Identity: Girls Everyday, On and Offline

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This dissertation titled
Identity: Girls Everyday, On and Offline

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ABSTRACT

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Identity: Girls Everyday, On and Offline

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This dissertation examines the culture of adolescent girlhood and identity performance as they coexist with social networking. Through application of adolescent development theory, identity performance theory, and girls’ studies, the dissertation answers the question, “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites like MySpace.com?” By incorporating participant observation, textual analysis and guided conversation interviews, I explore the culture of girlhood at an all-girls’ high school, and the performance of identity, adolescence, and gender of twenty-two participants. This dissertation differs from the previous literature on adolescent girls’ identity performances on social networking sites by including the actual voices of the girls. I allow the girls to talk about the way they present themselves both to friends and family as well as through their social networking “MySpace.com” pages. Grounded in theory, I expand the developmental theories of Erikson (1985), Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Elkind (1981, 2001) by demonstrating the need for an addition to the ecological systems of development with a “cybersystem” as well as explore Elkind’s “imagined audience” and argue that this “imagined audience” has been “actualized” through social networking. Identity performance, as delineated by Goffman (1959), is used to discuss the ways in which both the changing and overlapping social contexts of teenage girls requires a constant readjustment of performing self, a fluid identity practice. Finally, using the emerging field of girls’ studies this work is
informed by the feminist work of Gilligan (1982) and McRobbie’s (1982, 1991, 2000) who understood the importance of foregrounding the culture of adolescent girls. Overall, this dissertation recognizes the changing social environment for teens as they move into adulthood and looks to acknowledge the increasing struggle for performing identity in girls’ everyday lives.

Approved: 

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO MYSPACE

I first became intrigued by the popular social networking site, MySpace.com, several years ago when news of a young couple being investigated for a double homicide hit the national headlines. David Ludwig, 18, was accused of killing the parents of his 14 year-old girlfriend, Kara Beth Borden, after their relationship was discovered and subsequently forbidden by the parents. According to the press reports, the two teenage lovers, it was reported, maintained a secret relationship for months, only to be discovered sneaking home early one Sunday morning in November by the girl’s parents. Panicked by the discovery, Kara text messaged her boyfriend that she had been caught and requested he come talk to her parents. David, armed with a handgun, a shotgun and a hunting knife, engaged in a forty minute argument with her parents. The argument resulted in David being asked to leave and to discontinue his relationship with Kara. David shot Kara’s father in the head at close range and turned the gun towards her mother, shooting her in the head as well. Kara’s younger brother witnessed his father’s murder and ran to the bathroom. Kara’s older sister heard the shots from her bedroom and ran to a neighbor’s house to call 911. Kara left the house chasing David, and David slowed his get-a-way car down for her. David and Kara drove for several days and their run ended after a high speed car chase in Indiana on November 15, 2005. Safely returned to Pennsylvania, information about the two teenagers began to flood the media. Perhaps the most important sources for the information on the teens’ relationship and their identity came from their social networking websites on Xanga.com and MySpace.com. The information found on their personal profiles painted a more complex, deeper picture.
of the two than the knowledge of their “conservative Christian” identity would presumably illustrate. In other words, publicly revealed background information by family members and neighbors only touched the surface of the intimacies of the teenagers’ relationship. Access to the social websites allowed a public window into the private lives of these two teens.

For instance, with the two social networking sites, we were able to trace the beginnings of the relationship and construction of identity, and from the social networking sites we know that David was carrying on intimate email correspondence with another young female during this time. Additionally, the websites allowed visitors to view David’s arsenal of artillery (over 100 guns) and pictures of him posing with them, an identity of a criminal or at least a violent man. The websites also portrayed David’s struggle with his Christianity, yet another signifier of a different aspect of his identity. In retrospect, his blog writings gave way to speculation that he was a psychopath who hid behind his religion. Through the Internet we were able to read David’s emails and postings to both girls where he urged the girls to repent for their sexual activities, to hide their relationships from their parents, and to pray to God for forgiveness for their indiscretions, all while detailing his longings for the young girls.¹

Why did this story intrigue me so? Perhaps it was the notion of getting a secret glimpse at these two young people whose identities were so different to mine. Through the use of the Internet, I was privy to their dark secrets. Although they kept their relationship and many facets of their identities private, once their reality was forced into the public by the death of Kara’s parents, it spread to the “über-public” through the
Internet. How, I wondered, did they think they could keep their love a secret while they posted details of their relationship to the public Internet audience? Did they feel their love was private and could be kept so, while at the same time posting the intimate details for anyone to read? Which of their identities were more likely true to their selves? Their offline identities presented to their parents? Other adults? Most of the outside world? Or their assumed to be private, online identities carefully presented through their MySpace and Xanga pages? If parents were aware of the teens’ Internet identities, could they have prevented their own deaths? Could someone knowing the teens in both the offline and online space notice the warning signs of David’s volatility?

Creating My Space

This story intrigued me. I decided to create a MySpace account in order to get in on the secret conversations. How were people I knew presenting their virtual identities on their MySpace accounts? As soon as I created my account I looked up a young teenager I knew. His presentation of self on his page greatly differed from my knowledge of him. Based on what I had experienced with him, I knew his offline identity him to be a happy guy, interested in school, his band, and girlfriend; however, from his MySpace page, he had a very different identity. First, I noticed he had changed his age. He posted that he was eighteen years old, even though I knew him to be only fourteen. Also, his page was full of dark broodings, referring to his dissatisfaction with his family life, his disinterest in school, and his sexual relationship with his girlfriend. This was a shock to me and also I felt guilty for intruding into his performance of an online self to an audience that wasn’t supposed to include me. However, he posted this information. He
chose to present himself as so, and he had to know that anyone with a MySpace account could easily find his page. Once again I found myself curious about the choices one made in presenting self on a social networking site. He was using his MySpace page to present himself in a very different way than he did in his offline world. His identity changed drastically between the two forums. This led me to the focus of this dissertation: how adolescent girls perform identity on MySpace.

Research Questions

As illustrated above, I have struggled with questions about teenagers’ use of social networking sites and changing identities. Ultimately, these questions have become the central focus of this dissertation: How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com? The following questions address the girls’ personal sense of identity, performance of identity, and how the medium of MySpace fits within these performances. This dissertation seeks to understand the ways girls construct and maintain an identity on and offline. Because of the significance of social networking sites in the girls’ everyday lives, both their online and offline performances of identities to various audiences are explored through interviews, their social networking pages, and participant observation. Questions and responses of the girls direct the dissertation research and include:

- How do girls express their adolescent identity both on and offline?

Adolescent development theory (Erikson, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; and Elkind, 1981, 2001) suggests that adolescence is a time for identity experimentation and practice. The girls in this study used various social interactions and social networking sites to perform
many identifying qualities (social relationships, interests, personality traits, and activity involvement) of self.

- How can identity performance be researched/demonstrated through interviews and observation of social networking sites?

Goffman’s (1959, 1967) theory of presenting self through performance to different audiences suggests that individuals have a very social and fluid identity that changes and shifts in various social contexts. The girls identified their own definitions of identity and illustrated the ways in which their identities change in different social relationships (Friends, family, and authority). Additionally, the girls highlighted various aspects of their identities online portraying social relationships, media interests, personality traits, and activity involvement on their social networking pages. Through the conversations with the girls, a better understanding can be reached about the way their identities are performed both on and offline.

- How do girls “be girls” or perform gender online and offline?

Gender studies, and more specifically girls’ studies (Gilligan, 1982; McRobbie, 1982, 1991, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1991) suggests that gender identity is constructed and maintained through adherence to social norms and mores directed down from dominant ideological systems. How the girls fit into the dominant gender norms was reflected in their response to questions regarding “What does it mean to be a girl today?” and expressions of gender on their social networking pages.

When approaching the question, “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites like MySpace.com?” I
isolated three distinguishing elements: adolescence, identity and girls. Through my data collection, I found that the girls reflected the literature and related to these three elements. I also noticed the ways in which their incorporation of new media social networking sites highlighted and intensified these factors in their everyday identities. The findings chapters are divided by themes of performing adolescent identity, identity performance, and being a girl (or performing gender); yet they are also linked by the common denominator of how these themes are influenced and incorporated with the social networking site, MySpace.com. My research uses adolescent girls’ social networking site pages and the girls’ own descriptions of these pages to gain a better understanding of how this new media technology is changing what it means to be an American teenage girl today.

The Project

This dissertation explores how girls are using the social networking site, MySpace.com, to perform and maintain identity in their everyday lives. I will explore this within the context of adolescent developmental stages as explained by the work of Erikson, Bronhenbrenner, and Elkind; identity theory as performance as developed by Goffman; and the growing research on girls’ studies.

Why is this Study Important?

In the midst of rising popularity, Internet social networking sites like MySpace.com and Facebook.com have been are under attack by parents, educators, policy makers and law enforcement agencies. These sites cause panic as adults worry that adolescent Internet users post too much personal information, possibly getting into
the wrong hands. Sensational TV news programs like, *To Catch a Predator*, add to the fear. However, scholarly research on adolescent Internet use contradicts the fear created by the popular media. Research indicates that adolescents benefit in terms of identity work and experimentation on the Internet (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 1998; Stern, 1999, 2000, 2002; Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). Since adolescence is a time in which identity is precarious and experiments with identity are prevalent (Brown, Reese-Dykers, Steele, & White, 1994; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Steele & Brown, 1995) the Internet can be used as a tool to experiment with and express changing notions of identity.

At the time of the study (2007) the Pew Internet Project reported, “More than half of all online American youths ages 12-17 use online social networking sites” with older teens and girls the most frequent users (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 1). Of the social networking sites popular amongst teenagers, MySpace.com is the most popular: “Fully 85% of teens who have created an online profile say the profile they use or update most often is on MySpace, while 7% update a profile on Facebook” (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 4). This overwhelming popularity of MySpace over other social networking sites has shifted considerably since Facebook.com opened its site up to the general public (January 2007). Facebook originally was used by colleges and limited only to college networks, but began expanding access opportunities to other networks which included high schools and teens.

*Why MySpace?*

Even though Facebook was becoming a newly acquired social networking outlet for recruitment sample (January 2007-September 2007), MySpace was selected. Why?
Because it had been around longer, girls would have been more established users of MySpace, and, at the time, Facebook was very different from MySpace. Issues of recruitment are discussed in Chapter Three. MySpace was selected over Facebook initially because when the project began MySpace allowed for greater creative expression of self. The MySpace pages of the girls studied contained carefully selected and designed layouts, backgrounds, fonts, and graphics—unique unto each individual user. Since this was a project about identity, identity presentation, and changing identities, MySpace was the selected medium to best reflect the expression of identity\(^2\).

**Why Girls?**

Girls, in particular, are important to study. Many feminist scholars assert that female adolescence is a difficult time period because they are at risk for losing a sense of self or identity (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Brown & St. Clair, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Pipher, 1994). Female adolescence is a time in which young girls are left to maintain a strong sense of self in a society/culture that pushes them towards a subjugated self. Therefore, it is important to study how girls negotiate identity during this turbulent stage. Stern (2000) studied girls’ Internet homepages as sites for self-expression and found that, “Girls’ home pages seem to be a form of self-presentation, characterized by the portrayal of an identity, in the service of reaching an audience” (p. 47). Though Stern’s work is invaluable to the study of girls’ use of the Internet for self-expression, one key voice is missing in her work, the voice of the girls themselves. My project adds to her work by studying the *voices* of girl MySpace users.
In addition to expanding upon Stern’s (2000) work and the work of others in girls’ studies, I have also chosen to look at girls because girls are the most prevalent social networking site users. As noted earlier, according to a Pew Internet survey (2007) girls are more likely users of social networking sites, instant messaging, and email functions on the Internet in comparison to boys who prefer to use digital downloading sites and videos like YouTube. Girls’ preference of social networking on the Internet can be attributed to the common assumptions that state that girls are more likely to engage in relational communicative practices than boys. In other words, in general, girls are more likely to engage in maintaining relationships through communication, verbal and written, than boys. Social networking sites like MySpace.com provide the medium for girls to continue and nurture their relationships and identity beyond offline interactions.

**How is this Different from Other Studies?**

Little has been done on the topic of teenage girls, identity and MySpace; therefore there will be no formal literature review included. Instead, limited findings from the few studies that do address adolescent girls, identity performance and MySpace at the beginning of each findings chapter are detailed in Chapters Four, Five and Six. As stated above, Susannah Stern (2000) conducted a study of teenage girls’ personal webpages in order to determine certain identity practices taking place on the Internet. This study differs from Stern’s (2000) in that it not only includes the voices of the girl creators, but also provides the girls an opportunity to walk the investigator through their choices and everyday uses of MySpace.com. Additionally, whereas Stern relied only on communication theory such as theories of self-disclosure in analyzing her participants’
pages; this dissertation examined the culture of the girls on three different levels (adolescence, identity performance, gender performance). In order to answer the question: “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites such as MySpace.com?” these three different levels were thoroughly researched and analyzed. It is within these three contexts that this dissertation more fully explains the ways in which girls are using MySpace as a place for identity expression and maintenance and how social networking sites, in turn, are blurring the lines between the girls’ everyday interactions both offline and online.

Theoretical Positioning Within the Project

My Own Theoretical Shift

I began this project believing that social science offered a way to explain adolescent development and identity construction, but have since moved to an understanding that it is the cultural context of an individual’s development, as well as the multiphrenia of media, images, and technology that heavily influence the identity performances of teenage girls. The shift moves us away from a traditional understanding of identity to a postmodern cultural studies frame of reference when approaching girls’ identity practices on the Internet.

Where I Started

My research of adolescent media use has been a journey. I started off studying Jane Brown’s work on adolescent media use, focusing on her methods and incorporation of theories, and was really attracted to her style (1976, 2000). However, as time went by, I found myself conflicted with her conclusions while thinking of her work in context with
my own. Although I liked what she was doing, it became apparent that there was some sort of ontological and epistemological difference between our philosophies on adolescent media use. Initially my intent was to apply Steele & Brown’s (1995) Adolescent Media Practice Model, which suggests that adolescents attend to different media according to their different needs. In other words, this model is shaped from Uses & Gratifications Theory, which implies that individuals attend to different media in order to fulfill varying needs. To me, this oversimplified adolescent media use.

Where I Am Now

Having just outlined my position, the choices I made were part of an arduous journey not yet complete; however, they do reflect my understanding on the individual in relation to the social world. While Steele and Brown’s work such as the Adolescent Media Practice Model (1995) is very attractive and accessible, I am wary of her theoretical starting point. Initially I thought that I could use the method of having the girls “walk me through” their MySpace pages like the teens in Steele and Brown’s (1995) project walked them through their bedrooms. The teens’ bedrooms were overwhelmed with references to current popular culture media icons. Posters of films, video games, movie stars and rock and roll bands wallpapered their rooms. Steele and Brown (1995) concluded that the teens were using these media images to reflect their changing identities. Since their bedrooms also consisted of references to their pasts, stuffed animals, Disney posters, etc., Steele and Brown inferred that the bedroom sites were spaces to reflect transitioning identities.
However, this conclusion is too simplistic and lacks a complex understanding of identity construction and performance. It just doesn’t match my understanding of identity. In the beginning, when I thought about adolescents and identity development, I believed that it was the outside media choices that reflected the interior identity. For instance, I believed that the music choices an adolescent selected determined their identity—the teen would adapt/adopt the persona of the music preference they maintained. The music you selected reflected who you were. Media “out there,” swirling around with its own predetermined meaning, is selected by the individual and put on, like a mask. This gives too much power to the media, and takes away responsibility or agency in identity work. This notion suggests a tangible, measurable, outer world that stamps identity on the impressionable youth. In a sense, it was like identity came from outside sources in. Additionally this notion of a powerful media does not translate to current thinking on consumers as media makers and a participatory culture. In other words, MySpace.com is a medium in which the users are manipulating media into their own meanings. Brown’s work seemed to rely too much on media’s influences on the individual; whereas I began to believe that the individual possessed more power in his or her own identity work. I was beginning to believe that identity came from within and was projected outward.

The theories employed in this dissertation include adolescent development theory with an emphasis on Erikson (1968, 1985), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Elkind (1987, 2001); identity performance, concentrating on Goffman (1959) and his work on the performance of self; and feminist analyses represented in girls’ studies. Methods utilized
in this study include qualitative interviewing, guided tour conversations, textual analysis, and participant observation. The triangulation of methods was selected in order to obtain a deeper understanding of how girls were using MySpace in their everyday lives and what sort of culture was present on the online social networking site. In total, twenty-two high school aged girls participated in the interviews and online observation and correspondence. These girls were students at an all-girls Catholic high school in Cincinnati, Ohio. The high school population is largely lower middle class to upper middle class families and is set in an urban area. Out of the girls who participated, six were of color and sixteen were white. The interviews were arranged by and conducted in the Guidance Department.

Identity Defined

Identity is a term that has been problematic and carries with it several varying definitions. One of the problems is differentiating between identity and self. These two terms are often times conflated; however, a distinction does exist between the two. Weigert and Gecas (2005) explain that self, “refers to a substantive social referent for the reflexive process of being self-aware and self-acting” (163). Identity, on the other hand, is “typifications of self as . . . defined by self or other, and often the focus of conflict, struggle and politics” (163). In other words, identity is the outward representation or manifestation of self. Identity, to me, is how you see yourself, how you define yourself—what words would you use to describe yourself? For instance, I would begin to describe myself as Lisa, a woman, daughter, student, and so on. It is important to note that these words refer to me, myself, as well as me in relation to others. Therefore, my
definition of identity extends to include relations to others as defining factors. In other words, I see identity as being both personal and relational and above all things contextual. My definition would change for different audiences—in other words, who’s asking, and my definition changes for myself as well. This dissertation’s definition of identity comes from Erving Goffman (1959, 1963, 2004). Identity, as defined by Goffman (1959), is viewed as a “performance,” shaped by context (environment and observers). Performance is enacted in order to impress the audience according to the individual’s desired encounter. In other words, the individual presents or performs or creates his or her self according to specific circumstances. In this way, the individual develops identity as a function of interaction with others. An individual, therefore is compared to being both a performer, as well as an actor in an ensemble—both individual and social notions of identity.

The Chapters

This dissertation consists of six chapters, divided by the theoretical dimensions: adolescence, identity performance, and girls’ studies. The reader will find that each of the three findings chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six) structured around the girls’ responses includes first a literature review, the findings, and then discussion in the context of these dimensions. The following is a brief description of what each chapter details and how the information is organized within.

Chapter One, “Theorizing about Theory,” is divided into three sections, each dedicated to a discussion of the foundational theories behind the project. The chapter begins with a discussion on developmental theory and in particular adolescent identity
development. This section emphasizes the work of Erik Erikson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and David Elkind—three developmental theorists who contribute to my frame of reference of adolescent development. The second section of the theory chapter involves identity performance theory. Erving Goffman’s work is explained with a brief background of his scholarship, a review of his key works, and, his definition of identity as it relates to performance. The third and final section of the theory chapter contains a discussion of girls’ studies. It is important to trace the ways we talk about what it means “to be a girl.” In addition to a description of the theoretical foundations of this dissertation, this chapter is meant to briefly demonstrate the evolution of each important concept: adolescent development, identity theory as performance, and girls’ studies.

Chapter Two, “Finding a Method for my Madness,” details the methods employed in this dissertation. It is organized to provide a framework for understanding the methods selected and how these tools presented themselves throughout the research. I begin by describing why the nature of this dissertation requires qualitative research methods, and then define each method of research selected: participant observation, interviewing, grand tour/guided conversations, and textual analysis. These definitions include reference to particular communication research methodologists such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), Mason (2002), Duke and Kreshel (1998), and McKee (2003). Also this chapter contains a brief discussion of the “researcher entwined,” and how self-reflexivity presented itself throughout the entire dissertation process. Finally, the method chapter provides a detailed explanation of how each process played out throughout the research project.
Chapter Three, “Setting: Meet the Girls,” is an in-depth description of the setting and the participants of the study. Here I detail the experience of obtaining the research site, recruiting participants, encountering parental questions, working with the teachers and staff at the school, and preparing for the interviews themselves. This chapter allows interested readers an opportunity to understand all the preparation that went into the moment I actually “met the girls”. It also provides rich context to the description of the girls shared offline culture. In other words, in dedicating an entire chapter to describing the setting and preparation of the study, I allow room for details of the cultural environment of the high school and the girls’ everyday lives. This chapter is organized to describe the neighborhood, high school, teachers, students, and staff. Not only does it provide details about the setting but also includes issues I encountered while setting up the study. Basically, this chapter prepares the reader (and the writer for the moment) when we “meet the girls.”

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I discuss the findings of the research. Because little has been written on Adolescent Girls, Identity, and Social Networking sites, these search terms come up with plenty of research on their own individual levels, but when combined, the findings are sparse. Therefore, I’ll include a brief literature review at the beginning of each findings chapter (Four, Five, and Six) highlighting the pertinent information relating to the chapter’s theme. Each chapter presents a review of the relevant literature, the research findings based on both the interviews and the girls’ MySpace sites, and a discussion of the findings. Chapter Four, “Adolescence,” showcases the voices of the girls, their culture, and how the girls practice adolescent identity in their
everyday lives, both on and offline. Also, the girls discuss their own interpretations of the culture of MySpace and how it factors in to their everyday lives. Chapter Five, “Identity,” looks at the ways the girls define identity as well as how the girls are performing identity online and offline. Chapter Six, “Being a Girl,” discusses the ways in which the girls perform their gender, or “be girls” both on and offline.

Finally, in the Conclusion, “Moving forward and looking back,” I reflect upon the research question “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites, like MySpace.com?” This chapter explains how this question is answered through specific examples and is grounded in theory. I’ve also included sections on contributions to the field of identity and girls’ studies scholarship, limitations, and future research possibilities.

1 For more information on this interesting case, see: http://www.crimelibrary.com/news/original/1105/2801_ludwig_borden_christian_values_facade.html

2 Currently, in 2011, MySpace.com is practically obsolete in terms of teenage girl usage. The site has undergone several layout improvements that has aligned it more with the sterile structure of Facebook.com. However, currently, MySpace.com has seemed to return to its original intention, a site for the promotion and sharing of musical acts.

3 Specific names of high schools and neighborhoods have been changed to protect the identities of participants.
CHAPTER ONE
THEORY: THEORIZING ABOUT THEORY

Introduction
This chapter addresses the theoretical framework that has shaped my thinking. It includes three theoretical perspectives: adolescent development in particular as it relates to the construction of a sense of self, identity development through performance, and feminist theory as it is reflected in girls’ studies. I have selected Erikson, Bronfenbrenner, and Elkind because I believe they represent a shift in developmental theory throughout the 20th century, bringing us to the present postmodern day. Additionally, each theorist is considered to have made significant contributions to their field of developmental psychology. Erikson and Bronfenbrenner’s important contributions are more obvious: Erikson furthered Freud’s psychosocial developmental theory in order to extend a more complete notion of the life cycle, and Bronfenbrenner created the Ecological Systems Theory of development which not only included child psychology, but incorporated sociology, anthropology, economic and political theory when studying human development. Elkind is included because he is innovative in his emphasis on the hurried child, which criticizes in an accessible style, popular parenting trends. I move away from the scientific stages and systems of Erikson and Bronfenbrenner’s explanation of human development into the popular cultural criticism of Elkind’s developmental theory.

While there have been many approaches to identity theory, I focus on Goffman’s seminal theory of identity performance (1959). Lastly, my discussion on girls’ studies explores the brief historical conception and later development of the academic shift in recognizing the study of girls’ experiences. The following chapter on adolescent identity
theory and girls studies helps the reader understand the background behind a project that asks: How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites like MySpace.com?

Adolescent Development

In this section I will discuss three developmental theorists, Erik Erikson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and David Elkind. I’ve organized this section to include their definitions of adolescent development, how they mark or measure development, their views on adolescence, and finally a comparison of all three theorists which discusses how these theories have led to what I see as a postmodern theory of development.

Erikson: The Life Cycle in Eight Stages

Erikson was introduced to Freud’s psychosexual theory of development through Freud’s daughter Anna and he became an enthusiastic student of Freud’s practice of psychoanalysis. Erikson subscribed to Freud’s psychosexual developmental theory that consisted of five stages: oral, muscular, loco-motor, latency, and genital. To Erikson, Freud’s stages explained psychosexual development as a child’s successful navigation of stage-specific tasks that emphasized certain pleasure zone fixations. In other words, Freud believed that all humans are born with intrinsic sexual drives that manifest at different stages (and ages of development) in specified erogenous zones (oral, anal, phallic, etc.). At first, these stages refer to a child’s instinctual needs and growing awareness of pleasure principals. With each stage comes a task, conflict or crisis. For Freud, these stages and tasks revolved properly-timed control and satiation of pleasure specific to each of the erogenous zones. In other words, each specified stage requires
Erikson built on Freud’s original stages and created a theory of development that accounted for the entire life cycle, which consisted of eight stages. Erikson elaborated Freud’s genital stage into adolescence and added three stages of adulthood (young adulthood, middle adulthood, maturity). According to Boeree (2006), Erikson’s stages involved tasks that were psychosocial in nature, and, like Freud, he defined themes crises. In other words, as Freud’s stages focused on sexual drives (id) alone, Erikson’s contributes to ego development (Erikson, 1985, p. 64). Erikson’s stages were psychosocial, accounting for more than sexual development and taking into consideration biological, historical and cultural influences on human development.

Erikson: Development defined.

According to Erikson (1985), development occurs with the successful negotiation of psychological crises characterized by eight developmental stages (See Table 1.1). The personality and identity develops at the point of accumulating successful negotiations of crises. The crisis is a paired opposite, and during the crisis period of each developmental stage, “a person’s experience determines which of the two opposed personality potentials will be stronger” (Elkind, 1987, p. 95). In other words, for each stage the crisis or task is divided into two parts, and each task must be balanced. For example, the infant in the oral stage is faced with negotiating between trust and mistrust (trust that the mother will give it milk/food). The infant needs to learn trust; however, he or she must also learn mistrust in order to prevent growing up to be too trusting or naïve.
These stages must be successfully balanced during optimal times of development (See Table 1.1). If the stage is managed successfully, the developing individual will gain virtue or psychosocial strength. If the stage is improperly balanced or managed, the individual will develop maladaptations or malignancies. The following table illustrates Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development.
## Table 1.1

**Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages of Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage (age)</th>
<th>Psychosocial crisis</th>
<th>Psychosocial modalities</th>
<th>Personality Trait</th>
<th>Maladaptations &amp; malignancies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral (0-1 yrs)</td>
<td>trust vs mistrust</td>
<td>to get, to give in return</td>
<td>hope, faith</td>
<td>sensory distortion -- withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscular (2-3 yrs)</td>
<td>autonomy vs shame and doubt</td>
<td>to hold on, to let go</td>
<td>will, determination</td>
<td>impulsivity -- compulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loco-Motor (3-6 yrs)</td>
<td>initiative vs guilt</td>
<td>to go after, to play</td>
<td>purpose, courage</td>
<td>ruthlessness -- inhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency (7-12 yrs)</td>
<td>industry vs inferiority</td>
<td>to complete, to make things together</td>
<td>independence, competence</td>
<td>narrow virtuosity -- inertia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (12-18 yrs)</td>
<td>ego-identity vs role-confusion</td>
<td>to be oneself, to share oneself</td>
<td>fidelity, loyalty</td>
<td>fanaticism -- repudiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adulthood (the 20’s)</td>
<td>intimacy vs isolation</td>
<td>to lose and find oneself in another</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>promiscuity -- exclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Adulthood (late 20’s to 50’s)</td>
<td>generativity vs self-absorption</td>
<td>to make be, to take care of</td>
<td>care</td>
<td>overextension -- reactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity (50’s and beyond)</td>
<td>integrity vs despair</td>
<td>to be, through having been, to face not being</td>
<td>wisdom</td>
<td>presumption -- despair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Boeree (2006) & Erikson (1959)

Important to this study is Erikson’s Adolescent stage, characterized by the crisis between identity and role confusion. The main purpose of the adolescent in this stage is to develop peer relationships, and with a successful balance between identity and confusion, the developing adolescent will acquire the personality trait of fidelity (Erikson, 1985, p.
261-263). And at these stages, different personality traits are developed from ways in which the individual deals with the crisis associated with each level. This creates unique identities through the biological and environmental factors influencing each stage of development.

_Erikson’s adolescent._

According to Erikson, “The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of the moratorium, a psychological stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult” (1985, p. 263). Erikson describes the adolescent in a precarious position where he or she must look to the past in order to gather up the tools for the future (1985, p. 261). More specifically, he explains:

> With the advent of puberty, childhood proper comes to an end. Youth begins. But in puberty and adolescence all sameness and continuities relied on earlier are more or less questioned again, because of a rapidity of body growth which equals that of early childhood and because of the new addition of genital maturity. The growing and developing youths faced with this physiological revolution within them, and with tangible adult tasks ahead of them are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational prototypes of the day. (Erikson, 1985, 261)

Not only does Erikson acknowledge the precarious position of “in between” for the adolescent (in between childhood and adulthood, in between immaturity and maturity),
Erikson also describes what Elkind later coins as “imagined audience.” Adolescents are subject to biological, hormonal, and physical changes, but also are confronted with rapid role confusion, as the developing adolescent must negotiate all of the physical changes along with the social changes of gaining more independent responsibility. The changing social roles must be dealt with by acting out identity “out loud.” As the adolescent is negotiating through physical and biological change, their social world is one in which they can exert some control. The adolescent, therefore, is able to act out identities, by selecting peer groups that externally reflect the identity they are trying to express. During this social change, adolescents begin seeking out groups with similar interests and forging strong friendships. In other words, adolescents, as they negotiate the physical and biological changes of development, must cling to a peer group that reflects the external identities they are internally developing. In other words:

Young people can also be remarkably clannish, and cruel in their exclusion of all those who are “different,” in skin color or cultural background, in tastes and gifts etc. It is important to understand such intolerance as a defense against a sense of identity confusion. (Erikson, 1985, p. 262)

The above discussion on Erikson is brief but illustrates his Freudian roots, his progress in expanding Freud’s psychosexual theory into a psychosocial theory of development, and delineates his measurement of human development and his ideas on adolescence. Through his careful definitions of various developmental stages, Erikson defines an adolescent stage that is centered on identity, ego-identity v. role confusion. In this stage, an adolescent must not only negotiate the physical and biological changes her
body is experiencing, but must also work on ways to reflect the changes in an external performance of identity. Erikson contributes to this dissertation the idea that because of these rapid physical and biological changes, the adolescent is forced to stabilize themselves in some respect by compartmentalizing and joining others whom they see as similar and rejecting those who are different. The peer group becomes one way for outward expression of identity.

_Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Systems Theory_

According to Bronfenbrenner, the ecology of human development “involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded” (1979, p. 21). The ecological environment can be described as “a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). (See Figure 1.1)³.
Ecological systems theory includes understanding and studying varying levels or layers of environments and several factors or properties in those settings. These factors include: activity, role, and interpersonal relations (or dyads) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Settings are places where “people can readily engage in face-to-face interaction” such as home, day care centers, and playgrounds. The environments expand to include more settings as the developing individual learns to negotiate wider systems. Each system consists of elements—activities, roles and relations—that accumulate and build upon one another, moving the individual into bigger systems of negotiation. According to the theory, a role is “a set of activities and relations expected of a person occupying a particular position in society, and of others in relation to that person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 85). Therefore, the term role encompasses both activities and relations within
the setting or system. Further, roles are “usually identified by the labels used to designate various social positions in a culture” (i.e. age, sex, kinship, occupation, social status, as well as ethnicity and religion) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 85). These labels all answer the question, “Who is that person?” from the point of view of someone that is familiar with that person and the social context (or system) in which the person is situated. Finally, with each role come certain expectations. These expectations are situated within the context of the “content of activities” as well as the relationship between the individuals or “dyadic parameters,” such as: “degree of reciprocity, balance of power, and affective relation” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 85).

Bronfenbrenner: Development defined.

Bronfenbrenner defined human development as a lasting change that occurs and carries over to another time and place (or setting, or context). More specifically, “Development is defined as the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9). Development is enhanced through an increased involvement, from childhood on, in responsible, task-oriented activities outside the home that bring her into contact with adults other than her parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 282). Bronfenbrenner argued that development should be considered in context and stressed the concept of environmental interconnections; he described different contexts in levels of systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (1979, pp. 7-9) (See Table 1.2) and described development occurred in
context and the ability of the individual to apply what was learned in one context to the next. For Bronfenbrenner, the individual develops within a series of levels or systems.

*Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems of Development.*

Like Erikson, Bronfenbrenner created a theory on negotiating through various levels or systems for successful development (Table 1.2). Unlike Erikson, however, Bronfenbrenner focused solely on the negotiation of systems of interconnecting environments for successful development. Instead of stages, Bronfenbrenner measured development through ecological systems of development (micro, meso, exo, and macro). Within these systems, a child encounters various roles, settings, and relationships:

Table 1.2

*Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems of Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System (age)</th>
<th>Relationship to individual</th>
<th>Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micorsystem (0-1 yrs)</td>
<td>individual’s activities, role and interrelations within a setting</td>
<td>sensory distortion - withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem (2-3 yrs)</td>
<td>two or more settings in which an individual participates (family school)</td>
<td>impulsivity -- compulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem (3-6 yrs)</td>
<td>two or more settings in which the individual does not participate; however these settings have direct influence on the individual (television industry, father’s office)</td>
<td>ruthlessness -- inhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem (7-12 yrs)</td>
<td>the culture and ideologies which influence the exo, meso, and micro-systems</td>
<td>narrow virtuosity -- inertia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner (1979)
Although the systems end at seven to twelve years old, these systems are continuously revisited and re-nested. As the individual enters new environments throughout the life cycle, each system will come into play. However, development begins at the micro level and not until the child is in the age range of seven to twelve years does the child first recognize and negotiate cultural ideologies of influence to identity development. This development and learning that takes place at each level/system/setting should last in that it carries over to other settings. For example, Bronfenbrenner describes:

The young person leaves home to enter a variety of settings as he goes to college, finds a job, joins organizations, gets married, becomes active in community life, changes jobs, and so on. In some instances the old settings are not abandoned for the new but continue to be frequented so that the network expands with ever greater possibilities of interconnection. The most stable and enduring base throughout this process . . . remains the family. (1979, p. 232)

The exosystem becomes an influential source of the child’s development as well. The exosystem includes other settings that the child does not directly participate in, but does influence the child (for example, the child’s father’s workplace influences the father and the social status/class of the family which would influence the child). Bronfenbrenner’s system of development with its focus on environmental influences is therefore more cultural in nature in comparison to Erikson’s inclusion of biological and psychological factors.
Bronfenbrenner’s adolescent.

Although Bronfenbrenner does not specifically address adolescent stage of development in terms of his ecology of human development, an adolescent would have access to and awareness of a greater number of systems and relationships within various systems at this point in life and therefore must negotiate within these systems in order to move forward. So as the human develops and experiences life in greater and greater doses, moving out of the nursery, out of the home, into schools, and neighborhoods and cities, an adolescent gains with this momentum greater insight into expanding systems and develops accordingly. As an adolescent has passed through each of Bronfenbrenner’s systems he or she should be gaining awareness of these influential systems by this point in development.

While Bronfenbrenner’ interest is in the younger child, he does allude to certain cultural and contextual obstacles a developing adolescent encounters. It is important to note that Bronfenbrenner was writing in the 1970s when he distinguishes this key factor in adolescence:

In the United States it is now possible for a person eighteen years of age to graduate from high school without ever having to do a piece of work on which somebody else truly depended. If the young person goes on to college, the experience is postponed for another four years. If he goes on to graduate school, some might say the experience is postponed forever. (1979, pp. 52-53)

This observation is an extremely telling distinction from Erikson’s developmental theory, especially in relation to the teenager’s everyday life. While Erikson places great
importance on the adolescent stage of development—how identity and autonomy must be acquired and negotiated—Bronfenbrenner essentially observes that the teenager in the 1970s (and even more so in the 2000s) is without the external/environmental pressing forces urging them into adulthood. In other words, Bronfenbrenner recognized that the ecological or environmental systems of the 1970s did not force adolescents into urgent readjustment periods. Instead, teenagers were allowed to luxuriously or comfortably maintain in one system longer or for a prolonged period of time, thus stunting development.

*Elkind: The Hurried Child*^5*

*Elkind: Piaget’s influence.*

During the 1960s, Elkind was a national Science Foundation Senior Postdoctoral Fellow at Piaget’s Institut d’Epistemologie Genetique in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was introduced to Piaget’s theories of child development. Jean Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development details that there are four distinct, increasingly sophisticated stages of mental representation that children pass through on their way to an adult level of intelligence. These four stages include: sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operational (see Table 1.3)^6*. 
**Table 1.3**

*Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage (age)</th>
<th>Acquired Knowledge</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensorimotor (Infancy)</td>
<td>Object permanence, memory, mobility, some symbolic language</td>
<td>Knowledge of the world is based on physical interactions and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-operational (Toddler, Early Childhood)</td>
<td>Symbols, language and memory matures as well as imagination</td>
<td>Egocentric thinking, non-logical, nonreversible thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Operational (Elementary, Early Adolescence)</td>
<td>Logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects (length, liquid, mass, weight, area, volume)</td>
<td>Egocentric though diminishes, mental actions are reversible (a.k.a., logical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Operational (Adolescence, Adulthood)</td>
<td>Logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts</td>
<td>Return to egocentricism (early in the stage), many people do not think formally in adulthood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Huitt & Hummel (2003)

*Elkind: Development defined.*

Elkind’s theory of development is centered on education and culture. He attributes development to a more holistic (whole person) level. Elkind describes each stage of the child’s development (based on Erikson and Freud’s stages) and identifies the important cognitive social developments meant for each level (building on Piaget) (Elkind, 2001). Although Elkind does not create his own step-by-step explanation of developmental moments, he does compartmentalize developmental stages in terms of educational ages and familial settings. In his book, *The hurried child: Growing up too soon, too fast* (2001), Elkind relies on Piaget’s cognitive developmental stages to
illustrate his theory which combines cognitive stages as well as environmental context (See Table 1.3).

*Elkind’s adolescent.*

According to Piagetian theory, the abilities to separate oneself from one’s own thoughts and analyze them, as well as conceptualizing others’ thoughts are developed only in young adolescence. Elkind describes how young adolescents are preoccupied with themselves because they are undergoing major physiological changes. The egocentricism of adolescents lies in the restrictions of cognitive development at the age of adolescence (See Table 1.3). According to Piaget, adolescence is a time for developing formal operations or “the capability of thinking about other people’s thinking.” Yet, although the adolescent mind develops so that they may understand that others think as well, they are also preoccupied with self, therefore they assume that others’ thinking is strictly about the adolescent themselves.

Like Erikson, Elkind argues that the adolescent is in the position to look at the past, assess any wrongful misdoings of parents/environment at different stages of development, and must deal with the present to face the future. According to Elkind, “Many of the problems and behaviors of adolescents have their roots in childhood experiences that are only resented at the time but reacted to later” (2001, p. 134).

Additionally, according to Elkind, adolescents in the formal operational period, begin to construct an “imaginary audience” (2001, p. 134)(See Table 1.4)⁷. Indeed, as adolescents are able to
Think about their own and other people’s thinking, they nonetheless make a characteristic error. They confuse what they are thinking about with what other people are thinking about. Because of the dramatic changes taking place in their bodies, in their feelings and emotions, young people concentrate upon themselves. Consequently, they assume that others are as concerned with their appearance, their feelings, and their thoughts as they are. This is the imaginary audience, the belief that others are as concerned with the same anxieties as we are. (Elkind, 2001, p. 134)

Unfortunately, this imagined audience encourages and nurtures the typical adolescent trait of self-consciousness (134). Finally, Elkind explains his accordance with Erikson:

It is not until adolescence that young people construct a sense of personal identity, of having a unique personality. Nor do young people attribute personal identity or personality to other people until adolescence. The construction of a sense of personal identity requires, in addition to formal operations, some consistent experiences of self. (Elkind, 2001, p. 140)

In other words, Elkind acknowledges that for adolescents, personal identity becomes tantamount, not only in terms of their own personal identity, but in the recognition of others’ identities as well. This extends the notion of categorization, but also explains how adolescents deal with changes and assimilate by attempting to “fit in.”
Table 1.4

Elkind’s Adolescent Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imagined Audience</th>
<th>Personal Fable</th>
<th>Apparent Hypocrisy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about other people’s thinking</td>
<td>Center stage in front of imagined audience, pretty special</td>
<td>Conceptualizing fairly abstract rules of behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is as preoccupied with teen as they are</td>
<td>Story told to self about self that isn’t true</td>
<td>Can’t relate these abstract rules to concrete behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super self-consciousness</td>
<td>It can happen to others, not me</td>
<td>Expressing high moral principles, yet no need to concretely activate them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Elkind (1979, 1981)

Unfortunately, at this stage, adolescents are not aware of the fact that what others may be thinking of is not necessarily the same thing that they themselves think. In other words, teenagers, while able to recognize other people think too, are unable to recognize that what other people are thinking about is not the same thing that they are thinking about. This leads to the notion of adolescent egocentricism.

Adolescents thinking about themselves, think that others are thinking about their selves as well . . . an adolescent who thinks, “I’m having a bad hair day,” will think that others are thinking, “Look at her bad hair.” So, this sort of egocentricism aligns with the developing teenagers’ cognitive capabilities. As with all developmental stages, the formal operations period is loosely defined as including the teenage years—on an individual basis, most teenagers will fall into these frameworks at different points in time.

If a teenager is in the formal operations period of cognitive development, David Elkind (1979, 1981) theorized that teenagers perform self to an imagined audience. The
imagined audience is based on the notion that young people believe that everyone in their vicinity is as preoccupied with their appearance and behavior as they are themselves; thus, making them, super self-conscious (1981). As an actor on a stage performing to an imagined audience, a teenager must in fact, feel pretty special. As we will see, this concept of performing self like an actor performs on a stage can be attributed to Erving Goffman (1959).

If the teenager has conceptualized his or herself into being the center of attention to an auditorium full of admirers, it is therefore logical to understand the teenager’s creation of the “personal fable.” A personal fable, according to Elkind, is a story that we tell ourselves about ourselves but which isn’t true (1981). A simple example of this is the thought that everyone is as concerned about your appearance as you are. A more troubling example of the personal fable deals with risky behaviors—driving too fast is a problem for Johnny, but not a problem for me . . . I know how to deal with the speed. This notion of personal fable also extends into the common tendency of teenagers to assume that what is ordinary to everyone is unique unto themselves. And conversely, they assume that what is unique unto themselves is common to everyone. This behavior is reflected in the typical teenage battle cry, “you just don’t understand!”

The Three Compared and Contrasted

While Erikson and Elkind both are heavily influenced by their respective mentors, Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget, they both also represent a shift from the theoretical to a more practical application of theory. Bronfenbrenner adds the successful negotiation of layers of cultural and institutional influence. Like Erikson and Elkind, however,
Bronfenbrenner recognizes adolescent egocentricism as well as awkward phase in development. According to Bronfenbrenner: “the peer group tends to undermine adult socialization efforts and to encourage egocentricism, aggression and antisocial behavior” (Elkind, 1979, p. 284). I begin my discussion of adolescent development with Erikson, who includes psychosocial, biological, and cultural aspects to development.

Bronfenbrenner discusses environment in measurable terms, thus emphasizing cultural surroundings as well as relations as major contributors to development. And Elkind focuses more on the social, educational, and cultural contexts when illustrating three very detailed characteristics of development: the imagined audience, personal fable, and apparent hypocrisy.

I come away from the three with an understanding of adolescence as period of adjustment amidst difficulty in finding stability. In other words, I see from their research and theories that adolescents must be on overdrive in performing and adapting self in both changing environments as well as changing social settings.

Identity

Before we begin a discussion of identity, it is imperative for me to differentiate between identity and self. These two terms are often times conflated; however, a distinction does exist between the two. Weigert and Gecas (2005) explain that self, “refers to a substantive social referent for the reflexive process of being self-aware and self-acting” (163). Identity, on the other hand, is “typifications of self as . . . defined by self or other, and often the focus of conflict, struggle and politics” (163). In other words, identity is the outward representation or manifestation of self. Identity, to me, is how you
see yourself, how you define yourself—what words would you use to describe yourself? For instance, I would begin to describe myself as Lisa, a woman, daughter, student, and so on. It is important to note that these words refer to me, myself, as well as me in relation to others. Therefore, my definition of identity extends to include relations to others as defining factors. In other words, I see identity as being both personal and relational and above all things contextual. My definition would change for different audiences—in other words, who’s asking, and my definition changes for myself as well.

In this section, I will discuss identity theorist, Erving Goffman. I have selected Goffman because I feel he represents a practical means of studying the ways in which identity can be performed on the Internet. Goffman’s theory of performance or presentation of self describes the ways in which an individual approaches identity expression as if like an actor on a stage—the Internet can represent the stage on which an actor performs her identity. Extending beyond Goffman’s theory of performing identity, I will make connections to Goffman and social theories of identity.

Goffman: Presentations of Self in Everyday Life

According to Goffman (1959), identity is viewed as a “performance,” shaped by context (environment and observers). Performance is enacted in order to impress the audience according to the individual’s desired encounter. In other words, the individual presents or performs or creates his or her self according to specific circumstances. In this way, the individual develops identity as a function of interaction with others. An individual, therefore is compared to being both a performer, as well as an actor in an ensemble—both individual and social notions of identity.
Goffman associated the establishment of social identity with the creation of a “front.” A front is described as, “that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). The front is a sort of standardization tool used for the audience or observers to understand the performer. Basically the audience knows the performer based on his or her presentation of the front. The front establishes proper “setting,” “appearance,” and “manner” for the social role assumed by the actor (Goffman, 1959, p. 27). The actor, in order to present a compelling front, is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner and in a manner in which he or she believes to be acceptable by the others.

Performers are also actors, members of teams (or ensemble casts) that perform upon a stage (region). The region consists of: front, back, and outside. The “official stance” of the actor and his or her team (ensemble) is visible in their stage (front) presentation (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). In the backstage, the conflict and difference associated with familiarity is more fully explored, often evolving into a secondary type of presentation, contingent upon the absence of the responsibilities of the team presentation—basically the individual is somewhat separated from his or her own team and left to reckon with the many influences that brought him or her to the stage in the first place. To be outside the stage involves the inability to gain access to the performance of the team, described as an “audience segregation” in which specific performances are given to specific audiences, allowing the team to determine the proper front for the
expectations of each audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 137). This allows the team, individual actor, and audience to preserve proper relationships in interaction and the establishments to which the interactions belong. Bottom line, an individual performs within contexts and to the expectations of observers. Yet an individual is also part of a team of actors and the observers are part of the performance as well, all recognizing the element of performance within the exchange.

*Goffman: Identity defined.*

As explained in the above account of Goffman’s (1959) comparison of identity presentation to performance, the key aspect of an individual’s identity comes from the concept of the “front.” The front, according to Goffman is defined as the “part of the individual performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (1959, p. 22). The front serves a place for standardization, “allowing for others to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits that have normative meanings” (1959, p. 27). If identity was a performance, the actor’s skills are relevant to controlling or managing the impressions identity performance leave on others. In other words, it is imperative for the actor or individual presenting self to maintain somewhat stable identity impressions that rely on others for affirmation and confirmation. For Goffman (1959, 2004), these others consist of the actor’s “audience.” The individual’s identity relies heavily on performing to “social norms” that exist with shared meaning to the audience. The performance must draw from the existing standards and norms in order to present self in a relatively stable way. Goffman (1959, 2004) not only described how identity can be successfully
communicated to others through impression management, but also how those others (in the audience) worked together with the individual to help them maintain successful social interactions. He also noted that the context within which exchanges between actors and audiences take place provides shared expectations and formation processes. Thus, Goffman’s theory of performing self to an audience relates well with the notion that identity is socially constructed through shared roles and expectations that a larger system, dominant cultural system, dictates as normal. The successful actor is cognizant of the social norms and, along with the audience, performs to those standards. This notion is an excellent transition into a discussion of gender studies.

Gender

This last section of the chapter, Girls’ Studies, looks to the study of the culture of girlhood. The foremothers of girls’ studies, Carol Gilligan and Angela McRobbie, drew from developmental psychology theory (Gilligan, 1982, 1990, 2004) as well as cultural identity theories (McRobbie, 1982, 1991, 1997, 1999) to study what they determined to be an underrepresented field of study—the culture (and voices) of girls. This section is arranged a bit differently because it is difficult to assign certain theories about girl studies to a few scholars in particular. Girls’ studies builds on feminist theory and cultural studies. Since girls’ studies is strictly a cultural approach to identity work, it diverges from the social scientific approach of Erikson (1985). However, as explained above, Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Elkind (1981, 2000) factored in cultural influences to the development of identity, and to the notions of identity performance to varying cultural contexts.
After dedicating the first two sections of this chapter to the work of male scholars and emphasizing the unique ways in which scholars such as Erikson and Elkind relied on theories by Piaget and Freud, Carol Gilligan’s greatest contribution to psychology and by extension, girls’ studies, challenged the work of her contemporaries. In Gilligan’s breakthrough debut book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982), she rejected well known theories of scholarly names like Piaget and Freud, and scholars influenced by Piaget and Freud’s work like Gardner, Erikson, and Kohlberg that were based on the recollections of boys and men (Eakin, 2002, p. B9). Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* declared that women and men have different moral sensibilities and the book was one of the first in what became girls’ studies (1982). Grounded in psychological theory, it earned her the honored placement as “the first feminist culture star to have had substantial impact on American education” (Berube, 2000, p. 95).

In Gilligan’s own words, she explained how *In a Different Voice* came about:

> I wrote *In a Different Voice* to show how the inclusion of women’s voices change the voice of psychological theory and also to explore the dilemma in women’s development created by the opposition between selfishness and selflessness. . . . When the Supreme Court gave women a decisive voice and legitimatized women’s choices with respect to continuing or aborting a pregnancy, it spurred women to question the morality of selflessness. . . . It was the time of the women’s movement. In consciousness raising groups, women
were claiming their voices, women’s studies were unearthing women’s history
and women’s writings, and women were discovering that their experiences were
shared by many women. (Gilligan, 2004, p. 132)

In a climate in which women were discovering that their experiences were “shared by
many,” Gilligan was surrounded by the feminist sentiment of individual expression. The
theories of psychological development Gilligan had learned, theories of psychological
greats (Freud, Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg) “were all based on the assumption that man
was the measure of all things human” (Gilligan, 2004, p. 132). Gilligan asked “not how
well can woman do when measured by standards derived from studying men, but rather,
what had been lost by leaving out women?” (Gilligan, 2004, p. 132). Gilligan’s mentor,
Lawrence Kohlberg’s moral development was based on samples made up entirely of
boys. Piaget’s work was also focused solely on boys and men. Gilligan gave the
example, “Jean Piaget said in his book on moral judgment and child development that
‘Girls seem to have a different mentality, so I’m going to leave girls out and work with
boys’” (Krucoff, 1983, p. C5). Gilligan began to look at the theory of moral development,
and psychological development alternatively. Instead of concluding that “there is
something wrong with women” who don’t fit psychological theories cut from masculine
cloth, Gilligan maintained, “There is something wrong with these theories.” By equating
“human” with “male,” Gilligan reasoned, the male psychologists have limited “the
conception of the human condition and omit certain truths about life” (Krucoff, 1983, p.
C5).
Gilligan first began studying—“quite indirectly”—this “different voice” during the late ‘60s. “In my teaching I’d observed a real difference between the language people used when they were talking about a hypothetical dilemma, and a real, concrete problem. I wanted to study people making a real decision where they’d have to live with the consequences” (Krucoff, 1983, p. C5). When she did a study of people faced with a moral dilemma, she recognized the true source of her unease. She interviewed male Harvard students, sophomores and seniors about the Vietnam draft. With this eminent and very real moral dilemma in sight, Gilligan reasoned she could listen to the voices of moral reality. However, during her study, Nixon ended the draft—thus ended her study. Five days earlier though, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in “Roe v. Wade that state anti-abortion legislation was not legal” (Goldberg, 2000, p. 170). Gilligan’s study of “real moral dilemmas” took a turn, and this time it included the voices of women. She now had a new real moral dilemma—the decision pregnant women faced as to whether or not to end an unwanted pregnancy. Finally, things began to come together for Gilligan:

Gilligan had been taught to consult the work of Freud, Weber, Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson as the touchstones against which to judge psychological health and normative experience. The work of these men . . . was rooted almost entirely in studying white male behavior and experience. As Gilligan interviewed more and more pregnant women, a different pattern began to emerge. “I’m hearing something from women for the first time. It became, “if I bring my voice into my relationships, will I become a bad, selfish woman and, will I need to end my relationships?” (Goldberg, 2000, p. 170)
These women, she realized, “were concerned about very private issues of how the unwanted pregnancy would affect personal relationships and whether they could be responsible mothers—issues seldom heard and usually distorted in the public debate” (Goldberg, 2000, p. 170). For Gilligan, it became clear:

I really understood in the specific instance of the abortion dilemma how the sound system of the world—the prevailing construction of human or moral problems—often made it very difficult for a woman to speak and hear herself in the way that she was thinking . . . That was the moment when I got it, and I thought: Now I see one reason why everyone’s leaving women out. Because to bring women in is not just to rectify an inequity . . . it means to change the whole conversation.

(Goldberg, 2000, p. 170)

Gilligan found that women tended more often than men to take relationships among people into account when weighing a moral dilemma. She argued that this was neither immature, nor incorrect, it was just different. Gilligan concluded that Kohlberg’s theory was incomplete (Goldberg, 2000, p. 170).

Gilligan was deeply embedded in her research of adolescent girls and loss of voice. The research she conducted in the ten years between her first and fourth books marked a shift from including women’s voices in psychological moral development to drawing out girls’ experiences as they leave childhood and enter the male dominated adult world. For her following books, Mapping the Moral Domain: A contribution of Women’s Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education (1988), Making connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School (1990), and Meeting
at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls Development (1992), Gilligan conducted in-depth interviews with girls at the single-sexed Emma Willard School in New York and Laurel School in Ohio. Her interviews with the girls lead her to the conclusion that girls around “10 or 11 begin to build walls around themselves and retreat inside, losing their audacity and independence. They start dealing with their emerging identities by trying not to be too emotional, too sexual, ‘too much’” (Medwick, 2002).  

In other words, Gilligan found that girls began to make conscious decisions to hide their feelings from those they love in order to avoid losing them. These books identified “that the passage out of girlhood is a journey into silence and disconnection, a troubled crossing when a girl loses a firm sense of self and becomes tentative and unsure” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Overall, Gilligan desired her work to be viewed as source for questions. She wanted people to start asking questions about norms and standards, about subjectivity. “I think my work called attention to a huge absence,” Gilligan said. “Half the population was missing from so-called ‘samples of humans’ routinely used in academic research. That called attention to other absences, which were people of color and all people seen as ‘different’—gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, the poor” (Gilligan, 2004, p. 133). For girls, according to Gilligan (1982), “adolescence is a particularly tender time. Although both boys and girls experience puberty (the biological process characterized by sex distinction) and adolescence (the emotional process characterized by gender formation), girls are faced with a unique set of challenges.”
Angela McRobbie: British Cultural Studies

Working contemporaneously as Gilligan was publishing her research on women’s and girls’ voices in America, Angela McRobbie’s seminal piece, “Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity” (1982) came out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, an institution strongly associated with the tradition of British Cultural Studies. Among her peers and colleagues at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies are Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and Richard Hoggart. The Centre published collections of working papers written by these students of critical and cultural studies on the topics of youth subcultures in post-war Britain. Of particular interest is McRobbie’s contribution to the discourse on youth subcultures. She was one of the first scholars to address the position of girls in youth culture and the importance of studying this often-neglected group. McRobbie continues today to publish articles and books about cultural studies theory, feminist media studies, youth subcultures, teen magazines, girls, music, popular culture and fashion (McRobbie, 1982, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2009).

McRobbie has worked extensively with girls, feminist media studies, and teen magazines. McRobbie’s research interests in the above topics started in the mid-seventies. She began to branch out into the fashion and music areas of popular culture in the late eighties. McRobbie (2000) identified “how commercial representations of young women which now dominate visual culture bring together the signatures of ‘slim blondeness’ and also perpetuate daily a series of violent exclusion, of the non-white, non-heterosexual, non-able-bodied” (p. 198) Clearly, according to Merskin, “body image, self-esteem, and sexuality are disproportionately affected by peer pressure as well”
Scodari found in her study (2005) that “when girls are provided an outlet for their voices they often replicate the same codes of romantic individuals first identified by McRobbie some thirty years ago” (Mazzarella, 2005, p. 10).

Making Girls: Gender and Identity as Performance

Simone de Beauvoir (1949) famously said, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” This quote references de Beauvoir’s existential belief in existence before essence. In other words, this quote relates to the notion that gender is socially constructed into normal roles and behaviors dictated by a dominant hegemonic system. Gender, according to West and Zimmerman (1987) is “a situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production” (p. 126). West and Zimmerman explain further, “Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (1987, p. 126). In other words, “Gender is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127).

According to Judith Butler (1990, 1991) gender, sexuality and bodies are personal productions. Like Goffman, she argues that gender is a performance, a continuous practice of doing. Butler’s concept of performativity “encompasses the process of making gendered selves that reproduce social norms of femaleness and maleness, femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality” (Lorber, 2005, p. 266).
Being a “girl” or a “boy” is “being competently female or male,” in other words, “learning to produce behavioral displays of one’s ‘essential’ female or male identity” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 142). In this concept, you cannot separate the doer of gender from the doing. “Gendering has to be done over and over, almost ritualistically, to reproduce the social norms” (Lorber, 2005, p. 266).

One must perform or present his or her identity in terms of some sort of context or the other. And also, according to all these theories, it is imperative to understand that each individual’s performance (and even before performance) comes loaded with all sorts of circumstances and contexts that are unique and individual and fluid to him or her.

Conclusion

When approaching the research question, “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites like MySpace.com?” one must isolate a few distinguishing elements: adolescence, identity and girls. Further questions develop like, “how do girls practice adolescence? Or how is an adolescent identity performed? How is an adolescent identity performed on and offline?” Other questions specific to identity include: “How do girls define identity? How do the girls perform identity offline and how do the girls perform identity on MySpace.com?” Finally, questions like, “How does one become a girl in today’s Internet and media saturated culture? What does being a girl entail?” These questions are addressed as: how are the girls “being girls” offline and how are girls “being girls” (or performing gender) online? These questions, grounded in the theoretical works of adolescent development theorists, Erikson (1968, 1980, 1985), Bronfenbrenner (1979)

From adolescent theory we understand that the development and maintenance of a stable identity are the main focus of the developing adolescent. Erikson’s (1968, 1980) life stage of Adolescence focuses on the development of ego-identity versus role confusion. Erikson’s (1968) adolescent must carefully balance a healthy identity as well as understand his or her place and role he or she must perform. Bronfenbrenner (1979) does not speak of the adolescent specifically in his Ecological Systems Theory of Development, yet his adolescent is one that has greater access and interaction with various systems which requires the adolescent to negotiate within more dyads encouraging a forward moving development. Elkind’s (1979, 1981, 2001) adolescent is based off of Piaget’s stages of cognitive development where the adolescent comes to terms with a broader understanding of the world around them, especially the thought processes of the people with whom they surround themselves. Elkind (1979) translates Piaget’s cognitive theory of development to include three characteristics of adolescence: the Imagined Audience, Personal Fable, and Apparent Hypocrisy. The three theorists on development share a common thread in adolescent identity by focusing on the notion of the adolescent negotiating his or her place or role within a grander social context, as well as working out his or her identity amidst a broader social setting.
From identity theorist, Erving Goffman, we understand that an individual must perform and re-adjust his or her performance to varying audiences or social contexts. Goffman’s (1959) performance of identity theory suggests the individual must adjust his or her identity to the various roles and “settings” that he or she encounters. In presenting a unified front, various aspects of his or her identity carry through from one presentation to another, always keeping in mind the particular audiences to which the individual is performing identity.

Finally girls’ studies comes from feminist analysis starting with Carol Gilligan (1982, 1990, 2004) and Angela McRobbie (1982, 1991, 2000) addressing a marked absence in literature on the voices and experiences of girls. Gilligan (1982) drew attention to the fact that girls were excluded in research and theory on development, thus she started to showcase the voices of girls. McRobbie (1982) identified girls as a neglected subculture of interest in her feminist analysis of the culture of girlhood through various media outlets. Extending from theories on adolescent identity development and identity performance is the notion that gender is also a performance. In other words, an adolescent, working on identity, performing identities in various social contexts, also performs a gendered identity that will either align or diverge from socially accepted norms on what it means to be a girl or boy. This chapter on theory has set up a foundation for the following study. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I discuss the selected way to approach the collection of data and the means by which to analyze it.
This Chapter’s summary of Freud’s psychosexual theory of development is brief and simplistic and only offers context for Erikson’s departure.

These stages present in Table 1.1 are summarized from Erikson’s (1985) Childhood and Society (35th edition). For more detailed information, please see, “Eight Stages of Man” (pp. 250-287).

This figure (Figure 1.1) is included to illustrate the nesting quality of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems of Development theory. The image itself comes from Richards (n.d).

This Table (1.2) is adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems of Development and demonstrates the ages associated with each system, the relationship the system has to the individual, and the roles that the individual must develop.

David Elkind differs from the other two theorists, Erik Erikson and Urie Bronfenbrenner in that his theoretical work enjoyed more of a popular reception as opposed to scholarly/academic acceptance. Elkind is like Carol Gilligan in this way. Both wrote to and received success from a popular audience.

This Table (1.3) is an illustration of Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development as adapted by Huitt & Hummel (2003).

Table 1.4 illustrates Elkind’s (1979, 1981) Adolescent Identity as identified through three cognitive developments: the Imagined Audience, Personal Fable, and Apparent Hypocrisy.

See endnote 6

Gilligan receiving copy space in O, The Oprah Magazine, suggests big time fame. Unfortunately, Gilligan’s work has not been inducted into the Oprah Book Club.

Interesting side note, this quote was printed on the cover of St. Catherine’s quarterly alumni publication showcasing the ways in which St. Catherine’s cultivates “women” out of the girls who attend the school.
CHAPTER TWO

METHODS: FINDING A METHOD FOR MY MADNESS

Introduction

This chapter continues to explore the influences on the development of this dissertation. Beginning with a discussion on qualitative research the nature of qualitative research is related to the decisions of the methods used in this dissertation. The methods incorporated, participant observation, interviewing/grand-tour conversations, and textual analysis, are then discussed. The role of the researcher is included in order to address the self-reflexive struggles prepared for and encountered throughout the study. And finally, the specific steps to this dissertation are provided in order to give the reader an overall understanding of how the qualitative research methods played out in the study. The intent of this chapter is to demonstrate to the reader why I have chosen qualitative research methods, a combination of methods in particular, in order to answer the question: How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites like MySpace.com?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research identifies a philosophical approach whereby researchers seek to understand, social interactions and settings, individualistic realities and differing perspectives. According to McKee (2003), qualitative research involves the exploration into an individual’s sense-making practices, or ways of making meaning. Qualitative research looks at phenomena from a perspective that allows for continuous development of research questions and methodology. It takes into consideration the contextual nature
of reality and its subjects. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) define qualitative research as a way in which we study “how people engage in symbolic performances to create meaningful worlds in which they live,” (p. xi). Each project, each situation, each individual is unique within a particular context, and therefore the researcher must be adaptable and it is a highly involved process that requires “active engagement from its practitioners” (Mason, 2002, p. 4). Perhaps Lindlof and Taylor (2002) described it best:

If we hope to understand how people choose to express themselves in everyday life, we must come to terms with our own reasons for studying them and with intellectual traditions that are embedded in these methods. (p. 5)

In other words, it is important to be reflexive and aware of one’s own positions before entering the research realm. Most important is the process of continuous questioning. The questions lead the project, thus leading to the methods. However, it is imperative to question every step of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998; Mason, 2002; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Mason (2002) stressed the importance of being cognizant of each decision and step of qualitative research. Continuous reflexivity is required of the researcher and an acute awareness of the implications of all decisions and actions have on the research is necessary (Mason, 2002, p. 84).

Adolescents exist in a very distinct culture that has its own means and methods of sense-making a social reality; the choices are not always obvious. Therefore, I employed qualitative research methods in order to allow the girls to express their unique experiences, which ultimately allow me a window into their sense making practices. In other words, my choice in qualitative research methods lends itself to the cultural inquiry
of adolescent girls MySpace users. Additionally, the school in which the research was collected, St. Catherine’s High School, has its own distinct culture. In entering the school as a researcher, I was granted access to one aspect of the culture of the girls’ offline world. As I discovered from an earlier project, the culture of the schools are very much apparent in the different MySpace pages (Wagner, 2007). 1 The quest to understand how adolescent girls in an all-girls’ Catholic high school are able to express and maintain identity on MySpace.com calls for the cultural studies approach of qualitative research methods.

The questions explored in this dissertation revolve around issues of identity, definitions of identity, and performance of identity on and off the Internet. Identity is an extremely difficult concept to measure or study. In order to identify the varying aspects of identity I wished to explore (definitions, performance, public identity, private identity, online identity), it was important to determine ways in which these concepts could be made tangible. The various methods employed in this dissertation allowed for me to confront the multiple levels of identity. Interviews allowed me to assess individuals’ definitions of identity, and allowed the participants to discuss, determine, and establish their own views on the topic. Guided tours and textual analysis of the MySpace pages allowed for illustrated examples of identity performance. Additionally the MySpace page as text also allows the researcher to read into online identities versus offline public identities.
Methods of Research

A combination of research methods was used here including: participant observation, interviewing, and textual analysis. According to Mason (2002), triangulation of qualitative research methods lends itself to deepening the analysis and strengthening the conclusions. She warned, however, the importance of maintaining similar ontological and epistemological perspectives in the combination of research methods. In other words you need to make sure that each method used utilizes similar ontological and epistemological standpoints. The use of multiple methods strengthens and identifies a clearer more complex picture of the culture being studied.

The combination of interviews and guided tours to the method of textual analysis of the girls’ MySpace pages allows my dissertation to provide a deeper analysis of the culture of adolescent MySpace users. While a study of the presentation of self of female adolescents on Internet webpages has been done by Stern (2000), her research was a textual analysis of Internet homepages that did not include the voice of those who created the websites. In incorporating qualitative interviewing/participant observation/guided tours into my research methods, I am able to add a deeper dimension to previous research’s conclusions. Not only do I look at the texts, but I also include the voice of the text-makers themselves providing a more well-rounded, fully developed, assessment of adolescent girls’ identity work on personal webpages, the culture of the adolescent girl personal webpage user, and the culture of MySpace. The following is a brief account of the particular methodological tools used here.
Participant Observation

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that researchers using participant observation “become participating members of an existing culture, group, or setting and typically adopt roles that other members recognize as appropriate and non-threatening” (p. 4). The researcher must be cognizant of his or her own position within the observation setting. How he or she wishes to be included or ignored, determines how he or she will act within the observation setting. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also explain the ways in which a researcher can be an effective participant observer: “being able to think, act, and feel as a true participant would. Observing without participating may inhibit the researcher’s ability to adequately understand the complex, lived experience of human beings” (p. 4). In other words, a participant observer must be able to think and adapt instinctively and quickly to changing circumstances, and immerse his or her self fully into the situation and setting that is being observed.

Observation extends into several different research methodologies: ethnography, auto-ethnography, participant observation, interviewing, focus groups, etc. Patton (2002) defines observation as a means in which to “understand the treatment to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews” (p. 23). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) identify four categories of observation: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer (p. 144-150). A complete participant does not make his or her self known to researched group as a researcher (p. 140). In other words, the researcher’s identity as researcher is unknown to the group. Glesne (1999) also provided a continuum for observation research for which
the researcher must situate him or herself within the roles of “observer to full participant.” Glesne explained that the role of observer could be anywhere from extremely removed to extremely involved in the activity or setting. I am fulfilling the role as observer as participant.

*Interviewing (Conversations with a Purpose)*

A key aspect of participant observation involves qualitative interviewing. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explained that interviews are remarkably adaptive and can be referred to as “conversations with a purpose” (p. 170). A researcher must be open to “going with the flow,” because interviews oftentimes bring up instances that are “unexpected and emergent” (p. 172). According to Patton (2002) an interview is an extremely complex and involved process that incorporates lots of preparation, interviewer/interviewee involvement, and awareness. Some of the many steps interviewing involves are: choosing who to interview, setting up the interview, easing into the interview, “pacing the interview”, and “terminating the interview and gaining closure” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 270-271).

The purpose of interviewing allowed us to see the perspectives of others (Patton, 2002). Mason (2002) also explained that interviews “involve the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it” (p. 63). In other words, interviews should elicit stories that can be constructed or reconstructed into knowledge, instead of peppering the interviewee with factual close-ended questions. She also insinuated that the purpose of an interview is to ensure that relevant “contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced (Mason, 2002, p. 62)
Mason (2002) referred to interviewing as an “interactional exchange of dialogue” (p. 62). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) referred to this purpose of interviewing as “understanding the social actor’s experience and perspective” (p. 173). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that interviews allow for “here and now constructions,” “reconstructions,” and “projections” (p. 268). This is similar to Patton’s (2002) assertion that qualitative interviewing can be completed creatively by “think aloud protocol,” type interviews where the interviewee explains what he or she is doing (interview is concurrent with activity, rather than retrospective (as in reconstructed) (p. 385). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) proposed that we “expect people we interview to tell us about events, processes, or objects that exist outside the immediate interview context” (p. 173).

Patton (2002) identified three types of interviews: informal conversational type, generally guided type, and standardized open ended question type. Lincoln and Guba (1985) divided the types into only two categories: structured and unstructured (p. 268). There are several different approaches to interviewing but most importantly is the recognition that interviewing is fluid, and requires an adaptable personality when conducting this sort of research. A good way to think about interviewing is as if it were a conversation (See Appendix A for interview guide); qualitative interviewing should be a type of conversation that emphasizes equal ground between interviewer and interviewee. According to Duke and Kreshel (1998) the interviewee should be given the power to contribute equally if not superiorly to the conversation; the interviewer is on equal or lesser ground with the interviewee because the interviewee possesses the information of interest to the interviewer. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reflected this notion as well in
saying that an interview “is a conversation with a purpose” (p. 268). I feel my interviewing (conversational) method falls between the informal conversational type and the generally guided type. Props were incorporated into the interview method, which relates to a discussion on the “grand-tour” conversation method.

**Grand-Tour, Guided Conversations, or Bedroom Tours**

The method of participant observation or qualitative interviewing with props I implemented is known as “grand-touring.” This method, which involves the researcher sitting down with the participants, uses a prop as a launching point into a conversation. I was first introduced to this method in Duke and Kreshel’s (1998) project on teenage girls reading teen magazines. They used the magazines in their interviews as a means to ease into the conversation and to allow the girls to guide the conversation. They asked the girls to show them how they read the teen magazine, which order they read it, and to discuss what they thought of the magazine as they paged through. Duke and Kreshel (1998) attributed the “grand-tour” method to Crabtree and Miller (1992). Crabtree and Miller used the “grand-tour” in order to elicit responses to “tell me, and show me, how you (read this magazine)” (Duke & Kreshel, 1998, p. 56).

Steele and Brown (1995) used a style of this method in their bedroom studies project. They asked their research participants to lead them through their rooms and discuss the artifacts and describe what those artifacts meant to them. For instance, different posters, awards, music selections that make up an adolescent’s room were points of discussion. This method, incorporated the same notion of “tell me, show me, how do you” that Crabtree and Miller (1992) called “grand-tours.” Once again, allowing the
participants access into their world, providing them with familiar space, encouraged discussion. Also, I feel, it allows the participant to feel less anxiety as to whether or not her answers are “right.” In allowing the participants to walk me through their MySpace page, they have ownership over their choices and ownership over their explanations of the text.

This style of grand tour interviewing lends itself to the very nature of the MySpace page. There are many ways in which to look at a MySpace page; there are many ways to approach it. Each individual participant has designed her page to reflect aspects of her online identity that are most important to her. The interactive nature of MySpace and the Internet encourages its users to engage hands-on with the presentation of self. Therefore, in utilizing grand-tour style interviewing, the girls were allowed to approach their pages interactively. They are encouraged to tell me about their page, about the decision to make a page, about the choices they encountered while making their page; they can show me these aspects by reaching over and using a mouse to scroll and move around the page; and, are allowed to explain how they thought about the many aspects that go into a MySpace page. The girls and were asked to “tell me, show me, how they read their MySpace page.” This would allow the researcher to understand why the girls included certain aspects, references to media (like Steele and Brown’s bedroom study), and how they read these items included on their page. This method was used as a means to ease into conversation about identity performance on MySpace.
Textual Analysis

McKee (2003) defined a text as evidence of someone’s/a culture’s sense making practice. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) celebrated textual analysis as a “paper trail,” or a pathway to follow someone’s process of meaning making. McKee (2003) used the term text as way of addressing a cultural artifact (film, text, song, building, story, article, article of clothing, or document). Texts that can be analyzed are expansive and inexhaustible (Glesne, 1999; Mason, 2002; and Patton, 2002). They include everything from formal documents like Wills and Constitutional Amendments, informal items like diaries, letters, emails, photographic images such as albums, films, television shows, commercials and magazine advertisements, and other items like graffiti or music. Mason (2002) valued the process of visual media. She described the benefit of allowing the researched to create his or her own documents that offer a visual representation of their own worldviews to the researcher. The texts analyzed in this dissertation are individual MySpace pages created by my research participants. These MySpace pages offer visual representations of the adolescent girls’ online identities and the culture of MySpace users.

Texts fill in important details that add richness to the description of a phenomenon being studied. They can provide information that indicates what the organization produces, how it certifies actions, how it categorizes events or people, how it codifies procedures or policies, and in what ways it informs or instructs the membership. (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 118) Additionally, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explained that documents such as diaries and letters could provide “insights into the construction of personal beliefs, identities,
relationships and communicative styles” (p. 117). This reflected the very philosophy of qualitative research because it provides a means in which the researcher can discover individual perspectives.

Mason (2002) offered the advice to the researcher that the questions one has about the document determines the ways in which the researcher approaches it (p. 150). The researcher must determine whether he or she would like to dissect the document using the pre-existing codes already worked into the document or create new codes when examining the text. Patton agreed and delineates the process for which a researcher must go about tackling the document in question. Important steps Patton included are: “Understanding how and why document is produced, determining accuracy, and deconstructing and demystifying institutional texts” (p. 499).

If a text is a cultural artifact, then it must demonstrate a process of meaning making specific to that culture. In other words, if you are looking at a text as a way of understanding a culture’s meaning making processes, then the text itself must be significant to that culture. The text I explored in my dissertation is the MySpace page. The MySpace pages in my sample are specific to a culture of MySpace users, adolescents, adolescent girls, adolescent girls from a particular school, etc. The text will give me insight into how the culture is making meaning and how the culture views social reality.

Textual analysis is not to be mistaken as a completely “human free” experience. Mason (2002) and Creswell (1998) warn against dismissing the human nature of textual analysis, in which the researcher must be aware of his or her presence in the selection of
the document, how to analyze the document, and how to apply that analysis to research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out the necessity in being mindful of the reliability of the source. This comes into hand especially when dealing with Internet research. There are no “truth detectors” scouting out pages while girls create their MySpace page. They are allowed to enter any information they choose, and as I discuss in the findings chapters four, five, and six, I have taken liberties with certain responses (such as location, age, hometown, employment). Because the very nature of the MySpace page and Internet webpages in general allow for free authorship, it is necessary to view these artifacts not as actual truths, but as representations, or manipulations of an individual’s truth. By incorporating the guided tour style of interview, the girls were able to discuss their levels of truthfulness, and also provide a more reliable reading of the textual space.

Traditionally, the process of analyzing the document or text is the full responsibility of the researcher: the researcher is the instrument of meaning making. The ways in which a researcher reads a text are left to the individual and depend on his or her background information and understanding. McKee (2003) emphasized his preference for the method of “reading” a text instead of “interpreting” a text; interpreting can suggest a power relation to the text (the researcher has the power to interpret the text in his or her terms), versus reading a text which would suggest a universality to the process. While agreeing with McKee’s terminology here, my research differs from the traditional style of textual analysis. In using the girls’ own explanations of their MySpace pages as part of my analysis, I hand over to them a degree of the responsibility in guiding my reading of their texts, allowing the girls’ a voice in the interpretation of text (or textual reading).
Researcher Entwined: Self-Reflexivity

Overall, the combination of methods will add depth to this analysis; however, I am aware of the difficulty in preparing qualitative research and maintaining rigor to method. It is important to note here the intentional use of the term “conversation”. Duke and Kreshel (1998) referred to their interviews with girls as conversations, in order to eliminate a sense of power within the dynamic of the situation. I tried to maintain this conversational quality within the exchanges. Here, it is absolutely imperative the researcher remains reflexive throughout the process and recognizes her role in the execution of and analysis of acquired data. I feel the continued reflexive nature (constant questioning of research decisions) was extremely important but also extremely taxing. The researcher has to be ‘über’ prepared for every step of the research process. The researcher must be firm and clear of his or her ontological and epistemological viewpoints and mindful of each and every decision that goes into the research process. This is difficult and at times overwhelming.

Another of the obstacles involved with qualitative interviewing is issues of power. There is no way of getting around the power issue when it comes to qualitative interviewing. Each participant (interviewer and interviewee) is aware of specific roles they must fulfill. The difficulty rests in the interviewer’s ability to ease the conversation, relationship, and flow of information into a more equal ground. Once again, by utilizing the grand tour method of interviewing, hopefully allowed for a more comfortable entrance into conversation. The balance of power proved to be a constant struggle for me in this project.
The Process

The following process explains preparation for this dissertation. After receiving the University’s Institutional Review Board (See Appendix B for IRB protocol) approval I began recruitment at the high school.

Recruitment

Initially, recruitment was approached in three ways: a MySpace page; posters; and school announcements. First, MySpace page was created for the project that included information about myself, about the project, and about how to respond if interested in participating (See Appendix C for screen shot of MySpace project page). In order to attract the girls to the page, posters were put up throughout the school (See Appendix D for recruitment poster). On these posters, which were mock-ups of the MySpace page, the URL addresses was attached as tear-off slips for the girls to take. In addition to the posters, the guidance counselor read morning announcements explaining the posters and the project. The online page contained additional information about the project and clearly stated that interested girls would need parental approval before participating.

Once the girls expressed interest, the researcher requested to add them as a friend on MySpace. Here they had a second chance to consider their participation. Along with the request, an email was sent reiterating that their participation would require parental permission. If the girl added the research on her MySpace, the guidance counselor was contacted with the girl’s name and permission and information packets were mailed to the girls’ homes. The guidance counselor controlled the mailings in order to maintain the
girls’ privacy. These letters explained the project and provided parents the opportunity to consent or deny their daughter’s participation in the research (See Appendix E for Mailing Packet).

Permission and Schedules

After the girl returned her signed consent forms, through self-addressed stamped envelopes the guidance counselor was contacted once again with the list of volunteer participants. The counselor had agreed to coordinate the student’s interviews according to their availability; she had access to the student’s academic schedules and could therefore arrange these meetings during their 45-minute study hall period. The guidance counselor also had access to the room availability, thus scheduling the research interviews in one of three available rooms in the school. These rooms consisted of a library conference room, a quiet area in the Business Office, or an empty office in the Guidance Office. The girls were given passes on the day of their scheduled interviews and were interviewed at the specified locations.

Guided Tour Interviews

Twenty-two girls, who will be described in the next chapter, participated in the interview sessions for this project. Each girl came, individually, to the assigned room for the interview where a verbal consent form was read aloud before beginning the interview conversation. The conversation was divided into two parts: discussion about their MySpace page followed by a discussion about identity. Each girl’s MySpace page was saved as a screen capture to facilitate the guided-tour interview because the school’s wireless Internet system, controlled and operated by the Archdiocese, had blocked
MySpace and other websites that were deemed questionable or objectionable websites. The girls were asked to discuss their MySpace pages from a laptop computer; these were also saved to the computer in order to update and compare changes as the study progressed. After the student “walked me through” (grand tour) or “showed me and told me how” she looked at and read her MySpace page, questions were asked about her definitions of identity (See Appendix A for interview protocol). These guided conversations took place within the 45-minute allotted time. Through these guided conversations, analysis and interpretation of the girls’ narratives about their pages as well as the stories their MySpace pages themselves impressed, took place. In other words, having access to both the pages’ presented identities alongside of the girls’ verbal and visual identity presentations allowed for simultaneous interpretation.

Textual Analysis

In terms of Textual Analysis applied to the girls’ MySpace pages, overall initial impressions of the pages were reviewed. These pages differed from girl to girl and featured varying degrees of sophistication when it came to page layout and background manipulation. Mostly, though, the girls’ pages contained the same elements: profile picture, screen name, About Me section, “Top Eight” (friends section), pictures, videos, quotes, music selection, and blogs. The focus of this research was not to categorize and interpret the girls’ MySpace pages and selected features, but to allow the girls to explain how their pages represented their selves, or how the girls were able to present or perform their identity through their pages. When key elements were referenced or items made immediate impression, I noted them. Often I’ve included items from select girls’ pages
in the appendix of this dissertation. Please see Appendix F for a collection of the first pages of each girls’ MySpace profile page.

*Online Correspondence*

Following the initial conversation and with participant permission, the girls were contacted through email using the MySpace project page. Here the student was asked about any changes on their MySpace profile pages over the summer months. These email conversations took place over the summer months and early new school year months and were centered around any changes made to the participant’s MySpace page and/or changes in attitudes about the use of MySpace. For example, if a new background choice on a participant’s MySpace page was noticed, or a new video stream added, they were asked about their changes. At that point, an additional email was sent to the girl using the MySpace “message” function. She was then asked why she changed her background or what made her want to change it. Additionally, questions were asked about whether or not the participant still used her MySpace page or if she had noticed any change in her using habits. Email contact consisted of two to three 15-minute email conversations during the summer and fall months (June-November 2007).

These interview conversations and email conversations were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed for themes in identity practices: adolescent identity practices on and offline, identity performance on and offline, and gender identity performance on and offline.
Conclusions

The steps detailed above demonstrate the application of the qualitative methods selected for this research project. The combination of methods and process provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the culture of adolescent girl MySpace users and their identity performance practices.

This chapter looked at qualitative research methods and the rationale behind method choices. First the reader is presented with an understanding of qualitative research through reference to research scholars. This explains why this dissertation would use qualitative research methods. Second, a discussion on method selection was included, giving reasons for a combination of methods, and illustrates how these methods applied to the dissertation questions. Next, a discussion about the researcher’s role in qualitative inquiry discussed how power and self-reflexivity factored into the interaction with the participants, and how this influenced approaches to the conversations. Finally a step-by-step detail as to how research progressed was provided.

As we get closer to the actual study itself, the researcher must insert self more into the text of this dissertation. This project is a journey, moving away from academic ideas and into real life application of theory. The next chapter, “Setting: Preparing to Meet the Girls” brings with it the presence of the researcher. I can no longer remove myself from the writing, but must acknowledge my ever-presence throughout the rest of this document.

\[\text{1 Geographical differences, socio-economic differences, tend to be the most obvious differences apparent in MySpace pages of high school students. In a preliminary study I conducted, I} \]
compared a large public high school in an affluent neighborhood in Central Ohio, to a smaller, private high school in Southwestern Ohio. The overall tones of the pages were noticeably different. Therefore I concluded that the cultural differences on the pages were reflective of cultural differences of the offline high school cultures as well.

2 Technical aspects that can be manipulated, deleted, added, embellished, etc., include: page background colors and design, streaming videos from other websites or user generated, music selections and playing choices, format and layout of design, etc. There is a standard MySpace format that includes certain staples like name, hometown, age, “about me”, friends (top eight), media preferences, hobbies, and occupation and education. However, several applications and formatting software has allowed users to “decorate” and rearrange the layout of their home page.
CHAPTER THREE

SETTING: MEET THE GIRLS

Introduction

*My Alma Mater*

In 1993 I was an eighth grader attending various open houses for high school. It came down to a choice between two, St. Agnes Academy and St. Catherine High School. St. Agnes was more expensive, on the east side of town (I was a Westsider), and older; it represented old money, prided itself on its competitive admission exam, and its annual Mother-Daughter tea party. I was impressed particularly with the wooden balustrade in the grand entrance. However, St. Agnes was located in a notoriously crime ridden urban neighborhood. My plans for Swim Team and French Club would be impossible according to my parents who feared for me staying after dark.

St. Catherine High School, on the other hand, was on the west side of town. St. Catherine’s was where most of my friends were going and girls from my grade school attended. It was closer to our homes and neighborhoods and therefore more familiar. Though St. Catherine’s was also situated in a “not-so-safe” neighborhood, my parents would be able to car pool more easily. And, although I sensed my father wanted me to choose a school based on academic rigor, my mom’s off-hand comment is what made me make my decision. My mother said of St. Catherine’s “this feels more like a high school.” And that’s exactly what I wanted.

Catholic schools have a rich tradition in Cincinnati, and Cincinnati is the eighth largest network of Catholic schools in the United States (www.catholiccincinnati.org). As most Catholic schools in Cincinnati, St. Catherine’s was single-sex and it was only
when students graduate and attend colleges out of the area are they alerted to the fact that single-sex schools are not typical. As an eighth grader I was not concerned about the fact that I was choosing between two schools where there would be no boys, I was more interested in where my friends were going.

I very much value the education I received at St. Catherine’s. I enjoyed my time there, was actively involved, and remain close friends with several of the girls from my “group.” At St. Catherine, as I imagine at most high schools everywhere, there were groups. In the beginning, as a freshman, girls tend to start off hanging around the other girls that came from the same “feeder” schools. Then as classes begin, and academic “tracks” are set, girls begin to mix and mingle and establish their groups. Like the film, Mean Girls, you can identify the different groups by where the girls sat in the cafeteria.

Setting

For the past several years there have averaged around 700 to 800 students enrolled. Of those 700 currently enrolled students, fourteen percent are girls of color (approximately 105). My research sample included 22 students, five of which were African American (approximately 33%). Therefore, my participant sample was slightly more inclusive of non-Caucasian students than the overall student body, but not by much. Annual tuition is approximately $8000 per year (2007-2009).

Setting Up at the School

When I contacted the principal at St. Catherine’s, her response was quick and enthusiastic. She praised me for continuing my education and warmly invited me to begin my study at St. Catherine’s. She immediately set me up with a guidance counselor, Beth,
to serve as a liaison. (See Appendix G for correspondence with school). It was good to know that I had support behind the principal at the school and made my anxieties easier to manage knowing that I would be allowed to conduct my interviews on the school grounds; with the school’s support and allowance of time and space, more parents would be more likely to agree to their child’s participation.

When I arrived at St. Catherine’s it was the first time I had been in the halls since 1998, a year after I had graduated. A new science wing had been added, extra space attached to the cafeteria, and renovations on the auditorium were in the works. The principal took me on a personal tour of the improvements, boasting the sizable gym, orchestra rooms, video center, and computer labs. At the end of our tour, she passed me off with a hug to the guidance office, which is where I would be settling in for the remainder of the study.

At first, Beth seemed like the perfect ally. She was very much interested in my work and we discussed how it would relate to the “mean girls” phenomenon; she seemed to think that the girls at St. Catherine’s very much fell within this phenomenon of mean girls. Beth had graduated ten years earlier than I from St. Catherine’s and for a while we talked about the differences. When she attended school the girls had to wear nametags and the legendary disciplinarian, Sr. Perpetua, monitored the halls. I remember hearing stories of Sr. Perpetua being a sort of all-knowing presence hovering above ground, almost as if floating.

Initially the guidance counselor was very enthusiastic, and we started with posting the posters around the school. Immediately there was a strong response Beth happily
reported to me. She had seen the information slips removed from the posters and was optimistic about my recruitment. However, Beth also was quick to inform me that some of the posters were missing all together. She speculated that they had been taken down possibly by some of the teachers who did not understand the project or that the project had been approved by the principal. Obviously this concerned me immediately, so we set in motion for Beth to start with the morning announcements (See Appendix H for the morning announcement). I was under the impression that these were done over the PA, the announcement simply said that I was an alumna working on my dissertation and was conducting interviews of MySpace users. We thought that official word from the morning announcements would allow the St. Catherine’s community as a whole to understand that this was a legitimate project conducted by an alumna.

*Group Mentality: The Thing About Adding Friends . . .*

While this recruitment process brought several girls to the project it was not without problems. The interest was there. The girls were intrigued as evidenced by the missing slips of paper. The problem was a sort of group mentality. Even though the information slips were disappearing, and girls were talking about the project, no one was “adding” the project’s MySpace page. Beth and a close friend who taught at St. Catherine’s said they had heard a lot of girls talking about it and also they both noticed that the tab parts of the posters were going fast! My teacher friend surmised that the girls thought that I was a “narc” for the school. They knew that the school did not smile upon MySpace because it had been blocked (along with other “risky” (YouTube, Facebook, etc) websites) by the Archdiocese. The teacher speculated that the girls were worried I
was going to tell the school what the girls were up to on MySpace. The girls were talking amongst themselves.

The power of the group also presented itself as problematic when I finally did receive contact from the first interested participant. The first girl who requested to add me as a friend appeared, through her MySpace presentation, to be “different.” Upon first impression, I sensed that she was a bit of a social outcast. She seemed a bit awkward in her self-presentation, green hair, and an absence of the common images of friends and movie quotes. Her page boasted atypical interests for a high school aged girl (Dayton Air Force flyers). I was a little concerned that if I added her immediately, other girls would be reluctant to express interest. Recognizing this issue of “group acceptance” I decided to wait until I had a couple girls express interest before allowing any of them to show up in my friends’ section. I knew I needed to manage the appearance of “group interest” by adding a crop of interested participants instead of a singular girl. This was such a worrisome initial problem. I felt so bad “holding out” on my acceptance of the first friend request because I was able to recognize the possible detriment her single friendship might have on the recruitment of other possible participants. I knew that if I wanted any sort of group interest in the project that it would be detrimental to my recruitment if girls looked on the page and saw that she was my first and only friend. They would immediately not want to be associated to a project that the loner was a member.

The group mentality was affecting me in unanticipated ways. At first the group expressed interest. They were tearing down the information slips quickly. Then the group “re-grouped” and collectively decided there might be something suspect about this
research. The group’s inaction, spoke loudly. Next, when a girl, outside the group, made contact, her lack of group support concerned my interest in attracting participants. In other words, I was worried that with the addition of one “outsider” I would lose group interest all together because the girls would be hesitant to leave their group behind.

_The Researcher Has Entered the Building . . ._

This obstacle in initial recruitment launched me into my second phase of recruiting. I arranged to make a personal announcement on the school’s closed-circuit morning television show. My reasoning behind this was maybe after the girls saw me they would be able to realize that I was not a “narc.” I emphasized that I was doing this for my own academic interest. And I further explained that the school was simply kind enough to allow me to recruit and conduct the interviews on their grounds, but had no special interest invested in my project. I worried for a couple of days about what to wear and managed to get a bad sunburn the day before the announcement so I was glowing on camera. When I was finished with the morning announcement, I was greeted in the hallways by a couple of my old teachers. They were interested in what I was up to and I asked them to encourage their students to “help me out.” Beth offered to set up a table at lunch so that interested girls could stop by and ask questions or sign up. We did this by displaying a couple of signs advertising my presence in the cafeteria and waited. One girl immediately marched up to the table and signed up. She said she thought my project sounded “cool.” I thought she seemed cool. Beth told me that she was an amazing artist, so that immediately caught my attention.
Then, no other girls approached the table. One brave “outsider” (i.e. artistic) girl expresses interest, the rest wait to see what the group will do. Several of the girls looked at the table, but none approached. Beth said we were going to have to walk around the cafeteria and approach the girls’ tables. I did not want to seem pushy, but we weren’t getting anywhere. So I walked around and asked two questions, “do you have a MySpace page?” and “do your parents know you have one”? If they answered yes to both, I asked them if they would be interested in assisting in my academic research. I told them that I was going to interview them during one study hall and ask them questions about their page and how they were using MySpace. Most of the girls said yes they had a page. Some of the girls said they had a page but never used it. Only a few of the girls said that their parents didn’t know they had a page or would approve of them having a page. Beth focused on the few without parental knowledge, proclaiming, “the girls were hiding something.”

When approaching the different lunchroom tables, I noticed a common behavior. The girls were very much aware of our mingling through the cafeteria. They watched us approach neighboring tables, and waited for us to get to their own table. When we arrived, most of the time the girls would sit there and not say anything until their leader spoke up. Once she would speak, they all chimed in. I noticed some were looking at each other daring them to be brave. I’m not sure if this was because here were two adults looming overhead or not.
Insecurities Abound

Let me digress here a bit—I thought I was going to be easily relatable to the girls. I felt, well, I graduated from here only 10 years ago. I’ve been in school ever since, so not so far removed from their experience. I thought, I’m kind of hip, they’re going to warm up to me. They’re going to not be afraid to talk with me. Never was I so wrong. I was ancient to them. I was not easily relatable to them. All of my insecurities of pre-adolescence came rushing to a head. Throughout adolescence, I was self-conscious of my appearance. I was sitting there thinking how every single girl in that school was beautiful. Needless to say, I was insecure. When I was a student there, there were a couple of tables of really pretty girls. Like naturally pretty. Athletic, tall, beautiful long straight hair. Now, though, every single girl was beautiful. They all had awesome highlights, were all wearing their hair in ponytails and wore big hoop and chandelier earrings. It was kind of crazy how they all looked alike, but they also all looked beautiful. Really, when I was in school, most of us all looked pretty plain and pretty sloppy. Like I said there was the group of tables where the really pretty/popular/party girls sat, but other than that you could kind of tell the different groups. There were the smart/nerdy/nice girls and the smart/nerdy/mean girls, there was the theatre group, the art group, the sporty group, the science group, the literary group, the “I’m cool ‘cause I had an older sister go here” group, the heavy metal group, the outcasts, the druggies, the girls who smoked cigarettes, etc. Bottom line, the way I remember it, there were a lot stronger distinctions between the tables. In other words, you knew what you were walking up to in terms of different tables. Now, though, it seemed like all the girls were the same—
very beautiful, very confident, and too cool for school. Maybe this has something to do with the everyday culture of the school? As an outsider, looking in, I was unable to distinguish the soft distinctions between groups, but maybe a student here, who was here every day, would be able to identify the different groups like I was once able to do.

Back to the Cafeteria

Well, we walked up to the tables, the leaders spoke first, most were willing to sign up after they asked what the project required of them. I collected several signatures. One girl asked me if she was going to get in trouble because she wrote swear words on her page. I thought that was hilarious but Beth was upset about the “curse word” problem. She told me she handed out conduct points to girls all the time because of their language. Goodness, I had forgotten all about conduct points. The only reason I lost any conduct points was because my shirt would always be untucked. I hated tucking it in. Maybe I got one or two for chewing gum too. Anyway, I immediately started thinking about my own potty mouth and hoping that I had not said anything off color in front of Beth. I was flabbergasted by Beth’s reluctance or inability to look at the girls as “adults in training.” The way she talked really made me believe that they (the girls) were unable to exercise free will. It reminded me that I did get in trouble for having my shirt untucked and chewing gum and I became nostalgic for college, when you no longer had to ask permission to use the bathroom.

Maybe the rules and structures are put in place to get them to focus more? Because especially now, with all the distractions available to the girls, maybe they need more rigid rules to follow? So Beth bemoaned the curse words, note passing, cell phone
problems running rampant throughout the halls. And I began to seriously reconsider my first impression of Beth. I couldn’t see the point in getting overly excited about relatively mundane infractions, and I quickly categorized Beth into a certain group of authority figures from my high school experience. It was the teachers who sort of let those things slide that I remember liking the best. The teachers who you didn’t want to upset, but who you also knew would allow you to slip up. They didn’t freak out about your shirt being untucked, they celebrated you showing up.

Mr. Ski, a teacher I had when attending the school, came up to me in the cafeteria and was pumped about my project. He said he totally remembered me, which I found amazing considering I took Biology as a freshman. Well he was really cool and friendly and I liked how he kind of talked to me like I was an adult, something I guess I was feeling like I wasn’t being treated as. So I left the cafeteria that day with a lot of work done. I had a very good list. About twenty-five girls signed up. I went back to the guidance office with Beth and we sorted yellow bookmarks to pass out to the homeroom teachers’ mailboxes.

The Waiting Game, Part II

That evening I went home and addressed letters to every girl who signed up on my list. I put the letters together with the parental information letter, permission letter, and student consent letter. I included stamped envelopes for return. I also looked up all the girls’ MySpace pages based off the email addresses they provided and requested they add me as a friend. Also I wrote each an individual message through MySpace
explaning what I was doing (mailing the letters, adding them as friends, etc). (See Appendix I for Sample MySpace email messages).

The next morning I dropped off the envelopes to Beth and had her address them. I was not allowed access to the girls’ home addresses, so Beth was in charge of this. I volunteered to do this in her presence so she could see that I was not taking the girls’ addresses. I really wanted to make her job with me as pain free and work free as possible. But she said no she would do it.

Now began the waiting game for real. I had to wait to receive the signed permission slips before we could set up appointments. I also had to wait to see if the girls would add me as a friend or not. The numbers did not correspond. Most of the girls added me immediately. They did not send in their consent letters though. After a week, I emailed all the girls a reminder, I posted a bulletin, and I sent out postcard reminders. Once again, Beth had to address these reminders. I decided to offer incentives, 15 dollar gift certificate to Target for their time. I was hoping that the carrot of cash would inspire the girls to get their slips in. Finally! I got two.

I set up these two interviews immediately. I downloaded their MySpace page the day before the interview so I could pull it up in the school. The Archdiocese had blocked the website, so I was going to have to image capture every page of the girls’ site. This was not a big deal; I just lost the interactivity of the webpage in doing so. In my opinion though, this worked out pretty well because I did not really like the distracting songs blaring from the computers speakers. Also, this worked in my favor because it forced me to really look at the pages before I met with the girl in order to save all the items she’d
posted (pictures, blog postings, about me sections, etc). I kind of had ideas of what the
girls would be like before they entered the room, and most times I was surprised.

*Interviews Begin*

So the first day, first interview, did not go over very well. The first girl did not
show up. I sat there for quite a while, and then I had to go to the attendance office in
order to find out if the girl was absent from school that day. She was. During this time
they were having a Spanish Fiesta/Celebration, Cinco de Mayo party outside that my
teacher friend was hosting. I stepped outside and enjoyed some salsa and hoped to talk to
the girls, but the girls segregated themselves from the teachers.

So as I was standing around eating chips and salsa at 9 in the morning, my old
math teacher, Mrs. Guff came bustling out to the party. She remembered me as one of her
students and we talked for quite a bit about a lot of random things (family and
retirement). I confided that first interview did not show up and she asked me how the
whole thing was going and I told her I was worried about the fact that no one was signing
up or getting their permission slips in. She told me I could come into her classes in the
afternoon and make announcements and hand out the letters/permission slips to the
students. She would then require the girls return them to her the next day. I immediately
set about making extra copies. Mrs. Guff’s plan worked and by the end of the week I had
twenty two girls signed up and scheduled for interviews.

*Meet the Girls*³

In this section I will introduce you to the girls according to their grade level,
freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. To begin, I’ll describe the girls as a
representative sample from their grade level, and individually introduce each girl as she
described herself in our interview and also as her MySpace page presents her self. Here’s
a brief table (Table 3.1) of the girls names and class levels for future reference
throughout, followed by narrative descriptions in their own voices:

Table 3.1

*Meet the Girls* of My Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Sophomores</th>
<th>Juniors</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>Abby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbi</td>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Jocelyn</td>
<td>Annabelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise</td>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>Kiki</td>
<td>Bea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Mya</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Marna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
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<td>Renee</td>
<td>Sunny</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Toni</td>
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*Each girl selected her own pseudonym for the study*

_Freshmen_

Out of twenty-two participating girls, six freshmen volunteered for the study.

Freshmen generally fall into the age range of fourteen to fifteen years old. The six
freshmen girls were all white and interestingly their grade represented the most years on
MySpace, on average, around two years. This was interesting to me because they were the youngest group interviewed but had used MySpace the longest. These girls, for the most part, had pictures on their pages boasting eighth grade graduation and the summer leading up to their freshman year. The following is a brief description of how each girl described herself and a short first impression of her MySpace page (See Appendix J for a sampling of the transcripts of interviews).

**Annie** begins by defining identity as “*what a person is known by,*” in other words, “*like how other people know that person, their personality, their history, and like what schools they go to.*” Annie describes herself as “*outgoing and energetic.*” Her friends would say she’s “*hyper,*” but her teachers would identify her as “*quiet.*” Teachers, according to Annie, are “*just there to teach you.*” Annie speculates that her family would also describe her as quiet and nice. When asked why she is not so much “*hyper*” around her family, Annie explains, “*I can be myself with my friends, but I have to be well behaved with my family.*” When Annie hangs out with her friends, they mostly go to the mall, movies, or talk hanging out at each other’s houses. Annie’s page is *very* pink and utilizes the Victoria’s Secret background. Her friends are very prominent throughout her page and overall, it gives an impression of being very young.

**Bobbi** opened up about her love of freshman honors English class. I was in the same class when I was a freshman and we had the same teacher. Bobbi lit up when I brought up our teacher and continued to let me know that she would also describe herself as smart and nice, but not always talkative in all of her classes (like math) or with her

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*Direct quotes from the girls are italicized throughout the dissertation. This is to give emphasis to the girls’ voices.*

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family. Bobbi really likes to read, and sometimes prefers to stay in her room all day reading. Bobbi’s MySpace page features a singing and dancing profile picture of her swinging an umbrella on a sunny day.

*Elise* thinks it’s hard to describe herself, but comes up with “*friendly, artistic, and creative.*” Her friends and family would agree with the artistic part, because “*art’s a big part of my life*”. Elise specializes in painting and drawing. In addition to painting and drawing, music is also a big part of Elise’s life. Maybe her family would add *kind* and *considerate*, while her teachers would use *responsible* to identify Elise. Like Ellen, Elise admits to lacking MySpace design skills “*I’m like MySpace retarded,*” Elise explains. Elise’s MySpace page is simple but hints at throwbacks to retro style and celebrities. She chose yellow as a background.

*Ellen* defines identity by personality, looks, and hair and eye color. Besides being blonde, Ellen would describe her identity (“*personality wise?*”) as fun and happy. Her friends probably see Ellen as crazy and fun, and her teachers and family also must think she is hyper because she asks a lot of questions in class. Ellen claims to be “*not really good with computers*” but “*loves shopping.*” When she’s with her friends, Ellen enjoys playing pool and messing around. She lights up when she talks about her friends describing them as happy and hyper people. She doesn’t think she “*could ever be with, like, a boring group, like in a group where people aren’t crazy or fun like me.*” Ellen refers to herself as “*really young*” and “*just a kid, you know?*” Ellen’s page, admittedly, was created by a friend. Since she’s “*not really good with computers*” she relinquishes all power of creation to her friend. However, Ellen’s page also is very pink.
Immediately **Kylie** provided an alias to her identity, “you can put me down as drama queen” she declared. Identity, according to Kylie, is “a person.” Kylie’s own description of her identity is “unique, smart, um outgoing, caring, and open to different experiences.” Kylie’s friends would agree with the “outgoing” part but also add funny and risk taking. Kylie prides herself in her participation in most classes, but admits to slacking in classes easier than her honors biology class. Family can get confusing according to Kylie. She lives with her mom and stepdad during the week and her dad and stepmom during the weekends. For the most part, she feels she’d be described as loving, dramatic, and mature in both family situations. Dramatic refers to her proclivity towards “bickering.” Kylie is very much involved with drama club, however, and already has established herself in the boys’ high school drama programs (a big accomplishment for a freshman). Kylie’s profile reminded me of an old soul. Her self-description as mature rang true. She had many references to romances, both literary and filmic.

**Maria** had a cultural view of identity, “a lot of things make up identity, what kind of music you listen to, your world views, your family, your friends, influences.” Her own identity is defined as “I know who I am, I’m a little crazy, pretty, blonde, I make pretty wise decisions, I’m good with people, I’m good with my studies, I get along really well with my family, a lot of good friends, good influences and bad.” Maria’s friends would agree and add, “energetic, charismatic, caring, lively, and spontaneous.” Family and teachers identify Maria as “determined, hard-working, and driven” and “compassionate”.

Maria’s MySpace page is headlined with “pretty people are pretty messed up” and “I’ve got liquor to drink, boys to confuse, and parties to go to.” Nadine, who was also
interviewed (See Sophomores) is also all over Maria’s page. They are best friends, according to Maria, who recently left her previous best friend of ten years to work on her and Nadine’s friendship.

**Sophomores**

Exactly as I remember my high school experience, the sophomores were a sort of ragtag, or lost bunch. Sophomores had attitude when I was in high school, and I think it’s safe to say, sophomores still have attitude. The only thing exciting about being a sophomore is that you are no longer a freshman and you generally are learning to drive (new independence!). Three sophomores participated in my study, Nadine, Jamie, and Brooke. Nadine had been encouraged to participate through her freshman friend, Maria. I coincidently ran into Jamie hosting at a local restaurant. When she took our name and party number, she looked at me and asked, “Hey, are you the MySpace lady?” Because of this introduction, I encouraged her to talk to me during one of her study hall hours.

For the most part, sophomores are around 15 to 16 years old. The three sophomore girls were all white and had their MySpace pages for an average of about one and a half years. **Brooke** identifies herself as “just a teenager” who is “fun, easy going, just likes to have a good time, I guess.” Brooke is certain her friends would describe her as crazy and someone to talk to. Brooke also admits to being crazy in class because she “gets real fidgety,” and is “easily distracted.” Brooke very much fits into her family as they are all “crazy,” they “just like to have a good time, we don’t care what everyone thinks, so, if we’re having fun, then it’s all good.” As the designated “person to talk to,” Brooke has overcome a “lot of drama” because of the drama and gossip that goes on in the school.
hallways. Because of this, she hopes her page will allow people to know how she really is. She explains, “because I don’t just like randomly talk to people,” she wants them to know that she’s not “rude,” she doesn’t have a problem with anyone, and that she’s friends with “most people in my grade, it’s just like some of them don’t know me because they don’t want to know.” Brooke’s page is rather plain with blue. It shows fun, family, and photos.

I knew Jamie was outgoing before she even came to the interview. I had met Jamie at a restaurant early in my recruitment stages and knew she was sociable early on. Jamie described herself as a crazy party animal, except when she’s working because then she’s “real serious.” Jamie’s friends would agree with her crazy party animal assessment, but would also include “loud”. Jamie disagrees with this because she doesn’t think she’s “that loud.” In class, Jamie admits to “not paying attention” therefore she feels her teachers would call her a procrastinator. When asked how Jamie’s family would describe her, Jamie quickly says, “My dad would be just like you’re a bitch . . . but I’m like so mean to my dad.” She qualifies, “we’re just like playful . . . my family doesn’t know my outside side, like they don’t know how I go out and hang out with my friends and party and stuff.” Jamie’s page is full of homemade videos and opinions. She boldly posts a list of her “likes and dislikes” making sure to point out particular groups and people who fit in each category.

Nadine, like her friend, Maria, was very self-assured, and standoffish. Nadine describes herself as “bouncy, very talkative, and sometimes really hot and cold.” When asked to explain, Nadine remarks, “like some days I’ll be like get out of my face, and
other days I’ll be like willing to talk to you, you know.” Her reason behind the mood shifts is attributed to “tiredness.” Nadine is also athletic because she skates. Nadine believes her friends and family would call her caring and hyper, but her teachers would note that she is quiet. While Nadine admits that she does not really participate in much at St. Catherine’s, she’s totally devoted to her skating program. Because Nadine is admittedly not very involved at St. Catherine’s, she feels it is important to let people know about herself through her MySpace page. One of the most impressive images from her page is a picture with “F**k Authority” written across it. Also, her page had a profile picture with red hair, yet when she walked down the hallway, her hair was blonde.

Juniors

Once again, as I remembered my junior year, the Juniors I met were all stressed out. Junior year is difficult because of honors exams and preparing for SATs and ACTs. I remember junior year being a drag, kind of like you’re working really hard but you don’t have any rewards waiting for you. Five juniors participated, and as a whole, the junior girls had used MySpace the shortest amount of time (about a year). There was one multiracial girl in the junior group. Overall, I would say that the juniors had the most creative and artistic MySpace pages of the entire research group.

Haley was the second girl I interviewed and the first girl to get her consent and assent forms returned to me. According to Haley, identity is defined as “how you look at yourself or how other people look at yourself.” Haley describes herself (quietly and after a long pause) as “friendly” and “um really um happy.” Haley’s friends would add to her assessment “funny, um, maybe crazy” and she admits that “I can be crazy.” In school
Haley knows even though her teachers “wouldn’t say [this] to her face,” her teachers would recognize that Haley is “smart, but also a lazy student.” And in the same vein, Haley’s family would describe Haley as being “not helpful.” She speculates the difference of opinions between friends and family is because of her “different attitudes towards my family and my friends.”

Haley’s page was one of my favorites of the group. Her page was very mature, I thought, in comparison to the other girls’ pages. She included a lot of photography and different “albums.” When I asked her about her photography, she whipped out her camera that she had been carrying around with her in her bag. The camera was a pretty high tech gear and I was shocked to see she had it on hand.

When asking Jocelyn to define identity, she responded, “who you are as an individual.” In the following question, asking Jocelyn “Who are you as an individual?” she replied, “Like my name?” Pushed farther, Jocelyn described herself as “your typical teenager I guess? I don’t know, I dance, I’m a junior in high school, the oldest of three, and my favorite color is pink.” Both Jocelyn’s friends and her family would describe Jocelyn as “fun, crazy and outgoing.” Her teachers, on the other hand would say that Jocelyn is “organized and responsible,” because “I’m really organized this year.” (She got in trouble her freshmen year, she says.). Jocelyn’s page, which she doesn’t check very often, is covered in “I love my boyfriend” and it’s pink.

Of all the girls interviewed, Kiki had some of the most unique things to say about herself. Kiki’s definition of identity is “basically who you are as a person and what makes you you, your personality and your sense of style and stuff.” When asked to
describe herself, Kiki explains, “well you’re probably not familiar with this word because it is a Japanese word, but it’s otaku, and basically it means that it is someone who’s a really big fan of like anime and Japanese stuff, and that’s definitely me.” She adds, “it [otaku] also kind of means nerd.” And Kiki would like to also describe herself as artistic. Kiki knows her friends would agree with her description of otaku, but her friends would also note the fact that Kiki is “loud and flashy.” Kiki considers herself “flashy” because over the summer she has “blue hair.” Teachers would identify Kiki as being a “daydreamer, artistic, [and] easily distracted.” Finally Kiki is uncertain of how her family would describe her, but speculates that her parents would “probably say I’m rebellious cause I definitely got this cartilage pierced . . . without even asking them about it.” Her youngest brother (16 years older than Kiki) would say that she’s “artistic and a writer cause I think he knows me best of all my brothers,” and she “honestly has no idea what my other two brothers would say cause I never see them.” All and all, Kiki admits to having her artistic side dominate her personality. Kiki’s page was rather dark in comparison to her bubbly personality in the interview. She had a rather somber/emo profile picture with a very sad face.

Before interviewing Mya, a mixed race girl, I had met her in the cafeteria recruitment day. Mya proclaimed herself as “MySpace famous” when I asked if she’d participate in my study. Mya’s definition of identity is “the person who you are and the characteristics that define that person.” In terms of her own identity, Mya explains she’s “umm outgoing, fun, energetic, sporadic and funny.” Her friends would agree with her description of “funny” because she makes them laugh “until they piss their pants.” Her
friends would also describe Mya as being helpful and caring because they always come to her for advice and she also is the designated “planner.” When they go out they like to go to malls, movies, and Wal-Mart. Mya’s teachers would describe her as “bright,” but “sometimes I don’t work to my potential,” and sometimes “argumentative.” Mya’s family would mark Mya as “um crazy, um lazy, and helpful sometimes.” She explains, “I know I’m spoiled.” Mya’s MySpace page was noticeably color coordinated and well planned. She told me she matched her background and font colors to match whichever outfit she was wearing in her profile picture.

“How you like people to perceive you and also how you perceive yourself” is how Samantha defines identity. She also adds, “the image you kind of like want to show to other people.” In defining herself, Samantha “would like people to think that I’m different but not just unique in a way that I’m not like everyone else and that I don’t like always follow the trends or like go along with what everyone else thinks is cool or something, I just kind of try to be my own person.” Samantha’s friends would describe her as being “kind of loud, funny, talkative, um, outgoing, bubbly” and she would agree with their assessment. Teachers of Samantha’s would say that she’s a “hard worker” and that she’s persistent and “smart.” Samantha laughs at this but decided that smart was pretty accurate except in chemistry. Finally Samantha’s family would agree that Samantha is fun loving, “not wild,” adventurous and talkative, because as she explains, “I talk.” Samantha had a rather mature looking MySpace page with light blue, black and white background colors. She did include a picture of her “forbidden” tattoo.
Seniors

The seniors, for the most part were the most easy-going group to interview. Seniors, at St. Catherine’s, had the leisure of extended free periods throughout the school day, and were getting VERY close to graduation. The senior girls represented the biggest group of participants, eight in total, this large number probably because of their added free time and the fact that they were mentally checked out of school. Half of the eight girls were African American. All eight girls had college and career plans for after graduation, and for the most part were rather pleasant to talk to. The senior girls’ MySpace pages were the most varied according to appearance. There were a couple simple pages with unobtrusive background designs; there were also Final Fantasy themed pages as well as sports related. And the one page out of the entire group of participants that was utterly swimming in romance with hearts, bears, and romantic musings about a boyfriend.

Abby, like Renee and Sunny, was an upbeat African-American girl and walked into our interview with a big smile on her face. I quickly learned the smile was attributed to the fact that she was excited about graduation. Abby’s definition of identity is “who you are, like what kind of person you are.” Abby thinks she’s “an outgoing person, kind of unique if you want to call it that, I’m myself, I guess.” Both friends and teachers would note that Abby is “outgoing” and “loud.” Abby explains, “it depends on what teacher it is,” for her to be loud in class. In other words, “if I’m really close to the teacher then I’ll joke around with the teacher, but some teachers I’m not as close to so I’m fairly quiet.” Abby’s family would “probably call me unique, we’re all crazy.” Even though Abby is
outgoing around her everyday acquaintances, she admits “I know that there’s like a limit where I need to be like more mature and other times when I don’t have to be mature.”

After graduation, Abby is heading to the University of Cincinnati to study business. Abby is concerned with many of her friends moving away from Cincinnati, so she is relieved her MySpace page will allow her to keep in contact with her friends. Abby’s profile page is rather plain and simple for such an outgoing girl; however, her friendships are prominently displayed throughout the page.

Annabelle was the first girl I interviewed. Annabelle described herself as fun, energetic and “always happy, I’m a happy person. Loving and caring, too.” Just to be clear, Annabelle reiterated, “I’m not a very sad person” and “I don’t change at all. I’m myself all the time.” Annabelle’s friends, teachers and parents would all probably describe her as being outgoing and “pretty much just happy” except her parents might note that she’s “sometimes” obnoxious. Annabelle plans on going into pediatric nursing even though she knows it’s a lot of work and she had her heart set on being an interior designer. Annabelle’s page was very simple, clean and blue. Her page showcased her friends. She did include a lot of blog posts against abortion, including pictures and prayers.

The last senior interviewed was Bea. Bea came to our interview wearing a clear nose ring, which is against the uniform code at St. Catherine’s. She admitted to already receiving “like four conduct points.” Bea defined identity as: “so, it’s just like who you are, I guess, and not giving out too much information.” And she described herself as:
Um, I can be very random, I like to talk a lot, once you get to know me, um,
I’m kind hearted, I do not like hurting other people’s feelings even if they make
me mad, um I’m an all around nice person I guess.

Bea’s friends would say that she’s “probably like . . . caring, and loyal” which is similar
to how her family would describe her. Her mom would also note her “gentle type of
personality” and say that she’s “responsible.” Bea’s teachers, though, would all agree
that she’s a “procrastinator!” Bea, however, admits to being very quiet in class and, that
she doesn’t “like disturbing the teacher much.” Bea’s MySpace page was very romantic
and had lots of pictures of her and her boyfriend. Bea was extremely focused on having a
family and a career that would allow her to stay home with her children.

Cat and I met for two study hall hours. Cat was extremely talkative and detail
oriented which was very much reflected in her MySpace page. Cat’s mother was one of
the few parents to contact me before the interview. Cat’s mother was concerned with her
having time to participate and explained to me that Cat would be going to prom,
graduation, and West Virginia for college. Cat believes identity to be “how you express
yourself, like how you show people who you are.” Cat describes herself:

I’m a free spirit, I’m creative, I’m like an open and accepting person, um, crazy, I
guess, sometimes. That’s a description of me. And um, a lot of people like get, a
different impression of who I am just by looking at me or whatever, than a lot of
people that know me, I don’t know what word to use for that.

I asked Cat to explain what she meant by this last part and she provided an example from
camp where the leader told her she was originally scared of Cat, “she thought that I was
going to be mean just because of I guess, the way that I had dressed or looked.” I next asked Cat how her friends would describe her and she had a long pause before answering, “A lot of people describe me as nice, usually, and um, “cute” [air quotes included] is a word that they use to describe me a lot.” Cat included the air quotes because she’s not completely sure what they always mean by it whether her friends are referring to her “cute” appearance or behavior. Cat surmises that her teachers would identify her as a “good student” because she participates most of the time in class. When I asked Cat how her family would describe her she admitted, “This is a hard one. I think a lot of people in my family would have different ways of describing me.” Cat is closer to her cousins than her siblings, who are quite a bit older than her, and her closeness to her cousins makes her think they would know her better than her sisters and brother. Cat then confided in me about her sister’s unconventional life choices and the strains they make on her family.

Cat had tons and tons of pictures organized by albums on her MySpace page. She wants to go into computer design and art, and she practices on her photography and has even entered her photos in contests. Her page is rather artistic, in general, and expresses an “emo” feel in the background choice of red and black.

**Marna** defines identity as “like who your friends are and how you see yourself in the world.” When I asked, “how do you see yourself in the world?” Marna responds, “um, well, I go to St. Catherine’s, I’m eighteen years old, um I have a family and friends.” Marna is also, “outgoing and friendly, um sarcastic.” According to Marna, her friends would note that she “talks a lot, laughs a lot, and is easy to get along with.” Hopefully Marna speculates with a laugh that her teachers would “probably” say that “I,
um, am a good student?” She also is “easy to talk to and participates a lot in class.” Marna plans on attending University of Dayton after graduation and majoring in psychology and pre-med. Finally, Marna’s family would probably describe her as “nice and fun, and uh, a good sense of humor.” She admits that if she’s “with a group of people” that she’s not really friends with, she isn’t as outgoing as with people with whom she’s more familiar. Marna’s MySpace page was extremely bubbly—literally, it was covered in blue polka dots and bubbles. In fact, before meeting Marna, I thought she was a Freshman or Sophomore based on her MySpace page design.

**Renee** was probably the biggest shock I had when meeting the creator of her MySpace page. Renee did not have a personal profile picture, but instead had a picture of a Final Fantasy character. Her entire page was covered in Final Fantasy images and references. Renee, an African-American, was an extremely polite, soft-spoken young woman. Renee also had a wonderful sense of humor and even described herself as humorous, “I always make them [her friends] laugh.” She believes both her parents and teachers would also say that Renee is humorous and creative as well. Renee defined identity as “who a person is, like how you relate to other things and how you act to different situations.” When I asked Renee to define her own identity, she responded “Different than others. I read a lot, so I relate myself to books and stuff . . . Right now I’m reading Pride and Prejudice, and I’m more like Elizabeth Bennet.” I asked her why she saw the connection and Renee explained, “She’s kind of sarcastic and views stuff with a different kind of light.” Renee continued to refer to herself as sarcastic, this is probably why I had such a good impression of Renee when she left. After graduation,
Renee was moving to Virginia Union College in Richmond, VA. As an alumna of St. Catherine’s, I can attest that Renee’s choice in going far away to college was an anomaly. Like I said above, Renee’s MySpace page was decorated in Final Fantasy paraphernalia. It was dark, scary, and mostly red and black.

Meeting Sunny was exciting because all I knew of her appearance from her MySpace page was what a picture of her two feet looked like. Sunny was a bubbly (hence the selected pseudonym) upbeat girl of color. She believes identity to be “who you think yourself [to be] and what other people think of you as.” Sunny thinks of herself as “very loud, very moody” and someone who “likes to listen to people.” She likes “to help people a lot” meaning she “puts people before [her] self all the time.” Sunny’s friends would note that she’s funny, moody, and probably a good listener, but her teachers would describe her as being “probably obnoxious.” Sunny agrees with the teachers’ assessment because “I just talk too much in class . . . I’m a very social person!” Even though Sunny is a “very social person” she also gets “really quiet” because she likes to keep to herself because she “gets angry at people so she stays quiet like all day.” Sunny’s family would also describe her as moody, funny, and “self-kept.” Sunny was going to attend Wright State College after graduation and major in early childhood education. Besides pictures of her feet, Sunny’s MySpace profile was hot pink with tiny hearts all around. Overall it gave an impression of positivity.

Toni, another African-American senior, identified identity as being “what makes you the person that you are.” Toni, in her own words, is “energetic, joyful, just laughable, and I guess, very kind.” Her friends would probably identify Toni as being
“weird, funny, cute, um, just spontaneous and outgoing.” According to what Toni’s “heard [her teachers] say,” she is “dedicated, determined, and a joy to have in the class.” In hearing these strong compliments, I had to ask Toni’s after graduation plans, “I’m going to Xavier of Louisiana,” and “I got into their pre-med program.” Toni aspires to be an OB/GYN. Finally, when reflecting on how her family might describe her, Toni said, “Drama queen, cause I do theatre. Loveable, um, determined again, and a fun daughter.” I asked Toni why she hadn’t included “determined” in her own assessment, and she explained, “I can just get lazy.” Toni’s MySpace page featured a lot of information about her extra-curriculars. She had pictures of dance teams and drama productions. There was a lot of school spirit posted all over her page.

Conclusion

By now I hope you’ve been able to realize the overall scope and setting of this research. I was extremely fortunate to have such a supportive research environment at St. Catherine’s. Being allowed to conduct the interviews on the school property was very helpful in organizing and following up in data collection. Additionally, I was able to get an overall feel for the school environment as I collected my data regarding the sentiment towards MySpace and also observe some of the grouping social casting systems still present and apparent in the school. This chapter introduced you to the setting of the research, delineated the process of interviewing girls about their MySpace use, and also introduced you to the featured characters in this research project. The next three chapters, four, five, and six will explore the findings and analyze the ways adolescent girls perform
identity to their peers both in everyday life and using social networking sites, like MySpace.com, at St. Catherine’s all-girl high school.

1 A reminder to the reader, names of schools, parishes, neighborhoods, and people have been changed to maintain privacy and anonymity.

2 It should be noted that even though I did accept this girl’s friend request, and sent her all the information and consent packets, I never heard from her again. I also wrote her a personal note regarding her page because shortly after I added her one of the Dayton Air Force Flyers died in an air show crash. When I did accept friend requests from the girls, I had waited until I had four girls to add.

3 The first profile page of each girl and one page of our interview transcript are included in the Appendix (F and J). These samples are organized by grade level and alphabetized within each grade.

4 Cat continued correspondence with me through the project’s MySpace page for the longest time. She would occasionally check in to see how I was doing and tell me about college, which she loved, as I imagined she very much would. I was surprised to see her relationship with her boyfriend going so strong after the college separation.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS: ADOLESCENCE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the ways in which the girls are performing their adolescent identity. From the larger research question, “How are adolescent girls performing identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking girls?” the notion of performing adolescence was extracted. This chapter answers the question:

• How do girls express their adolescent identity both on and offline?

Adolescent development theory (Erikson, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; and Elkind, 1981, 2001) suggests that adolescence is a time for identity experimentation and practice. The girls reflected this notion in that they recognized they were presenting selves to varying audiences on and offline. The girls performed a fluid identity as they performed to various fronts from their offline friendships to their online “fans.” Another important aspect to the exploration of and development of an adolescent identity is a reliance on friends and peer groups. The girls in this study used various social interactions and social networking sites to perform many identifying qualities (social relationships, interests, personality traits, and activity involvement) of adolescence.

Traditionally, when studying teenagers one will look at several factors including: biological, cognitive, developmental, historical, social, and cultural. Generally, these factors are examined to focus in on how teenagers are situated in the grander realm of humanity; how they are separated from adults and children, how they are different, and what makes them behave the way they do. While this is a cultural and new media
communication based research project, I am not looking at the biological factors in adolescent female development. I am, however, focusing on social and cultural factors that aid in the performance of identity. In an effort to address the research question, how are adolescent girls using MySpace.com in their everyday lives to create and maintain identity, I have separated the factors: adolescence, identity, and girls. These three factors contribute to the overall culture of girlhood in today’s media saturated society. With social networking sites such as MySpace contributing to the communicative practices of expressing and developing an identity, one must look to several factors influencing the development of an identity.

Literature Review

As stated before, little has been written on Adolescent Girls, Identity, and Social Networking sites. These search terms generate numerous research on their own individual levels, but when combined, the findings are sparse. Therefore, I’ll include a brief literature review at the beginning of each findings chapter (Chapters Four, Five, and Six) highlighting the pertinent information relating to the chapter’s theme. The major theme that needs to be addressed before delving into the research findings for this chapter is the scholarship on adolescence on the Internet. Chapter One discusses the theoretical work behind adolescence and the developmental characteristics common to the age. This chapter looks at the literature that’s been written directly regarding adolescents on the Internet. Three major themes in this collection of literature became apparent:

- adolescents use social networking sites to experiment with and present their identities;
adolescents use the Internet to strengthen or reinforce relationships with offline friends;
adolescents use the Internet to communicate with friends.

From this list of three major themes, the presence and emphasis on “friends” is paramount. Therefore, when I delve into the findings of my research, there is a particular emphasis on the girls’ relationships with and to their friends and peers.

Experimentation: Adolescent Identity Work on the Internet

Thiel (2005) began her work on instant messaging (IM), as many other scholars do, by referencing Erikson’s work on adolescence. She noted that as the period of adolescence fosters development of identity it does so during a stage when the adolescent is “straddling” the moments between childhood and adulthood. As the adolescent must negotiate her way through this turbulent time, she is afforded the medium of the Internet to practice the performance of her identity (Thiel, 2005). Grisso and Weiss (2005) as well as Stern (2002) discussed the ways in which teenagers may “experiment with different self-presentation styles” through the Internet (Grisso & Weiss, 2005, p. 32). Gross found through his research that adolescents use “the Internet for anonymous identity experimentation” (2004, p. 634). He inquired:

If, as Erikson (1963) theorized, the critical developmental task of adolescence is to explore and resolve the crisis of identity, might not the Internet, with its anonymity and cluelessness, provide adolescents with an ideal setting in which to explore their identity? (Gross, 2004, p. 635)

The quality of anonymity and the large selection of means by which to manipulate self-
presentation on the Internet allowed for adolescents to experiment with their identities. Leung (2003) heralded the “capacity of the Internet” to allow adolescents “to present a different persona when interacting online” (p. 107). Leung also noted that identity is fluid online which allowed users to pass between identities (2003). Valkenburg, Schouten, and Peter (2005) also relied on Erikson in emphasizing the “critical developmental task in adolescence is to transform identities into an integrated self” (p. 385). Finally, as quoted in Gross (2004) a journalist, Sweeney (1999), proposed that “The Internet’s greatest asset to teendom may be access to, and the confidence to slip in and out of personalities, the ability to try on identities, the adolescent equivalent of playing dress-up in the attic” (Gross, 2004, p. 635).

Manago, Graham, Greenfield, and Salimkhan (2008) found that MySpace provides adolescents “with new cultural tools for identity construction” (p. 454). This finding is relevant to the adolescent stage of identity exploration. Manago et al (2008) also found that the cultural tools on MySpace.com “provide a means to construct personal, social, and gender identities” (p. 454). Once again, Erikson’s work (1959) becomes exemplary in explaining how adolescents are able to both individually and socially construct an ego identity that balances their own values and allows for acceptance within societal expectations. This balance extended to the online world (Livingstone, 2008). Valkenburg et al (2005) explained also that young adolescents “often engage in imaginative audience behavior” as they “tend to overestimate the extent to which others are watching and evaluating” (p. 385). Therefore as adolescents are balancing between autonomy and social acceptance, offline and online, they must also
perform this balancing act to an imagined audience. This audience is far greater than previous generations as it extends to the limitless world of Internet users. “Emerging adults objectify possible identities through profile images, displaying them to a new kind of public audience. Transcending physical limitations, public presentation presents a new mechanism for young adults to realize experimental aspects of their identities” (Manago et al., 2008, p. 454).

Building Friendships on the Internet

Time and time again it is noted the importance of social connections and peer groups to the development (and sometimes detriment) of developing teens. Subrahmanyam, Greenfield and Tynes (2004) found the Internet to only reinforce and bolster this important aspect of adolescence:

An important feature of adolescence is the adolescent’s need for close friends and desire for emotional fulfillment from friends. Young adolescents typically form small groups of friends, usually of the same sex and enjoy spending time and talking to each other. Often, they spend all day together at school and then come home and spend more time talking to each other on the phone or in recent years via instant messaging and chat. (p. 654)

Howarth (2002) noted that from the age of 12 adolescents cultivate self-reflexivity in cognitive development thus increasing awareness of their belongingness to community, culture, and social peers in their age group (p. 146). Gross found, contrary to popular belief, that adolescent Internet communication consisted mostly between friends and known others regarding “fairly ordinary” topics like friends, school, and gossip (2004, p.
646). In fact, Gross found that the majority of Internet use by adolescents was “devoted to private communication” between “close, offline friends” (2004, p. 642). Clark’s (2005) findings found that Internet played an important role in the “lives of contemporary teens” (p. 205). She explained that adolescents must “attempt to control various online interactions so as to both maintain relationships with and to ensure that they remain favorably evaluated by their peers” (Clark, 2005, p. 206). Ling and Yuri proclaimed that adolescents “thrive on access and interaction” on the Internet, and “to receive a message [email, chat, etc.] is a confirmation of one’s membership in the group” (2002, p. 149). Therefore, if the Internet provides a space for teenagers to continue close interaction with friends as previous research has demonstrated, the teenager’s identity will be linked to the social connections made through Internet interactions.

New Ways to Communicate with Friends

The net-generation\(^1\) is capable of and used to spending time on many activities at once (Gross, 2004). Merchant studied the ways in which adolescents used new technology and how their use influenced the ways in which they communicated and participated online. Merchant noted that adolescents are “skilled users of new technology,” and are “more adaptable” and quicker to adopt new technology (2001, p. 294-296). She found that “teenagers . . . fluently exploit the possibilities of digital technology, radically changing the face of literacy in a variety of media” (p. 294). In other words, Merchant found that teenagers, being quicker to adapt to new technology, and therefore more practiced, are also influential in the ways that the Internet is used. For example she explained how teenagers “create and critique multimedia texts” with
“moving images and sound files along print text” (p. 296). And Berson and Berson (2005) mimicked this finding by asserting that “Youth in today’s world do not merely consume information from the diverse media sources that are accessible online. Young people are active agents who can manipulate, adapt, create, and disseminate ideas and products through communication technologies” (p. 29). With this skilled use of the Internet and the myriad of ways in which the adolescent user can interact with the communicative means afforded to them through the Internet, Berson and Berson noted the importance of adolescents maintaining a “proactive voice” as they connect with other users on the Internet (2005, p. 29). They also noted that with the ever-present permeation of the Internet in the lives of adolescents, we must be mindful of their readiness for social interactive experiences online (Berson & Berson, 2005, p. 30).

Overall, the literature collected relating to adolescence on the Internet focused on three main themes: adolescent Internet use for identity experimentation, using the Internet to further communication and relationships with offline friends, and how adolescents might use the Internet in innovative ways that also tends to their need of expressing voice and negotiating a balanced identity. As discussed above, the adolescent Internet user tends to utilize the anonymous and fluid nature of the Internet to experiment with identity. Also, the adolescent Internet user tends to communicate more often with known users and cultivate offline friendships online, continuing their everyday interactions in non-face-to-face environments.

Findings

Significant findings in this chapter include the confirmation of the stage of
adolescent development: the girls are practicing varying identities, or are experimenting with many identities, and the girls rely heavily on their friendships. Like the literature suggests, the girls perform adolescent identity through their emphasis on friendships and communication as well. Offline, and in the girls' everyday lives and identity performances to their peers, the girls expressed their adolescent identity by their emphasis on their friendships. Also, the girls expressed an importance of maintaining strong communication with their friends through the online social networking site, MySpace.com. So through interviews and observation of the girls’ MySpace pages, it was apparent that the girls were experimenting with and balancing their adolescent identity through experimentation, maintaining and cultivating friendships, and communicating in new ways online.

When the girls reflected the adolescent identity practice of experimenting with identity they demonstrated this as they performed self to many varying social networking sites and outlets. The girls also emphasized their fluctuating identity between childhood and adulthood as they expressed the importance on how age matters when performing identity. And in addition to the literature review, the girls expressed adolescent identity, as identified by Elkind (1979, 1981, 2000) as performing to the Imaginative Audience.

This first section of findings in terms of adolescence centers on the way the adolescent girls in this study experiment with identity on MySpace, practicing their fluidity, imaginative audience behavior, and experimenting with different elements of their persona. The second section of the findings highlights the ways in which the girls emphasize their friendships, the roles their friends played in their MySpace page creation,
and the ways in which the girls use their MySpace pages to cultivate their friendships through communication. Throughout the interviews common themes stood out. Among them, the extreme importance of friends and social groupings, were highlighted in the girls’ responses. The following description highlights the ways in which friends and social groups factor into the girls lives and how these two necessities are both cultivated and damaged through the social networking site, MySpace.com.

*Experimenting with Adolescent Identity: On and Offline*

This first section of findings explores the way the girls experiment with identity, a key characteristic of adolescent development. Adolescence is marked as an age in which individuals must experiment and practice with their identities. Teenagers “try on” different identities as they discover “who they are.” Identity is fluid and changing, as discussed in Chapter One. Identity changes in different social contexts for different audiences; thus, requiring varying performances of identity. Girls often perform for imaginative audiences, and experiment with highlighting different elements of their personalities, trying to see which elements fit.

*Fluid identity performance to their audiences.*

One of the most fascinating aspects of MySpace, social networking sites, and the Internet in general, is the capability of allowing every user with access a “voice” or “virtual presence.” The girls first and foremost demonstrated this aspect by building and maintaining their own MySpace pages. Some girls were more involved with the performances of self on multiple social networking sites. The available social networking sites that the girls could participate in were numerous, and the girls that did
participate in numerous social networking sites performed varying elements of their identities to the different available audiences. In other words, the more websites the girls participated in, the more performances they were able to practice to various audiences. Kiki was one of the most active girls on the Internet in my study, and Kiki had a wide range of audiences to which to perform.

Kiki was an active member in many other Internet blog sites and Web 2.0 interactive sites (fanfiction.net, livejournal, deviantart, and adultfanfiction.net). All of these other user generated content sites demonstrate a strong desire for virtual presence and voice. Kiki explained that her friend needed to know what was going on in her life, and then laments that she does not really “give the people what they want” because she only posted three blogs on her MySpace page.

Kiki, a sophomore, who described herself as “Otaku” presented herself to me, in our interview, as having quite a fan base. For instance, when detailing why she decided to create a MySpace blog page, she explained†:

Basically, cause like one of my friends moved, and she’s like ‘Well I never know what’s going on in your life and I never hear from you or anything.’ So finally I was like, ‘You know what? Fine. Everyone wants me to get one.’ And now, I like hardly ever use it, I mean I’ve got like a grand total of three blogs in the total time I’ve had it.

First off, girls discussed their inclusion of blogs on their MySpace pages. Some chose to post personal reflections, favorite quotes (a very long quote from the film, Little

† Once again, the girls’ quotes are italicized throughout. This stylistic choice was made to highlight the voices of the girls.
Miss Sunshine, was repeatedly posted across the girls’ interviewed pages (See Appendix F for screen capture of MySpace pages) memorials to deceased grandparents, cousins, and a popular school priest, and song lyrics. Annabelle explains why she’s included a blog posting expressing her opinions on abortion, “It’s out there so people can look at it—cause that’s what I felt about like abortion and everything. I wanted to throw it out there and let other people see it.” This blog posting Annabelle describes, is a rather graphic anti-abortion comment, complete with pictures and pro-life propaganda.

Mya includes “inside jokes” on her page. For instance, she ran into a boy at the mall that she recognized from MySpace. Her friend confronted the boy, “‘Why you keep staring at her (Mya)?’ And he’s like ‘I know her from MySpace.’ I was like ‘Oh my gosh! I’m about to be freaking popular on MySpace.’” When recruiting girls for my study, Mya boldly proclaimed that she was “MySpace Famous” when I approached her table in the cafeteria. She postulated in our conversation, “I wonder how many people see me and are like, ‘ooh that’s the red head girl off MySpace.’”

Jamie also has a distinct audience in mind when posting pictures and blogs on her MySpace page: “Um, my ex-boyfriend.” But he can’t see it because he deleted me from his friends and I always think he’s with my friend, my ex-friend, Angie. I think he can see it [her MySpace page] from her page.” Here, Jamie has created an imagined audience of her exes, boyfriend and best friend, where she performs and presents to them in a way that she is aware of.

Age matters.

There was an interesting divide between the younger girls in my sample and the
older, senior, girls who responded. While the younger girls tended to have had their MySpace pages a bit longer than the older girls (perhaps because the trend became popular while they were in a more conducive environment for Internet use and were more engrained in technology, if even by a few years), the younger girls were a bit more liberal with their MySpace policies. The younger girls (freshmen and sophomores) were more likely to admit to having had “public” MySpace pages as opposed to the Seniors mostly keeping their pages on “private” since their origination. Even more interesting, both the Seniors and the Freshmen discussed “younger kids” having problems with risky online behaviors. For instance, Annabelle, a senior, first learned about MySpace from her little brother. He was in seventh grade at the time and she was upset about him having a MySpace page:

_I don’t know. I didn’t like it_ (her brother’s MySpace page) _at first. I was like why are you talking about your life on here? And he’s like oh, my friends are, and I’m like “oh ok,” and then I didn’t get one for like a year after that._

So while Annabelle was critical for her brother to create a page and share details about his life, a year later she joined the same social networking site. What changed in a year?

Also, Renee expressed concern for younger kids use of MySpace:

_Well it also kind of depends on the kid, cause there are some girls who are kind of like crazy well stupid and they’ll go out there and try to talk to the guy, yeah my one friend she is fifteen I think well I know she’s younger than sixteen, and you’re supposed to be sixteen, and I didn’t even think about that, until my mom saw her page and was like what’s she doing on there._
While Renee was MySpace secure enough to have included her accurate age, she was not concerned enough to set her page to “private.” Renee’s page was open to public access, so that “anyone who wanted to contact me could find me.” There could be several reasons for why girls are changing their age, but perhaps the most basic reason is that if a new MySpace user places her age as under 18 years of age, she is unable to have her profile on public display. This safety precaution is a well-known function of MySpace that has been put into place to protect younger users from inappropriate content and contact from older users. The girls who created a page at an older age were less likely to adjust their age, but were, therefore also less likely to put their page on private.

Sam, a Junior, explains why she was not concerned about having her page on “public” view:

_I don’t think it’s a big deal like, if you’re careful and you don’t put your address on there. Like sometimes on facebook they (other people) put their phone number or something. I would never do that. So, just like how smart you are about what you put on there I guess. And like people who are really slutty in their pictures and stuff I don’t know, just, don’t go there. It’s the Internet like, everyone can see it._

In this comment, Sam expresses her awareness of how “everyone can see it,” everyone being all Internet users, and she enacts caution by simply being careful of what she posts, rather than taking the extra step in setting her profile to private. Sam continues to warn parents and adults about potential misuse of MySpace:

_Make sure you know, like how well do you know your kid and what they’re up to._
. . . You should monitor them, especially if they’re younger maybe and make sure they’re not putting anything up, bad pictures, or they’re using it for like the right reasons.

Sam was number one in her class academic ranking when I spoke with her and very confident in her self-presentation. She did, however, have an interesting picture posted in her profile that demonstrates the notion of personal fable and apparent hypocrisy. Sam posted a picture of her tattoo. “Well the one (picture) with my tattoo is just bad, I really need to get that one down. . . . My parents don’t know I have a tattoo, please don’t tell them, cause I will die” [laughs]. This tattoo is clearly taboo, yet permanently inked onto her hip and posted for the public to see. Yet Sam just explained safe MySpace use by advising users to be careful what they post and urging parents to “know what your kid is up to.” This conflicting action between “knowing how to behave,” and yet acting against this knowledge is typical of adolescents in their cognitive stage of development.

Both Annabelle and Sam offer advice to adults regarding “younger kids” behavior. They have set themselves on a “higher” moral ground, yet are acting in ways that suggest they have not been able to connect their judgmental principles to their own behaviors, just the behaviors of others.

Toni, a senior, also gives advice to parents and adults regarding their children’s MySpace use. She differentiates between her self, an older more mature MySpace user and the younger more reckless MySpace user:

Kids who are like between the ages of 12 or 14 are getting on there, or even younger, and they’re chatting or going to chat rooms trying to meet people and I
guess they don’t want their child to say something or meet somebody who asks ‘em some really weird questions about them or like or what they like to do.”

Toni understands why parents might be a “little antsy” but explains:

Then again, it also depends on what the child says cause if it leaks some information or tells their home address or like just go a long with what the person is saying, then I don’t think they should do that cause that’s going to get them in a whole lot of trouble.

Toni had her public MySpace page plastered with images and newspaper article links to her dance team and choir competitions. These images and articles had both Toni’s first and last name and the schools with whom she competed. Additionally, she boldly posted her college selection. Therefore, with this sort of included information on her MySpace page, anyone could find Toni if interested as well as know the specific sorts of things she was interested in. Once again, Toni, like Sam, has created a personal fable or demonstrated apparent hypocrisy as she differentiates her online behaviors from “younger” users. They know right from wrong, yet are unable to enact the corresponding behaviors with each.

Adolescent Identity through Friendships: On and Offline.

Reinforcing and maintaining friendships.

Overwhelmingly, the girls almost all attributed the very reason for joining MySpace to their friends. When asked why they joined MySpace, many replied that they were encouraged to join because of friends or siblings. “My friends were like “oh yeah MySpace,” and I was like “MySpace? What’s that?” and my friend helped me get on it”
(Annabelle). Kiki reiterates, “*Everyone wants me to get one, I’ll just like get one.*” Kiki’s statement about how “everyone” wants her to get one reflects the notion of adolescent egocentricism. This concept suggests that Kiki has convinced herself that the world is waiting for her MySpace page and she is doing the world a favor by joining in. Annie exclaims, “*Oh because a lot of people had ‘em [MySpace pages] and it’s like cause most people put theirs on private, so it’s so I could see all my friends’ MySpaces.*” And Mya gushes, “*my best friend got one and I was like ohh I want one and she was like yeah I’ll make you one, so we started working on it, took a while cause we wanted it to be really cute and everything so …*”

Mya was not the only girl to have help from a friend when constructing her page. This raises an interesting point in the construction of identity. As teenagers perform identity, present identity, and manipulate identity in order to fit in with a social group, teenagers are afforded an opportunity through the medium of MySpace to physically assist their friends in the creation of an online identity. Cat explained that her friend also had something to do with her initiation to MySpace; her friend “*helped me [Cat] like start it, like put it together.*” Nadine’s friend, Becca, made her page, and Ellen completely surrendered control over her online identity to a friend:

*My friend made me one like a long time ago, like maybe two years ago, and um, but I’d never gone on it cause I never knew she actually made it, well like I, I asked her to, but I didn’t know she, like that it was ever finished, and then my friend just like redid the whole thing like a year ago cause like I’m not real good with computers so she did it for me.*
New ways to communicate with friends.

In addition to creating a MySpace page for the purpose of keeping up with their friends, the girls also joined on for the practical purpose of keeping in contact with long distance friends. Toni: “a lot of my friends had one and plus friends who I really don’t see as often like who go to different schools had one so I wanted to keep in contact with them.” Haley also joined in order to stay in touch with distanced friends, “Well one of my friends had it and I don’t really get to see her that much so it was just a way to communicate with her.” Nadine describes her reason for signing on to MySpace as one of necessity as well:

I didn’t have a cell phone at that point and it was a good way to just like keep in touch and then like over the summer and a way to like talk to friends, to like talk about what we were going to do next week.

And Renee notes the difficulty keeping in touch with fellow classmates who graduate on to college. She uses MySpace “to communicate with most of my friends . . . a lot of them are in college and stuff so it’s a lot easier.” Brooke notes the very practical reason for having a MySpace page, keeping in touch with BOYS! “Because of going to St. Catherine’s it’s hard to like see the boys throughout the week.”

Not only are girls trying to keep up with their friends, joining on at their friends’ urging, and creating a page in order to keep in contact, they also are making pages to see what everyone else is doing. Sunny created a page so that she could “look at people’s pictures—ha ha!” Kylie thinks:

It’s really cool to be able to go to your friends’ MySpace and see what they’re up
Like one of my friends, Britney, she moved away a couple years ago and I just recently got in touch with her through MySpace.”

Like Annie who wanted access to her friends’ “private” pages, Jamie explains:

*Well I didn’t even want a MySpace page. I just got an account so I could look at people’s things, and then, I don’t know, everyone else had one, so I was like I’m gonna get one and my neighbor helped me out with it.*

Annie and Jamie’s curiosity about what everyone else is doing also suggests a neediness to join, of not being left out. While some might consider this voyeuristic, I believe this heightened interest in what “other people are doing” on MySpace does indeed correlate to the developmental stage of adolescence.

Jamie also states:

*I want to see what everyone does, like when I go on in the morning, I usually go to like Angie’s MySpace page and all the people that I hate just to see if Mason’s (Jamie’s ex) talked to them—and he has. And a lot of the stuff is about me. Like and Mason said that and leaves that stuff up there about likes and dislikes about Mason.*

Here, Jamie has admitted to checking out what her “audience” has written about her, all the while performing for some sort of reaction. In other words, Jamie has posted information to create a stir amongst her friends, she had a particular audience in mind, her “frenemies”³ and they reacted as she had hoped.

*Expression of Adolescent Identity on MySpace*

A lot of the times the girls’ pages reflected the activities and connections they had
with their offline friends. As Annabelle explained, “most of the people on my top friends
I talk to all the time.” This is common. As discussed above, most of the girls joined
because their friends were joining or even more, creating pages for each other. They
already knew at least one person with a page and they, therefore, created a page in order
to see what the fuss was about as well as stay in touch and stay “in the loop” with their
offline friends. Therefore, the pages themselves would also reflect the friendships that
casted them to join the social network in the first place. When I asked Bobbi, a
freshman, about her profile picture [she’s holding an umbrella out singing and dancing
with it on a sunny day] she responded, “We [friends] like to goof off and act weird all the
time. I don’t know, we just act like random, goofs and stuff. We just act goofy.” In
addition to her carefree profile picture she includes “Proud loser” in her profile quote.
When asked she responded, “In grade school everyone’s like Bobbi, you’re such a loser,
and I’m like, well yeah, I’m proud.” Bobbi explained this in a way where she was taking
pride in her “loser” status from grade school. She has re-positioned the put down into a
self-acclaimed, positive way—“proud loser.” Bobbi demonstrates her power over this
derogatory remark by owning up to it and proudly proclaiming this status on her
MySpace profile page.

Jamie also demonstrates her offline social network within her top eight—although
she’s made it into a top sixteen. Her top sixteen is extremely fickle—

Well the first girl, she’s like one of my best friends. She used to go here. She
doesn’t go here anymore. She’s just like always there for me. And then there’s
Jacob, he’s going to be my soon to be boyfriend, but not yet—he’s asking me out
on my birthday. Sadie’s been my best friend since kindergarten, Christof’s my neighbor, CJ is a friend of Jacob’s and Lauren’s been like my best friend since like this year.

Marna also switches around her top friends frequently due to offline pressure from friends:

The last thing I did was update some of my top friends—actually the top eight.

Brianna, she’s one of my friends and she gets on MySpace constantly. She’s like ‘I should be one of your like, your top two.’ And I was like ‘OK, whatever.’

Conversely, some of the girls chose to keep their “top friends” private. Mya chose not to put her friends publicly on display on her homepage because, “I don’t want people stealing my friends. I don’t want girls to go on guys’ pages that I talk to like say, ‘Hey baby.’ No, I don’t like that.” Mya keeps her page on private:

Because a lot of girls, like from other guys’ pages come to mine and they try to add me, but I deny ‘em so they can’t look at my stuff—or steal my pictures . . .

People do steal pictures and poses, like if you’re really pretty and they’re not, they’ll like take your pictures and act like they’re somebody they’re not.

Mya’s friendships offline are very guarded. She enjoys going to the mall and movies and Wal-Mart with friends. She keeps friends from different neighborhoods she’s moved from while growing up. While she does not allow her “top eight” friends to be visible, she does fiercely defend her relationships. Kylie remarked on the drama that can come from the top eight friends ranking, “There’s always drama, like, ‘You’re my number one,’ and it’s like, ‘You’re my number one, but I’m not yours.’”
Haley, a junior, was rather reticent when she met with me, and her page was one of the most creatively presented of the group. I was anxious to talk to her about her creative choices, but she kept rather quite in our meeting. On the front of her page was a Japanese anime-style drawing of a girl with “I’m a f***ing Princess” written above it. This, I felt was a bold statement and the girl behind the page must have a rather strong personality. However, like I said, she was rather quiet and shy . . . until I started asking her about all the pictures she’d included. Haley had several albums labeled, “Friends,” “Family,” “Pets,” etc. These pictures were all well framed and rather artistic (says me, an amateur photography lover). Most girls posted their pictures all together in one group, and I found Haley’s choice in separating the albums rather interesting. When asked about her decision, not only did Haley open up vocally, she also retrieved her very nice camera that she carried with her in her school bag to show me: Haley responded, “Just so people can see what they want to see and not have to see maybe what they don’t want to see.” She was offering the choices to friends, family, and audience to select their own viewing experience. Haley’s pictures of friends demonstrated a strong bond between three girls and some rather “out there” activities. In comparison to the majority of “friends pictures” Haley’s stood out. She included pictures of her friends posing on mall playland structures, odd-angle shots of screaming faces riding on roller coasters and other amusement park rides—Haley’s pictures did not include a bunch of girls in pastel colored dresses posing awkwardly in front of a family room mantel with tall skinny boys—Haley’s pictures reflected the types of friendships she had cultivated and a sense of style that did not jive with the majority.⁴
Ellen, a freshman, also provides details about how her page represents her offline friendships. I noticed a photo-booth style photo and asked her about it, “It was like at one of those places where they have the rides and everything, we are like, we act really young. We like to do stuff, like mess around.” In the picture, Ellen and her friends do look really young. I wonder why she would include a picture of her looking young when her “MySpace Age” says 100 years. Ellen continues:

I guess we go to other people’s houses a lot and just hang out, play pool, mess around. Like last weekend, our friend’s house had a pool and it was freezing outside, but we like threw one of my friends in. It was really funny. When I say we’re happy people, we’re just really hyper. I don’t think I could ever be with like a boring group.

This a balancing act between growing up and letting go of childhood.

Discussion

This chapter has looked at the ways in which adolescence is performed and presented through the girls’ everyday use of MySpace.com. It answers the questions, how are girls practicing adolescent identity both on and offline? The literature reviewed for this chapter looked specifically at the ways in which adolescence and Internet use go hand in hand. If the key developmental task of adolescence is the creation of or movement to a more stable sense of self or identity, adolescent identity practices on the Internet lend themselves to this developmental stage. Literature reviewed noted three key aspects to adolescence: experimentation with identity, reinforcement of relationships, and communicating with friends. The girls in this study participated in all of the above.
Experimentation with identity is a theme that will appear in each findings chapter. First, though, in this chapter it is framed under the context of an adolescent characteristic: a key practice of developing adolescents. The girls experimented with their identities on MySpace.com as well as in their relationships and roles offline. Kiki experimented on other social networking sites practicing many different facets of identity work. Other girls defined their adolescent identities in terms of age. They practiced with different ages, altering their ages on MySpace. They also differentiated their role in between adulthood and childhood as they offered advice to adults to how to keep an eye on children’s online behaviors. Others spoke to the imaginative audiences to which they performed. This was a notion identified by Valkenburg et al (2005) as they spoke about the ways in which teenagers perform to various audiences when presenting their selves online. The girls interviewed acknowledged various audiences when justifying choices in MySpace activity.

One of the main reasons the girls joined MySpace.com was in order to control and build their close friendships. The literature review discussed the ways in which adolescents use the Internet to reinforce relationships, and Clark (2005) recognized that adolescents needed close friends during adolescence and also adolescents needed to “ensure favorable peer evaluation” by controlling their interactions with others. The girls spoke of how they helped create friends’ MySpace pages, and how they joined in order to stay in touch with long distance friends; thus, controlling the appearance of their peer groups.

Finally the literature suggested that adolescents use the Internet to communicate
with friends, and more specifically, adolescents are “active agents” able to “manipulate information quickly” in order to “adapt to new technologies.” The girls demonstrated this concept clearly with their participation on MySpace, and their use of MySpace to “keep in contact” with their long distance friends. Also the girls would use MySpace to “see what friends were up to” as well as comment on one another’s pictures and blog postings. The girls were techno-savvy in their abilities to apply new background layouts to their pages and manipulate design qualities like where they placed their “top friends” and what sort of music streamed on their pages.

Above, I have detailed the ways in which the very nature of adolescence, curiosity and identity development, lends itself to the social networking site. The girls’ use of MySpace.com was both inspired by and focused on maintaining friendships whether they created profiles because their friends encouraged them to or they joined online in order to monitor their existing friendships. The girls’ friends played an integral role in their online participation. The research question, how are girls practicing adolescent identity is answered through the girls’ use of MySpace.com to experiment with identity, reinforce and build close friendships, and communicate with friends in innovative ways.

The following chapter continues analysis of my research findings regarding how adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com. This chapter discussed how adolescence lends itself to identity experimentation and how the Internet and MySpace.com in particular cultivates this quality of development. Chapter Five looks at the ways in which identity
is defined and translated by the girls both off and online.

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2 Interested in all things Japanese, like anime and J-Rock.

3 Friend + enemy = frenemy. I say “friend,” because Jamie has added and maintained their “friend” status on her MySpace page. When the interview happened, however, Jamie was in an obvious argument with several of these “friends”.

4 It should be noted that Haley was one of the first to respond to my emails and messages. It appeared as if Haley was more comfortable communicating with me through text rather than face to face. Additionally, a year after our first meeting, Haley’s page has completely changed. She now has gotten rid of the F***ing Princess picture and has replaced it with quotations of “love”—it seems as if Haley has found herself a boyfriend.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS: IDENTITY PERFORMANCE

Introduction

Identity is how you see yourself, how you define yourself—what words would you use to describe yourself? Identity is both personal and relational and above all things contextual. The definition of identity would change for different audiences—in other words, who’s asking? Ultimately though, identity is carefully orchestrated performance that requires constant adjustment and affirmation from all parties involved, the actor and the audience.

The purpose of this chapter is to isolate the notion of identity performance in the overarching research question: “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com?” and more specifically addresses the question:

- How can identity performance be researched/demonstrated through interviews and observation of social networking sites?

I answer this question by asking the girls about their own notions of identity and their views on how others (friends, family, and teachers) might see them. The girls defined identity. Their definitions varied from rather social notions of identity (i.e. who I’m related to, who I am to you) to physical and personal characteristics (i.e. blonde, age, funny, driven). It was necessary to hear and see how the girls were defining identity in order to listen to the ways in which they performed identity in their everyday lives and online. The girls were also asked how their performances changed for different audiences (friends, family, and teachers). Their answers varied from “I’m pretty much the same” in
all social contexts, to “when I’m with my friends, I can be more loud.” Then I asked the girls to point out important (to the girls) aspects of their MySpace pages and to interpret what sort of person they think their MySpace page represents. For the most part the girls’ interpretations of their MySpace pages reflected their own notions of “who they were.” In other words, the girls’ MySpace pages identified their creator (the girls themselves) as being the type of person the girls identified themselves to be.

Goffman’s (1959, 1967) theory of presenting self through performance to different audiences suggests that individuals have a very social and fluid identity that changes and shifts in various social contexts. The girls identified their own definitions of identity and illustrated the ways in which their identities change in different social relationships (Friends, family, and authority). Additionally, the girls highlighted various aspects of their identities online portraying social relationships, media interests, personality traits, and activity involvement on their social networking pages. Through the conversations with the girls, a better understanding could be reached about the way their identities are performed both on and offline.

This chapter explores the notion of identity performance by first having the girls answer: How do you define identity? Next, the girls discuss their various performances within different social contexts and settings (performing to friends, family, and teachers) when they answer the question: How do you think your friends might describe you? How would your parents describe you? What might your teachers say about you? In other words, how are girls’ performances of self influenced by their everyday offline lives and social contexts? Finally, And how are the girls performing identity on MySpace.com?
Literature Review

When it comes to reviewing the literature that’s been written about female adolescent identity on the Internet, I feel that Heilman describes it best: “Identity is much more complex than the simple labels we use that refer to the life stage, class, and gender” (1998, p. 184). However, as a review of the literature on identity performance on the Internet demonstrates, because identity is so complex, it is difficult to articulate without surrounding cultural contexts from which to use. Below I will first address the ways in which the literature has framed:

- how identity is considered a social construction, pulling from surrounding identifying factors;
- ways in which adolescent girls are a particularly salient group for studying identity;
- and, ways in which the Internet and, MySpace in particular, lends itself to identity exploration, performance, and expression.

*Identity as Social Construction: Framing Identity*

There are many ways to discuss and frame identity; however, the approach I most fully subscribe to is the idea of identity as social construction. Thiel explored identity through a constructivist or standpoint approach, she explained: “Identity is a complex social construction created and sustained by a subject’s location within a culture and society” (Thiel, 2005, p. 181). Abu-Lughod (1990) asserted, gender, age, race, class, geographical location and any characteristic that sets a person apart should be considered in identity formation. Both Butler (1990) and Hall (1996) emphasized the social
construction and performance of identity as they addressed the cultural influences on one’s self-definition of self. In other words, through cultural constructs or socially accepted definitions of what is normal or what is expected of different identifying aspects (or social roles), the individual will perform in relation to or in accordance with the cultural mores surrounding these aspects or roles. Thus, the individual must pull from surrounding cultural contexts in order to identify and identify with, as Hall said, “a narrative of self” or story one tells one’s self about oneself (Hall, 1996, p. 277). And this story is told using the surrounding cultural contexts as reference points. Butler (1990, 1991) suggested that identity is fragile and the roles are always shifting; thus the individual “must continually repeat their performances of identity in different contexts and for different audiences in order to provide some measure of stability and certainty” (Brown & Tappan, 1998, p. 53). Heilman mirrored Hall and Butler’s sentiment when describing the way in which expectations existing in “personal and public institutions” like family and school influence our sense of “who we are and who we can become” (1998, pp. 182-183). Heilman explained that an unavoidable experience in adolescent identity development comes from a constant social positioning (1998, p. 202). Interestingly, Valkenburg et al (2005) also utilized the social and relational understanding of identity in differentiating between an individual’s singular “self” but “many different identities.” According to many, the identities (note the plural) vary across relational contexts such as family, peer groups, and school (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Valkenburg et al., 2005). Valkenburg et al (2005) defined identity as a representation of the “aspect of the self that is accessible and salient in particular contexts and interacts
with the environment” (pp. 384). Once again, this emphasized an extremely contextual and socially constructed understanding of identity.

Is it safe to assume that the act of “constructing” identity through the social and cultural contexts surrounding the individual is also an act of performance? Goffman (1959) alluded to the notion that the self devises social portraits for others to consume. These social portraits (or performances) were “adopted to reveal conformity with prevailing codes” and these codes were gathered from the social surroundings and cultural contexts in which the individual resides and desired to reveal (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008, pp. 240-241).

Baumeister and Muraven found “the relationship of identity to social context can be understood in terms of adaptation” (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996, p. 405). This can be explained as an individual’s identity adapts to different social contexts. Yes, this notion is postmodern and performative in nature as well. Postmodern because it suggests a fluid state of identity; an individual has multiple selves for multiple situations--and performative because an individual must present his or herself to an audience given certain situations. According to Baumeister and Muraven:

The concept of adaptation is useful because it does not imply mere passive acquisition of identity by individuals, but it also does not overstate the scope of self-determination. History, culture, and the proximate structure of social relations create a context in which the individual identity must exist. (1996, p. 405)
In other words, a person’s past experiences added to his or her own present identity and provides schema for handling differing situations. A person presented his or her changing self to the changing world.

Thiel’s 2005 study situated identity performance and the social construction of identity within varying social contexts:

By understanding the process of identity construction, we may also understand the degree to which such roles and preferences are conveyed online. Central to this particular study is the notion that social roles and preferences are formed in large part before adulthood—specifically, during adolescence. (Thiel, 2005, 182)

Much of media technology usage is tangled up with adolescents’ notions of the “real world.” This age group develops within a dominant cultural system of meaning making “which is in large part an effect of the dominant mediated discourses surrounding them in conversations with parents and teachers (Finders, 1996), fashion magazines (Currie, 1999; Duke, 2000; Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Durham, 1996; McRobbie, 1982, 1997; Milkie, 1994), romance novels (Christian-Smith, 1993; Rogers-Cherland, 1994), and the Internet and computer-mediated technologies (Currie, 1999; Durham, 2001; Lewis & Finders, 2002; Sefton-Green, 1998; Stern, 1999)” (Thiel, 2005, pp. 182-183). In other words, the cultural contexts and dominant mediated discourses that surrounded the developing adolescent are what influence the development and expression of self that somehow fits into the dominant cultural context. The Internet, once again, offered limitless models from which to choose and adapt. Thus, it is imperative to explore the
ways in which the Internet contributes to the social construction of the adolescent female identity.

*Identity and the Adolescent Girl*

As demonstrated in Chapter One, identity experimentation and development is especially poignant during the adolescent years. During this time, the adolescent’s social contexts, relationships, and greater overall involvement, requires them to make sense of who they are and where they fit in within the context of a larger society in which they reside. Theorists have recognized that identity development is distinct for men and women and these distinctions relate to the expectations of various social and cultural contexts with which the individual exists (Erikson, 1963; Lykes, 1985; Sampson, 1985; Butler, 1990). The various social contexts that influenced the identity and gender identity development in adolescents came mostly from personal institutions like family and friends/peer groups, as well as “public institutions such as schools” (Heilman, 1998, p. 182-183). Grisso & Weiss (2005) noted that within the social construction of identity, girls are “responding to the need to have an identity, a self, in a highly demanding environment” (p. 22).

Deborah Merskin (2005) discussed the cultural demands on gender identity for adolescent girls. She explained that for many girls, “identity is largely shaped through images of themselves seen in movies, television, magazine, and music” (2005, p. 53). Further, during adolescent identity development, girls are faced with “intense self-consciousness and self-scrutiny” and in turning to these pop culture icons and outlets for models of “self,” the Internet has only expanded the options and choices girls have from
which to choose. Scodari mimicked this sentiment by referencing the history of literature that addresses girls’ position as social actors performing identity in relation to cultural products (McRobbie, 2000; Mazzarella & Pecora, 1999), and argues that the Internet must be factored in to the study of how girls are pulling from surrounding cultural constructs to present and perform self and gender (2005, pp. 106-107).

Identity Online: MySpace, My Identity

As mentioned above, identity is a “complex social construction created and sustained by a subject’s location within a culture and society” (Thiel, 2005, p. 181). As the Internet and more specifically, social networking sites like MySpace.com, have become so prevalent in adolescent girls’ lives, it is imperative to explore the ways in which the culture and society of online social networking influences the construction of a self-identity. In other words, we must take into consideration the fact that we are now finding ourselves in new “locations with a culture and society”—these locations include our online presence and online presentations of self. Thus, online identity construction and performance has become an “enormous consideration” in the process of communicating identity among adolescents (Thiel, 2005). The shifting and expanding locations of cultural and societal influences from which the adolescent must situate his or her self becomes an added process in identity performance: “Negotiation is often located directly through the discourse of online communication—specifically through language use, social networking, and power negotiation among peers as well as a general surveillance of the social online landscape” (Thiel, 2005, 185).
Other authors, like Brake (2008), referred to identity performance as a “production.” More specifically, as Brake quoted boyd (2006):

The dynamics of identity production play out visibly on MySpace. Profiles are digital bodies, public displays of identity where people can explore impression management. Because the digital world requires people to write themselves into being, profiles provide an opportunity to craft the intended expression through language, imagery and media. (Brake, 2008, p. 286)

It is interesting to me, both in my own research of adolescent girls’ performance of self on MySpace, as well as in my exploration of literature written about girls’ identities on the Internet, that teenagers are not as likely to “fake” identities or assume “false” personages in their online presence. In other words, the popular press and moral panic surrounding teenage girls online would have us believe that young teens are assuming false identities and are more likely to get in trouble by pretending to be someone they are not online. This relates to early literature (Turkel, 1995) and the notion of the disembodied self. Earlier Internet studies hailed online spaces as places for experimentation and play. However, through my research as well as more recent studies, it has been confirmed that teenagers are actually more open to portraying close likenesses to their self and work on performing online identities most like their perceived offline identities:

Scholars have found that rather than actually pretending to be someone else, the only place where some adolescents may feel comfortable expressing what they feel to be their “true” identity is in fact online (Tobin, 1998, p. 123), and
adolescents acknowledge a pureness (Clark, 1998) in their online relationships that is not present in their real-world ones. (Thiel, 2005, 185)

As Brake said, “The providers of the online spaces where identity-related texts are produced often frame them as being spaces for untrammeled self-expression” (2008, p. 287). In other words, social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook allow and encourage the adolescent user to freely be who they are. The very name of the site, “MySpace,” according to Brake, “emphasizes the profile creator’s individual autonomy and ownership” (2008, p. 287). And as Merchant’s research reinforced, “Perhaps this is a reflection of this particular age or gender group who may be too preoccupied with establishing and confirming their own identity in relation to their peer group to try on a different identity” (Merchant, 2001, p. 299).

Findings

For this chapter, I have allowed the girls to reveal identity, identify identity, present identity, and discuss identity on their own terms through their own voice, ultimately performing identity. The girls were asked to “define identity” and to “describe self.” The following addresses their responses. Apparent themes in the girls’ definition of identity include affirmation of my initial beliefs: how you see yourself and how others see yourself. This also includes how you think about yourself and how others think about you and the “things” that make you you. Briefly I’ll discuss the girls’ definition of identity. But where the true distinguishing factors come out is in conversations about self. This is where both a MySpace user and I would be able to “see” the girls and come up with my/our own “thoughts’ about the girls. The descriptions of self, the girls’
interests, “characteristics’ and “things that make you you” are more apparent and most definitely more interesting than the “definition of identity.” For these girls, and for this researcher, the “presentation and performance of self” is where the vibrancy comes. The girls describe self in terms of their own identifiers as well as how they feel others—friends, family, and teachers—might describe them. This also includes descriptions of their public performances of self found on their MySpace pages—how are these pages presenting the girls’ selves?

*Girls Defining Identity*

First I will discuss the girls’ definitions of identity, and then I will include the girls’ descriptions of self, and their predicted descriptions of self in terms of others (social self). Finally these self-descriptions will be explored in relationship to the girls’ presentation of self on their MySpace pages.

*Identity defined: Like what it means to me? A teen’s perspective*

For the most part it was easier for the girls to respond to my request to “Define identity,” as opposed to my question about their own identity. The girls preferred to provide me with responses, like questions, like definitions requested of them in a classroom as opposed to describing, or self-disclosing, information about their self. The responses to “Define identity” came quickly, whereas descriptions of self both self-prescribed and predicted by others, were slow and difficult to retrieve. However, as you will see in the following analysis, the interesting identity markers were disclosed when describing self as opposed to defining identity.
Themes in the girls’ definitions of identity include: views of self; others’ views of self in terms of relational (what I am, you are not and vice versa); and descriptions/identifications of traits both physical and personality characteristics. For instance, Bobbi answered, “Identity is like who you are and like what people think of you and how you feel about yourself,” thus including all three thematic responses. Bobbi, a freshman suggested that the definition of identity must include self, self in relation to others, and personality traits. Other girls’ responses, however, were less inclusive and more one-sided.

Kiki, Mya, Toni, Cat, and Nadine simply defined identity in terms of self—who they were as people. Their definitions did not include relational aspects to identity or identifying markers like physical or personality traits. “Who you are as a person, what makes you you,” and “How you express yourself,” were typical responses in this vein. Abby waveringly described, “Identity is who you are, like what kind of person you are, I think.” Nadine expands this notion by explaining that identity is, “who you are as a person, and like what you want to be and like what you want to make of yourself.” Other girls began to become more inclusive in describing identity in terms of both self and relational self: “Um, how you look at yourself or how other people look at yourself,” is a typical response. Cat’s response mirrors this shift away from defining identity within an individualistic point of view to including more relational understanding, “How you express yourself, and how you show people who you are.” And Jamie sums it up simply, “Who I am, who I am to you, I guess.”
As the responses moved away from the individualistic view, they became more relational—definitions reflected identity in terms of its situation and position in a social world. Elise thinks identity is “however people see you,” and Renee explains it’s how you “act to [sic] different situations.” This is more of a situational, contextual understanding of identity. Annie even goes as far as to include historical background to her definition of identity: “How people know that person, their personality, their umm, history, and what schools they go to.” Marna’s response is similar: “I think identity is like who your friends are and how you see yourself in the world.” Once again, this intimates a contextual understanding of identity.

Finally, when it comes to defining identity, some girls focused their responses simply on the physical, exterior, identity markers such as style and body. Kiki projects that identity is both “your personality and your sense of style and stuff.” Ellen adds, “the way you look and stuff, like what color hair you have, the eyes you have, and your height.” Maria also extends her definition to include “a lot of things,” she says, defines identity as “who you want to be, who you think you are, a lot of things make up identity. What kind of music you listen to, your world views, your family, your friends, and your influences.” Her definition allows for both describing self, others’ view of self and exterior influences like family and friends.

The Many Faces of Self—Girls’ Performances ofOffline Identities

As I mentioned above, asking the girls to define identity was simple enough, it served as a sort of icebreaker. When I asked the girls to describe themselves, the responses were much more varied and much more difficult to express. However, when
describing self, the girls made references to the typical definitions of identity, both individualistic and relational. What was interesting to me though is the findings of how teenage girls are describing their identities and how they are performing identity both on and offline. Where are these two types of performances overlapping and where do they converge and disperse? When Brooke responded to my request to “define identity,” she remarked, “Who you are and like, and what you want to tell people about yourself.” This is what I was looking for. I wanted to hear what the girls wanted to tell me about themselves and see where those disclosures corresponded and differed with their “telling of self” on their MySpace pages.

**Describing self: Like who I am?**

In describing self, the girls, for the most part, painted a rather upbeat picture of their selves. Happy, friendly, funny, outgoing, spirited are common examples from the initial descriptions provided to me by the girls. These initial responses, the descriptors that cast the girls in a positive light, start the conversations and lead into more interesting disclosures—“Sometimes I can be obnoxious” Sunny proclaims, “I’m very loud and I’m very moody—laughs—ahh, I don’t know, I like to listen to people so I guess I’m a good listener. I like to help people a lot.” When asked to describe their own identity or to answer, “Like who I am?” the responses were overall positive. It would be best to allow the girls to identify “who they are” explicitly:

**Annie:** umm, outgoing, and uh, energetic [laughs], I don’t know.

**Bobbi:** I have no idea. I guess funny. . . . I have no idea what I want to be when I grow up. I did and then I wasn’t sure and then I was like no I don’t want to do
that. I want to be in a rock band—[laughs].

Elise: oh, that’s hard, um, I guess friendly, artistic, creative.

Ellen: fun, um, happy, um, long pause, um, I don’t know. Like I like being happy, I don’t like being sad, so I like to like make everything happy.

Kylie: Uh, unique, smart, um, outgoing, open to different experiences, -- throw in caring.

Maria: Um, I pretty much know who I am, I’m a little crazy, pretty blonde, I make, I make pretty wise decisions, um I’m good with people, um I’m good with my studies, I get along really well with my family, a lot of good friends, good influences and bad. I’m a freshman this year.

Brooke: That I’m, that I’m just a teenager, pretty much I don’t like to give out a lot of information, unless it’s like its private, which I think it is actually. Um, I don’t know, fun, easy going, just likes to have a good time I guess. [laughs].

Jamie: Um, crazy, um, I don’t know, I guess, everyone just says I’m crazy, and a party animal and stuff. When I’m working I’m real serious.

Nadine: Umm, bouncy, probably, very talkative, most of the time, sometimes I’m like really hot and cold though—like just like some days I’ll be like get out of my face and other days I’ll be willing to talk to you, you know—just tired, usually. I guess I’m athletic –I um, skate.

Haley: Um [long pause] friendly, I’m just um really um happy, Um, funny, um, maybe crazy, I can be crazy, but, Um well, I’m not as, well, I’m smart, but I’m a lazy student, so uh yeah.
Jocelyn: Um, your typical teenager I guess? I don’t know, I dance, I’m a junior in high school, the oldest of three, and my favorite color is pink. [Laughs].

Kiki: We’ll you’re probably not familiar with this word because it is a Japanese word, but its otaku, and basically it means that it is someone who’s a really big fan of like anime and Japanese stuff, and that’s definitely me. It (otaku) also kind of means nerd but I can’t really deny it, cause I’m taking like 3 AP classes next year, and if I’m right I’ll be exempt from all the required courses my freshman year of college so . . . I’m very artistic.

Mya: umm, outgoing, fun, energetic, sporadic—funny, I like to make my friends laugh and everything . . . Yeah, I’m just like that (outgoing, fun, energetic, funny, crazy) all around, I don’t like hide it anywhere I go unless it’s somewhere you’re not supposed to act like that—like church or something . . . I’m very artistic I should have told you that.

Samantha: Um, I would like people to think that I’m like different but not just like unique in a way that I’m not like everyone else and that I don’t like always follow the trends or like go along with what everyone else thinks is cool or something, I just kind of try to be my own person.

Abby: Um, I think I’m an outgoing person, kind of unique if you want to call it that, I’m myself I guess. . . . Yeah, no, I mean, I know that there’s like a limit where I need to be like more mature and other times when I don’t have to be mature like, other than that yeah, I’m pretty much crazy and outgoing.

Annabelle: fun, energetic. I’m always happy. I’m a happy person. Loving and
caring. I’m not a very sad person. Outgoing, I guess I’m pretty much just happy, sometimes I get upset, sometimes I can be obnoxious.

**Bea:** Um, I can be very random, I like to talk a lot, once you get to know me, um, I’m kind hearted, I do not like hurting other people’s feelings even if they make me mad, um I’m an all around nice person I guess. I know when to talk and when I should really be quiet. Like I don’t like getting into trouble, so I like choose not to talk during class, but like during lunch or outside of school, I talk a lot, so sorry, I should have clarified that.

**Cat:** I guess, ah, that I’m a free spirit, I am creative, I’m like an open and accepting person, um, crazy I guess sometimes, that’s a description of me, and um, um, a lot of people like get, like er a different impression of who I am just by looking at or whatever than a lot of people that know me, I don’t know what word to use for that.

**Marna:** Um, well, I go to St. Catherine’s, I’m an eighteen year old, um I have a family and friends . . . Um, [long pause], I guess, like I’m outgoing and friendly um, sarcastic. And, uh, I’m diabetic.

**Renee:** Uh, different from others, I read a lot so I relate myself to books and stuff—like characters in a book. I look taller than I am. I like movies, but I love book. Um, right now I’m reading Pride and Prejudice—and I’m more like Elizabeth Bennet—no, it’s just, she’s kind of sarcastic and views stuff with a different kind of light.

**Sunny:** I just, I don’t know, just people sometimes in general, like if someone
speak one wrong thing, that could probably ruin my whole day. [Laughs.] Just cause I get angry like easy, I don’t say that I get angry easy but like but I just get frustrated . . . I was going to do like special needs (education) but I, I decided not to cause like every time I see those kids I like cry so—that wouldn’t be a good job for me. [Laughs]. I love music.

Toni: um, energetic, um, joyful, um, just laughable, and I guess, very kind. Um, I do, like sometimes I can be determined and then I can just get lazy, then there is the I am pretty determined to do what I need to do.

In other words, girls identify themselves by the relationships they maintain. The following sections elaborate the ways in which the girls are able to self-describe themselves in relation to the closest people they know: friends and family.

Friends like me: Like how my friends see me?

When it came to seeing how the girls projected what their girlfriends would describe them as, it became clear that the girls interviewed felt that their friends experienced the most fun, most outgoing aspect of their selves. Some of the girls included relational terms like “loyal,” “caring,” and “good listener.” But for the most part, with the exception of Kiki, Bobbi, and Cat, most of the girls see their girlfriends as the people they can be most “crazy,” “funny,” and “energetic” selves around.

Ellen, Jamie, Renee, Brooke, and Abby all begin by saying their friends would see them as “crazy.” Ellen explains:

We’re just like, when I say happy people, we’re really just hyper and I don’t think I could ever be with like a boring group—Yeah, like well, I mean I couldn’t like be
in a group where people aren’t crazy or fun, like me.

Jamie extends the definition of “crazy” to include “party animal.” Along with “crazy” often goes “loud.” Samantha, Jamie, Jocelyn and Kiki follow up crazy with “loud.” Kiki elaborates, “they’d definitely say I’m loud, I don’t know, I guess they might say I’m flashy.” This emphasis on crazy seems to include boisterous, bubbly behavior. The girls value the quality of crazy, but do not seem to reference “crazy” along with weird or psychotic. Instead, crazy, to the girls, appears to embody spontaneity, happiness, and boisterousness.

Mya, Toni, Kylie, and Samantha begin by assuming their friends would describe them as “funny.” Funny includes “weird” according to Toni, and funny also often follows “hyper.” Renee defines funny as: “um humorous cause I always make them [her friends] laugh.” Marna emphasizes the importance of laughing in her identity with friends. Laughing a lot, according to Marna, marks her as outgoing and is something she does only with friends and people she knows well, “If I’m not with a group of people that I really know, then I’m not outgoing. I’m more myself with my friends and family.” Kylie also is funny and “laughs a lot” but she associates this “outgoing” quality with being a “risk taker” or in her words, “being open to new things . . . . without getting in trouble.” Once again, as demonstrated with the girls’ association with the word “crazy,” “funny” seems to emphasize and embrace the notion of laughter, happiness, and spontaneity.

In addition to describing their social-peer-related selves as crazy and funny, the other thematic term is “caring.” When Nadine describes herself in her friendship role as “caring” she follows the “caring” with a “?” (note the “?”). When I asked Nadine why
the question behind “caring” she explains “I don’t know, I’m not putting words in their [friends] mouths, you know what I mean?” Mya defines caring to include “if my friends have problems, they’ll call me or text me and we always talk about it---they ask me for a lot of advice.” Brooke and Bea also emphasize their role as caretaker: “I’m probably like someone to talk to cause, I’m normally the one that people come and talk to about stuff,” Brooke explains. She also does note that this role is demanding at times because it keeps her busy. But Brooke likes the role of confidante: It can get stressful at times, but yeah, I like it.” Bea feels she’s “Caring and loyal. Like I don’t like telling, like if someone tells me a secret, I don’t like tell other people. It’s not my business to tell other people.”

For the most part, the girls who emphasize the caring aspect of their identities note that their definition of caring includes role of confidante, talking and listening.

Three girls mentioned areas outside of “funny,” “crazy,” and “caring,” to describe themselves. Kiki, Bobbi, and Cat all mentioned rather negative characteristics about themselves that they thought their friends would identify. Kiki and Bobbi both said that their friends would call them “weird.” “They’d probably call me weird or something,” explains Bobbi. Bobbi’s MySpace page also proclaimed that she was a “Proud Loser” to her friends. She explains that this nomenclature comes from her friends in grade school who always called her “such a loser.” Cat also first identified her friends’ concept of her as being “mean.” Cat told me that most people assume she’s mean because of her appearance. Kiki also associated her “weirdness” with her choice in style and haircut. And Bobbi’s MySpace page features a profile picture of her “acting” like a loser to perhaps live up to her friends’ name for her?
The girls found it easy to discuss the ways their friends might describe them. The girls were able to discuss aspects of their identity through the voices of others and for the most part proudly enacted their friends’ projected labels. Their friendships highlighted certain aspects of their personalities and the girls surrounded themselves with the people that brought out their crazy, funny, caring selves. In other words, the girls embody the identities their friend’s project upon them and proudly perform to the personality qualities their friends expect.

*They’re your family: Bound by genes.*

After asking the girls to discuss the ways in which they thought their friends might describe them, I asked the girls to explain the ways in which their families might identify them. For the most part, the girls were more hesitant to detail the ways in which they portrayed their familial selves. Also, in contrast to the mostly positive ways the girls identified with their friends, their families were more likely to see the more negative qualities of the girls’ personalities. When it comes to describing their selves in terms of familial relations, the girls used words like “lazy,” “rebellious,” “dramatic,” and even words like “spoiled brat” and “bitch” came into our discussions. Otherwise, the girls also said their families and parents would see them in the same light as their friends (i.e. crazy, loud, and caring).

Haley expounds upon the notion of “laziness.” Her family would probably describe Haley as “not helpful. I have different attitudes towards my family and my friends.” Mya also notes her tendency towards laziness: “um lazy, um, but I’m helpful though sometimes.” Kiki, Samantha and Jocelyn note their rebellious sides reserved for
their families; however, they contextualize their rebellion with style and piercings. Kiki acquired her rebellious identity by piercing her cartilage without parental permission. Samantha highlights her unknown-to-parents tattoo both in our interview as well as on her MySpace page. And Jocelyn flippantly explained that her rebellion manifests in clothing choices unknown to her parents.

Brooke, Jocelyn, Abby, Nadine and Renee all note that their family would view them the same way their friends view them. Nadine explains, “Probably the same way as my friends would see me” is the way her family would describe her. Whereas Jamie, noted her family would not notice the qualities her friends see in her at all: “They don’t really know my outside side, like they don’t know how I go out and hang out with my friends and party and stuff.” In fact, Jamie’s dad, she speculates, would probably call her a “bitch.” Jamie explains:

Um my dad would be just like you’re a bitch, like he can be so mean sometimes—but I’m like so mean to my dad like. . . . It’s just like me and my dad we’re just like we’re playful, he thinks I’m mean, but he also says like you’re so mean to your friends, and I’m like, ‘No I’m not.’ And I’m not.

Jamie’s not the only one who feels her family might not describe her in ways that her friends see her. Cat also feels her family gets a different version of her self when she’s around them:

I’m more like quiet and like not as out going sort of cause I don’t really know or like have that much to talk to them about, and so, like I’ll have like little conversations with them but they’re just not like the kind of conversations that I
would have with like my best friend or anything. They don’t like always last extremely long or get in, like in-depth or anything like that.

Mya sums the discrepancy between friends and family by saying “I play the role, the baby, the spoiled brat, my brothers and sisters think I’m spoiled—I know I’m spoiled.”

Here, the girls recognize that their identities do change in different social contexts. They recognize that their presentation of selves shifts in different dyadic relationships. In other words, the girls assume “roles” in different social contexts.

In addition to the negative qualities and the similar crazy, loud and caring qualities shared with family and friends, there is also “nice.” As in “sugar and spice.” Annie explains, “I’m more like outgoing with my friends than family really—cause I can be myself with my friends but I have to be well behaved with my family.” Bea notes that her mom has called her gentle:

My mom said that I’m that I have like a gentle type personality, cause my mom knows that I don’t like hurting people’s feelings even if I’m in return being hurt, I don’t like hurting the person who’s hurting me.

Nice, to Annie, is well behaved. Mya also notes her “niceness” when she stepped up to the plate in helping her mother after her mother had surgery. Elise and Maria are “compassionate” and “considerate”

Sunny and Bobbi suggest that their family might describe their identities as “moody” or “reserved.” Both girls mention that there are certain days when they just want to be by themselves and stay in their rooms. Sunny explains, “I’m just kept, self-kept, I’m just, I like to be alone sometimes, very social—yeah, I don’t know, I guess it
depends on my mood that day.” Whereas Kylie and Tony both note that their family would mention their “dramatic” nature: “Umm, I’m a drama queen [to my parents] cause I do theatre,” Toni says. I thought Toni and Kylie’s mention of dramatic would relate more to over-the-top behaviors and reactions; however, they both mention drama in the context of their personal interests in performance and theatre. Kylie does extend the notion, though, to a degree, of being dramatic in different contexts. She plays the role as Mya does:

I live with my mom and my step dad most of the time, and I visit my dad and my step mom on weekends---so um, it can get confusing, but for the most part, [I’m] loving, dramatic, um mature—depends on the situation. Um, I guess dramatic is pretty much like when I’m with my mom because my step dad, we like to bicker a lot so I’m dramatic in that way. (Kylie)

Straighten Up: Identity outside the comfort zone and inside the teacher zone.

There is not much variation in the ways the girls see themselves in authoritative environments. For the most part three themes emerged as the girls described themselves according to their teachers or classroom personas. The three themes were: depending on the class and/or teacher I either talk and participate a lot or I’m very quiet, I don’t work to my potential, and I’m very determined. A few girls mentioned that they were “too talkative” and bad in the classroom, and the same girls also said they were procrastinators, therefore, bad in the classroom. Briefly, I’ll demonstrate the themes of the girls’ responses to the questions, “How do you think your teachers would describe you?”
“I guess it depends on the class,” Bobbi explains. Many of the girls mentioned that in the subjects they liked and the teachers they were comfortable with they were good students who participated a lot and had lots to say, “like English. I talk a lot in English. I give my opinion a lot.” Cat “participates most of the time in class with answering and or asking questions.” And Kylie, Samantha, and Abby mention the differences in their behavior relies on the teacher:

*I can be loud sometimes in classes it depends on what teacher it is . . . like if I’m really close to the teacher then I’ll joke around with the teacher. But some teachers I’m not as close to, so I’m usually fairly quiet.* (Abby)

And Kylie explains it further by mentioning that depending on the rigor of the class, her participation varies: “*There are just some classes that—okay this is going to sound really bad, but I know I can like slack off a little bit and still get a good grade.*” Samantha also notes that in chemistry she keeps her mouth shut because she’s not as confident in her abilities in chemistry, but in English Samantha excels and therefore participates a lot. So overall, the girls noted that in subjects they were confident in, they talked. The girls equated talking or participating in class as a good thing. I do too.

The next theme apparent in the girls’ responses regarding qualities their teachers might note is “not working to potential.” Haley, Mya and Renee all noted that they are bright; however, their teachers might say that they aren’t working hard enough. “*A lot of ’em [teachers] say I’m bright. Bright. Sometimes I don’t work to my potential, but I can, they always say you’re so smart and yeah, sometimes I’m argumentative if I don’t get my way,*” Mya illustrates. And Renee admits that her teachers might complain that she
“could show more potential.” The girls who mentioned their non-working potential were critical of themselves because they realized they could achieve and succeed in the classes if they would apply themselves.

Finally, and to the contrary, girls who mentioned that teachers might assume them to be “determined” also included terms like “dedicated, responsible, hard working, and driven.” Both Samantha and Toni noted that they saw it “on their report cards” that their teachers believed them to be “a joy to have in class” (Toni) and “a hard worker”. These girls were proud of their hard work and accomplishments. They recognized that their determination was a good and admirable quality.

Above I have discussed the ways in which the girls see themselves in varying social contexts. They recognize that there are different aspects of their personality that they reveal in different situations. In speaking about their “friend” identity, the girls were excited and verbose, highlighting positive qualities about their selves. In speaking about their familial identities, the girls tended to be a bit harder on themselves, mentioning qualities that they did not always find admirable. And finally when the girls discussed their classroom identities, they featured positive behaviors in the classroom (confidence, participation, determination) and they also were able to identify qualities about themselves that could also be considered less-desirable (quiet, procrastinating, and not working to their full potential). The final section to this chapter reveals the ways in which the girls then translate these multi-layered sides to their identities onto their MySpace pages.
Without interpreting the girls’ pages by my own observations, I allowed the girls to tell me and show me what sorts of identities were present on the MySpace pages. I wanted the girls to have ownership of their presentation of selves and detail to me how they feel their MySpace page represents them. Additionally, this section explores the ways MySpace use factors into their everyday lives; how the girls use MySpace in terms of design as well as how they are using the social networking site with friends. The following discusses the themes present in how and who the girls thought their MySpace pages represented them: fun, different, artistic, and friendly; how the girls managed to demonstrate these characteristics on their pages; and what do the girls do with their MySpace pages.

Who am I on MySpace?

For the most part the girls identified their pages to represent an individual who is fun, different, artistic, and friendly. Many of the girls left it at “fun.” Annabelle begins, “I don’t know what my profile represents, would you think its fun?” She chose to include bright “cute” colors avoiding “the dark stuff”. Annie also has a happy MySpace representation of herself by avoiding strange background layouts: “like if it’s like weird or abnormal, like blood, I don’t like that or like the gangster symbols or whatever.” Therefore Annie’s page has lots of bright “fun” colors. Haley thinks her profile represents a fun girl because she includes pictures of “all the fun things” she does. Haley’s pictures are “just a whole bunch of random” pictures that are not like other people’s whose pictures are just “like the same in like a row.” I believe Haley is
referencing the standard “before dance” poses that girls include, but truly I have no idea what she means by the pictures on other people’s profiles being “the same in a row.”

Sunny explains how her profile represents her:

\[ I \text{ guess like someone who’s like fun and easy to talk to cause that’s exactly who I am, like I try to be fun, I try to be easy to talk to. There’s a lot of pretty colors—it makes it look like I’ve got a lot of friends [laughs].} \]

Maria also wants her page to signify a fun girl, “I like my friends and I don’t like fake people especially [laughs], and that I’m entertaining and fun to be around I guess.”

Maria had a quote on her page that talked about “fake people.” Marna also thinks her page represents “a fun, interesting, nice person.” She says her page signifies this because she “really likes her profile picture,” and she has “Lorelei Gilmore from Gilmore Girls” on her page and “if you watch Gilmore Girls, I’m kind of like her. I guess.” Finally, Kylie demonstrates her fun side by including “all the stuff” she’s involved in, like drama club, dancing and different theatre productions.

Nadine, Haley, Brooke, Abby, Samantha and Jamie all feel their pages are up for interpretation. They mention that they know people will see whatever it is that they want to see about them on their pages. In other words, these girls are acknowledging an audience to their MySpace pages and feel that individuals who view their pages can think whatever it is they want about their pages. Nadine, Haley, Brooke, Abby, Samantha and Jamie would like to give an air of aloofness. Haley explains:

\[ Umm, \text{ I don’t know. Like I guess what kind of person I am without them having to get all personal and stuff and just saying everything out. Like just by looking at it} \]
you can probably tell some things about me without having to like ask me questions.

I followed this statement up with “So you say you want people to look at it and make some assumptions about you?” To which Haley responded, “Right, but not like a bad assumption.” Nadine also admits to the vagueness her page identifies her as:

Well, I mean, I would hope, I mean I know it must come off different for everyone but I would hope that it would be like, it would come off as someone who has a decent sense of humor and listens to good music. I mean I don’t want it to come off like I’m a bad person, but I want it to like, I hope that people realize that everyone’s a little different.

Perhaps Jamie explains it best. Her page represents, “Um, just basically who I am. Like whoever people think I am through it. I want people to be like ‘oh here she is.’ Whatever. Like get over it.” Abby responded to my question of who her profile represents, “I don’t really care what people think. Kind of an outgoing person?” And Samantha summarizes, “I don’t care if people look at it.” But then follows up with:

I want it [her page] to show like me. I guess, who I am, like I don’t know, someone who likes like music. . . . I don’t want to be like that [girlie girl]—like when people have like coach layouts. I don’t like it. It bothers me [laughs].

Do the girls really not care who their profile represents? It takes time to change background layouts, color choices, song selections. It takes time to list favorite bands, upload pictures, and re-type significant quotes from movies and songs. Nadine, Haley, Brooke, Jamie and Samantha all have pages with these items carefully controlled. Elise
admits that her page represents “Um, probably whoever I am that day. I uh, I change a lot, depending on what mood I’m in.”

*Producing my identity on MySpace.*

So how do the girls represent “whoever” they are that day? For the most part there are three key components: pictures of friends, quotes, and music selection. For Annabelle, whenever she feels “strongly about something or if [she] likes a quote” she’ll add it to her page. Abby also uses her quote to demonstrate her identity:

*I guess by my quote, people can kind of tell that I’m crazy and like, everything that I’ve wrote it kind of, I guess it kind of wraps me up in a way sort of like and you can understand where I’m coming from and like who I am.*

Kylie also mentions the writing on her MySpace page as having significance to identifying her identity. For Kylie the “about me” section is the most important aspect of her page: “I think it really shows who I am, you can like find out, like what I do, what I am, just by looking at that, which I think is really cool.” Toni also noted the importance of the “about me” section: “cause it’s just like, it’s explaining everything about me and what I like to do and just be like so people can get to know me.” Haley has a picture of a little angry cartoon girl that says, “I’m a F***ing Princess” underneath. When asked what the intention was behind including this picture, Haley simply responds, “I just liked it.” And for Renee, her background is the most representative of her personality.

Although Renee wanted her profile page to represent a “laid back” and “relaxed” individual, her profile background is of “Cloud,” a Final Fantasy character. This profile was the darkest in appearance. Cloud is not a warm and fuzzy kind of character, and
Cloud looks not very “laid back.” Renee explains:

My background—my one friend which I think her name is on there is Dark Shadow or something like that, uh we both love Final Fantasy and I put that up there . . . It’s a video game. Vincent Valentine is her favorite character—well he’s mine. She likes Cloud, but we always just kind of like uh make up stories about him or something.

So Renee selected a profile background that reflected her love of Final Fantasy as well as a tribute to her friend’s appreciation of “Cloud.”

Mya took great pains to show me how her profile pictures and background choices were color coordinated. She feels her page:

Pretty much describes just me, like all the stuff I wrote and all my pictures and [all my pictures] with my friends and everything and my little thing [pictures] with my brother and my sisters and all my friends, all my best friends, and everything.

Marna notes that the most important aspect of her MySpace page is “a little slide show there with my pictures. I really like looking at and taking pictures.” Sunny thinks her page best represents “Sunny” with “All of the pictures, like all the pictures of my friends and stuff.” And Abby also says that the most important part of her MySpace page is her top friends list, “just cause those are the people that I’m closest to.” So for Abby, her list of closest friends is the most significant identifier on her MySpace page.

Brooke, Maria, Toni, Jocelyn and Nadine all enjoy and change the music streaming on their page most frequently. They note that the music playing on their
MySpace page is one of the most important elements to their profile. Toni said when she logs on she enjoys looking at other people’s pictures and “just listen[ing] to the music cause that’s the one big thing that I like on there.” Nadine likes the music: “I like the music, like music is really really important to me.” Nadine even disclosed that “I would be rocking out in my room where no one could hear me” to the music featured on her MySpace page. Maria and Elise also mentioned the significance of their song selection on their pages. Maria said about the most important element on her page was the song: “Hmm the song probably—cause it can tell you probably about any mood the person’s in, if they’re in a good mood they’re probably playing a pop-y energetic music so.” Brooke also changes her song to match her mood:

I change the music because like it depends on like my mood of the day, like if I’m in like kind of like a sadder mood, I’ll put like kind of like ah, more mellow songs, or if I’m in like a really happy mood, it will be like a crazy song—just like it depends on my moods that’s what I’ll do.

And Elise admitted to changing her song often: “I change my song almost every day, I like a lot of different kinds of music and a lot of new stuff and I know all my friends learn about bands from my website.” Brooke also explores the different music available on MySpace: “Uh, I actually, to tell you the truth, what I do on MySpace is I go to the music section, that’s like where I’m normally at on MySpace when I’m on and I’m listening to like new music and stuff.” Finally, Jocelyn sums up music’s importance to her MySpace page: My music. . . .It’s just there, laughs, you just type in the name and it’s right there. [Music
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means] everything. I don’t know, laughs, I listen to music all the time.”

Discussion

In isolating the notion of identity performance from the overarching research question: “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com?,” it was necessary to first see how the girls were defining identity, and then look for the ways that the girls were performing identity both offline and on MySpace.com. Questions asked of the girls for this aspect were to find out how the girls were “being girls” or performing gender both on and offline. The girls were asked “What does it mean to be a teenage girl today.” Also the girls reflected on the positives and negatives of being a girl in today’s society. They also identified items on their MySpace pages that were particularly “girly” or girl specific, and also expressed in our interviews notions that were typical of teenage girl behavior (friendships and communication).

A review of the literature revealed three themes. Several authors subscribed to the concept of identity as social construction. For example, Thiel (2005) asserted that identity is “sustained” by a subject’s location within culture and society. This notion became evident when the girls defined identity using relational terms as in “how others see you” and “who you are friends with.” The girls also expressed varying degrees of identity differences when they situated themselves within different locations of relationships (i.e. friends, family, school). While many of the girls noted that their identities were rather stable, some admitted to the fact that they felt most true to themselves when with their friends.
Also, the literature stated that girls were an excellent group to study when looking at identity online because girls often shape their gender identity through images of themselves “seen in movies, television, magazines, and music” (Merskin, 2005). Renee thought she was most like “Elizabeth Bennet” from *Pride and Prejudice*, Marna associated herself with Lorelei from *The Gilmore Girls*, but none of the other girls explicitly made connections to specific characters from fictional entertainment. However, the girls did present their identities on MySpace by including quotes from movies and emphasizing the importance of their song selections. This leads nicely into the final section of the literature review: the ways the girls perform identity online. danah boyd (2006) discussed the ways in which individuals write themselves into being on MySpace and must take into consideration their digital bodies are presented on their profiles. In other words, the nature of the MySpace profile page allows the girls to perform their identity by publicly displaying their identities and producing their performances. So after I allowed the girls to voice their interpretations of identity, then describe their own identities, and speculate on the ways others might describe their identities, I asked the girls how their identities were present on their MySpace pages.

This chapter explored the ways in which girls performed identity, on and offline. It also answered the question as to how were girls defining identity. When defining identity as to “What does identity mean? And how do you define identity?” The girls’ responses divided into three categories: identity in terms of how one sees oneself, identity in terms of how others view the individual, and finally descriptions of physical and personality traits. After the girls defined what identity meant to them, they then describe
their own identities. For the most part the girls’ descriptions of their own identities mirrored their definitions of what identity meant: their selves were described in terms of their individualistic personality traits as well as their relational identities. So you can see that the girls have many different ways of describing and identifying self, but for the most part they borrow from collected and “socially acceptable” descriptors like, “nice, funny, crazy, unique, smart, outgoing” as well as descriptors that illustrate social relationships. The girls’ identities and descriptions of identities vary slightly when they start situating their selves in different relational locations (like friends, family, and school). The girls mostly described their identities to be similar from one social context to the next; however, they did disclose that the felt like they could be most like their own definitions of identity with their friends. As the girls described their identity performances with family and teachers, they tended to include more negative descriptors like “procrastinator” and “lazy.”

Finally I wanted to see how the girls were performing and practicing identity online on their MySpace pages. This question was answered by asking the girls to show me what was most important on their MySpace pages and also by having them tell me who they were on MySpace. The girls responses to who their MySpace page represented very much aligned with their own individual descriptors of their identities: fun, different, artistic, and friendly. These positive and upbeat identity markers translated themselves online on MySpace.com. What were the activities and MySpace practices employed when interacting with the social media? The girls enjoyed looking at pictures of friends, reading comments, and playing around with the music selections on their pages. They
noted how pictures, quotes, and music were the most telling qualities of who they were on MySpace.

To answer the question, “How can identity performance be researched/demonstrated through interviews and observation of social networking sites?” it was necessary to isolate many factors: how were the girls defining identity, or what did identity mean to the girls? Also, what sort of variations were the girls aware of when it came to performing identity to changing audiences? The girls noted that in some social contexts, their identities changed (i.e. from friends to teachers, and from family to friends). Finally, by having the girls show me important elements of their MySpace pages, key identifying factors were highlighted. The girls also interpreted what sort of person they thought others might assume created their MySpace pages. In other words, I asked the girls to tell me “What sort of person do you think your MySpace page represents?” The girls responses matched their own definitions of “who I am.” How do you study identity performances of adolescent girls both in their everyday lives and online on their social networking pages? First you ask the girls to define what identity means to them. Then you ask the girls to illustrate their identities based off their own definitions of the word. Finally, you look to the ways in which the girls’ identity performances vary in changing social contexts as well as on changing theatrical stages.

How do the girls define identity? Identity, to the girls, is both relational and individualistic. Identity is how the girls see themselves and how they predict others might see them. Identity is marked by personality traits and relationships. Identity includes physical attributes as well. How do the girls perform their identities offline?
They notice their own personality traits, and recognize their identity roles in different social contexts. They perform identities to varying audiences, varying subject locations, maintaining similar qualities to their identity from location to location, but also they recognized changes with family and school. Finally the girls perform identity online through their MySpace pages. The identities they present on MySpace align themselves with the identities the girls described themselves of having. Ways the girls express identity through MySpace are by posting pictures, sharing quotes, and music selection. The final findings chapter follows and will explore the ways the girls “be girls” both online and offline.
CHAPTER SIX
FINDINGS: BEING A GIRL

Introduction

The purpose of this final findings chapter is to discuss “being a girl” in today’s media saturated environment. The research question central to this dissertation, “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and while using social networking sites like MySpace.com?” requires a clarification as to what does it mean to be an adolescent girl. This chapter answers the question:

- How do girls “be girls” or perform gender online and offline?

I asked the girls what it means to be a girl today, and I answer the questions how are girls performing gender offline and on the MySpace pages. Gender studies, and more specifically girls’ studies (Gilligan, 1982; McRobbie, 1982, 1991, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1991) suggests that gender identity is constructed and maintained through adherence to social norms and mores directed down from dominant ideological systems. The literature reviewed for this chapter suggested that the Internet is both a place for danger for adolescent girls, as well as place for friends and identity construction. The girls in my study did not feel that the Internet was a dangerous place for their own use; however, they did note dangerous behaviors of other girls. The girls also reflected the literature in that they were intimately involved with their MySpace page largely for the reason that their friends were using MySpace. The girls used MySpace to cultivate the female preference of maintaining close relationships with their friends, as well as chatting with one another. Finally the girls noted feminine attributes of one another’s pages when discussing their own MySpace pages as well as the pages of other girls. The girls either
subscribed to the dominant feminine preference for all things pink, or they rejected this norm and purposefully avoided the color all together. How the girls fit into the dominant gender norms was reflected in their response to questions regarding “What does it mean to be a girl today?” and expressions of gender on their social networking pages. And for my own curiosity, I asked the girls about their futures, to see how the girls envisioned their selves in years to come.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, the question asked was: “how do girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com?” In order to answer this question, three key factors were isolated: adolescence, identity, and girls and how these three factors corresponded to the girls’ MySpace use. When it comes to joining the discussion on research focused specifically on adolescent girls, identity, and the Internet three major themes have emerged:

- girls using computers as cause for concern, i.e. fear and victimage (moral panic);
- girls using computers for preservation of friendships and chatting;
- and, girls using computers for self presentation.

Danger . . . Girls on the Net!

Oftentimes I tell my colleagues and students that my research focuses on teenage girls on the Internet. Ever so often, this comment elicits a snicker or raised eyebrow. Too often, the words “teenage girls on the Internet” has crossed our headlines in a negative light. If we only rely on popular press representations, or large-scale quantitative statistics, our understanding of teenage girls using the Internet has been laced
with fear of predatory and hyper-sexualized scandals. The absence of girls’ voices telling scholars and journalists and authority figures what they, themselves, are doing on the Internet has fueled the notion that the Internet is a bad scary place for teenage girls. In other words, what has been written about teenage girls on the Internet “primarily frame[s] the Internet as a dangerous place for girls, in particular as a result of girls’ potential to be victimized by other Internet users” (Mazzarella, 2005, p. 6). Too often, as Lynn Edwards (2005) discusses in her article, girls are framed as victims “who need protection from cyber-predators and from the technology itself” (p. 27). Henry Jenkins (1999), perhaps, says it best when he says if “we spend too much time worrying what the Internet is potentially doing to our daughters, we lose sight of what our daughters are doing with the Internet” (quoted in Mazzarella, 2005, p. 5). So when I tell others about my research they inevitably ask me “what do you think about MySpace, and teenagers using social networking sites?” And from my research I can confidently say, “it’s not as bad as you think.”

*Girls on the Net: Chatting and Building Relationships*

Over and over, research collected on girls’ use of the Internet and computers asserts that girls are using the Internet as a place to continue their offline preferences of talking, chatting, and relationship building (Blaire, Dietel-McLaughlin & Hurley, 2010). Birgitte Tufte heralds the Internet, and specifically girls use of social networking, as “best friend culture” (2003, p. 72). Tufte describes girls’ computer use as a place to “chat.” Takayoshi, E. Huot, and M. Huot (1999) identified the Internet as “a clubhouse for girls” once again intuiting that the online world has offered girls a place to congregate, chat,
and hang out with friends. Dede (1996) extends the traditional notions of Turkel (1995), 
Paasonen (2002) and later Manago et al (2008), that the Internet is a place where users 
are able to exaggerate, extend, or expand their social offline worlds. Specifically, Dede 
describes the Internet as a place to maintain friendships without face-to-face interaction 
(1996). Further, “girls’ use of the Internet affords ways of negotiating social 
relationships and supported engagement in “personalized, self-directed and self-initiated 
learning” (Robbins, 2000, p. i). In other words, teenage girls are using the Internet to 
continue their offline social lives, and translating cyberspace as a place to chat and 
maintain friendships.

Conversely, though, as teenage girls are using the Internet to continue their offline 
social interactions, they are also using it as a place to participate in the high-pressure 
realm of “peer review.” Denner and Martinez (2010) conducted a study where they 
compared and contrasted girls using MySpace with girls using “Whyville.” One of their 
findings confirmed that “online identities are dynamic and responsive to real world 
relational contexts” (Denner & Martinez, 2010, p. 218). In other words, teenage girls are 
not only “doing friendships” they are also using the Internet as a place to critique those 
outside of their friendship circles (Davies 2004, p. 36). Girls, identifying with groups, 
also identify and build identity by comparing with those outside of their groups. Clark 
(2005) calls this the process of “peer-related evaluation” (p. 206). This process includes 
either positive discussions or “chat” concerning fashion, school, and social engagements 
to criticizing the actions and behaviors of those with whom the girls do not identify. 
Clark states that “uses of new technologies need to be understood within this peer-
dominated framework” because the Internet facilitates and encourages a “constant contact” between girls and their peers (2005, p. 206). While this constant contact assists and encourages the development of friendships and in-group social identities, it also offers a potential risk for those outside the group.

*Girls on the Net: Presenting Girls’ Selves on the Net*

In 2002, Stern made the claim “only a handful of researchers have paid attention to existing and potential venues for self-expression. Thus we still know relatively little . . . about what girls at the edge of adulthood have to say about their lives, whom they want to listen to them, and how the regard their expression” (2002, p. 224). Robbins (2000) identified the Internet as a place for girls to search for knowledge about personal topics. Dafna Lemish suggested that the Internet world offers girls the opportunity to “join in the world of possibilities for blurring the boundaries between being consumers of Internet content to being producers and distributors of new content” (Lemish, 2010, p. xi). And Clark (2005) described the Internet as a place for girls to “control their environment” including their presentation of self within their peer community (p. 205). Valkenburg and her colleagues (2005) noted that there was no research done on gender differences in Internet-based “identity experiments” (p. 386). Valkenburg et al concluded that “girls engaged in internet based identity experiments more often than boys for social comparison” (2005, p. 395). Having reviewed the literature, this statement is true. However, there have been studies conducted to distinguish between male and female Internet usage (i.e. how and what men versus women do on the computer and for how long). This is not the scope of my research and still points out a deficit, even in 2011, in
research conducted on gender-specific adolescent Internet-based identity performances. Responding to the call put forth for further study on gender-specific differences in Internet-based identity work, Manago, Graham, Greenfield, and Salimkhan (2008) concluded, “gender role constructions on MySpace.com seem to correspond to gender role constructions in mainstream US culture” (p. 455). Manago et al acknowledge the social and cultural constructivist point of view that suggests that MySpace users are connected to the greater social and cultural contexts in which they reside before even logging on line (2008). In other words, the user is so enmeshed in his or her socially constructed roles and norms that he or she is unable to separate, therefore his or her Internet identity is linked and somewhat an “elaboration” or “extension” of their offline selves (2008, p. 455). Finally, Manago et al noted that self-presentation on MySpace reflected a “pervasiveness of sexualized female.” They concur that this overly sexualized female self-presentation reflects the offline culture where young women are pressured to “objectify their sexuality while also preserving their innocence” (Manago et al., 2008, p. 455).

Findings

The following findings discuss the ways in which the girls “be girls” or perform gender to their peers in their everyday lives and while using social networking sites like MySpace.com. Significant findings reflect the social constructivist notion of gender identity where the girls borrow from and reflect the dominant culture’s ideological standards for what it means to be a girl and what is normal and desirable behavior. The girls perform “girl” in their reliance on friends, their recognition of the versatility their
gender has in dress and behavior over boys (i.e. “we can dress more androgynously” and “we can cry and be tough; whereas boys can’t”), and their recognition of the sometimes lower standards society holds girls to under the standards of boys. Online, the girls recognized and expressed dominant cultural norms in their mention and use of pink backgrounds, the interests they expressed on their pages (i.e. fashion, shopping, friends, and dances), and the ways in which they either subscribed to or rejected the cultural norms for what it means to be a girl. Finally, the findings include a brief discussion on the girls’ plans for after graduation, college and career goals, and ends with the notion that the futures for the girls in this study is wide open, a future where girls become women.

Being a Girl: Offline

I have, so far, discussed girls performing identity in adolescence, the many faces of identity to adolescent girls, and now I will allow the girls, themselves, identify what it means to be a teenage girl in today’s media saturated culture. As time passed between the initial interviews I conducted with the girls, several of us remained in contact through our MySpace page and email. I asked the girls some questions throughout our continued contact and I feel their responses, for the most part, stand alone. The following discussion looks at some email responses to the question “what it means to be a girl,” interview and MySpace page observations as to “being a girl in everyday life”, and finally, I’ve included the girls’ plans for their futures. Perhaps with the diversity in future plans, I’ll have illustrated the fact that girls are adapting to their new media environment and are interested in a wide variety of career and life choices.
So I asked the girls “What does it mean to be a teenage girl today?” Their responses were thoughtful and diverse and several themes emerged. The girls noted their ability to be versatile, yet bemoaned dealing with double standards. Some girls noted that they were subject to more vulnerability, yet other girls celebrated a current culture that encouraged comfort in one’s own skin. For the most part, I’ll allow the girls to tell you in their own words what it means to be a teenage girl today.

**Versatility.**

“*lol I don’t know if I can help :P bc I have no idea what it means to be a girl. I know it’s NOT that you always have to be pretty, be skinny, act weak, love the color pink, or anything stupid like that.*”---Haley

Marci could have been in the conversation with Haley when she responded to my question, “What does it mean to be a girl today?” with:

*I think that being confident in yourself is definitely important. Today, sometimes that can be difficult with all the media showing that thinner is better. So that’s one thing that is bad. But also I think that our society has started the trend or idea that being comfortable in your own skin is ‘in’ which is definitely good.*

But Haley did follow up her list of what it doesn’t mean to be a girl with:

*Being a girl to me is having lots of fun every day, having a close girl-friend to tell your secrets to and to laugh with, and having someone in your life to make you happy and to love that can make you smile anytime of the day . . . I think a good thing about being a girl is that we are fun and spontaneous.*

Maria simply described herself when asked what it means to be a girl:
Um, I pretty much know who I am, I’m a little crazy, pretty blonde, I make, I make pretty wise decisions, um I’m good with people, um I’m good with my studies, I get along really well with my family, a lot of good friends, good influences and bad.

Overall, the girls emphasized the importance they placed on their girl-friendships and how important it was for them to be able to have close girl friends to have fun.

Rikki was the first to respond to my question about what it means to be a girl today:

*I think some of the good things about being a girl are being able to wear cute clothes for sure! But also being able to wear boy shorts and our hair on top of our heads. Also, the fact that we can get emotional and not be made fun of, as with boys if they cry they are immediately a punk or something.”*

Marci extends this notion by stating: “*it is easier for girls to be androgenous [sic] . . . sporty and girly . . . so that’s a plus!”* Kylie also noted the ease in blending back and forth between boy related characteristics and girly things:

*I always like to think that girls are able to play sports or go skateboarding but then get dolled up too. But me, I’m definitely more of a girly girl. I’d much rather be singing, dancing, or playing piano than running around on a soccer field getting all sweaty. . . . Some of the good things about being a girl is that, like I said before, you're able to be versatile, which is really good.*

I found it interesting that the girls appreciated their ability to cross back and forth between girl characteristics and traditionally boy characteristics. They recognize that
there is a double standard when it comes to boys dabbling in traditionally girl activities and dress, but girls are granted a freedom to cross more fluidly between tough and sweet. This double standard for boys; however, works in a negative way as well.

*Be a girl, but follow the rules.*

“A bad thing about being a girl is that we can easily be taken for granted and it makes us look like we are weak. We can be hurt or violated so easy [sic]”—Haley.

Kylie noted that a problem with being a girl sometimes is “being held to a lower standard”. For instance she cited that she was glad to go to St. Catherine’s, an all-girl school, because “there’s no boy’s to compare us to.” Kylie also quickly followed up, however, that “I believe I’m just as smart as the boys.” Although no one suggested that Kylie wasn’t as smart as a boy, she felt she was in competition or that perhaps girls were less intelligent than boys or at least girls have been perceived to be less intelligent. No other girls discussed comparisons between boys and girls and no other girls mentioned girls being weak. For the most part, the girls noted that girls were pretty hard on other girls, gossip is the biggest thing to fear, and keeping up with busy schedules, school work, and social functions was the largest source of stress in the everyday lives of being a girl.

Rikki also claims that there are many hardships that come with being a teenage girl. While the girls initially celebrated their “lack of double standard” when it came to being able to dress and participate in more masculine ways and activities, the girls are also pressured to either succumb to some of the more difficult aspects about being a girl. Namely, gossip. Rikki explains: “Some bad aspects of being a girl are what other
females think of you. If you don’t sleep with any guys you are ‘lame,’ but if you sleep
with too many, you’re a ‘slut’”. This notion of girls being girls’ worst critic or girls
judging girls was often noted in responses. Kiki mimics this notion by explaining how
being herself is difficult with other girls judging her self-expressions:

I guess a bad thing is trying to be yourself but not too far out so that people look
at you and you can practically hear them thinking ‘what a freak.’ I mean, I just
cut off all my hair and some of the other girls are like ‘[what] . . . ?!’

Haley reflects this sentiment: “another thing about being a girl that is bad is the
gossip. I don't understand why we think it is fun because it can only get us into trouble
with the other girls around us.” Kiki also noted the problem with girls hurting girls:
“Lately being a girl equals massive drama. Especially surrounding prom. And that's kind
of the bad. I mean, you can loose entire friendships over drama.” Abby pointed out the
drama that can run rampant in an all-girls school and online by pointing out a club that
she was a part of on her MySpace page: “There’s like a lot of drama at like St.
Catherine’s, but I try to stay away from those because like it drives me crazy. It gives me
a headache.” She explains the club she joined was called “I Hate Susie Jay” club. A girl
at St. Catherine’s created the I Hate Susie Jay club to express her hatred of another girl
(Susie Jay?) who did not attend St. Catherine’s. Abby explained to me that the club
creator wanted as many people as possible to join the I Hate Susie Jay club, so Abby
joined in. However, Abby also noted that she does not know how to join clubs and
therefore the I Hate Susie Jay club is the only club to which she belongs. While I find her
lack of ability to join MySpace clubs questionable, as she was a member of this club,
what is interesting to me is that Abby was able to point out the problem with drama, the prevalence of drama at an all-girls school, yet was unable, herself, to avoid the drama online.

Jamie also had a hard time with gossip online and the cruelty of other girls. Jamie had a list of things she does and does not like on her MySpace page and listed multiple times is her friend Angie. Angie, according to Jamie, has “recently found out that her boyfriend is more important than me—she let her boyfriend be more important.” Angie, also according to Jamie, wrote an awful lot of nasty things on Jamie’s MySpace page: “If you could see the messages she’s sent me, they are terrible.” Here Jamie is faced with the double standard of gossiping and cruelty on the Internet, while being victimized by gossiping and cruelty on the Internet as well. The gossip cycle that can often be found in groups of girls very much reflects the social identity theory of in group and non-group identity work. Through social comparison, girls are able to identify who they are and who they want to be by excluding those with whom they do not wish to identify and who they do not want to be like.

Being a Girl on MySpace.com

In this section I will hopefully paint a picture of what it means to be a girl today and how girls negotiate identity and adolescent femininity online on their MySpace pages. The following highlights the sorts of activities girls are involved in, the events and social functions to which they look forward, and how they reflect their “girlness” online. Following my over-arching research question: “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like
MySpace.com?” I was able to discover that girls today are extremely busy, involved in many social circles, and thus constantly constructing and maintaining their social identities both on and off line.

Kylie, a sophomore, was worried about getting into National Honor Society “I’m really worried about how that’s going to go . . .” However; she’s also involved in drama and at play practice “almost every day.” Haley, a senior, noted the importance of having a “girls’ night out,” because “being with guys all the time isn’t the best thing for a girl.” Kiki and Abby are very focused on up-coming dances and what they are going to wear. Both promise updated pictures on their MySpace pages and refer back to photos of previous dances on their profiles. Brooke and Bea both gush about their boyfriends, “He’s just a great guy. Like I’ve never met anyone quite like him before” says Brooke of her boyfriend. While Jamie and Renee joke about their lack of relationship status. Renee explains, “Me and my friend don’t really date, that’s what we always joke about, all the guys we like are for real fake.” Renee pointed out her latest obsession, Vincent Valentine, a Final Fantasy character she has plastered all over her MySpace page. Maria, Kylie, Kiki and Renee also are very much into their television shows and books they read. And Samantha, a junior, is focused on her current favorite bands. As you can see there are multiple things the girls are interested in and these interests keep them busy both on and off the Internet.

Fashion is something that some girls highlight on their pages. They can select and showcase certain brand name backgrounds to their profile page (i.e. Coach or Victoria’s Secret). Mya prides herself in her ability to match the background color of her
page to the outfit she’s wearing in her profile picture. Kiki promises to post pictures of her prom dress “‘cause it’s totally awesome!” Abby, a Senior, carefully coordinates with her girl friends matching outfits to wear to certain dances:

_We [her best friend and her] went [to a dance] last year and we had this matching outfit everyone loved it so we were like we’re going to do it again, and we got these hats in New York actually and then we kind of had to go off that, it was really hard, cause we do everything at the last minute so we were like what can we do that matches these hats? So we found that outfit and everyone loved it. I know!”_

Here Abby excitedly explained to me how the Freshmen take this all school dance rather seriously and get super dressed up and stressed out about bringing dates. Juniors and Seniors, though, are more casual and laid back about the dance. It is common for Seniors to go with each other instead of bothering with dates to this yearly dance.

How do the girls express their “girlyness” online? What is it about their profile that signifies their femininity? Well first and foremost the girls say their profile picture helps identify them as female. None of the girls have profile pictures of people or objects other than themselves. Also, the girls tend to use names that are either their real, given name, or names that reflect a variation on their name that is still feminine. For example, Renee’s name on her MySpace page is “Vincent’s Girl.” Kylie’s name is “Drama Queen.” Finally, most girls reflect their femininity through their choice of the color pink. Some of the pages are almost drowning in pink. As Annie explains, “Pink is my
signature color” (to quote Legally Blonde’s Elle Woods). And Ellen illustrates this sentiment:

Well, I like pink, so it’s just like obviously I like pink so its um, you know. [pink], and like it’s just a happy color to me so it just like, like I like being happy, I don’t like being sad, so I like to like make everything happy [i.e. pink].

Samantha, on the other hand despises the color pink. Her profile page is a very cool black, white, and teal. Samantha explains her purposeful choice. She wants a viewer of her MySpace page to take away that she is “someone who loves music” and not “girlie girl” because “oh it’s annoying, I don’t know—I don’t want to be like that—like when people have like Coach layouts, I don’t like it, it bothers me” [laughs]. So even though Samantha doesn’t use the color pink for her background, or plaster her background with a Coach brand layout, she recognizes that those stylistic choices represent extreme femininity (girly girliness). Marna agrees:

Yeah, some people have like I don’t know, have something like love stuff and that makes me think that they have a boyfriend or they’re really some stuff that people have I wouldn’t want that on my page like, like the Victoria secret angels. I wouldn’t want that.

So some of the girls recognized that there is such thing as “too girly” and avoid falling into the practice of including the overly feminine signifiers on their MySpace pages.

Beyond color choices, beyond background layouts, and beyond profile pictures identifying themselves as female, the girls also represent their femininity in the quotes they choose, the pictures they include, the relationships they value and highlight, and the
interests they list. Many girls had their MySpace profile picture include their friends. So not only were they, themselves, featured in their profile pictures, they also included their friends and best friends in the profile; thus directly identifying their selves with their closest friends. This direct link to self-identity through friendships is very reflective of feminine gendered characteristics of valuing friendship and relationships over individuality. Sunny, a self-proclaimed “social person” says, “I put people like before myself all the time.” Also the importance of relationships reflects the adolescent emphasis on others and belongingness. For instance, many girls had romantic quotes from romantic comedies or songs (i.e. Romeo + Juliet, Shakespeare in Love) Kylie’s page, in addition to having many screen shots from romantic comedy films also represents her overall femininity in the following way:

Um, it pretty much says I’m pretty girly through my like likes and dislikes and that I like doing drama, and . . . Um, well, my background’s all pink, and then it says that I really like shopping and like dancing and stuff—I’m pretty girly most of the time.

Here, Kylie has identified shopping and dancing and drama as feminine attributes. Toni also reflected this sentiment. Toni explained that she found herself to be “extra girly” because she identifies as a “drama queen, cause I do theatre.” Finally, a couple of the girls identified their anxieties on their pages through self-disclosures about insecurities: “I’m self conscious. I fear rejection” was a quote shared on one of the girl’s walls. When asked to explain this quote’s inclusion, the Freshman responded:
It’s not that I’m like, um, like, anorexic or anything, it’s just that um, I think I put that on there when I was like, like one of those really bad days, you know, and I was like oh my friends hate me oh no, it was just one of those things.

Quickly she followed up with, “it’s not like you can give just one adjective about me. Which I think is cool.” One final insecurity present or should I say absent in a girl’s page was her exclusion of her own creative writing. Throughout the interview, Sunny animatedly spoke of her love of creative writing; however, she did not include any original writing on her MySpace page. When asked about the absence of her own creative writing (amidst a whole bunch of other peoples’ writings), Sunny responded: “No, I don’t [include my own writing]. I don’t like people to like read my stuff, I think it’s kind of like awkward cause if they don’t like it and are like ohh that girl’s stupid—yeah, I’ll be pretty mad.” So beyond color, beyond background layout, the girls represented their femininity through the inclusion of friendships, romantic quotes and pictures, interests, and admissions of some pretty tough insecurities.

Girls Grow into Women: Where Do They Go from Here?

This is my absolute favorite question throughout the whole data collection process: What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you hope for your future? Well the answers were as diverse as the girls. I’m going to let some of them tell you in their own words:

Elise: I want to be an artist, well if I could make enough money to live off just being an artist, but that’s usually really rare, so, whatever I can get. Yeah, well, I love fashion and I love music so if I could do fashion and music together in some
Haley: I like doing different things to it [her MySpace page] so I like change it a lot, I like, like when I grow up I want to do something with computers that’s why I’m always messing with it.

Kiki: I want to teach English in Japan.

Samantha: I want to go into medicine. I haven’t decided if I want to be a chemistry major or an English major. But I want to be a nurse. (Even though Samantha admits, “I’m smart. Except in chemistry. But other than that I’m smart!”)

Abby: Yeah, I’m going to UC—business—I want to own my own business, but I don’t want to own it like right away, I want to work for somebody and get the hang of it so I can make sure I can handle my own business cause I want to make my own business.

Annabelle: I want to go into pediatric nursing.

Bea: I’m going to Cincinnati State, I’m going for medical coding because . . . I can pick my own hours and I can work from home, like my mom . . . I want a family. Also it’s only a two year program . . . Not too much time to have to worry about four years of college!

Marna: I’m going to Dayton, psychology and pre-med.

Renee: I’m going to Virginia Union, pre law.

Sunny: I want to go into special education and work with special needs children. But I don’t want to cry!

Toni: I’m going to Xavier of Louisiana, I got into their pre-med program, I was
excited, I was like yeah! Hmm hmm, a doctor, an ob/gyn.

As you can see the options are limitless and the wheels are already set in motion for many of the girls to achieve their goals. Their plans are diverse and many of them were already preparing for the next step in their lives. Others, like Elise and Haley, recognized some of their talents and were beginning to think of ways that they could incorporate their interests in to future career goals.

Discussion

To me this is perhaps one of the more difficult chapters to present, but also one of the most exciting. The girls in my research demonstrate girlhood, negotiate meaning from their everyday lives, and continue to grow and thrive within a culture that is both supportive and sometimes challenging to girls. As I revisited my alma mater, St. Catherine High School, I reflected upon my experiences there and contemplated the value of an all-girls’ education. In today’s constant contact culture, with new phenomenon such as “sexting” taking over the mobile phones and Internet devices of high schoolers across the country, it is imperative for girls to have the space to experiment, fail and succeed with possible selves. I reflected upon my own girlhood—what was it like for me to grow into a woman in an all-girls’ Catholic high school? Well, I am very thankful for the experience and recall an environment that did not cause me to feel self-conscious—a place where I was able to be myself. The only time I remember missing boys was the lunchroom, but other than that, I happily enjoyed the chance to participate uninhibited in all of my classes and cultivate strong friendships. This, I feel, after my interviews is the same sort of nurturing and positive environment found at St. Catherine’s. What is
different though, is the overall look of the girls. The culture the girls exist in is very different from my high school experience. These girls have wider social nets to cast and maintain, have more critical eyes upon them, and must perform to a much wider much more worldly audience then I could have even imagined not so long ago.

This chapter looked at the ways the girls were “being girls.” In response to the research question, “How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com?,” The identity practice of “being a girl” (what it meant to be a teenage girl today) was separated out from “performing a gender identity” (how they expressed their femininity online). I asked the girls what it meant to be a teenage girl today, and I asked them how were they expressing their femininity online.

The literature reviewed for this chapter had three apparent themes relevant to this study: girls on the Internet are cause for concern; girls use the Internet to maintain and cultivate friendships; and, girls can use the Internet as a place for an extension of their offline identity. Nowhere in these conversations did the girls reflect a fear of MySpace or intuit that MySpace and their online activities was a place to worry about. They did, as mentioned in earlier chapters, note that they were aware of potential dangers on the Internet. They had been warned, were monitored, or were aware that adolescents younger than themselves were behaving in inappropriate and dangerous ways on their MySpace pages. While other girls, not the interviewed girls, might be subject to the dangers of the Internet, my research group was safe and unaffected by the unknown risks.

In terms of the Internet serving girls a space to maintain and cultivate friendships,
the Internet has been labeled a “clubhouse for girls” and a space to cultivate “best friend culture.” Girls could use the Internet to practice similar offline preferences of “talking, chatting, and relationship building.” The girls in my study reflected these sentiments by expressing the importance of their friendships over and over.

Finally, the literature suggested that girls present an extension of their offline identity online. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the Internet, and MySpace in particular, offers the girls the opportunity to “write themselves” into being. In other words, the girls are using MySpace to present identities.

This chapter sought to answer the questions how are girls “being girls” offline? The answer comes from the girls’ own responses to the question, “What does it mean to be a teenage girl today?” as well as their revelations of their interests and activities. The girls responded to what it means to be a teenage girl in two ways. On the positive end, girls celebrated the fact that girls are able to be more “versatile” and/or flexible when it comes to crossing gender norms and expectations. They noted the fact that as girls, they were able to dress casually as well as glamorously. They were able to be tough and strong in sports, but were also able to express emotions and cry. The girls celebrated this aspect of being a girl and felt sympathy for boys unable to cross the gender norms as easily. On the other hand, the girls also recognized the negative aspects of being a girl. Some of the girls noted the problem with being held to a lower standard. They felt that society did not expect as much from girls in terms of success and intelligence as they did from boys. The girls also noted the problem with gossip. Part of being a girl and being a girl online is that girls prefer to talk, chat, and relationship build. In talking offline and
online, gossip can spread wider and to faster than ever before. Several of the girls mentioned their distaste and bad experiences with gossip and expressed a desire to avoid the gossip and drama all together. Being a girl offline also means maintaining close friendships. Chapter Four detailed the ways the girls practiced adolescent identity with their emphasis on friendships and this is apparent in this chapter as well. Friendships, the emphasis on and the maintenance of, are an extremely integral part to the identity of girls.

Also, I sought to answer the question, how are girls being girls online? The girls identified “feminine” identity markers like background color choices and fashionable, posed pictures and profile pictures. Beyond color choices, beyond background layouts, and beyond profile pictures identifying themselves as female, the girls also represent their femininity in the quotes they choose, the pictures they include, the relationships they value and highlight, and the interests they list.

Finally, in this chapter I asked the girls what they wanted to be when they grew up and what were their future plans. The responses were exciting and diverse. Many of the Seniors had college and career plans well on their way. Younger girls expressed their noticed talents and speculated career choices that would highlight their interests. I only wish they represented some of their career interests and goals on their MySpace pages so perhaps future researchers and investigators could look at the pages and realize that girls on the Internet is not something to be fearful for or worried about. Girls may use this social medium as a tool to express diverse plans for their futures as well as access information that will help them achieve their career goals.

MySpace has factored into the everyday lives of these girls by allowing them a
space to strengthen and navigate friendships and peer groups, express identities through groups to which they belong, share their interests to an interested public, as well as illustrate their femininity through color choices, background layouts, and artistic and fashionable selections.

1 Please note added enthusiasm included!
CONCLUSION

MOVING FORWARD AND LOOKING BACK

Introduction

Since I began this dissertation, several news stories have hit the headlines regarding MySpace.com. Perhaps the one with the greatest impact on me was the story of the suicide of a thirteen year old girl, Megan Meier, in a northern suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. Megan hung herself in her bedroom shortly after she received this last message from a boy named Josh Evans, “The world would be a better place without you.” Megan had met this boy on MySpace and after several weeks of flirting online, calling him her boyfriend, and believing that she was in a real relationship with a very cute boy, Josh suddenly turned mean. He began posting negative bulletins on her page such as “Megan is a slut,” “Megan is fat,” and “I don’t like the way you treat your friends.” Six weeks after Megan’s suicide, her parents discovered that Josh Evans did not exist; he was a boy made up by Lori Drew, a 47 year old neighbor who lived four doors down from the Meier’s. Lori Drew was the mother of a girl Megan used to be friends with and claims that she created the fictional boyfriend in order to “win Megan’s trust and learn what Megan thought about her daughter” (Maag, 2007). Lori knew that Megan had struggled with depression; however she still bragged to another neighbor that she hoped to “mess with Megan” through this fictional MySpace page. Megan had recently lost weight and switched schools in order to find a new group of friends. She was coming out of her awkward stage and finally was feeling better about herself. The addition of a boyfriend into her newly improved life was the icing on the cake. When ‘Josh’ began harassing Megan online and encouraging other friends linked to both of their MySpace pages to
join in the harassment, Megan decided there was no way out. She took a belt and hung herself in her bedroom closet. Megan died before she could know that Josh did not exist. Ms. Drew has responded that she felt bad about the hoax and she stated that she felt the hoax “contributed to Megan’s suicide, but she did not feel ‘as guilty’ because at the funeral she found out Megan had tried to commit suicide before.” (Maag, 2007). Megan, however, had never attempted suicide before and her doctors did not feel she was suicidal.

Both news stories I’ve shared in this dissertation, the murder of Kara Beth Borden’s parents in Pennsylvania, and the suicide of Megan Meier reflected the notion of identity performances. For Kara Beth and her boyfriend, David, they performed identities unknown to their parents. For Megan, she fell in love with a “boy” whose identity was created by Megan’s neighbor’s mother. Identities shift from social settings and relationships, identities must be performed in ways to be believable, and ultimately, adolescence is the perfect setting for practicing various identities while searching for a stable sense of self. Both of these news stories have influenced the ways in which I approach MySpace. At first I was intrigued with the idea of a virtual window allowing access into unknown teenagers’ private online lives. Because of this curiosity, I created a MySpace page and was surprised by the discrepancies of my own known reality of a particular teenager (my cousin) and the unknown reality he described on his page. This led me to questions about changing and shifting identities—public and private, offline and online. I was fascinated by the notion of the intersection of these different types of identities and how they played out in everyday life.

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My own dissertation research took place during a rather heated debate against MySpace and Facebook in the city newspapers of the location of the study. A student at a local middle school had threatened to bring a gun into school in a posting on his MySpace page. A local news station covered a story on neighborhood teens and their parents in reaction to a recent To Catch a Predator episode that featured another Ohio town. The St. Catherine’s Archdiocesan district had put restrictions on certain Internet sites throughout the entire school system (MySpace included, if not top-listed). In other words, there was a fairly widespread moral panic and awareness surrounding teens on the Internet in the city of the study and during the time frame. This presented recruitment issues and cooperation issues with the school and parents of the girls. Many wanted to talk about MySpace, many did in the hallways and cafeteria tables; however, none felt comfortable expressing their views and ideas with an outside researcher.

Traditionally, the ideal teenager is described as one who values independence, is able to explore individualism through the wide open spaces of the suburban neighborhoods and vast high school campuses, is self-centered to the point of egocentric, and is likely to believe that he or she is the center of all attention, performing self to an imagined audience in expressing ideas that are unique unto his or her self. Independence for the teenager is contradictory. Obviously, the teenager seeks independence from family—as he or she searches for her own place in society. No longer is she a child, not yet an adult, the teenager must forge her own space and in doing so identifies with those around her—other teenagers. Independence from family, adults, and children, generally comes along with dependence on members of similar social groups, classmates, teammates, neighbors, and friends. Reliance on friends for cues to social scripts as to
what it means to be a teenager, to perform *teen age*, rushes to the forefront in adolescence. The people the teenager spends the most time with on a daily basis are all traveling in the same pack, all seeking individualism in a world where one is both trying to fit in by finding their place, yet struggling with the notion that reality is unique unto themselves. Their friendships are of the utmost importance. Maintaining some sense of social order by counting on the reliability of group membership and differentiation allows the developing teenager to find a safe space for exploration and expression.

I realize this all sounds contradictory. At first I’m describing anonymity, independence, and individualism. Next I’m talking about freedom of space, as well as egocentric self-centeredness. Finally I’m discussing the group dynamic of the friendship-centric world of teenagers. Yet, these things all are from the cognitive developmental stage of formal operations. As the teenager is afforded the mental capacity to realize that other people are thinking, yet is unable yet to understand that what other people are thinking of does not necessarily revolve around themselves, then the safety in numbers and familiarity of the peer group is deeply depended on. In other words, reliance on social groups, categories, and prescribed norms, mores, and codes of conduct is celebrated in the adolescent development period. The more something can be relied upon, or trusted to live up to the standards established, the easier it is to navigate through the journey of self discovery.

Unfortunately, some of these ideals have changed through an ever increasingly restricted interior environment. In other words, contemporary teenagers have been encouraged to explore self in “safer” more “closed in” environments due to increasing crime and dangers in the once idyllic suburbs of America. Issues involving drunk driving,
reckless teenage driving, crime, drug abuse, sexual abductions and attacks, kidnapping, etc., have made the wide space of exploration narrow down into interior places such as the mall and even the home. As teenagers return to the home for their self-exploration and performance, an important innovation in communication technology aids this process—the Internet, and more specifically social networking sites.

Grounded in Theory

This section is included to illustrate the ways in which the theory presented in Chapter One manifests in the actual research findings. What follows is a brief discussion on how the adolescent development theories of Elkind (1981, 2001) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) can be applied to the ways in which girls are performing identities both on Myspace.com as well as offline. Additionally, I touch on how Goffman’s (1959, 1967) performance theory translates to MySpace.com. And finally, I’ll demonstrate the ways gender performance is evident in the girls everyday identity practices, on and offline.

Adolescence

Erikson (1968, 1980, 1985) declared that adolescence was the time for developing a stable identity, for discovering self and negotiating between conflicting strains between childhood and adulthood. Throughout this dissertation and throughout the literature reviewed, Erikson’s (1968, 1980, 1985) theories on adolescent development influenced the understanding of the importance on identity development during adolescence. It is undeniable that Erikson contributed greatly to the field of identity study. The three theorists on development (Erikson, Bronfenbrenner and Elkind) share a common thread in adolescent identity by focusing on the notion of the adolescent negotiating his or her place or role within a grander social context, as well as working out his or her identity
amidst a broader social setting. Particular to this dissertation, though, are moments where Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological System of Development and Elkind’s (1981, 2001) Imagined Audience can be extended to include the broadening social environment of social networking sites.

*Broadening the environment: Microsystem to cybersystem?*

Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed adolescence in terms of its natural progression and experiences within varying levels of ecological systems—micro, meso, exso, and macro. Kenneth Gergen (1991, 2001) spoke of the postmodern, saturated self. As Gergen (1991, 2001) argues, the notion of single selfhood is eroding due to an over preponderance of popular culture imagery, communicative connectedness, and emphasis on the commodifiability of self. Teenagers today are forced to negotiate even more systems than Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) original “four” in order to successfully develop and move on to adulthood. I’d like to propose that Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems include a new system, the cybersystem. The postmodern position of self does not exclude itself from the realm of development. The cybersystem enforces the problematic predictions of Gergen’s (1991, 2001) work as well as infringes upon notions of the developing self. According to the Ecological Systems of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), a developing identity must negotiate and learn to relate with the varying levels and degrees of interaction, settings and relationship building. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes development in terms of a child interacting within the home environment first, and then as the child grows, his or her interactions within the home begin to include larger and greater environmental contexts. For instance her father comes home from the office, thus bringing along more people to interact with as well as more
settings with which to negotiate. These settings and people encourage development by incorporating more contexts into the child’s life. The system I’ve proposed here to add to the original four systems, cybersystem, would sit between the exsosystem and the macrosystem. While the exsosystem includes settings and people that have no direct interaction with the developing individual, these people and settings do have an indirect affect on the child. The macrosystem accounts for the culture and ideologies of the environment in which the child is growing. While the Internet includes both direct interaction with people, indirect influence on people, as well as contributes to the overall culture in which the child exists. The cybersystem extends beyond the macrosystem in that it allows for other cultures and ideologies to enter into the child’s home setting, thus bringing an innumerable amount of people and contexts with which to interact. Not only does the cybersystem include cultural influence, it also influences within a more localized manner as well.

*Actualizing the imagined audience.*

Elkind’s Imagined Audience (1979, 1981, 2001) includes two other elements: Personal Fable and Apparent Hypocrisy. The personal fable, according to Elkind and Bowen (1979), discusses the adolescent characteristic of feeling center stage, very special, and invincible to harm. In other words, the personal fable accounts for the notion, “It can happen to others, not to me.” Perhaps one of the most interesting findings discovered in reflection of the girls’ responses includes the notion of Elkind and Bowen’s (1979) Personal Fable. When asked by others about my research, invariably someone will ask whether or not the girls are being safe while on MySpace. This question most definitely stems from the popular press coverage of the moral panic surrounding social
networking sites, the Chris Hansen “Dateline” specials, *To Catch a Predator*, and the news stories of falsified identities as well as cyberbullying. Interested persons want to know are the girls aware of the dangers that surround social networking sites and Internet use, and are the girls acting responsibly? To these questions, I am able to answer that it mostly varies on age.

I’ve identified findings that represent elements of Elkind’s (1979, 1981, 2001) adolescent: Imagined Audience, Personal Fable, and Apparent Hypocrisy. The following section delineates how the girls are practicing adolescent identity in terms of Elkind and Bowen’s Imagined Audience, Personal Fable, and Apparent Hypocrisy (1979) and the ways in which the girls’ friends factor into their MySpace use and MySpace identities. Elkind (1979, 1981, 2001) described adolescence as a time in which teens created and performed for an Imagined Audience. MySpace allows for the actualization of the Imagined Audience—a tangible, albeit not always known, audience that teenagers are performing and posing for. One of the most fascinating aspects of MySpace, social networking sites, and the Internet in general, is the capability of allowing every user with access a “voice” or “virtual presence.” One of the girls in my study, Mya, proclaimed that she was “MySpace famous” when I asked her to participate in my study. She also recognized that other people on MySpace recognized her from her profile page: “I wonder how many people see me and are like, ‘ooh that’s the red head girl off MySpace.’”

Elkind’s (1981, 2001) characteristics of adolescence including the Imagined Audience, the Personal Fable, and Apparent Hypocrisy were covered in Chapter Two. Briefly, the notion of Apparent Hypocrisy explains how teenagers are able to
conceptualize abstract rules and morals; however they lack the ability to connect appropriate behaviors to these rules and moral beliefs. In other words, the teenager identifies rather high principles, yet is unable to connect the “acting out” of said principles to the high ideas. A good example to illustrate this Apparent Hypocrisy is when a teenager comes home to a family dinner and declares that she is now a vegetarian. She proclaims her distaste for meat and judges the family (even grandma who slaved over the ham and turkey all weekend) for eating meat—declaring them morally corrupt. However, as the teenager is announcing her newly enlightened lifestyle, she fails to recognize that as she sits at the table in her leather boots and searches through her oversized leather handbag, she is insulting the family that has raised her, fed her, and want her to do well. She expresses these high moral ideals, yet is unable to activate the morality fully. Examples of the Apparent Hypocrisy in my study include the ways the girls looked down upon their younger siblings and “other people’s” mis-use of MySpace.com. The girls mentioned that younger teens were more likely to be “stupid” on MySpace by giving out too much information and for keeping their profiles on “public.” However, these girls engaged in risky behavior themselves. While Toni and Bea thought their pages were safe, they included schedules and after school activities all over their photos and blogs. Other girls included quotes about partying, drinking, and “f***ing authority” without realizing the sort of identities they were presenting were risky. All in all, MySpace.com offers Elkind’s (1979, 1981, 2001) adolescent a place where the imagined audience is actualized, the girls are able to live out some of their personal fables, and apparent hypocrisy extends to another form of expression.
Identity Performance

While this dissertation focused more on identity performance and the work by Goffman (1959, 1967), social identity theory did come into play often, especially when talking about the girls’ reliance on friends and group membership. In this way, I was able to apply Goffman’s (1959, 1963, 1967) performance studies to the ways in which the girls practiced identities in different social contexts and settings (friends, family, and school). The girls had distinct definitions of identity, which ranged from individualistic characteristics to relational statuses. Their own description of self tended to be more favorable illustrations of “who they were” as compared to some of their proposed familial or school identities. Overall, the girls described their “best” most “real” selves when identifying with friends. Here, I note that the girls were able to perform in a “front” with which they felt most comfortable and most familiar. If Goffman (1959) said we are “actors on a stage” that must be aware and constantly adjusting for varying audiences, the girls demonstrated this with their varying identities that shifted from social settings. Additionally, the girls were able to further practice their performances as they were able to physically manipulate the MySpace page to align with their changing identities. With a single mood change, a girl can change her quote, change her song, and change her profile picture to signify a darker more introspective identity than the bubbly “fun” identity she felt over the weekend.

Girls’ Studies

This whole dissertation has been about performing identities. I started off by discussing the ways in which the girls performed adolescence. Adolescence is defined by key factors and elements that teenagers must face and overcome during the stage of
development. The girls’ behaviors often reflected the identity practices related to adolescence: performing for audiences, the need for close friendships, identifying with peer groups, etc. Next I talked about how girls were performing their identities both offline and on MySpace. How their identities varied in different subject locations or social settings, and depending on the interaction, certain aspects of their identity changed. Finally, the girls performed their gender, their “girlness” both offline and on MySpace.com. Simone de Beauvoir (1953) said, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. The girls are becoming women. They may use their adolescence as a time to practice identity, to perform varying identities from social setting and subject location, yet all the while, the girls are becoming women. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Debra Merskin (2005) discussed the ways in which cultural and societal norms and mores influence the definition of “what it means” to be a woman, and that the developing woman must negotiate her position as woman within the grander social and cultural contexts. Cultural and social influences are more apparent each day. Our access to and the availability of cultural images and social definitions of what it means to be a woman are everywhere we turn. The girls have access to all sorts of images with which to identify and model. MySpace.com allowed the girls to pull from the cultural context and apply those images to their own presentations of self.

Contributions

It is important to ask what are the significant contributions a dissertation of this size and magnitude add to the field of communication and this is a question I have thought about for a long time now (very long). This dissertation adds many things to the study of “identity”—first, it contributes to the field of developmental studies by
extending the notions Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory as well as Elkind’s (1979, 1981, 2001) Imagined Audience. I have suggested adding a fifth system to Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979), the cybersystem—thus extending the environmental contexts and relational encounters by one. As for Elkind (1979, 1981, 2001), I have suggested that the characteristics common to adolescents, performing for an Imagined Audience as well as participating in one’s own self-authored Personal fable and Apparent Hypocrisy, has in fact been actualized. In other words, these non-truths of “imagined audience” as well as the personal fable that the individual is “center stage” is no longer false—the imagined audience has been actualized and the self is in constant danger, for lack of a better word, of perpetually being “on”—a constant image culture.

In addition to extending theories of development, I have also made connections between identity and cognitive development as well as identity and the culture of girlhood. In doing so, I have contributed to the literature of cultural studies—incorporating cultural contexts, biology, societal, as well as mediated influences on the construction and maintenance of identity. Goffman (1959) compared identity to a theatrical performance, one comes to the stage to perform self with the knowledge that others are coming to the same stage and audience with expectations and knowledge of accepted normal behaviors that should encourage a seamless or fluid identity. We must be able to easily flow from one context and one set of expected behaviors to another because our reality is shifting constantly. As I have set out to explore in this dissertation, how Myspace.com and by extension other social networking sites are factoring into the everyday lives of teenage girls, it is apparent that the girls are adapting to the new media
environment and very much so are incorporating social networking into their everyday lives.

Finally in terms of girls’ studies, this study has simply contributed to the limited field of girls’ studies as well as given girls a voice in their own subjectivity. What I mean to say here is that often times girls’ studies consists of adult women scholars speculating what it means to be a girl in contemporary society. Feminist scholars have critiqued the surrounding cultural contexts for ways in which the media influences the performance of gender, and gender expectations. This study looks at the ways in which the girls are interpreting those surrounding texts, and appropriating and manipulating the images into new meanings and also new identities. Girls perform gender; they recognize the ways in which their gender roles have norms and expectations. They may choose to subscribe to the dominant gender practices of covering their MySpace pages in pink and fashion brands, or they may choose and practice an all-together different performance of their gendered identity.

Limitations

Of course there were limitations to this study. First off, this was one school in a very controlled environment. I studied girls at a private single sex school that was run by the Catholic Archdiocese. The school had restrictions on Internet access, which made the guided tour on their MySpace pages difficult. I made screen captures to get around this blocked website, however it did change the “immediacy” of the actual live streaming page (no music, no flash, no video capabilities). The school being single sex and Catholic also influenced the setting. It is a more conservative school with the well-being
of the girls and the girls’ reputations tantamount. So, coming into a conservative and concerned academic environment, the overall reception of the study was influenced.

It was a relatively short study as well. I interacted with the girls from six to twelve months. I would have liked to continue the conversations and follow up with the girls longer. However, this leads me to another limitation. MySpace.com. It has practically gone extinct since the beginning of my study. Facebook had just become available to the girls when my study began, so I was able to get many MySpace users. MySpace also allowed the girls to manipulate their profile pages in ways I felt, and still feel today, is a lot more expressive of identity performances than Facebook has ever allowed. But, because of the timing of my study, most of the girls abandoned MySpace, so following up with them through their pages was near impossible.

Also, girls are not the only teenagers going through identity development tasks. And girls at all-girl high schools are not faced with all of the same gender development tasks as girls in other high school settings. I would like to see how girls in other schools define their identities and see what sort of influences a single-sex school has on developing gender identity. Of course, I’d be interested in looking at how boys’ perform identity in different social contexts. I’d like to see if boys perform their identities in similar ways to girls in terms of the ways in which the girls vary identity performances for friends, family and school.

Future Possibilities

I might like to look at the environments in which the girls are using social networking. I’d like to also observe how they communicate and present identity offline in ways similar to the observation of identity performance on MySpace. In other words,
I was able to mark and identify ways in which the girls expressed self on MySpace.com, I’d like to watch the ways girls perform their identities offline.

More voices need to be heard. Girls are tasked with the role of identity performance and development and they are facing this task in a broader social and mediated environment. How do other media choices, and other social networking tools factor into the everyday identity practices of adolescent girls? How do these things influence the ways in which the girls perform? These are questions that need further study and exploration. I’d like to change the setting for the study, broaden my school choices, and lengthen the amount of time for observation and conversation.

Conclusion

How do adolescent girls perform identity to their peers both in everyday life and on social networking sites like MySpace.com?

Adolescent girls perform identity to their peers by presenting their best selves to friends, an important social group for adolescents. For the girls in my study, they tended to present selves most like their own notions of “who they were” to their close friends. In other words, the girls felt like their friends were the most likely to get the closest picture of who they were. On the other hand, some of the girls performed identity to their family and teachers in ways that varied from their performances to friends.

• How do girls express their adolescent identity both on and offline?

The girls in this study used various social interactions and social networking sites to perform many identifying qualities (social relationships, interests, personality traits, and activity involvement) of self, a practice that is central to the developmental stage of adolescence (Erikson, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elkind, 1981, 2000). The girls
performed to imaginative audiences on their MySpace pages. These imaginative audiences, however, are not so much imaginary any more. With social networking sites, the adolescents have an actualized audience to whom to perform. Additionally, a key factor of adolescence is an over-reliance on friends. The girls in my study depended on their friends when it came to performing selves that most likely reflected their own notions of who they were. In other words, the girls were more likely to be truer to their selves when it came to interacting with their friends than they did when they were involved with their family and teachers. Although the selves they presented to their family and teachers varied in more degree than the selves they presented to their friends, the girls still recognized that it was simply a manifestation of another element to their identities. In other words, they did not deny or reject varying performances, they simply recognized that there were better versions of their selves than other versions. Adolescent identity was expressed in the girls practice of varying identity performances as well as their reliance on friendships both offline and online.

- How can identity performance be researched/demonstrated through interviews and observation of social networking sites?

Through the conversations with the girls, a better understanding can be reached about the way their identities are performed both on and offline. To answer the question, “How can identity performance be researched/demonstrated through interviews and observation of social networking sites?” it was necessary to isolate many factors: how were the girls defining identity, or what did identity mean to the girls? Also, what sort of variations were the girls aware of when it came to performing identity to changing audiences? The girls noted that in some social contexts, their identities changed (i.e. from friends to
teachers, and from family to friends). How do the girls define identity? Identity, to the
girls, is both relational and individualistic. Identity is how the girls see themselves and
how they predict others might see them. Identity is marked by personality traits and
relationships. Identity includes physical attributes as well. How do the girls perform their
identities offline? They notice their own personality traits, and recognize their identity
roles in different social contexts. They perform identities to varying audiences, varying
subject locations, maintaining similar qualities to their identity from location to location,
but also they recognized changes with family and school.

Finally the girls perform identity online through their MySpace pages. The
identities they present on MySpace align themselves with the identities the girls described
themselves of having. Ways the girls express identity through MySpace are by posting
pictures, sharing quotes, and music selection. I had the girls show me important elements
of their MySpace pages, where they highlighted key identifying factors. Key factors
included profile picture, pictures of friends, About me section, music selection, friends,
and quotes. The girls also interpreted what sort of person they thought others might
assume created their MySpace pages. In other words, I asked the girls to tell me “What
sort of person do you think your MySpace page represents?” The girls responses matched
their own definitions of “who I am.” How do you study identity performances of
adolescent girls both in their everyday lives and online on their social networking pages?
First you ask the girls to define what identity means to them. Then you ask the girls to
illustrate their identities based off their own definitions of the word. Finally, you look to
the ways in which the girls’ identity performances vary in changing social contexts as
well as on changing theatrical stages.
• How do girls “be girls” or perform gender online and offline?

Gender studies, and more specifically girls’ studies (Gilligan, 1982; McRobbie, 1982, 1991, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1991) suggests that gender identity is constructed and maintained through adherence to social norms and mores directed down from dominant ideological systems. How the girls fit into the dominant gender norms was reflected in the girls’ responses to the question, “What does it mean to be a teenage girl today?” as well as their revelations of their interests and activities. The girls responded to what it means to be a teenage girl in two ways. On the positive end, girls celebrated the fact that girls are able to be more “versatile” and/or flexible when it comes to crossing gender norms and expectations. They noted the fact that as girls, they were able to dress casually as well as glamorously. They were able to be tough and strong in sports, but were also able to express emotions and cry. The girls celebrated this aspect of being a girl and felt sympathy for boys unable to cross the gender norms as easily. On the other hand, the girls also recognized the negative aspects of being a girl. Some of the girls noted the problem with being held to a lower standard. They felt that society did not expect as much from girls in terms of success and intelligence as they did from boys. The girls also noted the problem with gossip. Part of being a girl and being a girl online is that girls prefer to talk, chat, and relationship build. In talking offline and online, gossip can spread wider and to faster than ever before. Several of the girls mentioned their distaste and bad experiences with gossip and expressed a desire to avoid the gossip and drama all together. Being a girl offline also means maintaining close friendships. Friendships, the emphasis on and the maintenance of, are an extremely integral part to the identity of girls.

Also, I sought to answer the question, how are girls being girls online? The girls
identified “feminine” identity markers like background color choices and fashionable, posed pictures and profile pictures. Beyond color choices, beyond background layouts, and beyond profile pictures identifying themselves as female, the girls also represent their femininity in the quotes they choose, the pictures they include, the relationships they value and highlight, and the interests they list.

MySpace.com has become another tool for which girls are able to practice their changing identities in front of a real audience with the capability of changing as easily as the girls’ identities may change in various social settings. In other words, MySpace.com is like another social setting that the girls must present another version of their identity too, like presenting self to friends, family, and school, MySpace allows. The social and media environment is broadening. Girls must negotiate a sense of self and perform their identities in wider and wider cultural contexts within wider and wider social norms and expectations. Social networking sites allow for developing adolescents to perform identities, practicing various presentations of multiple selves in a world where audiences are widening and what it means to be a girl today is expanding in scope.
REFERENCES


Web: Girls, the Internet and the Negotiation of Identity (pp. 69-83). New York, NY: Peter Lang.


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hi, name, general chit chat, here’s what we’re going to do. I’m going to ask you some questions about your definition of identity, and some questions about your MySpace page. I’m going to pull up your page (that I saved on a computer because MySpace is blocked here at St. Catherine’s. You can use the page to answer some of the questions but you can’t click on anything because it’s kind of like a fake page.

Before we start, I am going to remind you that this is all in confidentiality—you may pick a pseudonym or I may pick one for you. Also if at any time you have any questions or would like to stop the interview, please do not hesitate to do so.

General Interview Guide/Interview Topics

Identity: To discover, how do girls define identity? How do they define their personal identity and their public identity? *(Tell me questions):*

- Tell me what words you would use to describe yourself.
  - Do these words ever change? Why?
  - Are there certain times when you change the words to describe yourself?
  - When are those times?
  - Why do you change these descriptions?
- Tell me what words your friends would use to describe you
- Tell me what words your teachers would use to describe you
- Tell me what words your family would use to describe you
Are the words your family, teachers, and friends use different from the words you use to describe yourself?

Why do you think there is a difference?

Questions about the creation of the MySpace profile, will help address the student’s performance/presentation of identity on the Internet. These questions will be addressed during the “grand tour” of the MySpace page. In other words, What role does MySpace play in their public performance of self? (Show me questions):

• How long have you had a MySpace page?
  o do you have or have you had an other type of page? which do you prefer? why?
  o how often do you check your MySpace page?

• Why do you use MySpace?

• Show me the most important factor/item/aspect you chose to include in your profile?

• Show me what sort of choices you made when creating your profile.
  o Why did you include/exclude this item?

• Show me what item do you most often change or update on your page?

• What did you want your profile to represent?
The tensions between **public and private identities**. How do the girls negotiate the tensions between public and private identities on their MySpace pages? What do they see are the differences between their identity online and their offline identity?

- What sort of person do you feel your profile represents?

- Who did you make your profile for?

- Do you know all of your “friends” on your page? How well do you know them?

- How many of these “friends” do you interact with outside of MySpace?

- Do you get feedback from your “friends” on your MySpace comments section?
  - What sort of feedback do you get?

- Who did you want to see your profile?
  - What do your friends say about your profile?
  - What would your family say about your profile?
  - What would a teacher say about your profile?

- Did you have an audience in mind?

**Rumor Control:** Currently there has been a lot of news about MySpace and its dangers. (a boy at pleasant run was arrested because he made a threat to kill other students through
his MySpace page. men are arranging meetings with young people they meet on
MySpace.) Have you heard of any of these news stories? What do you think of the
rumors?

- why do you think adults are worried?

- are your parents worried about you using MySpace?

- do they have any rules about your use of MySpace?
  - how do you feel about the rules?

- do you feel that MySpace is a private place?

- do you feel you can control who views your page or not? do you feel safe on
  MySpace?

Is there anything they would like to add about their MySpace page and identity.

Can I count on you to answer a few questions over the next couple months about your
page and responses through email?
APPENDIX B: IRB PROTOCOL

OHIO UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
PROJECT OUTLINE FORM

Title of Research Proposal

Presenting face on MySpace: Girls, identity and the Internet

Investigator(s) Information

Primary Investigator
Name Lisa M. Wagner
Department TCOM

Address School of Telecommunications, Ohio University, Athens, OH
(If off-campus, include city, state and zip code)

Email lw345404@ohio.edu Phone (740) 589-5951

Training Module Completed? X Yes No (Attach Certificate as Appendix H)
(http://cscwww.cats.ohiou.edu/research/compliance/citiprogram.html)

Co-investigators
Name n/a
Department

Address
(If off-campus, include city, state and zip code)

Email Phone

Training Module Completed? Yes No (Attach Certificate as Appendix H)

Attach sheets for additional co-investigators if necessary, and check here

Advisor Information (if applicable)

Name Norma Pecora, Ph.D.
Department TCOM

Address School of Telecommunications-221 RTV Phone 593-4864

Email pecora@ohio.edu

Training Module Completed? X Yes No (Attach Certificate as Appendix H)
Anticipated Starting Date  April 16, 2007  Duration 6 mos yrs  
(Work, including recruitment, cannot begin prior to IRB approval. This date should never precede the submission date)

Funding Status
Is the researcher receiving or applying for external funding?  Yes  X  No  
(Note – This refers to funding from entities outside of Ohio University)
If yes, list source n/a  

(Note – If an application for funding has been submitted, a FULL copy of the funding application must accompany this form as APPENDIX G)

If yes, describe any consulting or other financial relationships with this sponsor.

Is there a payment of any kind connected with enrollment of participants on this study that will be paid to persons other than the research participants?  Yes  X  No  
(If yes, describe.)

n/a

Review Level
Based on the definition in the guidelines, do you believe your research qualifies for:

___ Exempt Review  Category ____________  
___ Expedited Review  Category ____________  
X Full Committee Review

Final determination of review level will be determined by Office of Research Compliance in accordance with the categories defined in the Code of Federal Regulations

Prior Approval
If this or a similar protocol been approved by OU IRB or any other, please attach copy of approval and label as Appendix E.

Recruitment/Selection of Subjects
Estimated Number of Human Participants 20

Characteristics of subjects (check as many boxes as appropriate).

X Minors  ___ Physically or Mentally Disabled  ___ Elementary School Students  
___ Adults  ___ Legal Incompetency  ___ Secondary School Students  
___ Prisoners  ___ Pregnant Females  ___ University Students  
___ Others (Specify) ____________________________
Briefly describe the criteria for selection of subjects (inclusion/exclusion). Include such information as age range, health status, etc. Attach additional pages if necessary.

Participants will be selected from the identified research site, St. Catherine High School, an all girls’ private high school in Cincinnati, Ohio. Participation in this research project is limited to high school aged girls who use MySpace.com. MySpace.com is the most popular social-networking website on the Internet. MySpace.com is most popular with high school aged adolescents, ages 12-17, and girls are more likely than boys to use the social networking site: According to a recent Pew Internet Project report (2007), “More than half of all online American youths ages 12-17 use online social networking sites . . . “The survey also finds that older teens, particularly girls, are more likely to use these sites” (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 1). And, “Fully 85% of teens who have created an online profile say the profile they use or update most often is on MySpace, while 7% update a profile on Facebook” (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 4).

Because MySpace is the most popular social networking site, because older teens, particularly girls, are more likely to use the site, and because studying the voices of girls has long been neglected in academic work, the investigator limits her research to the study of high school aged female adolescent MySpace users.

The differences between boys and girls’ Internet usage range from web game preferences to Internet activities. Boys tend to prefer more fantasy and violent type Internet games; whereas girls prefer realistic games involving “themes with realistic or familiar characters” (Valkenburg, Schouten, and Peter, 2005, p. 386). Additionally boys are more likely to download games and videos from the Internet; whereas girls are more likely to prefer Internet communication activities (chat, IM, comment boards) (Valkenburg, et al., 2005). Although no study to date has been done examining the difference between boys and girls’ personal MySpace profiles, gender differences between personal homepages have been identified (Döring, 2002; Stern, 2004; Valkenburg et al., 2005). Boys tend to “emphasize status and competence,” and girls tend “to present themselves as nice and attractive” (Valkenburg, et al., 2005, p. 387). In the 2005 Valkenburg et al., study, the researchers concluded:

“The motive to engage in Internet-based identity experiments for self-exploration was predicted only by gender. Compared to boys, girls experimented with their identity more often to explore their selves and investigate how they appear to be in the eyes of others. Girls are more likely than boys to experience decline in self-esteem during adolescence. Compared to boys, they are generally unhappier with their body and more likely to worry and ruminate about their problems. This decrease in self-esteem could encourage girls to use the Internet more frequently than boys to explore and test certain aspects of their selves” (p. 397).

Because girls are more likely to experiment with their identities online and because of the threat to a decreased sense of self-esteem, the researcher has decided to focus this dissertation project on female adolescent MySpace users and their senses of identity and exclude the use of male adolescent MySpace users from the study.

(For Reference List, please see Appendix F)
How will you identify and recruit prospective participants? If subjects are chosen from records, indicate who gave approval for the use of the records. If records are "private" medical or student records, provide the protocol, consent forms, letters, etc., for securing consent of the subjects for the records. Written documentation for cooperation/permission from the holder or custodian of the records should be attached. (Initial contact of subjects identified through a records search must be made by the official holder of the record, i.e. primary physician, therapist, public school official.)

A research site, St. Catherine High School, in Cincinnati, OH, has been selected for this study. Participants will be recruited through the use of flyers (see Appendix B) and morning homeroom announcements (see Appendix B). Prospective participants must meet the following requirements: enrolled in the high school site, have a scheduled study hall during the months of the research project, and be a MySpace user. All students have study hall; although freshmen have only one study hall a week, and seniors have “open study hall” which means they do not have to sit in the assigned study hall room (rm.127). Students will contact the researcher if interested through the project’s MySpace page (see Appendix B). They may visit this site and choose whether or not they wish to volunteer their participation. Once their interest is expressed through email contact with the researcher, she will contact the student and their parent requesting parental consent and informed participant assent (see Appendix A and the following Informed Consent section).

Please describe your relationship to the potential participants, i.e. instructor of class, co-worker, etc. If no relationship, state no relationship.

No Relationship

Attach copies of all recruitment tools (advertisements, posters, etc.) and label as APPENDIX B

Please see Appendix B

Performance Sites

List all collaborating and performance sites, and provide copy of IRB approval from that site and/or letters of cooperation or support.

The selected performance site is: St. Catherine High School

The letter of cooperation and support is attached (Appendix E).
Project Description

Please provide a brief summary of this project, using non-technical terms that would be understood by a non-scientific reader. Attach an additional page, if needed, but please limit this description to no more than one typewritten page.

This dissertation looks to answer the over-arching question; how do adolescent girls use the social networking site, MySpace.com to present their identity? Through a combination of interviews and email conversations, the researcher will investigate how adolescent girls are using MySpace.com to present their selves and compare this presentation or performance of an online identity to the girls’ personal definitions of identity. The researcher will have the participants act as tour guide to their profile page and explain what sort of choices she made in creating an online profile. Then the researcher will ask the participants to discuss different notions of identity, i.e. how the participant describes herself, how she imagines a friend would describe her, or how she imagines her family would describe her. These definitions will be looked at in relation to the participant’s discussion of her profile page. The researcher is looking to see if there are tensions or discrepancies between online public identities, personal offline identities, and public offline identities. Additionally the researcher would like to address the ways in which adolescent girls are using social networking sites to reflect the adolescent’s struggle with changing and developing identities.

Please describe the specific scientific objectives (aims) of this research and any previous relevant research.

This qualitative study aims to address the following research questions:

• How do girls define identity? How do they define their personal identity and their public identity?
• What role does MySpace play in their public performance of self?
• How do the girls negotiate the tensions between public and private identities on their MySpace pages? What do they see are the differences between their identity online and their offline identity?
• How are adolescent girls using the social networking site, MySpace.com, to present self?

Through methodologies detailed below the researcher intends to gain a better understanding of how girls work through their changing sense of identity on the Internet, and how they overcome the tensions between personal identities and public performances of self. This study builds on existing literature which explores themes found on adolescent homepages and adolescent’s use of homepages for self-disclosure. This research incorporates an important and often neglected factor in studying adolescents on the Internet, the voices of the adolescent text makers themselves. By including the voice of the female adolescents in describing and explaining their MySpace page profile, this research will add to the emerging field of girls studies, developmental psychology, adolescent Internet use, and communication of identity.
Methodology: please describe the procedures (sequentially) that will be performed/followed with human participants.

The methodological nature of this dissertation research is qualitative. Qualitative research is a means in which a researcher seeks to understand humans, social interactions and settings, individualistic realities and differing perspectives. Qualitative research is emergent, just as humans and reality are contextual. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) define qualitative research as “how people engage in symbolic performances to create meaningful worlds in which they live,” (p. xi). In terms of studying an individual’s identity processes, it is extremely necessary to recognize that individual in terms of his or her own cultural context. According to McKee, qualitative research involves the exploration into an individual’s sense-making practices, or ways of making meaning (2003). This dissertation research looks at the many different levels and contributions (cultural contexts) that go into an individual adolescent’s use of MySpace.com. The primary method employed is known as “grand-tour” which combines participant observation with interviewing. Basically “grand-tour” is an interview using props. Duke and Kreshel (1998) attribute the “grand-tour” method to Crabtree and Miller (1992). Crabtree and Miller used the “grand-tour” in order to elicit responses to “tell me, and show me, how you” (Duke & Kreshel, 1998, p. 56).

Sequentially, the research method is as follows. After the volunteer participant returns her signed consent forms (Parental/Guardian and Student Assent) to me (through self-addressed stamped envelopes) I will contact Becky Crowe at St. Catherine High School with my list of volunteer participants. Becky Crowe, a Guidance Counselor, has agreed to coordinate the student’s interview conversation with me according to the student’s Study Hall availability. Becky Crowe has access to the student’s academic schedules and will therefore arrange for students to meet with me only during their study hall time (a 45 minute time slot). Additionally Becky Crowe has access to the room availability schedule for the high school and has informed me that I will be able to conduct my research in one of three available rooms in the school. These rooms consist of: a library conference room, a quiet area in the Business office, or an empty office in the Guidance Office.

Approximately 20 students will participate in this study. The student will come to the assigned room for the interview and the principal investigator will read over the verbal consent form before beginning the interview conversation. The conversation will take place in two parts: discussion about MySpace page and discussion about identity. The student will be asked to show her MySpace page (on the researcher’s laptop computer with wireless Internet access). This MySpace page will be saved to the computer in order to compare to updated versions over the course of the summer months. The student will be asked questions regarding the creation of her MySpace profile and about her use of MySpace.com. After the student “walks the researcher through” (grand tour) or “shows me and tells me how” she looks at and reads her MySpace page, the researcher will ask her questions about her definitions of identity (Please see Appendix C for sample interview questions). This initial conversation will take place within the 45 minute allotted time. Qualitative research methods look for repetition in responses to find a good ending point in surveying participants. The researcher will interview participants until responses become repetitive (estimated at 15 interviews).
Following the initial conversation and with participant permission, the researcher will contact the student participant through email (within the MySpace project page). Here the researcher will ask the student about any changes on the MySpace profile page over the summer months. These updated pages will be saved in order to compare to student responses regarding changes. The researcher plans on “remaining in contact” with the participants through email (two to three 15 minute email conversations) on the project’s MySpace page. These email conversations will take place over the summer months and are centered around any changes made to the participant’s MySpace page and/or changes in attitudes about the use of MySpace. For example, the researcher may notice a new background choice on the participant’s MySpace page, or a new video stream added. At that point, the researcher will write an email to the participant through the MySpace “message” function and ask the participant why they changed their background or what made them want to change their background. Additionally, questions may be asked about whether or not the participant still uses their MySpace page or if they have noticed any change in their using habits. Email contact consists of two to three 15 minute email conversations during the summer months (June-August 2007).

Finally, the participant has the possibility to participate in a follow up conversation, to take place once again during the student’s Study Hall, will take place in August/September of the 2007-2008 school year. This interview will allow the student to add any thoughts or opinions about MySpace, their profile, and their definitions of identity. To remind the student of her rights, the researcher will provide another copy of the Research Assent form for review. This follow up conversation will ask the participant to add any additional thoughts she may have had regarding her MySpace page, her use of MySpace, and changing definitions of identity.

Recorded conversations will remain within the primary investigator’s possession at all times. Digital recordings of the conversation will be downloaded into the primary investigator’s personal computer which is password protected. Hard copies of the recorded conversations and email conversations will stay locked in a file cabinet in the investigator’s office and will be destroyed upon the dissertation’s defense.

Interview conversations and email conversations will be transcribed and coded for response themes. Themes regarding public notions of identity, personal notions of identity, and changing identities are of particular interest. Using reader-response theory to analyze the texts of these conversations will allow the researcher to identify the prevalent themes.

Describe any potential risks or discomforts of participation and the steps that will be taken to minimize them.

There are no potential risks or discomforts to this research project.

Describe the anticipated benefits to the individual participants. If none, state that. (Note that compensation is not a benefit, but should be listed in the compensation section on the next page.)
While there are no known benefits to participating in this researcher, the project has the potential to provide the student participants with a more informed understanding of their use of the popular networking site, MySpace.com. Through participation in this project, students will be asked to articulate the choices they make while creating their online identities which in turn has the potential to encourage the student to become more critical of the creation of their online identities. And, perhaps, they will also become aware of a broader audience to their MySpace identity and may become more cognizant of the role the Internet plays in their lives.

Describe the anticipated benefits to society and/or the scientific community. There must be some benefit to justify the use of human subjects.

In the midst of rising popularity, Internet social networking sites like MySpace.com and Facebook.com are under attack by parents, educators, and law makers and enforcement agencies. These sites, popular with both adolescent male and female Internet users, are causing panic amongst layers of adults. Adults worry that these adolescent Internet users post too much personal information, possibly getting into the wrong hands. Sensational TV news programs like, To Catch a Predator, add to the dread.

However, scholarly research on adolescent Internet use contradicts the fear popular media would have you believe. Research indicates that adolescents benefit in terms of identity work and experimentation on the Internet (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 1998; Stern, 1999, 2000, 2002; Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005). Since adolescence is a time in which identity is precarious and experiments with identity are prevalent (Brown, Reese-Dykers, Steele, & White, 1994; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Steele & Brown, 1995) the Internet is used as a tool to work with and express changing notions of identity.

According to a recent Pew Internet Project report (2007), “More than half of all online American youths ages 12-17 use online social networking sites” (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 1). Girls are the more likely users of these types of sites (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 1).

Girls, in particular, are important to study. Many feminist scholars assert that female adolescence is a difficult time period because they are at risk for losing a sense of self (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Brown & St. Clair, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Pipher, 1994). Female adolescence is a time in which young girls are left to maintain a strong sense of self in a society/culture that pushes them towards a subjugated self. Therefore, it is important to study how girls negotiate identity during this turbulent developmental stage. Stern (2000) studied girls’ Internet homepages as sites for self-expression and found that, “Girls’ home pages seem to be a form of self-presentation, characterized by the portrayal of an identity, in the service of reaching an audience” (p. 47). Though Stern’s work is invaluable to the study of girls’ use of the Internet for self-expression, one key voice is missing in her work, the voice of the girls themselves. My project adds to her work. I will study the voices of girl MySpace users.

Currently, adolescent Internet use is a worrisome topic in the popular news media. Adults and parents are concerned by the sorts of information adolescents are posting to a world-wide audience. Girls are more likely to experiment with their identity on the Internet and are at a greater risk for losing a sense of self than boys. Research must be
performed to better understand female adolescents’ thinking behind the creation of their online identities. We must learn through the adolescents’ themselves why they post what they do and how they are using their online identities. This research project aims to explore the ways in which female adolescents are using the most popular social-networking site, MySpace.com, to manage an online identity. Research findings will better inform both academic and popular communities alike about the ways in which female adolescents are using MySpace.com and will bring forth a greater awareness to the adolescent users themselves about the role the site plays in their lives.

Describe procedures in place to protect confidentiality. Who will have access to raw data? Will raw data be made available to anyone other than the Principal Investigator and immediate study personnel (e.g., school officials, medical personnel)? If yes, who, how, and why? Describe the procedure for sharing data. Describe how the subject will be informed that the data may be shared.

Confidentiality is imperative. Raw data will be accessible to the principal investigator and faculty advisor alone. Raw data includes recorded conversations, email conversations, and transcribed conversations. Raw data will be kept in a locked file cabinet. The participant is informed of her anonymity in the consent and assent forms. Although the participant may be quoted, pseudonyms will be employed. St. Catherine High School Guidance Counselor, Becky Crowe, fulfills the role of study personnel or performance site liaison. Although she will know participants through scheduling and room assignment, research participant quotes are kept anonymous through the use of assigned pseudonyms. No identifying information will allow for students to be recognized.

Will participants be: Audiotaped? X Yes No

Videotaped? Yes X No

If so, describe how/where the tapes will be stored (i.e. locked file cabinet in investigator office), who will have access to them, and at what point they will be destroyed.

The digital recorder containing the interview conversations will remain with the investigator at all times. Additionally, the voice recordings will be downloaded into the investigator’s personal computer (protected by a password) and all hard copies of recorded conversations will be kept in a locked file cabinet. The investigator alone will have the key and access to these taped recordings. The recordings will be destroyed and deleted one year after the dissertation’s defense.

Provide details of any compensation (money, course credit, gifts) being offered to participants, including how the compensation will be prorated for participants who discontinue participation prior to completion.

There is no compensation for participating in this research.
Instruments
List all questionnaires, instruments, standardized tests below, with a brief description, and provide copies of each, labeled as APPENDIX C.

The purpose of this study is to encourage the participants to talk about their MySpace page and the ways in which they see their page presenting their identity. Guided conversations (grand tour conversations—Duke & Kreshel, 1998) will be used to encourage discussion about the individual’s page. Student participants will be asked to “walk” the investigator through their MySpace page and talk about choices in including and excluding information on the page.

A general interview guide will be used to start the conversation. Starter questions will ease the participant into conversation:
- About when did you begin to use MySpace?
- Why did you create a profile?
- How often do you use MySpace?
- And, When you first log on to your MySpace page, what are the first things you look at/check?

An in-depth interview guide will be used to address questions about the creation of the MySpace profile. This guide will help address the student’s performance/presentation of identity on the Internet:
- What sort of choices did you make when creating your profile?
- What was the most important fact you chose to include in the profile?
- What item do you most often change or update on your page?
- What did you want your profile to represent?
- Who did you want to see your profile?
- Did you have an audience in mind?

And finally, questions regarding the student participant’s definitions of identity will address how the student differentiates between public and personal identity:
- Tell me what words would you use to describe yourself?
- What words would you use to describe your MySpace page?
- What sort of person do you think your MySpace page presents?
- How would your friends describe you?
- How would your family describe you?

Please see Appendix C for a more structured in-depth interview guide.

How will the data be analyzed? State the hypothesis and describe how the analysis of the data will test that hypothesis.

Qualitative research does not utilize hypotheses; however, the research questions guiding the study are as follows:
- How do girls define identity? How do they define their personal identity and their public identity?
- What role does MySpace play in their public performance of self?
• How do the girls negotiate the tensions between public and private identities on their MySpace pages? What do they see are the differences between their identity online and their offline identity?
• How are adolescent girls using the social networking site, MySpace.com, to present self?

Transcripts of the interview conversations and email conversations will be analyzed in order to identify trends and themes in responses to interview questions. The texts of these conversations will be analyzed using reader-response theory. Reader-response theory suggests that the meaning of a text emerges from the interaction of the reader, who bears her own personal history, with the content of the text, authored by someone with a personal history of her own. The various and diverse interpretations different researchers might make of the same text can be accounted for by the uniqueness of each researcher and her unique response to the text (Ayres & Poirier, 1996; Stern, 2000).

The researcher’s anticipated outcomes propose that there are differences between the adolescent girl’s personal notion of identity and the public identity she is presenting on MySpace.com. Reader-response theory will help analyze conversations about the girls’ MySpace pages and the identities they are presenting through the creation of an online profile, and will allow for a thematic comparison to the girls’ definitions of differing identities (personal, familial, and friends).

Informed Consent Process  Attach copies of all consent documents or text and label as APPENDIX A.

Informed consent is a process, not just a form. Potential participants/representatives must be given the information they need to make an informed decision to participate in this research. How will you provide information/obtain permission?

Once contact between interested participants and researcher have been established through the project’s MySpace page, the researcher will mail the Parent Introduction letter, Parent/Guardian Consent form and Student Assent form to the interested participant’s home address (Please see Appendix A). A self-addressed stamped envelope will be included so that the signed Parental/Guardian Consent form and Student Assent forms may be returned to the Researcher at her home address (in Cincinnati). Once Parental/Guardian consent and Student assent is received, I will contact the student and Becky Crowe to arrange our initial conversation. Becky Crowe, the Guidance Counselor at St. Catherine High School will coordinate Study Hall schedules with the interview conversations and participants. Once again, the Student Assent form will be read aloud to the student participant before the conversation begins.

How and where will the consent process occur? How will it be structured to enhance independent and thoughtful decision-making? What steps will be taken to avoid coercion or undue influence?

Consent occurs before the study begins. After establishing contact and interest with potential research participants, I will contact the Parents with a detailed introduction letter describing the project as well as including both the Parental/Guardian Consent form and the Student Assent signature form in an envelope that also contains a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return of these signed forms. Signed consent and assent forms are to be returned to the researcher’s home address. By sending these information letters and
consent and assent forms home, the student and her parents may carefully review the details of the project before agreeing to participation. Participation is voluntary and the letter, consent, and assent forms all reiterate this point. Additionally, participants will be verbally reminded of their rights before the conversations begin. (Please see Appendix A)

Will the investigator(s) be obtaining all of the informed consents? **X Yes**  **No**

If not, identify by name and training who will be describing the research to subjects/representatives and inviting their participation?

Will all adult participants have the capacity to give informed consent? If not, explain procedures to be followed.

n/a

If any participants will be minors, include procedures/form for parental consent and for the assent from the minor.

Once the student has established interest and contact with the researcher through the project’s MySpace page, the researcher will mail an introduction/information letter to the parent/guardian as well as the Parental/Guardian consent form and Student assent form to the student’s home. Signed consent and assent forms must be returned to the researcher’s home address before participation in the project may commence. Students will be verbally reminded of their rights before the initial conversation begins as well. Please see Parental Information Letter and the Parent Consent and Student Assent forms (Appendix A).

Are you requesting a waiver or alteration of Informed Consent? **Yes** **X No**

An IRB may approve a consent that does not include, or alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent. Provide justifications below for the waiver.

a. Describe how the proposed research presents no more than minimal risk to participants.

n/a

b. Why will a waiver of informed consent not adversely affect the rights and welfare of participants?

n/a

c. Why is it impracticable to carry out the research without a waiver or alteration of informed consent?

n/a

d. How will pertinent information be provided to participants, if appropriate, at a later date?

n/a
Even if waiver of written informed consent is granted, you will likely be required to obtain verbal permission that reflects the elements of informed consent (if appropriate). Please specify below information to be read/given to participants.

n/a

Will participants be deceived or incompletely informed regarding any aspect of the study?

Yes          X  No

If so, provide rationale for use of deception.

n/a

Attach copies of post-study debriefing information and label as APPENDIX D.

n/a
Investigator Assurance

I certify that the information provided in this outline form is complete and correct.

I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, conduct of the study and the ethical performance of the project.

I agree to comply with Ohio University policies on research and investigation involving human subjects (O.U. Policy # 19.052), as well as with all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research, including, but not limited to the following:

- The project will be performed by qualified personnel, according to the OU approved protocol.
- No changes will be made in the protocol or consent form until approved by the OU IRB.
- Legally effective informed consent will be obtained from human subjects if applicable, and documentation of informed consent will be retained, in a secure environment, for three years after termination of the project.
- Adverse events will be reported to the OU IRB promptly, and no later than within 5 working days of the occurrence.
- All protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. Research must stop at the end of that approval period unless the protocol is re-approved for another term.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

Principal Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Co-Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date ____________
Faculty Advisor/Sponsor Assurance

By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student(s) or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol. In addition:

- I agree to meet with the investigator(s) on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
- Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.
- I assure that the investigator will report significant or untoward adverse events to the IRB in writing promptly, and within 5 working days of the occurrence.
- If I will be unavailable, as when on sabbatical or vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

Advisor/Faculty Sponsor Signature _______________________________ Date ________

*The faculty advisor/sponsor must be a member of the OU faculty. The faculty member is considered the responsible party for legal and ethical performance of the project.
Checklist:
Completed and Signed IRB-1 (this form)
Appendix A - copies of all consent documents (in 12 pt. Font) including
  ___ Informed Consent to Participate in Research (adult subjects)
  ___ Parental Permission/Informed Consent (parents of subjects who are minors or children)
  ___ Assent to Participate in Research (used when subjects are minors or children)
Appendix B - copies of any recruitment tools (advertisements, posters, etc.)
Appendix C – copies of all instruments (surveys, standardized tests, questionnaires, interview topics, etc.).
Appendix D - Copies of debriefing text
Appendix E - Approval from other IRB, School District, Corporation, etc.
Appendix F - Any additional materials that will assist the Board in completing its review
Appendix G – Copies of any IRB approvals
Appendix H – Copies of Human Subjects Research Training Certificates
(for all key personnel involved in non-exempt research)

All fields on the form must be completed, regardless of review level. If a field is not applicable, indicate by inserting n/a. Incomplete forms will result in delayed processing.
Forward this completed form and all attachments to:
Human Subjects Research
Office of Research Compliance
RTEC 117

Questions? Visit the website at www.ohio.edu/research/compliance/ or email compliance@ohio.edu
Ohio University Consent Form Template (must be in 12 point font)

Title of Research: __________________________________________________________

Principal Investigator: _____________________________________________________

Co-Investigator: ___________________________________________________________

Department: ______________________________________________________________

Federal and university regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

Explanation of Study
   Purpose of the research
   Procedures to be followed
   Duration of subject's participation
   Identification of specific procedures that are experimental

Risks and Discomforts

Benefits

Alternative Treatments (if applicable)

Confidentiality and Records

Compensation

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact (Researcher/Advisor & email/phone number).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

__________________________________________
Signature

__________________________________________
Date

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.
APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT POSTER

Mohawks is in your extended network

Mohawks's Latest Blog Entry [Subscribe to this blog]
[View All Blog Entries]

Mohawks's Blurb

About me:
Hi! I'm a 1037 St. Catherine alumna currently pursuing my Ph.D. at Ohio University in Athens, OH. I am conducting my dissertation research on female adolescent MySpace users. Please help me add more friends besides Tom—he's cool and all but he's just not what I'm looking for! I'll be making announcements about this project within the next couple of weeks. If you are interested in participating, please visit the project's MySpace page:
http://www.myspace.com/lisadissertation
and send me a message or add me as a friend.

Who I'd like to meet:
Interested in other MySpace users!

Mohawks's Friend Space
Mohawks has 1 friends.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS EXCITING RESEARCH PROJECT, PLEASE CONTACT Lisa Wagner at:

http://www.myspace.com/lisadissertation

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April 16, 2007

Dear St. Catherine Parent or Guardian:

Your daughter has expressed interest in participating in my doctoral dissertation research project, “Presenting face on MySpace: Girls, identity and the Internet.” The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how female adolescents use the popular social-networking site, MySpace.com, to express their identity. As a 1997 St. Catherine High School alumna, I have selected St. Catherine students to interview because of their strong sensibilities and values. I feel this is an exciting opportunity for your daughter to participate in this socially conscious academic research and to add to the growing scholarly work on girls’ studies and adolescents and the Internet.

I am requesting your permission for your daughter to participate in my study. This would entail your daughter spending one to two 45 minute recorded conversations and sharing a few email conversations with me about her MySpace usage. Your daughter may decline to answer any questions or terminate her participation at any time. Her name will remain confidential, although her comments may be included in published research (pseudonyms will be used). Because I understand that you may be apprehensive about having your daughter provide information to a researcher, I have arranged for the interview conversations to take place at St. Catherine High School. Additionally, I have created a project MySpace page that you may visit as often as you like: http://www.myspace.com/lisadissertation

If you approve your daughter’s participation, I’ll arrange an introductory conversation with her during her Study Hall hours in the Spring Quarter. I will be asking your daughter about her MySpace page as well as her personal definitions of identity. After this initial conversation, I would like to remain in contact with your daughter through email (two to three 15 minute email conversations), the project’s MySpace page, and possibly a follow up Study Hall conversation in the fall.

If you allow your daughter to participate in this study, I really think she could provide valuable insight into girls’ Internet use. If you have any questions about the nature of this project or desire further information, please do not hesitate to call me at (***********) or contact me via email at: lisa.m.wagner@ohio.edu. You may also contact my Ohio University faculty advisor, Dr. Norma Pecora, at (**********) or via email at: pecora@ohio.edu.

Please carefully review and sign the enclosed consent form and return it at your earliest convenience to:
I look forward to hearing from you and I thank you and your daughter in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Wagner
St. Catherine H.S. Class of ‘97
School of Telecommunications
Ohio University
I grant permission for my daughter, _____________________, to participate in Lisa Wagner’s dissertation research project, “Presenting face on MySpace: Girls, identity and the Internet,” at St. Catherine High School. The purpose of this research project is to investigate how female adolescents are using the popular social networking site, MySpace.com, to express their identity.

While there are no known benefits to participating in this research, some opportunities for my daughter are possible. First, she may gain a more critical view of social networking sites and the creation of a user profile. Secondly, my daughter may achieve a greater understanding about the role the Internet plays in her life. And finally, she will be given the opportunity to add a voice to the growing academic fields of girls’ studies and adolescent Internet use.

Potential benefits of the study to science or society include a greater understanding of female adolescent identity development and its expression on the Internet. This research project aims to explore the ways in which female adolescents are using the most popular social-networking site, MySpace.com, to manage an online identity. Research findings will better inform both academic and popular communities alike about the ways in which female adolescents are using MySpace.com and will bring forth a greater awareness to the adolescent users themselves about the role the site plays in their lives.

The nature of this study includes guided conversations (audio recorded) about the students’ MySpace page and written email contact. These interviews will take place in St. Catherine High School during the months of April/May and the beginning of the 2007-2008 (August/September) school year during my daughter’s scheduled Study Hall Hours. My daughter will be asked to participate in one initial 45 minute conversation with Lisa, two to three 15 minute email conversations during the summer months with Lisa, and possibly a 45 minute follow up conversation with Lisa. During these conversations, my daughter will be asked to talk about her MySpace profile page and will also be asked to share her personal definitions of identity. Throughout the months of this study (April to September, 2007), Lisa will regularly view my daughter’s MySpace page.

Given the open-ended nature of the data collection, it is possible that compromising information will be revealed. Any potentially compromising information should not be shared. The researcher is obligated to report any behavior that is illegal, potentially physically dangerous or life-threatening to the Guidance Counselor and project liaison, Becky Crowe.
This study presents no known risks or discomforts. My daughter’s participation in this research project is voluntary. My daughter and/or I may withdraw her participation at anytime throughout the study without penalty. The audio recorded interview conversations will be deleted approximately one year after the dissertation is defended. Additionally, the names of individual participants will not be revealed; although her comments may be included in published research, pseudonyms will be used.

If I or my daughter should have any questions or concerns throughout the course of this study, we may contact Lisa Wagner at (*********), or through email at lisa.m.wagner@ohio.edu, or we may contact Lisa’s faculty advisor, Dr. Norma Pecora at (*********) or pecora@ohio.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your child’s rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the investigator.

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree that my child may participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to my child have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my child’s participation in this research. My child’s participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I or my child may discontinue my child’s participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I or my child may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

____________________  ____________________
Signature of Researcher         Signature of Parent/Guardian

____________________  ____________________
Date                      Date
I, ____________________________, agree to participate in Lisa Wagner’s dissertation research project, “Presenting face on MySpace: Girls, identity and the Internet,” at St. Catherine High School. The purpose of this research project is to investigate how female adolescents are using the popular social networking site, MySpace.com, to express their identity.

While there are no known benefits to participating in this research, some opportunities are possible. First, I may gain a more critical view of social networking sites and the creation of a user profile. Secondly, I may achieve a greater understanding about the role the Internet plays in my life. And finally, I will be given the opportunity to add a voice to the growing academic fields of girls’ studies and adolescent Internet use.

Potential benefits of the study to science or society include a greater understanding of female adolescent identity development and its expression on the Internet. This research project aims to explore the ways in which female adolescents are using the most popular social-networking site, MySpace.com, to manage an online identity. Research findings will better inform both academic and popular communities alike about the ways in which female adolescents are using MySpace.com and will bring forth a greater awareness to the adolescent users themselves about the role the site plays in their lives.

The nature of this study includes guided conversations (audio recorded) about my MySpace page and written email contact. These interviews will take place in St. Catherine High School during the months of April/May and the beginning of the 2007-2008 (August/September) school year during my scheduled Study Hall Hours. I will be asked to participate in one initial 45 minute conversation with Lisa, two to three 15 minute email conversations during the summer months with Lisa, and possibly a 45 minute follow up conversation. During these conversations, I will be asked to talk about my MySpace profile page and will also be asked to share my personal definitions of identity. Throughout the months of this study (April to September, 2007), Lisa will regularly view my MySpace page.

Given the open-ended nature of the data collection, it is possible that compromising information will be revealed. Any potentially compromising information should not be shared. The researcher is obligated to report any behavior that is illegal, potentially physically dangerous or life-threatening to the Guidance Counselor and project liaison, Becky Crowe.

This study presents no known risks or discomforts. My participation in this research project is voluntary. My parents and/or myself may withdraw.
participation at any time throughout the study without penalty. The audio recorded
interview conversations will be deleted approximately one year after the
dissertation is defended. Additionally, my name will not be revealed; although
my comments may be included in published research, pseudonyms will be used.

If I should have any questions or concerns throughout the course of this study, I
may contact Lisa Wagner at (*******), or through email at
lisa.m.wagner@ohio.edu, or I may contact Lisa’s faculty advisor, Dr. Norma
Pecora at (*******), or pecora@ohio.edu.

If I have any questions regarding my rights as a research participant, I may
contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University,
(740)593-0664.

Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one and return the other to the
investigator.

________________________________________________________________________

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to
participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me
have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is
available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my
participation in this research. My participation in this research is given
voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without
penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that
I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

_____________________________                      ____________________________
Signature of Researcher                                      Signature of Student

_____________________________                      ____________________________
Date                                      Date
APPENDIX F: SCREEN CAPTURES OF GIRLS' MYSPACE PAGES
Appendix F: Screen Captures of Girls’ MySpace Pages

Elise
I'm in love and I'm having fun!

Female
17 years old
Vilas, Ohio, United States

Last Login: 4/10/2006

About Me:

Heart loves Ritchie.

57's Blues

BE WHO YOU ARE
and say what you feel,
because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.
- Dr. Seuss

Interests:

- Email
- Add Me
- Message
- Join

- FaceBook
- Share
- Save
- Block
- Rate

- Voices by Jax

Comment here.

- 9/13/2007

- 9/13/2007
APPENDIX G: CORRESPONDENCE WITH SCHOOL

17 March 2007

Mrs. Cheryl Sucher, Principal
St. Catherine High School

Dear Mrs. Sucher:

I am an alumna of St. Catherine’s Class of 1997 now working on a Ph.D. in Mass Communications at Ohio University. My dissertation will address the popular social-networking site, MySpace.com and the way young girls use it to construct an identity.

I became interested in this topic because of all the news coverage regarding teens and the Internet. My academic study focuses on girls’ studies, adolescent development and new media technologies, so I wanted to give voice to the focus of the news media. Instead of talking about how teens were using the Internet, I wanted to allow the teens themselves to talk about how they were using the Internet. Because I am familiar with St. Catherine girls, their values, and sensibilities, I would very much like to have them participate in this study.

This study will primarily involve individual interviews with about 20 St. Catherine High School students. Naturally I will try to be as unobtrusive as possible and will not interrupt class time. It is my plan to conduct these interviews during open study hall and after school hours and perhaps during summer break. The nature of this research topic and approach poses no risks or discomfort to the girls but I think it will offer us a better understanding of the way girls use these sites.

Confidentiality is imperative. The girls will be guaranteed privacy and anonymity and informed of the details of the study. Conversations will be recorded for transcription accuracy; however, the individual’s identity will remain private and, of course, these recorded conversations will be destroyed at the completion of my research.

I will contact you during the week of March 19-23 regarding this request. I sincerely believe this to be an exciting opportunity for St. Catherine students to contribute to a socially conscious academic research project.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Wagner
APPENDIX H: MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS

P.A. Announcement:

Attention St. Catherine MySpace users—A St. Catherine graduate, Lisa Wagner is writing her doctoral dissertation on girls, identity and the Internet. If you would be interested in participating in her research study, Please check out the posted flyers or contact Lisa through the project’s MySpace page, http://www.myspace.com/lisadissertation. Participation in this study will allow you to earn Service Hour credit and lets you be a part of exciting scholarly research!

questions and inquiries should be directed to Lisa Wagner at: http://www.myspace.com/lisadissertation

Homeroom Announcement:

Hi! My name’s Lisa Wagner and I’m a 1997 St. Catherine graduate. Currently I’m working on my Ph.D. at Ohio University in Mass Communications. I’m conducting my dissertation research on girls, identity and the Internet and I’m looking for participants. If you are a current MySpace user, please check out this project’s MySpace page at: http://www.myspace.com/lisadissertation and send me a message! I look forward to hearing from you!
APPENDIX I: EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE WITH PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for signing up for the MySpace project! I'll need your first and last name so that I may send a consent form to your home.

Mrs. Crowe will mail out a consent form for both you and your parent or guardian to sign on Wednesday, April 25th. The signed consent forms are due by Friday, May 4th. After I receive the signed forms, Mrs. Crow will arrange a time during the school day for us to talk about your MySpace page (the sooner the better).

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this important project. Your thoughts and opinions are invaluable to its success! Please tell your friends to check it out.

I look forward to talking with you real soon!

Thanks!
Lisa Wagner
**********
lisa.m.wagner@ohio.edu

Hi

Thank you for signing up for the MySpace project! Please “add me” as a friend to your site.

Mrs. Crowe will mail out a consent form for both you and your parent or guardian to sign on Wednesday, April 25th. The signed consent forms are due by Friday, May 4th. After I receive the signed forms, Mrs. Crow will arrange a time during the school day for us to talk about your MySpace page (the sooner the better).

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this important project. Your thoughts and opinions are invaluable to its success! Please tell your friends to check it out.

I look forward to talking with you real soon!

Thanks!
Lisa Wagner
lisa.m.wagner@ohio.edu
APPENDIX J: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS

ANNIE—Freshman

Me: um, let’s see, um, what if this had a pink background, what sort of person do you want your myspace page to represent?

Annie: a happy person

Me: ok, do you think it does that?

Annie: yeah, I think so

Me: ok, um, do you change this picture often?

Annie: um, probably like every other month maybe

Me: ok, umm, let’s see, any stories behind these pictures or why you chose to put em up?

Annie: um, just good times with friends, like graduation, dances, and then, the other ones were from Tremont when we went with our biology class, like a lot of us got to go, it was fun

Me: ok, umm, so do you have anyone in mind when you’re playing around with your myspace page, like when you’re changing these, writing these blogs or posting a funny quote or something, do you want other people to see that or are you thinking about oh so and so will get a kick out of this or are you just doing this for yourself?–>

Annie: umm usually doing it for myself, but like one of my old quotes was uh something funny that happened at a party I went to and this person took like a, like a really funny thing, so I took uh I put it up there and like all the people from that party they remembered that and they thought it was funny, so kind of for them

Me: ok, let’s see, umm, how do you use myspace? Do you mostly do it for yourself, like these putting these blogs up, posting pictures, or do you comment on other people’s pages, do you search other people?

Annie: I don’t like search for other people I just sometimes go through my friends and I look to see who they’ve like updated on theirs, so that’s usually, well yeah like I use it for myself, but also for like communication, cause like sometimes when I make plans for the weekends I’ll like message them through myspace, like if they don’t have a cell phone or aim or something
Me: why do you think it changes from context to context?

Bobbi: probably because they don’t know what I’m thinking when I do things—they know the actions but they don’t know what’s behind the actions

Me: do you think you could give me an example

Bobbi: laughs, I don’t know, like if I decide I’m going to stay in my room and read a book all day my parents are like “Ok I guess she’s just smart” or if I’m just reading a book cause I don’t like, I don’t know, I don’t want to talk to anybody or, so I think there is a difference

Me: yeah, that makes sense—that’s a thoughtful way of looking at it I think—“you must be smart” no, no, that’s an interesting way of thinking about it though, you know what the reasons are behind your actions and they can just see it

Bobbi: I just don’t want to talk to anyone

Bobbi: uh humm

Me: or they just experience your actions they don’t know the reasoning all the time

Bobbi: yeah

Me: ok, how long have you had a myspace page

Bobbi: um when I first got it I like did it and I’m like ok now what, then I kind of just left it for a couple of months and then I like have had for like two years where I was actually on it

Me: not so much any more?

Bobbi: no, like before I didn’t use it at all, now I use it a lot

Me: ok so you’ve had it for 2 or 3 years?

Bobbi: probably two years and for a while I just kind of like left it and then I came back

Bobbi: um, because at first I guess I was just too young to understand it and I didn’t like get how to do all the stuff on it and them I’m like well, this isn’t cool, and then like my friends still have myspaces so I should have one, so I just kind of left it on there and then I came back and it was all cool
**ELISE--Freshman**

Me: but your cousin does, do you have any other pages like a facebook?

Elise: yeah, I have a facebook, that’s it

Me: and which one do you prefer?

Elise: um probably myspace

Me: ok, why is that?

Elise: um, more of my friends have one and you can do a lot more to your page

Me: ok, um, how often do you check your myspace page

Elise: maybe once a day or once every two days—if I get on it one day, I’m not going to get on it on the same day, it’s not that important to me

Me: ok um why would you use say primarily use myspace?

Elise: umm, just talk to my friends, or other people that I know out of town, um a lot of people from my grade school who I’m really close with we don’t go to the same high school, so, just to keep in touch

Me: ok, now, for some reason your page would not download onto my computer, so I’ve printed yours out, blah blah—piano key background is missing—what’s the most important thing on your page?

Elise: probably this right here, cause it’s a link to another website that I really like

Me: maybe I should have done this with everyone’s then I could have written on em, anything else?

Elise: um I like my icons a lot I think they’re really funny, that’s why I picked them!

Me: I have cool socks on today? Did you make that or

Elise: no I found that off this website

Me: ok, what’s ah, oh I just realized this is your name backwards,

Elise: yeah, me and my friend, her name is Anna, and Anna is Anna backwards, so Emma is however you say that backwards
ELLEN--Freshman

Ellen: durma? Oh I just did, that’s just what I called her my whole life, like my sister calls her sugar momma

Me: she seems like an awesome lady, I’d love her gear!

Ellen: yeah, she doesn’t always dress like that, that’s my brother’s stuff, we were on vacation and she’s just messing around! She’s fun!

Me: laughs, um, so your pictures mostly consist of family, friends, and there are only like two shots of just you really

Ellen: yeah, the reason that one was my first one taken, because I was staying over at my friends house and that’s when she made it, so she took that picture and I was like, that just looks like a weird picture

Me: I think it looks normal

Ellen: that was just really late so I was like tired and so

Me: maybe you can tell me, I know that this is I don’t know, and omg, and just kidding, but was imao mean?

Ellen: imao?

Me: you don’t have it on here but I’ve seen it every where?

Ellen: oh! Lmao, laugh my ass off, OH! I don’t know if I should have said that on the recorder!

Me: no! no don’t worry about it, I’ll say a bad word if it makes you feel better!

Ellen: I know when my friend started sending that I thought it was like lamo and I was like What?

Me: yeah I was thinking lamo and stuff and it just wasn’t making sense so I started asking a couple of people and they were like I have no idea

Ellen: yeah

Me: thanks for the window!

Me: ok, so you don’t have a lot of pictures up
KYLIE--Freshman

Me: ok I’ll just toss that in for good measure, um how would your friends describe you?

Kylie: oh ah um, probably very outgoing, funny, um, risk taker, I don’t know

Me: do you think you are?

Kylie: um, for the most part yeah, like not so much as in anything I’d be getting in trouble for but you know, just like being open to new things and stuff

Me: ok, how would your teachers describe you?

Kylie: um, depends on which teacher, laughs, but uh for the most part, um, participation, like good participation in class, um, I you know it depends on which teacher

Me: ok so you’re different in different classes?

Kylie: yeah, l
Me; like how so?

Kylie: um there are just some classes that okay this is going to sound really bad but I know I can like slack off a little bit and still get a good grades, so those teachers might be like a little like well she slacks off but other teachers, there’s other subjects where I need to like keep up on grades and therefore I’m like very participating getting my homework done all the time and

Me: why do you think you have to keep up your grade in some but not like others/

Kylie: they’re just some like, here for example, like religion is really easy, but um, biology, like I know I have to study for tests cause I’m in like honors biology and so it’s harder than like a regular class

Me: how would your family describe you

Kylie: um, laughs, well, I have just to make sure, I live with my mom and my step dad most of the time, and I visit my dad and my step mom on weekends

Kylie: so, um it can get confusing, but for the most part, loving, dramatic, um, mature

Me: are these words changing with different families, like when you’re at home with your mom versus when you’re at your dad’s house

Kylie: um, most of those are in both, but there are a few that would change
MARIA--Freshman

Me: ok, umm, let’s see, so in your about me section, you’ve got your family knows you have this page, do they check it or

Maria: yeah

Me: do they have any rules about you using myspace?

Maria: no, my parents are pretty loose about a lot of things

Me: do you have a, is this set to private?

Maria: yeah, well it might be, I’m not sure if it is or not

Me: reason you set it to private?----?? So your parents don’t really care about what you put up on here?

Maria: no my mom sees it

Me: does she have any reactions for it

Maria: no she laughs

Me: oh, ok, I see you’ve put a big little miss sunshine quote in here, um, when you were writing this did you have an audience in mind

Maria: mostly just friends and people who would look at it and view it

Me: ok, do you want people, what do you want people to discover about you through your myspace page?

Maria: I don’t know, that, that I like my friends and I don’t like fake people especially, laughs, and that I’m entertaining and fun to be around I guess

Me: ok, do you um, it says you’ve got liquor to drinks, boys to confuse, and parties to go to is this your own words?

Maria: no I found that in one of my friends’ profiles

Me: what kind of message do you want that to say?

Maria: I don’t know I just thought that was funny--heeh
BROOKE--Sophomore

Brooke: um because like a lot of, like a lot of people were like, it wasn’t that popular then but I was like ok, you know, I have nothing better to do, so I just got one and, just to communicate and stuff if my instant messenger wasn’t working

Me: which one do you use more, instant messaging or

Brooke: I’d say myspace because like sometimes I’ll just check it for like five seconds instead of being on messenger, being tied down, having long conversations and stuff

Me: ok, and do you have any other pages, like a facebook page?

Brooke: yeah, I have facebook, I don’t get on that one very often though

Me: which one do you prefer?

Brooke: I think I prefer myspace

Brooke: um, I think like a lot more people have it and stuff and it’s like a lot more easier to use and I’m just kind of used to it

Me: ok, why did you get a facebook

Brooke: um, because, I can’t remember, one of my friends, I think it was actually one of my freshman friends, christa, she sent me a like an email to join and I was like why not, so, just did that

Me: ok, how often do you check your myspace page/

Brooke: um, maybe, maybe once a day, maybe every other day, sometimes, I like, like it depends on how like busy I am, and when I’m on I’m not on it that long either so

Me: and why would you say you primarily use myspace

Brooke: probably just to keep in touch with everyone because of um going to St. Catherine it’s hard to like see the boys throughout the week with like everything that is going on, just mainly to keep in touch

Me: ok, and of the people on your myspace page, how many do you know?

Brooke: I know a lot of them, actually that’s really weird you say that because there’s like a lot that, there’s like 400 something I need to delete a lot of em, last night I was
JAMIE--Sophomore

Jamie: yeah, but they’re not like a real gang, they think they’re so like tough, yeah like the crew they’re not

Me: when you say you’re partying with them what do you mean, are you going out drinking or just

Jamie: no, I don’t. they like, like me and Jacob, Jacob makes sure I doesn’t do anything, I don’t want to do anything, and like makes sure no one tries to get me to do anything cause like I don’t, but he like sometimes does it but not all the time, they usually get high—that’s what they do

Me: ok, and you’re doing this at other people’s houses?

Jamie: yeah, basically, like I don’t do it

Me: I’m not asking that, I’m just wondering what you mean by saying “partying”

Jamie: yeah! I just kind of sit there and laugh at them for being retarded

Me: yeah, they’re going to be retarded if they’re like getting high and drinking at someone’s house—not much to do with that except get retarded

Jamie: yep

Me: um, let’s see, um, do you have any one in mind when you were putting together your myspace page? Like oh I hope so and so sees this

Jamie: um, my ex boyfriend but he can’t see it because he deleted me from his friends, and I always think he’s with my friend, my ex friend angie, I think he can see it

Me: is he a recent ex boyfriend or?

Jamie: yeah we went out for nine months and then like um we broke up in November and then I got diagnosed with depression over it so

Me: ok, I’m sorry

Jamie: yeah, it’s ok

Me: boys suck

Jamie: I know
NADINE--Sophomore

Me: I see so it kind of makes you think like how important is this that I’m putting this kind of monetary burden or not burden, I don’t know however you want to see it but

Nadine: yeah

Me: so skating shapes you as a person and this video mostly reflective or representative of who you want others to see

Nadine: yeah, like, I guess, I don’t really participate in a whole lot of things at St. Catherine, I’m not really in any clubs and I don’t do any sports here so I’m just kind of like long pause not very involved

Me: ok

Nadine: but I put a lot of my time into skating, I skip school a lot for skating, and I guess, some people don’t really understand how much it means to me and it helps with a lot of the like the stress from high school and a lot of just different problems I can get on the ice and it doesn’t matter what else is going on and I guess it just is a nice way to express who I am by having the vide on there

Me: it makes sense, and it helps like for people who go to St. Catherine and who see you or recognize you in the hall let’s them know a little bit more about you, let’s them know that there’s more to you than some one who’s not into the clubs (9:56)—is yours set to private?

Nadine: I do not think so

Me: ok, is there a reason why you’ve put your full name?

Nadine: hmm, no, not really, kind of, no, no not really

Me: the privacy, you’re not really worried about the privacy on here?

Nadine: um, I guess that, I mean when people ask me, I mean when people find me I make sure I know who it is but other than that I guess I’m really not that concerned about people looking at my profile and

Me: are most of your friends on myspace people that you know?

Nadine: oh yeah, all of em, they’re all people that I’ve met through by like skating or, just people from Talawanda and Oxford that I know, or people from St. Catherine, they’re all people that I know
HALEY--Junior

Haley: umm, I don’t know like I guess what kind of person I am without them having to get all personal and stuff and just saying everything out. Like just by looking at it you can probably tell some things about me without having to like ask me questions

Me: like what

Haley: like um, [becky interrupts]

Me; ok so you say you want people to look at it and make some assumptions about you

Haley: right but not like a bad assumption

Me: right right, so what do you think this page represents here

Haley: well, I don’t like the thing, like now that look at that thing right there (fucking princess)

Me: this?

Haley: yeah I don’t really like it

Me; I think it’s cute and sassy—a little bit, it’s kind of like she looks kind of tough, but she’s calling herself a princess so its like two opposites, its not like its bad, but I bet you’re going to go home and wipe it off, and I like it. And you change your picture back and forth but you keep coming back to this one

Haley: yeah, I like that one, I did it on photo shop

Me: yeah I like it but at first I thought your nose was here and that’s your mouth,

Haley: yeah that’s my hair and chin

Me: but at first it looked like you were screaming out in that direction, which is cool—anyway, any reason why you’ve chosen not to have a blog?

Haley: cause people can look at your personal information and stuff—[mrs Schwartz interrupts]

Me: so your pictures, you play around a lot with the pictures

Haley: yeah
JOCELYN--Junior

Jocelyn: um, crazy, laughs, outgoing,

Me: so not so much crazy or outgoing in class but

Jocelyn; right

Me: otherwise, can count on you being crazy and outgoing

Jocelyn: yeah, yeah

Me: why do you change in class?

Jocelyn: um, because, I got in trouble my freshman year, I guess, laughs, I don’t know, not like deep trouble, just like yelled at

Me: you needed to calm down

Jocelyn: yeah, laughs

Me: how long have you had a myspace page?

Jocelyn: probably about a year I guess

Me: ok and why did you get one?

Jocelyn: I don’t know, all my friends had one and ah a lot of relatives have one

Me: like cousins or

Jocelyn: hmm mm

Me: do you have facebook page or anything?

Jocelyn: no

Me: any reason for not getting one of those?

Jocelyn: getting a myspace, I think, was easier, just I, I never heard about anyone like, I guess you could put facebook.com but I just figured myspace was easier, laughs

Me: got it, why or how often do you check your myspace page?
KIKI--Junior

Kiki: I’m taking English next year, and AP Spanish, which I don’t know why I’m taking AP Spanish, I can’t do grammar at all, I’ll write it in, but if you ask me what’s a gerund, I’m like doesn’t it have something to do with nouns?

Me: you should probably get, I was a French major as an undergrad, and I suck at French, but you should probably get a book that’s about English grammar for students of other languages

Kiki: that would probably be a good idea

Me: it waters down English grammar and if you’re taking Japanese, although Japanese doesn’t have tenses does it?

Kiki: no, Japanese and Chinese doesn’t, I’m taking Chinese right now and I’m crazy for doing this, I can’t believe I’m doing this, but there’s a three week course in the summer at Miami that I’m getting college credit for also if I get in. It’s from 8:30 till 3 in the afternoon every day for three weeks plus like 3 hours of homework after just in Chinese—for three weeks. You get paid a 1000 dollars and you get a free ipod if you make it through the whole class and you get to keep all the stuff you use but it’s like 8 hours a day in Chinese and I’m going to die

Me: that’s tough

Kiki: but I really want to do it because we have Chinese club here and its me, my friend who I’m rooming with and another friend of mine, we’re the only three girls left in the entire club. It started out with like 40 people and now there’s like 10 and we’re the only ones left—and I’m like oh dear!

Me: but you’re going to Miami, that’s awesome! How come they give you 1000 dollars?

Kiki: because they’re, well because they say you can’t have a job while you’re in the class just because it is so much work and so, I’m applying to work at a nursing home right now, so if I get accepted there I’ll have to take those three weeks off, and then they’re basically saying since you can’t work during this time, we’re paying you for the class

Me: whew, once again, that sounds like a great skill to have when you’re putting together your college application

Kiki: um, I don’t know, well, my parents would probably say I’m rebellious cause I definitely got this cartilage pierced, well these cartilage piercings without even asking
MYA--Junior

Mya: it’s annoying

Me: yeah that’s kind of bad

Mya: yeah I know, I’m like I’ll go on there and she says “hey boo,” and I’m like excuse me you stole all my friends

Me: I was wondering cause when I walked around the cafeteria a lot of people were like, “too much drama” with myspace and I was wondering what kind of drama is going on

Mya: girls, girls will see you on another guy’s page and oh why are you talking to him, I’m talking to him, like, and I’m like whatever at least I was out at the mall with him last weekend and you weren’t so obviously he’s talking to me and I’m like come on now. People will try to start fights on it and I’m like yeah you’re really cool tyiring to yell at me on a keyboard, like, that’s cute. It’s pretty stupid I just avoid that stuff, I try to block people or just don’t respond to their messages

Me: ok, what kind of person do you want your myspace page to represent

Mya: crazy mia, pretty much, just me, it pretty much describes just me, like all the stuff I wrote and all my pictures and with my friends and everything and my little thing with my brother and my sisters and all my friends all my best friends and everything

Me: and so you want it to represent you, do you think it accurately does?

Mya: uh hmm, cause there’s a lot of people who get on there and lie about who they are and put untrue things and that

Me: your real age

Mya: 16 yeah, that’s my real age

Me: and you put where you’re from. yours isn’t set to private is it

Mya: hmm, when you added me was it private? I’m pretty sure it is. Because like, a lot of girls, like from other guys pages come to mine and they try to add me but I deny em so they can’t look at my stuff—or steal my pictures

Me: ok

Mya: people do steal pictures and poses, like they’ll take, like if you’re really pretty and they’re not, they’ll take your pictures and act like they’re somebody they’re not
SAMANTHA--Junior

Sam: um, fun loving, and like, not like wild, but like I don’t know, I guess adventurous or something like that, talkative again

Me: ok talkative, so pretty much you say you’re different and unique, friends, loud and outgoing, parents pretty much the same and your teachers would say you’re hard working, not so much talkative around them or outgoing?

Sam: I uh, I talk, just not too much sometimes

Me: any reason why you’re a little different there then

Sam: it depends on like what class I’m in, it depends on how like the teacher is, like in chemistry I just keep my mouth shut, but like I ah, English,

Me: aren’t you just afraid to get in trouble in that class!

Sam: I know I don’t want her to like know I’m there, but, like English and things like that where I’m like more comfortable, I’ll talk in those classes cause I’ll want to participate and stuff

Me: ok, how long have you had a myspace page

Sam: um, maybe like a year, about

Me: ok, and why did you get one

Sam: I don’t’ really know, maybe because like everyone else had one, I know that sounds horrible but, just because and I know its like when you have one I guess you can look at other people’s pictures so, that’s always fun,

Sam: yeah I think I was bored one day, I think I was home sick is what it was and I decided that I would make it so

Me: do you have any other kind of page like a facebook or

Sam: yeah I have a facebook

ME: which one do you prefer?

Sam: ah myspace is, I think facebook is boring cause it’s all blue and white and I it bothers me. Myspace is more interesting and you can do more on it, you can see more people too which is why I got it
Me: can you give me a definition of identity?

Abby: definition of identity, um, identity is who you are, like what kind of person you are, I think

ME: and what kind of person are you?

Abby: what kind of person am i? um I think I’m an outgoing person, kind of unique if you want to call it that, I’m myself I guess

Me: ok, um, what kind of words would your friends use to describe you?

Abby: um, laughs, my friends, um probably crazy outgoing, um, funny, yeah, something like that

Me: ok, and how would your teachers describe you?

Abby: um, wow, I don’t know, probably, ah kind of outgoing, I can be loud sometimes in classes it depends on what teacher it is

Me: do you prefer to be outgoing and loud in a class or not?

Abby: um, sometimes I’m not, it depends on the teacher like if I’m really close to the teacher then I’ll joke around with the teacher, but some teachers I’m not as close to so I’m usually fairly quiet

Me: ok, and how would your family describe you?

Abby: um, my family would, laughs, probably call me unique, we’re all crazy so, and they know that I’m loud and outgoing

Me: ok, so you’re pretty much outgoing and crazy in all regards, you don’t change much for any reason

Abby: yeah, no I mean I know that there’s like a limit where I need to be like more mature and other times when I don’t have to be mature like, other than that yeah I’m pretty much crazy and outgoing

Me: ok, um, how long have you had a myspace page?

Abby: um I know it’s been over a year cause I got it like at the beginning of my junior year so I think it’s been close to two years, around two years yeah
ANNABELLE--Senior

me: like making yourself a senior

Annabelle: yeah

me: umm ok, did you have an audience in mind when you were writing it? or who were you writing it for?

Annabelle: I don’t know. I didn’t have a particular audience in mind

me: ok, did you kind of look around and see how others had put together an about me section and model it after theirs?

Annabelle: (small) yeah

me: moving on past this about me section, when you log on daily, what’s the first thing you check out when you log on?

Annabelle: if I have messages or comments

me: ok—and—what else? what would be the thing that you update the most on your myspace page?

Annabelle: hmm, probably my pictures, I’d have to say, yeah—instead of talking to people, that’s probably what I do most, I love putting pictures up

me: is that what you do mostly is playing around with adding pictures and the layout and not as much as with interacting with people?

Annabelle: yeah

me: like how much time do you spend searching around for or adding other people?

Annabelle: I usually, to, uh, like, when I first got on I used to go on the St. Catherine thing and look for all the people I know and then after I while I just would check my comments and like comment on my few friends who I like actually talk to online. and then sometimes like when I see people like randomly, and I’ll comment like “hey how are you doing?”

Me: ok, so let’s see you’ve got a bunch of friends

Annabelle: um hmm
BEA--Senior

Bea: um, I think it’s like, I don’t give out too much information, like I don’t like giving out like my last name, I might give out like the L or whatever but I don’t give out my last name, um, I actually at first I had my school on there but I don’t like have my school on there anymore because that just leads more, you can get information about that cause there’s not that many Bethany’s here, so, it’s just like who you are, I guess, and not giving out too much information

Me: but yours isn’t set to private? Any reasons?

Bea: no I, I, I don’t know like I’ve thought about it like a lot but it’s like I want people who actually do know me to be able to like figure out if that actually is me like, cause I’ve had people um like one of my friends from grade school I went and looked for him and cause he didn’t have his profile set to private I was able to find him and get back into contact with him, um, and you can’t really do that if the pictures are small or you can’t figure out who it is so, that’s been a constant struggle for me to figure out if I wanted it private or not, I know, and so far it’s been a, the un private

Me: have you had any weird people contacting you? Or how do you deal with that?

Bea: um, I have many people like friend request me and it’s like it’s just one of those, like I think um, like hey I want more friends so they send your email out to everybody and I just delete em, and then I mean then there’s bands that you know friend request me and I listen to em and then if I like em I mean I only really accept them um if I know them or if they’re bands that I like, I don’t accept anybody I don’t know

ME: so most people there, everybody there is people that you know

Bea: yeah, either an acquaintance from a friend or I don’t like accepting weird people

ME: friends of friends, or your own friends, or bands that you like, yet you’re selective

Bea: yeah, uh huh

Me: got it, ok, so you didn’t put your, but you did put your location, Cincinnati, oh, but there’s no school information,

Me: it’s true actually cause when I was looking you up and it came up but I wasn’t even sure if you went to St. Catherine, and I felt hesitant writing you cause if you didn’t go here then I’m crazy

Bea: that’s why I like, I like having it like that, so I don’t know
CAT--Senior

Cat; I changed, I think somebody like tagged a photo of me or something and I was going to try to figure out how to change my profile, like the display picture, and so like then I changed it, but then I like decided to change it back, and then it said like, it went Cat changed her profile picture, 5:01, 5:03 Cat changed her profile picture,

Me: laughs! Cat’s obsessed with her profile picture

Cat; laughs, it had like four different things about my profile picture and I was like this is the same one that it was before now

Me: right, ok, so facebook stinks. Laughs, that’s what I think at least. So you prefer myspace, how do you use myspace mostly

Cat; um mostly I use it to like talk to people I guess, and so, like comments and messages and I like I don’t know I really like getting comments and stuff cause it’s fun like when you’ve had like a bad day or a boring day and you come in and it says new messages, new comments, new photo comments, and I um, I’m sure you know, I have a lot of pictures

ME: yes

Cat: laughs, and so like some of em, like the artsy stuff more, I really enjoy like editing photos and doing things on the computer so I, that’s really the only place I have to display them and I don’t like just do those and print em out so I can (mumble) I put them on there to show them to people

Me: yeah, that’s nice cause you can get like reviews on there

Cat: and also, actually my friend Amanda who has a myspace, she also has a like a contest myspace page, laughs, where she does like picture contests, so you like, like cutest best friend pictures, and cutest, or like best winter picture and like kind of watch people enter and whoever, um, you have to vote on the pictures, and whoever gets to like I think she has it like 30 comments, ah maybe it’s twenty, I don’t know, whoever gets a certain amount of comments first is the winner of that contest, and then get like put on the hall of fame or something, but so I actually made some uh, I guess what would you call em, I guess promotional things for it called star contests, so I like did some artsy picture things and she sent me a picture of her and her little cousin that she wanted to have in one of her things and I like decorated it and did stuff with it to like make it exciting and then kind of like a little promotional thing that she can use to (mumble) actually put in her pictures, star contest

ME: that’s what the name of her myspace page is called
Marna; not like dramatically, like maybe if I am in, with a group of people that I’m not really friends with, then I’m not as outgoing, but if I’m with my friends and my family then I am myself.

Me: how long have you had a myspace page?

Marna: um, I think I got it, I don’t know, junior year in the fall-ish?

Me: ok, and why did you get one?

Marna: um, one of my friends she had a myspace page and she was like marcy you need to get a myspace page because it’s really fun, and then, I did it, and now I have one.

Me: ok, and um, do you have any other sorts of pages like facebook?

Marna: yeah I have facebook.

Me: do you, which one do you prefer?

Marna: facebook.

Me: why?

Marna: um because I like pictures and you can I guess you can put a lot more pictures on facebook and it’s seems more like well my older brother and sister have a facebook, had it well they do had one before I did, and they know I had a myspace and they said marcy you should probably get a facebook because it’s more like only your friends can see it, whereas myspace, I have it set as, well on private cause my dad was like well if anybody, you know, some freak sends you a message then tell me, so I did that but it just I don’t know, I just, I don’t know, but I like myspace cause you can like take your background and do all that stuff to it too.

Me: ok, so besides your dad telling you to set it to private and telling you to tell him if anyone creepy

Marna: yeah.

Me: um any other rules about myspace?

Marna: Um, not, well I don’t put my, obviously I don’t put like my address or my phone number on there, but not really.
RENEE—Senior

Renee: check um, friend requests

Renee: and then email

Me: do you look at other people’s pages frequently

Renee: um only when it’s like friend requests, sometimes, to like see who it is, like the myspace pictures can look completely different, like I have deleted people when I’m like uh I don’t know who this is and then they turn out to be my friend so she has to do it again for me, and I was like I didn’t know who it was

Me: yeah! .laughs, well I thought you were taller, like I didn’t know, this picture does not suggest you being tall, but for some reason I that’s why I didn’t think it was you outside cause I was like, ‘no she’s taller’ laughs

Renee: laughs, actually I can see that, I do look taller there

Me: isn’t that weird?

Renee: I look taller than I am

ME: blah blah, ok so mostly you look at your own comments or you look at people who commented you, but you don’t really

Renee: yeah—it’s like sometimes I comment back to em, but the only person I do comment back is my one friend which always, which is how we, we use this to communicate, for the most part

Me: ok, so would that be your primary reason for using myspace, just to talk to your friends

Renee: yeah—and I get music off of it, laughs

Me: anyone in particular you’d like to see your myspace page? Like,

Renee: mm, not really, that I can think of

Me: and besides you having it set to private, and you did that for your mom, to calm your mom down,

Renee: laughs, and also I realized like after it it kept coming up on the news about creepy people and so I’m like well I guess I could laughs
SUNNY--Senior

Sunny: my friend Beth told me to make one

Me: and how often do you check your myspace page?

Sunny: every day laughs

Me: ok. And why do you use a myspace page?

Sunny: to look at people’s pictures—ha ha—and like I don’t know, it’s really cool to like
meet new people I guess

Me: you meet a lot of new people from it?

Sunny: not really, but like sometimes random people will like add you as a friend and
you’re like, ok that’s cool, and they send you comments, so I’m like that’s pretty cool I
guess, so like people who read your thing they’re like oh they’re going to Wright state
next year so that’s pretty cool

Me: yeah, so you get to know people

Sunny: yeah

Me: before you even have to meet them face to face

Sunny: yeah, definitely

Me: do you um, on your list of friends, let’s bring up your page here, I can’t get onto
myspace here, so I web archived it and your picture is normally up here so I can’t –
significance between skeeter butter

Sunny: oh my god! This guy at my job made up, cause work I at graeters, and we were
thinking of like yeah, we were thinking of different things that seniors could be cause we
were going to get t-shirts made or whatever and we were thinking of like peanut butter
and I don’t know where that came from I really have like no idea, so he like, I don’t
know he always like spies on my page sometimes, I don’t know, he made that up and I
left it there

Me: ok, significance behind that quote?

Sunny: oh yeah, I just really like it. I like that quote a lot.
Me: does she have any advice on putting together your myspace page

Toni: um, no just when um I’m up late and I should be in bed

Me: oh she makes comments then!

Toni: yeah

Me: does your family have any rules about you being on myspace?

Toni: umm, my mom really doesn’t like it, but I told her that I don’t put anything up that’s like obscene or like I don’t put my address up there, it’s just for friends, or just to look at people’s pictures that’s it and she’s like ok, like cause my sister has one to so my sister’s monitoring me as well

Me: right, got it, ok, so let’s see, when you update your page, what’s the thing that you update the most?

Toni: um, I guess my pictures and my music

Me: ok, and what’s your quote mean or is it significant?

Toni: oh I just say that a lot, I go “oh snap crackle pop”

Me: oh ok, it’s something you say a lot, ok, umm, let’s see, your blog, is this mostly um, your writing?

Toni: hmm mmm, well it’s also

Me: quotes from others?

Toni: well this one I copied from a friend and then I commented on it cause I liked what she wrote, but this is hers, like yeah

Me: ok, so you took her comment, put it in there, and then

Toni: yeah, and everything else is mine

Me: why do you use your blog space? Like

Toni: I guess to just to express like what I’m feeling and just tell people like information I guess