does the project comply with the laws and regulations of the country where the project will take place? Yes No
- 94 Describe the cultural competence of the researcher for carrying out the project.
- 95 Does the researcher speak the language of the target population? Yes No

Declarations

DECLARATION FOR THE STAFF APPLICANT

I have read the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants and understand my obligations and the rights of the participants, particularly in so far as obtaining informed consent is concerned. I agree to undertake the research/teaching/evaluation (*cross out those which do not apply*) as set out in this application together with any amendments required by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Staff Applicant's
Signature

Date:

DECLARATION FOR LINE MANAGER (for research/evaluations undertaken in the Divisions)

I declare that to the best of my knowledge, this application complies with the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants and that I have approved its content and agreed that it can be submitted.

Line Manager's
Signature

Date:

DECLARATION FOR THE STUDENT APPLICANT (for supervised student research)

I have read the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants and understand my obligations and the rights of the participants, particularly in so far as obtaining informed consent is concerned. I agree to undertake the research/teaching/evaluation (*cross out those which do not apply*) as set out in this application together with any amendments required by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Student
Applicant's
Signature

Date:

DECLARATION FOR THE SUPERVISOR (for supervised student research)

I declare that I have assisted with the development of this protocol, that to the best of my knowledge it complies with the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants, and that I have approved its content and agreed that it can be submitted.

Supervisor's
Signature

Date:

Appendix B

Young Women, Identity and the World of Instant Messaging

Information Sheet

What is the study about?

My name is Katie Krueger and I am a student at Massey University. I am doing a study on how young women use MSN or ICQ Instant Messaging on the internet to keep in touch with their friends after school. The aim of this study is to see how this new technology is related to young women's sense of themselves. The study is under the supervision of Kerry Chamberlain, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Massey University.

Who is eligible?

I'd like to invite you to take part if you are:

- a young women aged 14-17
- who uses MSN or ICQ instant messaging at least 3 times a week to keep in touch with your friends after school and on weekends.

What would I have to do?

If you would like to take part, all you need to do is participate in a series of interviews. Two interviews will be online via MSN or ICQ Instant Messenger and will last about one hour each. I will save our conversations on my computer to be used in my analysis. One interview would be held at your home, unless you wished it to take place elsewhere. This interview would also last about one hour and would be tape recorded. In these interviews I will ask what it is like using Instant Messaging to keep in touch with your friends and what role this has in learning about yourself.

If you are willing to take part please send back the "Consent to be contacted form" and I will ring you to discuss any question you might have about the study. If you are happy then I will send you a consent form and arrange the first interview. If you are under the age of 16 and want to take part you should discuss this study with your parents and one of them will also need to sign the consent form.

What can I expect from the researcher?

If you would like to take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study up to the final interview.

- Ask any questions about the study at any time while you are taking part.
- Have all information you give me kept confidential (but please read the section on confidentiality). All records will be identified by only a code and are seen only by the researchers. I may use brief quotes in publications that are prepared about the study but I will make sure you cannot be identified.
- Be given a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of conversations on the internet cannot be fully guaranteed. Within this limitation, any information you provide to me will be kept confidential and will not be discussed with your parents or anyone else. However, if you disclose any serious issues (such as thoughts of harm to yourself or others) then I am obliged to break confidentiality and inform others. This is in your best interest and is the only circumstance under which I would have to disclose our conversations.

Compensation

A set of two movie tickets or a music gift voucher worth \$25.00 will be given to each participant upon completion of all three interviews as recognition of the time investment required.

You are welcomed to contact either myself (09-422-0882) or Kerry Chamberlain (414-0800 ext. 9078), either before you decide to take part or at any time during the study, for further information or to clarify any questions you may have about the study.

Katie Krueger

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, ALB Protocol 03/xxx. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Brian Murphy, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Albany, telephone 09 414 0800 x9251, email B.Murphy@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix C

Young Women, Identity and the World of Instant Messaging

Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study up until the final interview and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used and that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

I agree to the researcher audio taping the interview with me and keeping the transcripts from our online conversations. I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I understand that direct quotations from the interview may be used in reports about the study but I will not be able to be identified.

I understand the limits of confidentiality and circumstances under which the researcher would be obligated to break confidentiality.

I would like to participate in this study. I understand that if I am under 16 years of age my parent/guardian also needs to sign this form and talk to the researcher on the phone.

Signed _____ Date _____

Name _____

Parent/Guardian

I have also read the Information Sheet and discussed this study with _____ and agree to her participation.

Signed _____ Date _____

Name _____

Appendix D

Adolescent Girls, Identity and the discursive World of Instant Messaging

Consent to be Contacted Form

I have read the Information Sheet and now consent to be contacted by the researcher.

I understand this is not consent to participate, but purely consent to be contacted to discuss any queries. If I decide to participate, an interview time will then be made.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Best time to ring: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E

Proposed Interview Topics

These are not exact questions that will be asked but are indicative of the issues that will be raised for discussion.

Introductory questions:

1. How often do you use MSN or ICQ Instant Messaging?
2. Where are you when you go online to chat most of the time?
3. How many people do you usually talk to at once?
4. What are the usual ways you keep in touch with your friends when you're not at school?

-
1. What's appealing about Instant Messaging?
 2. What do you think of the opportunities teens had for expressing themselves "pre-internet"? In what ways do you see instant messaging as an advantage or disadvantage?
 - What do you think it's like for teens today in figuring out what sort of person they are or would like to be?
 3. Are there topics you would be more comfortable talking about online than face-to-face, even with your friends?
 - What is it like seeing your friends the next day after a real heavy conversation?
 - If you needed to make-up or do damage control with a friend, how would you do it?
 - What feels different online/offline?
 4. How do you personalize Instant Messaging to express who you are? What do you hope those personal touches say about you?
 - How is this different from expressing who you are offline?
 - People talk about us having "multiple selves". Do you think different aspects of your personality come out more online?
 - Does your language change when you're online?
 - How does being a female make a difference in the way you interact online?
 5. Have you ever gone to a chat room? How is that type of contact online different from Instant Messaging with friends who you see regularly? Are the rules with friends different?
 - What is it like having an argument online?
 - Can you think of an instance when you would go offline and need to phone your friend to continue the conversation?
 6. What role, if any, does Instant Messaging play in how you figure out who you are?
 - What is important to you in your online interactions?
 - Do you think you've changed at all since using Instant Messaging?
 - What feels different online than offline?