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Youth Connecting Online: From Chat Rooms to Social Networking Sites

Natalia Waechter, Kaveri Subrahmanyam, Stephanie M. Reich and Guadalupe Espinoza

Abstract

As media is rapidly changing and different technologies are gaining a losing favour, youth are adapting to these changes in ways that support th developmental needs. This chapter will present research, which demonstrat that as online contexts have changed and evolved, so have young people behaviours within them; yet at its core, these behaviours remain connected important offline developmental concerns. We do this by presenting resu from our own research on chat rooms and social networking sites as well drawing from other recent research on young people's online lives. We beg by describing an Austrian-American study on chat rooms, which was fi published in 2005 in German. Using participant observation and analysis chat room conversations between teenage boys and girls, the stu concentrated on adolescents' gender and ethnic identity negotiations in t public space. The second study was conducted at the Children's Digit Media Centre (CDMC@LA) and examined young people's use of soci networking sites; it was presented at the 'Cybercultures' conference (4 Global Conference: Cybercultures - Exploring Critical Issues, Salzbur Austria, March 13-15, 2009) and was recently published in the *Journal Applied Developmental Psychology.*[1] The study investigated emergin adults' online activities, their use of social networking sites f communication, and the overlap between their online and offline soci networks. After describing both studies, we will relate them to other relevai literature on chat rooms and social networking sites and compare the differe ways that young people use the currently popular social networking sit compared to chat rooms, which have been around longer. We will show ho - regardless of the seeming differences in online activities - both forms c online communication are important playgrounds for young people' development of identity and intimacy.

Key Words: Emerging Adults, Identity Development, Intimacy, Onlin Communication, SNS, Web 2.0, Chat Rooms, MySpace, Facebook.

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1. Introduction

A growing number of young people worldwide spend their leisure time on the Internet communicating with others online. The most commonly used online communication tools are email, social networking sites, blogs, instant messaging, and chat rooms. In this chapter, we will focus on our research on chat rooms and social networking sites as well as relate this work to other relevant research that has examined teenagers' communication through these online contexts. Whereas chat rooms have been used for more than a decade, social networking sites are a relatively recent tool for online communication. However, both offer similar and unique ways for users to connect with others. In this chapter, we will highlight two aspects of these tools: First, we show that the technical and communication characteristics of chat rooms and social network sites lead young people to use each of them very differently and for different reasons. Second, as different as these applications and the behaviours within them are, we argue that young people use them, nonetheless, to ultimately connect to others and support their own individual development.

Since the introduction of the Web 2.0, social networking sites (SNSs) such as MySpace and Facebook have become especially popular among adolescents and emerging adults. The numbers of new members are still increasing: For example, in 2008, 68% of German online youth, age 14-19 years, reported having used social networking sites (for private reasons), whereas in 2007 it was just 40%.[2] In addition to online social networking platforms, young people in some countries are still using chat rooms as a tool for online interactions. In 2008, almost half of the young German population aged 12 to 19 reported chatting at least sometimes, and 29% reported chatting several times a week.[3]

Capitalising upon quantitative and qualitative research, this chapter will focus on two of our studies, one on chat rooms and the other one on social network sites to demonstrate how youth use these platforms for addressing developmental needs such as identity formation and social connect. The Austrian-American study on chat rooms, which was first published in 2005 in German[4], investigated adolescents' use of chat rooms (chapter two) in two countries, Austria and the U.S.A. Using participant observation and analysis of chat room conversations between teenage boys and girls, the study explored adolescents' gender and ethnic identity negotiations in both contexts. The second, study carried out at the Children's Digital Media Centre (CDMC@LA), examined young people's use of social networking sites, and was presented at the 'Cybercultures' conference (4th Global Conference: Cybercultures - Exploring Critical Issues, Salzburg, Austria, March 13-15, 2009); it was originally published in the Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology[5], and investigated emerging adults' online activities, their use of social networking sites for communication, and

the overlap between their online and offline social networks (chapter three). College students in Los Angeles, CA, USA, participated in a two-step design, in which they were first asked to complete an in-person survey and then an online survey later that day. A variety of questions about online activities and with who people interacted with the most face-to-face, via instant messaging, and on social networking sites were included in the surveys. While not a central focus of this chapter, we will also refer to two more chapters, which describe research conducted at the Children's Digital Media Centre @ LA.[6] These chapters consider young people's use of chat rooms and focused on how adolescents use chat rooms in the service of adolescent developmental issues such as identity exploration and interconnection. Another qualitative study, which will also be described, was conducted at the Children's Digital Media Centre[7] and focused on how social networking sites are used to address core developmental issues, especially gender identity.

We will discuss our studies and the related research using a two-pronged approach (chapter four): On the one hand, we will show that the characteristics of Web 2.0, which are represented in social networking sites (such as more visualisation instead of mostly text-based communication or providing a broader semi-public audience), lead to a differentiated use of chat rooms compared to social networking sites. On the other hand, we argue that young people use both online communication tools, chat rooms as well as social networking sites, for primary developmental concerns such as identity and intimacy development.

2. Identity in Teenage Chat Rooms

Adolescence as well as emerging adulthood has been described as a central period for identity development.[8] Particularly in western worlds, emerging adults are believed to be still working on their identity achievement.[9]

Many authors have commented on the diverse uses being made of the term 'identity'.[10] Two opposed positions can be identified: The 'strong' concept of identity implies a fundamental and durable sense of selfhood[11], whereas the more recent 'weak' concept stresses the fluidity, impermanence, complexity, and context sensitivity of identities, often focusing on the construction of identity in social interactions as well as on certain aspects of identity.[12] For analyses of the social construction of 'the self' it is useful to acknowledge a combination of diversity and fluidity on the one hand and of core and continuity on the other.[13] The concept of the self-stresses that people have only one self, but many aspects of self-identity, some of which may be more primary.[14] Identity formation happens through questioning and restructuring of the self, which is a process of experimentation, trial and error, searching, and testing.[15]

Chat rooms are public online spaces, where participants can participate in multiple simultaneous conversations with other users. Chat providers usually offer not only one, but many different rooms, and the participants can choose which room they want to chat in.[16] The separate rooms tend to target certain groups, (e.g. a certain age group coming from a particular city or region) and can deal with a range of topics, although general chat rooms also exist. Most chat rooms that teenagers use tend to be 'flirt chats': the young chatters want to get to know new people for romantic interest and communicate with them.

Early authors like Turkle, who wrote about the information and communication technologies, speculated that virtual communication provides the opportunity for young people to try and live new identities, such as 'gender swapping' in which teens can identify themselves as a different gender.[17] In contrast, more recent studies have found that young people do not often change their identities when they communicate online, but rather, display their offline gender and ethnic identity.[18] The study described below also shows empirically that adolescents do not use chat rooms for gender swapping, but instead seem more focused on the development of their own offline gender and ethnic identity.

A. Research Design

Qualitative data collection took place 2002-2003 in two geographic areas and with different ethnic groups: in Vienna, Austria, with migrant youth from Turkey and former Yugoslavia, and in Los Angeles, USA, with young Mexican-Americans.[19] Data collection, in Vienna and in Los Angeles, took place in youth centres, where teenagers came regularly in the afternoons with the intention to chat. Most of the 80 young people in the study at the time were between 14 and 16 years old, with a mean age of 15. Whereas the small group of Mexican-Americans was quite homogeneous - they were all girls and first generation immigrants from Mexico - the much bigger group of young people in Vienna was very heterogeneous. Turkey was the country of origin for most of the boys, for the girls it was the former Yugoslavia.[20] Some of them were first generation immigrants and some were second (or third) ones. The gender distribution was equal.

Based on the participant observation method[21] for data collection, the true identity of the participants was confirmed. In conducting research about online communication this is quite the exception because when one collects online-data (e.g. online-conversations), one often does not know who stands behinds the online personas. Sometimes online profiles do not represent the owner's offline identity in all aspects, e.g. the adolescents in the study often did not provide their real age when chatting but adapted their age to their chat partners' age which, of course, may be 'fake' as well.

Throughout the participant observation, the main focus was on collecting and analysing chat room conversations. For data collection, Waechter sat down next to the teenagers, followed their online conversations, and then asked them to copy and save the conversations. Additionally, she interviewed the girls and boys about their online-conversations and took detailed field notes. For data analysis, Waechter used the method of conversation analysis, and, more precisely, the 'Santa Barbara School.' Whereas classic conversation analysis as it was grounded by Sacks[22] is not led by theory but only by data, the 'Santa Barbara School'[23] also takes into account the institutional context and provided theoretical assumptions into the analysis. This approach is also referred to as studies of 'institutional talk' and studies of 'talk and social structure'.[24]

B. Chat Rooms as Experimental Rooms

The analysis showed that for teenagers, chat rooms were opportunities for experimenting. New and otherwise forbidden behaviours could be tried with few repercussions. For instance, adolescents with migration backgrounds were free to try out conversations that their more traditional value system would not approve of. Typically, the teenage chatters reported that they did not know their chat partner in real life, but may have met before in an online chat room or were 'buddies' on instant messenger. For boys, the objective of chat communication appeared to be finding a girl who was willing to chat with them, and then, throughout the chat conversation trying to get a date with the girl (which, as they reported, never happened). As analysis of the interviews and the chat conversations showed, the girls' focus seemed to be more on the conversation itself, without having the goal of a date. They reported that they did not use chat rooms to meet a chat partner in real life, but to have exciting and entertaining conversations.[25]

C. Gender in Teenage Flirt Chats

In both samples (Los Angeles & Vienna) researchers found that the use of teenage chat rooms provided a chance for loosening traditional values that determine gender-specific behaviour of migrant youth. The results indicate that girls were taking the opportunities that the online context provided them, and they were clearly experimenting. Their behaviour in chat rooms differed from how they were expected to behave in offline contexts (and as observed in the youth centres). This was especially true for the Mexican-American girls, but also for the Yugoslavian-Austrian girls, who used the conditions of chat rooms for their benefit. Unlike typical teenage cross-gender interactions offline, in chat rooms they cannot be judged by their physical appearance. This may have allowed girls to focus on the content of their conversations in a more self-confident way and to bring in their own desires and needs. Some boys appeared to be surprised by the

strong and demanding behaviour of the girls, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

[...]
mickeygirl90921: i asked you a question
[...]
mickeygirl90921: you didn't answer my question
[...]
mickeygirl90921: are you busy
sophmoor16: not really
mickeygirl90921: answer my question
sophmoor16: wut question??????
mickeygirl90921: scroll up ur screen
sophmoor16: o 1987
mickeygirl90921: so your going to be 15
sophmoor16: no im gonna b 16
mickeygirl90921: when next year
sophmoor16: no in a couple of months my birthday is in january
mickeygirl90921: ok
[...]
sophmoor16: u dont really like me 2 much do ya?
mickeygirl90921: why
sophmoor16: I dunno
mickeygirl90921: you seem a nice guy
sophmoor16: o
[...]

'Sophmoor16' seemed to misinterpret his chat partner's behaviour. She insisted upon receiving an answer which he thinks is a bit rude and made him believe that she was not interested in him. An alternative interpretation of her behaviour also seems appropriate; because she was interested in him, she really wanted to know his age. This observation demonstrates how the girls were more active in their conversations compared to face-to-face cross-gender conversations.[26]

Nevertheless, in such teenage flirt chats, the display of gender is as important online as offline. For example, the observed boys and girls as well as their chat partners used their first chance to display their offline gender identity in presenting themselves with nicknames that enabled the chat partners to attribute gender membership. Analysis shows that girls have to make their gender membership explicit in order to be recognised as girls, which means they have to use girls' first names or add 'girl' to the name. The results also show that boys do not need to do that, if a nickname is gender

neutral everyone regards the person as male. There were no cases of 'gender swapping' or gender bending. Rather, the observed young people usually assumed their offline gender in the online chat space.

The girls used the nicknames to present themselves as sexually attractive; in the Austrian sample typical names were 'Sexygirl' or 'Sarisinbomba' ('Blond Bomb'). The nicknames the boys chose referred to their life style, interests and activities. Typical names were 'SubCuLtuRe' or 'Snoop016' where the part with numbers in it (which is called a 'flag') provides information about the age of the boy. With that stereotypical use of nicknames - the girls presented themselves as sexually attractive, the boys as active in public life - the young people displayed their gender membership. In the sample of the Mexican-American girls, they used the first question to confirm the partner's gender membership: using the code *asl* they asked for the partner's age, sex and location.[27] These are just some of the ways that the youth participants attempted to overcome the limitations of the disembodied environment.

D. Negotiations of Ethnicity

In this section we will show that ethnicity is also constructed in adolescents' chat room conversations. The Turkish teenagers from Austria displayed their ethnic identity already by choosing a particular chat room that was mostly used by Turkish migrant kids, but also by using a Turkish nickname, and by chatting only in Turkish. They and their chat partners used their nicknames not only to communicate their gender and their Turkish origin but also to show which town in Turkey their family originally came from by attaching Turkish license plate numbers to their nicknames (e.g. 'Sevda66' or Betül68'), or by using other references to their specific origin (e.g. 'Trabongüzeli' = 'Beauty from Trabon' or 'Daglarkizi' = 'Girl from the Mountain'). Interestingly, in the sample of Mexican-American girls, it was observed that the longer they had lived in the USA, the more likely they were to chat only in English and not use Spanish or a mix of English and Spanish anymore. However, even for those more acculturated to the host country and using the host's language, 'racialised' problems may occur as illustrated in the following conversation thread:

[...]
anastasia15> how do you look like
SubCuLtuRe> black spiky hair with blue ends, 1,75 tall brown eyes, skater
SubCuLtuRe> you??
anastasia15> what
SubCuLtuRe> how do you look like

anastasia15> brown hair, green-brown eyes, white in the face
SubCuLtuRe> white in the face?
anastasia15> yes why
SubCuLtuRe> what does that mean?
anastasia15> how do you look like?
[...]

The boy 'SubCuLtuRe' does not know how to interpret the information that his partner is 'white in the face'. Whereas for her, it is normal to present her complexion her description was not conventional or easily interpreted by her chat partner, this does not seem to make any sense to him. As a supposedly native Austrian, so far he has had no reason to assume that his chat partner has a migrant background. Also, he is not familiar with complexion being part of a person's description. In this case, the conversation ended very quickly, quite possibly because of the misunderstanding. However, there were also examples of conversations where the sudden appearance of different ethic memberships did not disturb the flow of the chat.

E. Gender and Ethnic Identity in Chat Rooms

Comparing the relevance of gender and ethnicity in chat room conversations, it seems that gender is even more important for a successful teenage flirt chat conversation. For instance, the analysis found that someone's perception of ethnic membership may switch without causing too much problems for the continuation of the conversation. That would not be possible if someone becomes suddenly aware regarding their conversation partner's gender. In contrast, because of adolescents' goal to chat with a potential romantic partner and their overall heterosexual orientation, we have to assume that a young person's 'gender bending' would disturb and probably end the conversation. The observed girls and boys try hard to not chat with a user who displays the same gender. If they cannot tell for sure by the nickname, they ask immediately for the chat partner's gender before continuing with the conversation. In the context of teenage flirt chats, girls have to chat with boys and boys with girls. In the whole period of participant observation only once was it observed that a girl pretended to be her offline best friends' male chat partner - for fun and with the knowledge of her best friend.[28]

F. Other Research on Chat Rooms and the Development of Identities

Along these lines, in their chat rooms study, Subrahmanyam, Smahel, and Greenfield added a developmental perspective and found that identity information was provided more often by participants who described themselves as younger.[29] They noted that many chat nicknames seem to

utilise strong gender stereotypes and are used to attract potential partners. It appeared that nicknames may help to compensate for the absence of the body and the face. Chat rooms help adolescents address important developmental issues such as romantic partner selection or the development of gender identities.

A quantitative analysis of recorded chat conversations has found that gender was the most popular category of the adolescents' identity declarations.[30] These researchers also found that nicknames were used to express gender identities. For example, for participants who stated that they were male, 32% used male connoted nicknames, whereas for the participants who stated that they were female, 49% used female connoted nicknames.[31] Since it was typical for those participants to first ask their chat partners for age, gender, and location, it may not be as important to have a gendered nickname (although the nickname may matter as they serve to attract potential chat partners). The finding that girls are more likely to use their nickname to display their gender identity than the boys, provides support for the conclusion that gender-neutral nicknames are interpreted as male ones. Girls have to make their gender explicit because female identities are not perceived as the norm.

Regarding ethnic identities, Greenfield et al.[32] also report Tynes, et. al.'s[33] finding that teenage chatters identified themselves on the basis of race using racialised discourse. The researchers distinguish between implicit forms such as the use of Spanish or African American English and explicit forms such as self-identification, identifying in-groups, partner selection or expressing racial attitudes. They point out that unlike in conventional face-to-face settings, race is no longer taboo. The authors conclude that 'all teens and not just teens of colour [...] appear to be exploring ethnic and racial identities'[34] and that the use of chat rooms seems to encourage inter-ethnic interaction, which may otherwise be limited in face-to-face contexts.[35]

The research presented so far has shown that the process of achievement of identity, which is a primary adolescent concern, is continued in the online context of chat rooms. Adolescents use these flirt chats to interconnect with potential romantic partners and to experiment and practice such interactions. Those chat conversations may contribute not only to the development of their gender identity but also to their ethnic identity.

3. Relation between Young People's Online and Offline Networks: Social Networking Sites

In the period of adolescence and emerging adulthood there are two basic developmental challenges: identity achievement and the development of intimacy. Friends are especially important for young people but also through interconnections with romantic partners, relatives and family youth seek to establish intimacy. There is evidence that adolescents and emerging

adults also use online communication and online interconnections for offline concerns such as the need to interconnect with others.[36]

One central new communication tool of the Web 2.0 is social networking sites, which are especially popular among adolescents and emerging adults. What differences do we find in young people's use of chat rooms versus social networking sites? There are several specific features that may also influence how these communications tools are being used: Whereas the use of chat rooms is mainly text based, social networking sites allow and support visualisation, for example, users can upload pictures and videos to their social networking site. Another difference is that a profile on a social networking site typically has a larger audience than a chat conversation. Also, we have shown that in teenage chat rooms, users typically have not met their chat partners offline before. For the study presented next, we investigated whether young people using social networking sites use them for communicating with people whom they also know offline. Because research of social networking sites has just been emerging in the Anglo-American as well as in the German-speaking area, questions still remain as to what exactly young people do on these sites and with whom they interact.[37] The question that often has been raised but not sufficiently answered yet is about the 'online-offline-connection', especially the influence that online activities through social networking sites has on offline lives. Also at the 'Cybercultures' conference one topic of discussion was whether online interactions have to be regarded as 'real' experiences with a significant impact on one's offline live.

These concerns prompted the survey study of emerging adults, carried out at the Children's Digital Media Centre (UCLA). Some of the questions examined were:

- The prevalence and frequency of college students' use of social networking sites.
- Their reasons for using these sites.
- Whether they present their 'offline self'.
- Who they interact with online and whether these are offline friends as well.
- Whether they feel their online activities have any affect on their offline relationships.[38]

At the 'Cyberculture' conference, the results of two questionnaires were presented: The first was a paper-and-pencil survey given to students in the

Department of Psychology at California State University, Los Angeles. The second questionnaire was administered online later that day. It specifically asked about online and offline activities and the use of the Internet on that particular day.

The sample consisted of 110 college students; equally divided by gender. They ranged in age from 18 to 29 years with a mean age of 21,5. The majority (78%) were between 18 and 23 years old and the sample was ethnically diverse. The majority of participants were Latino (51%) and Asian (20%). Other ethnicities in the sample were (in order of their frequency): White/Caucasian, Mixed, African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern (all between 10% and 2%). With regard to religious affiliation, 66% identified themselves as Christian, and almost a quarter reported no religious affiliation.

A. Usage of Social Networking Sites

Of our sample of 110 college students, 86 (78%) reported having a profile on a social networking site. Although more young men (82%) reported having such a profile than young women (75%), this was not a significant difference. Having a profile page on a social networking site was not related to the students' ethnic group membership or religious affiliation.

Of those students who had a profile, 61% reported having only one and 34% reported having two or three profiles. A few (5%) had four, five, or six accounts on social networking sites. The majority of participants used MySpace (88%). This was similar to the findings of Lenhart and Madden (2007), who found that 85% of teenagers using social networking sites have a MySpace profile. In our sample, only 8% had a profile on Facebook, and even less had one on Xanga, Bebo, or other sites. Although more recently, trends indicate that Facebook is becoming increasingly popular among adolescents and young adults.

The majority of participants in our sample could be characterised as frequent users: 57% reported checking their account or other people's profile at least once a day (half of those had their profile open all day or checked it several times a day). Another 23% reported visiting social networking sites every two to three days, and only 20% said that they go to such sites once a week or less.[39]

B. Reasons for Using Social Networking Sites

In order to assess why emerging adults had an account and their reasons for using it, participants with SNS profiles (n=86) were asked to indicate all of the statements that applied to them from a list provided with 12 items. The results suggested that the most common use of these sites was to interact with offline friends with 81% listing 'to stay in touch with friends I don't see often'. Other social reasons were also common, such as 'because all

of my [offline] friends have accounts' (61%), 'to stay in touch with relatives and family' (48%), and 'to make plans with friends who they see often (35%). 'To fill up free time/not be bored' was also another frequent reason with 52% reporting this purpose. These data suggest that college students used their account to maintain and enforce their existing 'offline' social network. MySpace and other social networking sites are not only used to connect with friends and relatives who they do not have the chance to see very often but also to connect with their day-to-day friends with whom they frequently spend time with.

Interestingly, meeting new people was not a common reason for having a social networking site profile. Only 29% of students reported that they had a profile 'to meet new people' and 'make new friends', and 21% admitted that they use the profile 'to flirt'. It appears that the use of MySpace and similar sites is strongly related to participants' offline worlds, whereas research on Internet chat rooms has shown that adolescents and emerging adults use it to a larger extent to meet new people and to flirt.[40]

One key feature of social networking sites such as MySpace is the ability to create a presentation of oneself through a profile. The profile gives basic information about a person such as their name, age, school/job affiliation, interests such as music and sports, etc. Interestingly, the college students in our sample reported presenting their 'real self'. The majority (70%) reported never having made anything up about themselves or others on their profile and only 2% admitted to having frequently made something up. Of those who had ever made something up, they did so as a joke, 'to make myself look better', or 'to see if people notice'.[41]

C. The Friends' List

Another important feature of social networking sites is the friends' list. We were interested in how many 'friends' participants had on their friends' lists, how they decided who to add to their list, and if those offline friends were also online friends.

On average, participants with SNS profiles (n=86) reported having 137 friends with a range from 0 to 642 friends. However, two thirds of the participants had less than 100 friends. Forty percent had up to 50 friends on their friends' list and 26% had between 50 - 100 friends on their list. When asked how many of the people in their list they have met face-to-face, 27% reported having met everyone of their friends' list. On average, they reported having met 78% of the people in their friends' list face-to-face.

When asked why emerging adults add friends to their profile, more than two thirds (73%) answered that they 'will only add a person who they have met in person.' About half of them even reported to 'only add a person if they are a face-to-face friend.' Eleven percent of the SNS users said that they will add anyone who sends a friends request, and if the person who

sends a request 'looks cool' only a few more said that they are willing to add him or her (17%). So looking cool helps a little but knowing the person offline, or at least having a friend who knows that person makes it a lot more likely that they will put them on their friends list (33% reported they 'will add a person who is a friend of a friend'). Regarding our research question about the link between online and offline social networks, these results provide further evidence that young people's online and offline social networks are interrelated as the participants' reasons for adding a person to their profile friend list are based on their offline connections.

The social networking sites that college students in our study used not only feature a friends' list but also a 'top friends list'. The results regarding the 'top' friends show that the best friends offline are the most likely ones to make it into the top friends' list; 68% of the students in the sample reported that they chose their best friends offline for their top list. Another, less frequent way of choosing their top friends was to reciprocate a friend who listed them on their top list (15%). Only 7% of respondents said they add people who ask for it or who put pressure to be in the top list. Quite a few did not use the top friends feature at all (15%) or had other criteria of selection (some participants mentioned family and relatives).[42]

D. Reported Impact of Social Networking Sites on Offline Relationships

When asked whether experience on social networking sites had influenced their relationships, the majority of the SNS using college students in the sample (n=86) reported that it had not affected the relationship they have with friends (73%). Twenty percent reported that it has made them closer and only 25% reported that SNS had created problems with their friends.

We also asked if anything in their profile had caused trouble between them and their friends or family, and if anything in their profile had fixed a problem or cleared a misunderstanding. Twenty-one percent reported troubles, especially problems with their romantic partners. When asked to describe the nature of the problems experienced on social networking sites, quite a few young women reported romantic trouble in which their boyfriend was jealous of male online friends ('I had an ex-boyfriend as a friend, my current one got mad'; 'Guys would leave me compliments and my boyfriend would ask about them. It seemed to annoy him.'). Young men also experienced romantic difficulties ('My girlfriend is possessive and jealous'; 'Ex-girlfriend thought I was cheating on her'). Difficulties were not constrained to romantic relationships. Troubles with parents also resulted from online use. Specifically when family members viewed the college student's profile and discovered things the young adult did not wish them to see ('My sisters would look through and see that I had a boyfriend, I was not allowed to have one before, and they told my Dad').

A few respondents reported that having and using a profile affected their offline relationships in a positive way. Specifically, 11% of students reported that something on their profile page had fixed a problem or misunderstanding. All problems that the college students in the sample mentioned had to do either with their friends ('make sure my friend wasn't mad at me, where it would be harder to ask in person or by phone') and/or with their boyfriend/girlfriend ('A partner/friend at the time had feelings of betrayal, but once they saw my page they found out that they were wrong'). However, there were also incidents in which the problem that could be fixed by the profile page had been caused through the use of the profile in the first place ('My boyfriend could read my comments that I've left for the guys and see that I've done nothing to provoke obnoxious comments they've left me').[43]

E. Overlap between Online and Offline Social Networks

In order to further understand the levels of overlap between young people's online and offline social networks, students were asked to list the names of up to 10 people whom they interact with the most offline, on social networking sites, and through instant messaging. Based on these data, 2 x 2 x 2 contingency matrices were created that assessed the amount of overlap between these three settings for each person. If participants named 10 people in each area and there was no overlap, they could name up to 30 people. For this chapter, only the overlap between face-to-face and social networking site friends will be discussed.

Of the total sample, 73 students provided the names of their online and offline friends. Of these, eight (11%) had no overlap between their face-to-face friends and the friends with whom they interacted with on social networking sites. Sixteen people (22%) reported 100% overlap between those online friends and face-to-face friends. On average, we found half (49%) of their listed social networking site friends also among their top offline friends.

These results suggest that there is a connection between college students' online and offline social networks. In fact, a key characteristic of social networking sites is that they consist largely of people with whom the emerging adult is friends with or related to offline. Even some college students, who do not own a social networking site profile, reported that they visit MySpace or similar social networking sites.[44]

F. Further Research on the Connection between Online and Offline Networks

The results of the CDMC's study on social networking sites are corroborated by a recent study conducted in Austria questioning online users aged 14 to 39 years. In the press preview, the authors of the study report that the users of social networking sites know the majority of their contacts in person. They estimate that only a quarter of the contacts are just used online.

Furthermore, respondents' main reason for using social networking sites was to stay in contact/communicate with friends.[45] Similarly, in a recent qualitative study in Germany of how 13-16 year old girls and boys' participation in local online social networks ('www.localisten.de') related to local offline integration into peer networks, found that in the virtual day-to-day communication with friends continues.[46] As such, the teenagers' activities in such local online communities document and stabilise existing relationships with friends.

Other results from US populations support our findings. For instance, Ellison et al.'s study that examined whether offline social capital could be generated online with the use of the social networking site, Facebook, found that college students, particularly girls, reported using Facebook mostly to connect with people from their offline world, above all to keep in touch with old friends rather than to meet new people.[47] Similarly, Lenhart and Madden found that adolescents, particularly girls use social networking sites to keep in contact with peers from their offline life, either to make plans with friends that they see often or to keep in touch with friends they rarely see.[48]

G. Social Networking Sites and Identity

Recent research indicates that social networking sites should be seen as a cultural context in which young people engage in processes of identity development.[49] Manago et al. regard MySpace as a rich cultural context in which norms of social interaction and opportunities for self-presentation create new possibilities for experimentation and reflection about possible selves.[50] Each participant in a social networking site presents himself/herself through a profile, which can be modified every time the owner of the profile visits the site. In their qualitative study of MySpace using focus groups with college students, Manago and colleagues detected several aspects of self-presentation and identity formation.[51] Above all, the students used MySpace for presenting themselves in interactions with friends. Through the public performance they reify their selves, i.e. through the self-presentations intended for a more or less public audience they make themselves real. The use of social networking sites also creates opportunities for identity exploration. However, because of the online-offline connection, obvious contradictions between the profile and the offline characteristics would be realised by viewers. Some other aspects of social networking sites are that they are used for social comparison, to display social relationships through communication on the public comment wall or the friends' list, and to display membership in exclusive groups.

Regarding gender identity, Manago et al. conclude that gender role constructions on MySpace seem to correspond to gender role constructions in mainstream US culture: 'females as affiliative and attractive, males as strong

and powerful'.[52] However, they also detected increasing pressure for young men to display their physical attractiveness.

Because young people's online world seems to represent an extension and elaboration of offline interaction, Manago et al. further conclude that social realities and roles translate into the online context.[53] Even though in our research on social networking sites, only a few students reported that the use of such sites has directly affected their face-to-face relationship, we suggest that it nonetheless has implications for young people's offline development.[54] First, emerging adults use such sites to interconnect with their peers, which is a core developmental issue during this life phase. Second, on social networking sites youth can present themselves in an experimental way, which contributes to the development of their sense of self. In both respects, social networking sites seem to provide a new developmental playground for adolescents and emerging adults.

4. Comparing Chat Rooms and Social Networking Sites: Conclusions and Outlook

The studies on chat rooms and social networking sites that have been presented in this chapter did not only have different detailed research questions but also concerned different age groups. Whereas the chat room sample for the participatory observation consisted of adolescents, the study of social networking site was with emerging adults. Nevertheless, examining the findings from research on both contexts enabled us to develop assumptions about changes in young people's online behaviour and its implications from a developmental perspective.

First of all, we want to outline important differences between chat rooms and social networking sites. Whereas research on social networking sites has come to the conclusion that the people with whom the users of such sites connect are partly friends from offline life, previous research on teenage chat rooms has shown that young chat room users, above all, interact with strangers. Chat rooms have been used especially for meeting potential romantic partners (or at least for pretending that the chat partners may become potential romantic partners). They have provided a perfect space for experimental behaviour of how to be attractive to the opposite sex and how to flirt successfully. Social networking sites on the other hand are used more to keep in touch and for exchanging (textual and visual) information with offline friends. Whereas the interaction in chat rooms was focused on textual communication, social networking sites have made it easy to interact using text, pictures, and videos.

The differences lead to the conclusion that (online) self-presentation has become more important in newer online contexts. The study on chat rooms has shown that even though in some chat rooms it was possible to set up a profile, it was very common for adolescents to present themselves in the

text-based conversations by giving a description of their physical appearance. In contrast, on social networking sites used by young people, the visualised self-presentation is one of the most important aspects. Comparing chat rooms with social networking sites, we therefore have to rethink some of our considerations about the implications of chat rooms. Our own as well as other research on chat rooms has stressed that the physical disembodiment of chat room participants might have implications for their behaviour. Furthermore, it has been posited that the physical disembodiment may even support the decline of gender hierarchies.[55] Whereas one may be tempted to think that online communication implies physical disembodiment, we now know that almost the opposite has happened. The rise of social networking sites suggests that adolescents' self-presentation of their bodies and faces becomes increasingly more important. On social networking sites much is communicated about the self through photos.[56] Of course, while in many chat rooms, it was common for users to have a profile with a picture of themselves; adolescents would have intense conversations about primary teenage concerns without the intervening influences of physical presence and physical embodiment. This argument seems harder to maintain now because adolescents use physical self-presentation for expressing and negotiating their identity when interacting online. If there is no possibility for a physical presentation, pictures will be presented as well descriptions of the missing physical appearance. This suggests that as online contexts have changed, so have youth behaviour - chat rooms and social networking sites have entirely different affordances, and youth have adapted to these affordances accordingly.

The development from chat rooms to social networking sites has another implication. Chat rooms usually have public rooms where several people can chat at the same time yet, they also offer separate rooms where private, one-on-one conversations may take place. Our research has shown that youth preferred private rooms for flirting and practicing romantic relationships. Social networking sites also provide the possibility for private communication, through sending messages to others but this is not solely the reason why they have become popular. The rise of social networking sites seems to be encouraging the semi-public playing out of identity negotiations and peer interactions. As Manago et al. have shown, the self-presentations of young users are intended for an audience of peers.[57] Many users keep their profile private which enables only their profile-friends to access all information. However, as the average number of friends that a teenager may have listed on their profile page can reach the hundreds or even thousands, even a private profile may be considered semi-public.

It is also interesting to compare social networking sites and chat rooms regarding gender identity. The research on both forms of online interaction confirms each other to a large part. Gendered expectations and

behaviour are transferred from the offline to the online world. In chat rooms[58] as well as on social networking sites, young people seem to present themselves to a large part according to stereotypical gender norms.[59] It appears that on social networking sites, because of the limited forms of expression often concentrated on the profile picture, the stereotypical gendered display is more relevant than in offline contexts. However, on social networking sites young men seem to be experiencing an increasing pressure to display physical attractiveness.[60] Research on chat rooms has also found certain contexts with potential for a decline of stereotypical gender roles, e.g. girls cannot be interrupted by their male chat partners, as it is typical in face-to-face conversations.[61]

From a developmental perspective it may be more important to point out the similarities in young people's online behaviour in these two contexts rather than the differences. Young people use both chat rooms and social networking sites for essential developmental issues. Chat rooms are used for having first experiences with romantic partner selection, while the users of social networking sites have a stronger focus on visualised self-presentation. Whereas in chat rooms only the chat partner reacts to the text-based self-presentations, on social networking sites there is a quite a large audience (at least all contacts of one's friends' list) that may provide feedback - praise or criticise - to one's presentation through the profile. However, both forms of young people's actions, partner selection as well as the negotiation of the self through peer interaction, are primary developmental concerns and we see how young people are playing out different concerns based on the particular characteristics of the online context.

One chapter in this volume also investigates social aspects of the Web 2.0 and online social networking. Regarding online-offline-connections, the text by Somaiah is interesting. Her research interest was a subcultural group of young people, eating disorder survivors, who are usually extremely isolated because of their illness. However, using the Web 2.0 they form online communities and tell their life stories and stories of illness, which is assumed to contribute to the healing process. This research implicitly supports our assumption of the connectedness of young people's online and offline worlds. Developmental research on online communication and behavior of young people also assumes that users of interactive online forums such as social networking sites are co-constructing their online environments, which implies that their online and offline worlds are psychologically connected.[62]

Regarding future research, there is still a lack of studies combining different age groups into one research design. This is currently being done by the CDMC research team in Los Angeles. The same research design as used in the study on social networking sites has been extended to high school students (13-19 years of age) within the Los Angeles area. While data are still

being analysed, our hope is to compare uses of social networking sites across these age groups (adolescents and emerging adults) using a developmental approach. Along these lines, results from an additional project by Waechter, Jäger, & Triebswetter on the use of the Web 2.0 and social networking is underway which focuses on socio-economically disadvantaged young people aged 12 to 19 years. Initial quantitative as well as qualitative results have been summarised in a research report[63] and further publications are currently being prepared.

Notes

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[3] JIM 2008, *JIM-Studie 2008. Jugend, Information, (Multi-)Media. Basisuntersuchung zum Medienumgang 12- bis 19-Jähriger.* Herausgegeben vom Medienpädagogischen Forschungsverbund Südwest (LFK, LMK), Stuttgart, 2008.

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[9] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.

[10] R Brubaker, F Cooper, 'Beyond Identity', in *Theory and Society* Vol. 29/1, February 2000. S Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall, S., Du Gay, P. (Ed), Sage Publications, London, 1996. R Jenkins, *Social Identity*, Routledge, London, 1996.

[11] eEg. J E Marcia, 'Development and Validation of Ego Identity Status', in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3 1966, pp. 551-558.

[12] for ethnic identity see e.g. Hall, 1996, op. cit.
for gender identity see e.g. C West, D H Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender', in *The Social Construction of Gender*. J. Lorber, S. A. Farell, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1991.

[13] L Jamieson, *Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity*. State of the Art Report of EC-project SERD-2000-00260, 2003.

[14] Jenkins, 1996, op. cit.
P Berger, & T Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit*, Fischer, Frankfurt/Main, 1969.

[15] J P Jordan, 'Exploratory Behavior: The Formation of Self and Occupational Concepts', in *Career Development: Self-Concept Theory*, De E Super, R Starishevsky, N Matlin, & J P Jordan, (eds), Princeton: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963, pp. 42-78.

[16] For literature about how chat rooms function see e.g. M Beißwenger, (ed), *Chat-Kommunikation. Sprache, Interaktion, Sozialität & Identität in synchroner computervermittelter Kommunikation. Perspektiven auf ein neues Forschungsfeld*, ibidem-Verlag, Stuttgart, 2001.
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[18] Greenfield, et al., 2006, op. cit.
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C L Halbert, *The Presentation of Self in Computer-Mediated Communication: Managing and Challenging Gender Identity*, Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2000.

[19] In labeling their immigrant populations, Austria and USA have different traditions. In contrast to 'Mexican-Americans' in the USA, Turkish immigrants in Austria are not labeled Turkish-Austrians. One may conclude that Austria is less open towards immigrants or that the United States seeks to assimilate their immigrants. However, the different terms reflect a different perception of the immigrants.

[20] Of course, there must be reasons for this relation: It is easy to explain why no Turkish girls show up: Their parents simply do not allow them to visit institutions with opportunities to meet with young men. Even though the Austrian youth center has established a day when the Internet café opens for girls only, they may not come. Most of the Turkish immigrants in Austria have emigrated from rural areas and are a lot more traditional than the young Istanbul generation of today. As for the lack of former Yugoslavian boys the youth workers assume that they do not mix up with their Turkish peers and the youth center has become - to a certain extent - the Turkish guys' territory.

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[24] G Psathas, *Conversation Analysis: The Study of Talk-in-Interaction*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1995.

[25] Waechter, 2005, op. cit.

[26] see e.g. C Thimm, Alter - Sprache - Geschlecht. Sprach- und kommunikationswissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf das höhere Lebensalter, Campus, Frankfurt/Main, 2000.

[27] Waechter, 2005, op. cit.

[28] Waechter, 2005, op. cit.

[29] Translated from German into English

[30] K Subrahmanyam, D Smahel, & P M Greenfield, 'Connection Developmental Constructions to the Internet: Identity Presentation and Sexual Exploration in Online Teen Chat Rooms' in *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 2006, pp. 1-12.

[31] ibid.

[32] Greenfield, et al., 2006, op. cit.

[33] B Tynes, *'What's Everyone's Race': Racialized Discourse and Self-Representation in Teen Chat Rooms*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. 2003.

[34] Greenfield, et al., 2006, op. cit., p. 19

[35] ibid.

[36] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.

[37] Eg. Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit.
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[38] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[39] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[40] Greenfield, et al., 2006, op. cit.
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[41] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[42] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[43] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[44] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[45] D Karobath, *Social Media Studie: Nutzung von Web 2.0 Plattformen.* Presseaussendung von marketagent.com vom Juli 2009, 2009.
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[47] Ellison et al., 2007, op. cit.
[48] A Lenhart, & M Madden, *Social Networking Websites and Teens: An Overview,* Pew Internet & American Life Project, Washington, DC, viewed on 6 November 2008, <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_SNS_Data_Memo_Jan_2007.pdf>.
[49] Manago, et al., 2008, op cit.
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[52] Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit., p.455.
[53] Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit.

[54] Subrahmanyam, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[55] Waechter, 2005, op. cit.
[56] See Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[57] Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[58] Waechter, 2005, op. cit.
[59] Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[60] Manago, et al., 2008, op. cit.
[61] Waechter, 2005, op. cit.
[62] K Subrahmanyam, & P M Greenfield, 'Communicating Online: Adolescent Relationships and the Media', in *The Future of Children; Children and Media Technology*, 18, 2008, pp. 119-146.
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Natalia Waechter, sociologist, is a Senior Researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, and she is Lecturer at the Department for Educational Science, University of Vienna, Austria. As a Post-doc Researcher at the UCLA she has collaborated with the Children's Digital Media Center. Her research interests are youth research, gender studies, sociology of migration, and research on online communication.

Kaveri Subrahmanyam is a Professor in the Department of Psychology, California State University, Los Angeles, United States, and Associate Director of the Children's Digital Media Center, Los Angeles, United States. Her research interests are children's and adolescents' interactions with digital media; games and their impact on children's cognition; as well as dual language learning.

Stephanie M. Reich is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, University of California, Irvine, United States. Her research interests focus on child development with the explicit goals of understanding children's social lives and how to promote healthy developmental trajectories.

Guadalupe Espinoza is a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, United States, specialising in Developmental Psychology. Her main research interest is adolescent development, specifically, the dynamics of peer relationships in the school and online context.

Cybergrace among Eating Disorder Survivors in Singapore

Chand Somaiah

Abstract
This chapter, in a spirit similar to Arthur Frank in *The Wounded Storyteller*[1], shows how the injuries of the eating disordered can become seeds of their self-stories. Through everyday life stories and reflections on their personal blogs, recovering eating disordered individuals forge bonds of empathy between themselves and their readers. Growing pains and telling pains in defining despair and disorder, in expressing trials while journeying through individualised and therefore unchartered paths for recovery make for painful and active typing and reading. Illness experiences in post-modern cyberspaces can serve as cultural (re)sources of healing and can aid in empirical studies of the socio-cultural roots and routes of illness and recovery. Illness, Frank asserts, is about learning to cope with lost control. Cyberspace then offers a medium to reclaim some semblance of lost control, a space where potential narrative wreckage can be rescued. The chapter conceptualises such online confessionals as proof of embodied community, sites where medically treated monadic bodies re-connect. Jennifer Cobb's concept of 'cybergrace'[2] allows for a tuning in to what can be observed as spiritually charged curative networks of support towards full recovery.

Key Words: Eating Disorders, Illness Narratives, Cyberspace, Cybergrace, Networks of Support, Recovery.

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1. I was chanting the mantra in my head [...] I need to finish all now to gain weight to get well to let go to set myself free - Helen

This chapter is a modest attempt to illustrate a fiercely embodied and youthful hungering for connection and community in a technological age of supposed ever increasing (dis)connect. It aims to show how socially defined vulnerable groups such as those bearing the label of mentally disordered, specifically the eating disordered (ED) in the Republic of Singapore - a city-state in Southeast Asia whose Tourism Promotion Board has actively promoted as a 'foodie's paradise'- make use of cyberspace to assert and express themselves as creative, proactive, often spiritually-charged individuals who form bonds of cyber-commensality via social networking tools and interconnected blogospheres.

Ethical acts of storytelling are explored through the textual analysis of virtual modes of expression. These outlets of localised vocalisation include thirteen personal blogs of recovering and recovered ED individuals