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Self-presentation and identity on the World Wide Web: an exploration of personal home pages

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with love to my husband Noah Samuel Friedman (even though he thinks that dedicating a dissertation to one's spouse is boring and clichéd) with deep gratitude for his patient support and steadfast encouragement.

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I am indebted to so many people for their ideas and assistance with this project that it would be impossible to thank everyone individually. However, I would like to express my thanks to the stellar faculty and staff from both the University of Texas at Austin and the University of California, San Francisco who advised and supported me during this process, and to my fellow students from UT's ACTlab and from the qualitative research program at UCSF for their enthusiasm, encouragement and collegiality. I am particularly grateful for the initial financial support I received from the Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin. I am also obliged to the people at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who made the AnSWR qualitative analysis software program freely available and even provided free, timely technical support when I needed it most. Finally, I want to recognize the informants who generously and openly contributed their time and their reflections to this report and who deserve my earnest thanks.

Self-presentation and identity on the World Wide Web: an exploration of personal home pages

Abstract

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Despite the paradox inherent in publishing personal content on an implicitly public network, the World Wide Web has hosted personal home pages since its introduction a decade ago. The purpose of this study was to learn why people choose to create personal home pages and what meanings are invested in this practice by those who engage in it. Special attention was paid to the consequences of personal home page publishing for the authors' constructions of self. An inductive approach rooted in symbolic interactionism and informed by concepts taken from audience theory and computer mediated communication was used to discover the core processes underlying this practice. Focused interviews were conducted with 18 informants between the ages of 20 and 56 who had published personal home pages on the WWW and who volunteered to give guided

tours of these pages to the researcher. Interview data was supplemented by content analyses of the informants' home pages. The factors influencing the publication of biographical materials, the tasks involved with home page publishing and the trajectories of production and publication are described, and the informants' fluid characterizations of the audiences for their home pages are explored. Authors often invoked frames denoting personal social contexts despite the widespread accessibility of Web media, and their strategies for ameliorating the tensions between these competing definitions are also discussed. Analysis indicated that the personal home page presents tools and resources for managing and exploring personal identity along with the interactional contexts requisite for engaging in processes of self definition, thus inspiring therapeutic self-exploration as well as permitting the construction of calculated self presentations. The implied public context of the WWW enables the home page to serve as a "looking glass" (Cooley, 1902) for the self. It creates a symbolic gateway to imagined or real reference groups that serve as potential sources of validation, thus allowing the home page to serve as a potent resource for self-definition.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The date is July 24, 1999; the place is San Francisco. I am wandering around a gritty urban gallery and performance space among a few hundred young hipsters who look fashionably cool in their ripped jeans, satirical tee shirts and facial piercings. They have come here to participate in an event called “Webzine99”—an exhibition, forum and party celebrating independent publishing on the World Wide Web. This is the second iteration of the event: the first conference, Webzine98, was held eight months earlier. The press release promised that all of the presentations at this convention would focus on the "future-community-building potential of the Web for artistic and social transfiguration.” The breathless prose of the event’s Manifesto reads:

> The Web provides a vehicle for collating and amassing a new folklore, mythology and history for a different kind of entrepreneurial future--one which rejects the prevailing (and suffocating) ethics of "commodity/ corporate/business culture." ...At the heart of WEBZINE 99 is the shared desire to celebrate personal empowerment, artistic creativity and social change. WEBZINE 99 aims to permanently alter the balance of power in the information world, rejecting the dreary limits placed on our imaginations. If a new social architecture and network can be stunningly envisioned, perhaps some of our wildest dreams can come true. (Vale, 1999)

Despite the radical, revolutionary stance of the Manifesto, the Web page for the event lists several corporate sponsors, including some commercial Web design and marketing firms and one publicly traded Internet access provider. I am struck by the apparent incongruities between the event’s radical rhetoric and its commercial patronage, although the other attendants here mostly seem to find it

unremarkable—after all, such contradictions are a routine part of their media-saturated lives. Free-floating irony, often acerbic enough to burn, is the prevailing tone of this convention, and individualism is the defining style.

Armed with my Xeroxed convention program and homemade entry badge, I stop at one of the many available computer terminals in the gallery and use a Web browser to scroll through the directory of webzines associated with the event. Above such categorizations as “critical reviews,” “pop media,” “literary” and “technical resources” are several 'zines grouped together under the simple heading “personal narratives.” In fact, the pride of place on the program lineup is given to events which offer suggestions for publishing personal accounts online: the first panel on the program, entitled "Just Because It Happened To You Doesn't Make It Interesting," is followed by a panel called "The World of Me: the bones inside the personal website.” I surf over to last year’s conference program, and click on a hyperlink that says “How to Make Your Own E-zine.” The instructions offered by the conference organizers suggest: “Tell a story or thousand from your experience here on planet earth. People exist in this world who really need to hear your perspective... YOUR VOICE IS THE DEFINITION OF GOOD SO SAY SOMETHING!” (1998, emphasis theirs.) While I read it over, other conference-goers come by and sit down at the terminals on either side of me, showing each other their webzines and online journals. Some of the web pages are angry, some of them are funny—and most of these publicly accessible documents are intimate and revealing explorations of what it means to be a feeling, thinking human in a confusing and often troublesome world.

To put these events in perspective, let me jump back ten years in time for a moment. In 1989, the Internet was an essential (although somewhat arcane) communications system primarily used by academics and researchers. Here in the United States, the Internet was operated under the aegis of the National Science Foundation, which prohibited any commercial use of their network. The World Wide Web did not yet exist except in the form of a proposal circulating at the Geneva Particle Physics Laboratory, which suggested that a hypertext system might be a good solution to the problem of sharing information among geographically dispersed researchers.

Since its release in 1991, the Web has become the standard for circulating information on the Internet, proving to be the "killer application" that moved the 'Net into the forefront of American cultural and commercial consciousness. No one could have predicted its far-reaching consequences, and certainly the intensely personal uses of this inherently social computer medium (such as those celebrated at Webzine99) were never anticipated. I was fortunate enough to witness this diffusion of the World Wide Web from a relatively privileged vantage point: that of a graduate student of communication technology at a large American research university. My enrollment there had been provoked by a fascination with new communication technologies and an abiding curiosity about their social impact. I was quickly seduced by the endless possibilities of this new technology.

To me, one of the most surprising consequences of the dissemination of the Web in its first years was how frequently people used it to publish personal

and biographical information. These documents, which rapidly became known as "personal home pages," were accessible to the entire Internet users' community with an ease of distribution and access unrealized by previous media channels. I began this research in order to understand why some people chose to create texts of identity in this public and far-reaching medium.

Since the boundaries between public, group and interpersonal forms of communication had been blurred by the ability to make personalized information available on a near-global scale through World Wide Web technology, I felt that new approaches to theorizing about mediated interaction were needed to account for this new communicative context and to explain why so many had adopted it for the purposes of self-presentation. I also wanted to investigate the subjective effects of this technology, to find out how crafting these personal documents shaped Web authors' experiences and expressions of identity and how they were used to organize reflexive notions about the self.

The main goal of this investigation was to discover how the authors of personal home pages manage self presentation and identity disclosure within this new medium, and how authoring home pages shapes the way that identity is understood and experienced. When I began my research, the World Wide Web was a new medium and little was known about the kinds of uses people were making of this technology or the meanings with which it was being invested. Therefore, it was impossible to develop standardized variables representing the categories of possible meaning that could have accurately assessed this practice through traditional survey methods. Accordingly, I undertook a qualitative

approach that was aimed at understanding the social and relational conventions related to the practice of World Wide Web home page production.

My aim was to create a grounded, substantive model of the social practice of authoring WWW home pages. This was realized through the inductive analysis of data gathered from intensive interviews of eighteen people engaged in the practice of creating personal or biographical materials on the Web. Interview data has been supplemented with content analysis of the documents the informants had created and with demographic data obtained from them by means of a short survey. However, the emphasis of this study is an emic one, based on the informants' descriptions of authoring home pages and the meanings that this practice holds for them.

Authoring a personal home page requires a certain amount of consciousness regarding one's self-presentation, and this process has potentially significant implications for identity construction. The act of designing a personal page involves steps ranging from writing bibliographic text, selecting pertinent graphics and other multimedia materials for inclusion, and identifying other Web documents that will be referenced in the form of hypertext links. This process forces people to think reflexively about their identities as they make decisions about the type and content of the information they will incorporate into their home page. In Foucaultian (1988) terms the home page is a technology of sign systems, in that it permits one to combine meanings and symbols in a bricolage of electronic media, and it can also be a technology of power, in that the home page invites objectification of its author as subject. Primarily, however, the personal

home page represents a technology of self, in that it empowers people to change their self-conceptions by creating and maintaining home pages, and allows these authors a chance to investigate their own identities, sometimes transforming themselves in the process. Whether these transformations will also inspire equally profound changes in our social architecture remains yet to be seen.

Chapter 2: Related Literature

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Since the World Wide Web is a recent innovation, I begin this chapter with a review of the use and history of this technology as well as an overview of the trends related to its adoption and diffusion in order to locate the home page publishing phenomenon in its social and cultural context. Afterwards, I summarize relevant communication research in the areas of audience analysis and computer mediated communication and then review pertinent concepts from the social psychological literature on self disclosure, symbolic interaction and impression management. These literatures offered a conceptual framework for this endeavor and engendered sensitizing topics that proved useful in the inductive analysis of the qualitative data.

THE REALITY OF THE WEB

There is no question that the World Wide Web has inspired dramatic cultural and economic changes during the past decade. It led to the creation of new industries and new jobs, inspired transformations in educational practice and political organization, and became a fundamental source for expressions of popular culture. The World Wide Web publication of the Lewinsky Grand Jury Testimony was a benchmark in the history of this technology, illustrating the profound extent to which it has become a vital and accepted public medium. The

Internet, formerly the effectively private domain of academics and researchers, was transformed by the graphical interface offered by WWW technologies into an environment ripe for commercial and public exploitation.

Description and history of the technology

The world of the Web consists of documents, links, and searchable indexes, but the technology behind the World Wide Web project represents any information accessible over the Internet network as a part of a "seamless hypertextual information space." Hypertext documents contain links to other documents, or to places within documents. All documents, whether real, virtual or indexical, look similar to the reader and are contained within the same addressing scheme identifying their location in the network (Berners-Lee, 1992).

Web servers are accessed by client applications (such as Netscape Navigator and Microsoft's Internet Explorer) which have been developed for most contemporary computing platforms. These clients provide the user with a simple, point-and-click interface to the information published on the Internet. To follow a link, the user clicks on it with a mouse. For searching and indexing operations, the user types in keywords or other search criteria. These are the only procedures necessary to accessing most of the data published on the WWW. However, specialized programs known as "plug-ins" which are designed to augment the capacities of the basic Web browsers are sometimes needed when accessing specialized material such as video or audio data.

The World Wide Web was developed originally to allow internationally dispersed teams of researchers to share and disseminate information. The initial

impetus for the development of the WWW came out of the High Energy Physics community at CERN in 1989 and one of its earliest applications was an interface into the CERN membership directory database (Berners-Lee, 1996). However, the idea of WWW technology quickly spread, attracting much interest among researchers and computing professionals for its applicability in user support, resource discovery and collaborative work areas. The initial prototype for the WWW was developed in late 1990; within two years of its release, the WWW accounted for the largest percentage of traffic among all services on the National Science Foundation's Internet backbone, and within three years Web browser applications were available for all common computing platforms.[1]

Demographics of the WWW

A number of teams are engaged in researching the demographics and trends of Internet use and some of them ask questions oriented towards general Web use. Some of these studies employ traditional, random-digit-dialing sampling technique for their user surveys, such as the Cyber Dialogue - Find/SVP (1997) and IntelliQuest (1998a) surveys, while the WWW Survey team at the Georgia Institute of Technology's Graphics, Visualization & Usability Center (Kehoe, Pitkow, & Rogers, 1998) utilizes a self-selected non-random sample. Although there are some variations in reporting between the studies, depending largely on how such terms as "user" are operationalized by each survey, the studies show mostly strong agreement on core demographic issues with continued

[1] See Merit, April 1995 NSF traffic distribution highlights. Unfortunately, due to the demise of the NSF Internet Backbone project and its transition to a privatized network architecture, the data from April 1995 is the most recent report available on the amount of overall Internet traffic.

and dramatic growth. The October 1998 survey from IntelliQuest reported 72.6 million adults (an estimated 35% of the U.S. population age 16 and older) were online as of the third quarter 1998, more than double the population recorded in their 1996 figures. An earlier survey by IntelliQuest during the first quarter of 1998 indicated that 25 percent of the total online population at that time began accessing the Internet in 1997, and as a group those adopters tended to be less well-educated and have less disposable income than those who had gone online earlier. The Cyber Dialogue American Internet User Survey completed in the first quarter of 1998 reported 41.5 million active Web users (age 18 and above) in the U.S., with just over half of all Web users clicking in on a daily basis. By the end of 1999, most demographic studies indicated that over half of U.S. adults were using the Internet daily, and a fifth of all Internet users were capable of creating or updating a Web page (Nua, 1999).

At the time the informants for this study were recruited, the average age of Internet users was approximately between 35 and 36 years old, according to both the self selected 9th GVU WWW User Survey sample and the random digit-dialed sample of users in the Cyber Dialogue 1998 American Internet User Survey (Cyber Dialogue & Emerging Technologies Research Group, 1998; Kehoe et al., 1998). The gender ratio of WWW users in the United States was still predominately male at this time (men were reported variously as accounting for between 57% to 61.3% of the total.) About 86.6% of the respondents in the 9th GVU survey stated that they are heterosexual, which roughly corresponds to the proportion typically reported in surveys of the U.S. population as a whole. About

one fifth of the 9th GVU survey respondents (21.4%) reported being in a field relating to computers, with 24.9% checking Education (including students), 22.5% indicating Professional fields, 11.4% in Management, and 19.8% checking Other. These surveys suggest that at the time the informants for this study were recruited, the Internet was moving away from being the exclusive playground of the stereotypical young straight male computer nerd. Indeed, over the past several years, user demographics of the WWW in the United States have tended to become more representative of the population as a whole as increasing numbers of people get online.

As the number of WWW users increase, so does the potential impact of the Web on social organization and culture. Approximately 60% of respondents in both the 7th GVU and IntelliQuest surveys reported that they customarily access the WWW from their homes, and more than half of the GVU sample of Web users claimed they used it for more than ten hours per week. More than one third of the GVU respondents claimed to use the Web instead of watching TV on a daily basis, while another 27% said that the Web replaced TV on a weekly basis. The Find/SVP and the Price Waterhouse studies reported similar, albeit less dramatic, declines in the use of other forms of telecommunication and media, such as long distance phone calls, video, magazine, newspaper and radio, due to increased Internet usage. These figures point to the WWW's astonishingly swift integration into the everyday lives of its users.

Additionally, almost half of the GVU survey's respondents reported that they felt more connected to people who share their interests since coming online,

with less than 3% feeling less connected than before. The GVU researchers suggest that this finding offers evidence for the assertion that the Internet allows people to build online communities based on shared interests. It also implies that Web users may be engaged in the creation of alternative approaches towards relationships and affiliation.

It is clear that the World Wide Web is instigating rapid and remarkable transformations in media use patterns and social connectivity in the United States. However, these surveys, like most traditional media research, are concerned mainly with how Web content is consumed by its audience. Other than occasional editorial flurries of anxiety over the easy accessibility of Web pornography, scant attention has been paid in the literature to the kinds of content Web users choose to provide, and nearly none on why some of them have chosen to publish personal or biographical information in this medium.

MASS MEDIA LITERATURE

Although the intent of this study is to explore the motivations and experiences of people who are publishing media content through the WWW rather than consuming it, the literature which explores audience activity in the mass media environment provides a useful framework for exploring the involvement of individuals with the Internet medium.

Audience research

In some respects, this project has much in common with the media research tradition known as the "uses and gratifications" project. This

psychological approach to the study of communication stresses individual use and choice. It endeavors to trace how people use media to gratify their needs, to understand peoples' motives for media behavior, and to recognize the functions and consequences that result from these motives, needs and behavior (Rubin, 1994). For example, Rubin identified two principal orientations towards media use: *instrumental orientations*, described as goal-oriented and selective, and *ritual orientations*, considered to be more passive and habitual (1981). Rubin later clarified this model by differentiating between two types of ritual motivations: *habitual motivations* used more for passing time, and *escapist motivations* which involve seeking distraction from loneliness and isolation (1983). Rubin's typology of motivations provided useful sensitizing concepts for this study.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch outlined the original research concerns of this approach as:

> (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) needs gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintentional ones. (1974, p. 20)

Similarly, I set out to discover the needs and expectations driving the production of WWW home pages, as well as the gratifications and consequences that derive from their publication. Also, some of my basic assumptions about methodology mirror the fundamental tenets of the uses and gratifications approach, namely (1) that users and produces of media are able to account for their own communication motives and for the gratifications provided by engaging in this practice, and (2) that value judgments concerning the cultural significance of media content should

be suspended while the motives and gratifications of the participants are explored on their own merits (Katz et al., 1974).

Although the intent of this study is similar to conventional studies of audience activity, it represents a significant departure from that tradition. Historically, the emphasis in this area of audience research has been on creating metrics of audience consumption of media texts; indeed, the possibility for participation in media production is completely absent from most theoretical models of audience needs or dependencies.[2] Accordingly, most of the research conducted on WWW users to date has employed traditional survey methodologies for assessing audience activity and has been concerned mainly with how Web content is consumed by its audience (Find/SVP, 1997; IntelliQuest, 1998; Kehoe, 1997, 1998). However, the challenge in studying new media messages in the interactive, many-to-many communication channels enabled by the global Internet is on the *production* of media by empowered users. In this respect, the personal Web page represents a new context for media, offering a potentially global scale for asynchronous mass communication which is immeasurably more accessible to message producers than the traditional mass media (Chandler, 1997). Instead of describing how a mass audience consumes media messages constructed by a relatively small, privileged group, this project explores the media messages that active individuals choose to provide and make public through the computer networks linked by the World Wide Web. Further, audience activity research has typically relied on a survey methodology employing rigid typologies

[2] See Priest, 1995, p. 194, for a cogent critique of this deficiency.

predetermined by the researcher, regardless of how this method may limit the potential discovery of unexpected media gratifications. To that end, I have chosen to go beyond the static functionalism of survey approaches, instead employing the more inductive and contextualized interpretive research paradigm to determine the frontiers of the personal Web page phenomenon.

Priest's (1995) qualitative study of television talk show participants deserves special mention here. Her study of why some people choose to reveal controversial or personal information on nationally syndicated talk shows also employs an inductive, interview based approach to explore how active subjects use media production to achieve their self-presentational goals. Like Priest, I am examining the behavior of individuals who are actively using a communicative medium that has the potential of reaching a widespread audience and who must choose how they want to portray themselves within that medium.

COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION LITERATURE

Since the World Wide Web is fundamentally a communication arena mediated by computer technology, it may be helpful to review previous research in the field of computer mediated communication (CMC). In particular, two types of CMC studies provide valuable grounding for this project: those which characterize computers as social realms (as opposed to merely assessing the efficiency of CMC when compared to face to face interaction contexts or other technologically mediated channels), and those which explore the social psychological processes related to this type of communication venue.

Historically, research on interpersonal communication mediated through the computer has characterized this form of interaction as less efficient and less effective than face to face communication. For example, computer mediated communication (CMC) has been described as lacking in "social presence" (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) or in "media richness" (Trevino, Daft, & Lengel, 1990). In the past, CMC has also been characterized as lacking cues about social context when compared with the face to face communicative ideal (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). Accordingly, early studies of CMC tended to focus on the ways in which the medium restricted or marred interpersonal communication, and they usually dismissed the importance of the time-shifting and space-collapsing features of this form of communication as being irrelevant to achieving interpersonal goals (Palmer, 1995).[3] However, more recent explorations of CMC suggest that people find the means to carry on communication of an interpersonal nature through computer mediated channels despite the inherent limitations of the medium--limitations which are, in any event, rapidly yielding to continual technical advancement as these new media mature. Content analyses (such as Rice, 1987; McCormick, 1992) repeatedly identify socioemotional content in CMC, while journalistic accounts and case studies (such as Rheingold, 1993 and Stone, 1995) and participant observation studies (such as Bruckman, 1992 and Reid, 1992) indicate that experienced users of CMC are able to infer rich

[3] It is important to realize, however, that most of these studies focused solely on primitive forms of CMC that only contained information that could be encoded by means of the computer keyboard. Therefore, this kind of communication was quite limited in terms of its semiotic bandwidth.

relational content and form strong interpersonal ties with communicative partners through this medium.

Social information processing and other strategies

More recent explorations of CMC indicate that the tenacity with which people pursue interpersonal goals is powerful enough to overcome the technologic obstructions to communication inherent in computer mediation— so users will tend to develop compensatory communication strategies that make up for the lack of paralanguage cues in these contexts. For example, Walther's explorations of interpersonal CMC suggest that the development of interpersonal relations through this channel is predicated on both the passing of time and the accumulation of messages from communicative partners, an approach he called the "social information processing perspective." According to Walther's theory, people are driven by the same basic motives (such as the need for affiliation and social rewards) in computer mediated communication as they would be in face to face circumstances. CMC users, like communicators in any environment, will desire to transact "personal, rewarding, complex relationships and... will communicate to do so." (Walther, 1992, p. 68). Walther, Anderson and Park (1994) found supporting evidence for this theory in a meta-analysis of CMC research: they concluded that communicators discover ways of pursuing interpersonal forms of communication over computer mediated channels when their interactions are extended over time.

Interpersonal communication strategies

Several of the strategies that are used to achieve interpersonal communication by CMC users in both synchronous and asynchronous channels are well documented. Some of these conventions are stylistic and textual, and include self-referential conventions[4], artistic representations known as emoticons[5], and parenthetical expressions[6]. These kinds of conventions, which allow users to make textual substitutions for traditionally nonverbal categories of information, are familiar components in most CMC environments (Reid, 1992). Other conventions are more dependent on the software or hardware components of particular CMC environments. Examples of these include "action words"[7] or "poses"[8] preprogrammed into certain chat systems and system commands allowing users to cause sound files to be played on recipient's computers.

Other self-identification conventions that predate the WWW are related to the provision of bibliographic or identity related materials through online

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[4] Such as the self referential arrow convention common on many chat systems: <Jane> <--- is smiling happily

[5] A facetious or joking remark might be followed by 8-), indicating a grin, or by ;-), indicating a wink. Many emoticons are designed to be read sideways and are artistic representations of facial expressions; users sometimes have "trademark" emoticons. There are several emoticon lexicons available online; some are indexed at http://www.yahoo.com/text/Arts/Visual_Arts/Computer_Generated/ASCII_Art/Smilies/.

[6] For example: A user may type (smile) or (blush) or (chuckle) to convey paralanguage information.

[7] For example: on certain chat systems, when user John Doe types any of a list of action verbs such as "smile", other users will see a relevant description such as "John Doe smiles happily." while John Doe will see "You smile happily."

[8] "Posing" is common on the popular Internet Relay Chat (IRC) system and within multi user domains, although the commands used to invoke them may differ on different systems. On many IRC client programs, for example, any set of words following “/me” is conveyed as posing, whereas words typed without the slash mark are treated as an articulation. Thus, if I typed “Hi!” on my IRC client, the system would convey “<Aviva >'Hi!'”, to other users, but if I typed “/me waves hello to everyone”, the system would transmit “Aviva waves hello to everyone.”

communication systems. These include "signature files," "plan files," and other types of user profiles which are made available to users by software protocol. Signature files are often appended to e-mail or other asynchronous forms of communication; they may contain the sender's mailing address, organizational affiliation, favorite quotations, pictures rendered in ASCII text form, or any other personalized content included at the whims of their creators. Online profiles or plan files may contain personal or biographical information about users, or may contain information that a given user wants to publish; they are accessed through software conventions that allow other users to remotely access this information. These conventions may have evolved in response to the frustrations inherent in initiating and sustaining relational communication across a low bandwidth medium.

The social practice of making bibliographic materials available on the WWW is reminiscent of on-line profiles, signature files, and plan files in that the WWW homepage also contains information selected according to the user's whim which is accessible by others. However, the WWW homepage differs in that it is not limited to text: it may contain photographs, movie clips, sounds, or any other material which can be presented in a digital format, and it may also include links to other areas on the Internet which the author wishes to mention. Nevertheless, the growth of the homepage phenomenon on the WWW may be implicated as a strategy for exploiting existing technology to achieve relational goals.

Enhanced communicative ability

Some technologically inherent aspects of CMC in general, and the WWW specifically, can actually extend human communicative ability beyond what is normally possible in face to face communication channels. These include the increased ability to network beyond traditional geographic limitations, which enables users to connect with other users at remote locations, and the technology's many-to-many capabilities, which allows a single user to connect easily with many others (Rogers, 1986). As noted earlier, the publication of a page on the WWW enables the author to reach a widespread international audience. An additional important enhancement of CMC relates to its asynchronous capabilities, which allow users to communicate with others at their convenience (Rogers, 1986). Certainly, home page authors seem to be using both of these features of the WWW to maintain a convenient repository of biographical data (such as online resumes) which is accessible by others remotely. Digital information technologies also extend human memory by providing an easily searchable repository of correspondence or other information (Rice, 1984) and by maintaining associations between various kinds of data through hyperlinks (Landow, 1992). Web authors make extensive use of these features in various ways, from the maintenance of extensive online journals in some cases, to the more familiar provision of “hotlists” of pages that the authors find relevant or interesting.

Social psychological enhancements

Other reported enhancements in CMC are related to social-psychological processes in combination with technological attributes of the media. When compared to face to face settings, computer mediation seems to provide a level of psychological distancing between actors that may serve to enhance intimacy and self disclosure and may also encourage equal and democratic participation in discussions that might normally be affected by social status concerns (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993; Rice & Love, 1987). This distancing effect may partially explain why many home pages contain such intimate and revealing personal accounts.

The term "hyperpersonal communication" was coined by Walther (1996) to describe computer mediated communication that surpassed face to face communicative contexts in achieving interpersonal functions of intimacy, solidarity and liking. He ascribes this hyper-personal capacity to CMC users' ability to carefully select and construct cues that promote "selective self presentations"—an ability which is especially enhanced within asynchronous channels (1992). This property of CMC is augmented by the idealization of the source of those self-presentations by the receiver due to the minimal cues in the interaction, and by the intensification of those idealizations through reciprocal feedback. Although Walther noted that interaction was often facilitated by web pages, he dismissed them as a "form of publication rather than a channel for interactive communication." (1992, p. 33) However, my perspective on home pages locates them as potentially part of an interactive system of relational

communication, leading me to attend to publication trajectories and their interrelation to interpersonal issues.

Computers as social realms

> …I am outlining what I see as a slow but profound change taking place over the current century—one that is indexed in a broad array of occurrences— for example, in the academic intrigue with the deconstruction of the self (Derrida), the disappearance of the author (Foucault), the individual as a terminal in a network of circulating images (Baudrillard), and the woman as cyborg (Haraway). In the culture more generally, we see the change manifest in the slow replacement of real persons with electronic impulses (for example, in carrying out friendships on computer networks, being entertained or intrigued by television, or achieving sexual gratification through telephone services)… (Gergen, 1996, p.135)

As Kenneth Gergen and many other commentators have noted, communication technologies like the World Wide Web enable people to extend their social relationships beyond the limitations of individual embodiment. Social theorist Craig Calhoun observed that these new technologies "enable the transcendence of not only space but also time: fewer relationships or transactions require co-presence..." (1992, p. 221). This theme is embellished by Allucquère Rosanne Stone, who concluded that social interaction is increasingly moving away from the old embodied norm and draws attention to the people who customarily participate in meaningful computer mediated social interaction and who "view computers not only as tools but also as arenas for social experience" (1995, p. 15). Stone discusses how participants in computer-generated social spaces become accustomed to delegating their interpersonal agency to software

proxies, making these representations into extensions of their will and instrumentality and blurring the boundaries of personhood in the process.[9]

On the reception side of the communication equation, there is a growing body of research indicating that people tend to treat computer interfaces in ways that are "fundamentally social and natural"--at least as long as the interfaces continue to function like social actors (Reeves & Nass, 1996, p.5).[10] Turkle quipped that computer users are happy to "take things at interface value" (1995, p. 103) and argues that users are capable both of emotional engagement with computer interfaces and of conceptualizing them as extensions of self (p. 110). Acting an interface for interpersonal agency, WWW home pages may be characterized as yet another way of using digital technology to extend one's agency beyond the physical limitations of the human body; thus, they are likely to be treated as more or less competent participants in social interaction by those who view them.

The apparent relationship between home pages and identity has come to the attention of a few theoreticians, although previously this phenomenon had not been subjected to detailed inductive exploration. Turkle commented that the home page phenomenon provides a dramatic illustration of postmodern notions about identity as multiplicitous, incomplete and associational (1995). Miller

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[9] It's worth mentioning here (as Chandler does in his online essay about identity and home pages) that the concept of delegating some part of one's identity to a media text predates the emergence of computer networks by quite a bit. The notion that people can interact with an author's ideas without ever meeting the author, thus extending the author's potential influence in time and space, has been kicked around since at least the time of Socrates, as evidenced in Plato's *Phaedrus* and in his *Seventh Letter*.

[10] See Laurel, 1991 for a discussion about how interface design and conversationality affect users' expectations of program responsiveness.

made analogies between the use of home pages and other self-presentational texts including pen pal letters, personal ads and curriculum vitae (1995). Chandler added other kinds of written narratives to this list, including magazine articles, journal papers, autobiographies and fanzines. He also compared the home page to other kinds of props used to provide tangible documentation about the self such as "scrapbooks, photograph albums, self-assessment questionnaires, family slide-shows, home movies, matchmaking forms, personal journals or diaries and even entire living spaces and homes, with their furnishings, posters, bookshelves, music collections, photos and so on." (1997) Chandler speculated that home page authoring combines the function of exemplifying "one's thoughts, feelings and identity… with the public function of publishing these to a larger audience," much as Michel de Montaigne did in 1580 with the publication of his Essays. Both Chandler and Turkle argued that the web page provides its authors with an "object to think with" about issues of identity and self.

SELF DISCLOSURE

The construction of a home page for the WWW requires the author to make certain decisions, thoughtfully or not, about the kinds of personal information that will be included in the document. Research in social and clinical psychology has given rise to an extensive literature on the concept of self-disclosure[11], which is often commonly, if vaguely, defined as "that which occurs when A knowingly communicates to B information about A which is not generally known and is not otherwise available to B" (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn,

[11] For more exhaustive reviews of the self-disclosure literature, see Derlega, 1993.

1969, p. 59). Self disclosure is generally operationalized as a verbal phenomenon and is most frequently studied by experimentally manipulating conversational settings (Tardy, 1985). The dimensions of self disclosure that are usually gauged include the expressiveness of the self disclosure, the intimacy level of the disclosed information, and the amount of imitation or relevance to the content of the information disclosed by the conversational partner. Despite this conversational bias, the first two dimensions are certainly relevant to personal disclosure within home pages. Furthermore, several other conclusions in the literature on self-disclosure seem germane for understanding the social context of the revelations contained within some personal home pages.

One such finding is a correlation between high levels of self-disclosure and high degrees of private self-consciousness or being in touch with one's feelings (Davis & Franzoi, 1987). This is particularly interesting since the potential accessibility of the personal home page to a broad audience may act to increase the self-consciousness of its author. Another interesting discovery related to the social context of the WWW medium was made by Weisband and Kiesler (1996), who found that subjects are likely to disclose more on a computer form than in an interview or on a paper form. They hypothesized that computer interfaces are lacking in social context clues, and therefore reduce evaluation anxiety and self-presentation concerns while increasing feelings of safety and invulnerability. They also suggested that those who lack experience with computers underestimate the risks of self-disclosing personal information in computerized contexts and thus are likely to disclose more readily. Accordingly,

the web page author's familiarity with the computer-mediated communication environment and his or her understanding of the ramifications and risks associated with disclosing personal information are essential considerations in constructing a model of personal home page authorship.

Also of interest is the link between self-disclosure and loneliness. Prager (1986) found that subjects lacking an intimate primary relationship were more likely to disclose at a high level with both friends and with strangers. Stokes (1987) argued that the receptivity of the target to disclosure and the inherent openness of the disclosing individual are both important factors in determining self disclosure levels. These findings suggest that both the social support networks of home page authors and the kinds of feedback which result from the publication of intimate material on the home page may be implicated in determining the level of self disclosure on home pages.

Several studies explore the relationship between self-disclosure and mental health. Jourard, the originator of the self-disclosure concept, associated disclosure with "personality health" and asserted that people without at least one target for disclosure risk both mental and physical health problems (1964, p.24), although he cautioned that too much disclosure could also result in relational and emotional problems. Coates and Winston (1987) and Stiles (1987) also associated high disclosure levels with the elevated states of self-consciousness brought on by periods of distress or crisis. These authors argued that the cathartic release associated with self-disclosure could lead to increased self-understanding and increased physical and mental health. Pennebaker (1989) also found that

disclosure or "confession" as he called it, may result in physical and psychological enhancements. Accordingly, there may be mental and physical health implications of publishing personal material via the WWW, and publication of intimate material may be associated with periods of personal crisis.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTION AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

Although the empirical data from the literatures on self-disclosure, computer mediated communication and audience analysis provide a number of useful sensitizing concepts to help orient my exploration of the phenomenon of personal home page publishing, the methodologies usually associated with these approaches tend to result in decontextualized predictive models and cannot capture the nuances, values and meanings of the social practice of home page publication. Accordingly, the symbolic interactionist framework (Blumer, 1969; Mead & Morris, 1934) will provide the epistemological foundations for this qualitative study. In contrast to the uses and gratifications approach and other psychological perspectives, the symbolic interactionist framework does not characterize human action as largely a response to drives; instead, individual actors are thought to construct action according to a variety of elements providing context for their behavior:

> They cover such matters as his wants, his feelings, his goals, the actions of others, the expectations and demands of others, the rules of his group, his situation, his conceptions of himself, his recollections, and his images of prospective lines of conduct. (Blumer, 1966, p. 537)

Human action is therefore viewed as dependent on the meanings that people ascribe to their situations, and these meanings emerge out of social interaction

although they may be modified through individual interpretation (Blumer, 1969; Strauss, 1959/1997). Epistemologically, the symbolic interaction project stresses the processual character of human behavior and the importance of viewing human conduct from the point of view of those who are being studied (Denzin, 1970).

One major goal of this research project is to explore the relationship between personal Web page production and constructions of identity-- those "fateful appraisals made by oneself—by oneself and by others" (Strauss, 1959/1997, p. 11). The symbolic interactionist assumption of the indeterminacy of action is based on the human capacity to objectify and ascribe meanings to self as well as to others; in other words, people are capable of defining their own identity to themselves and then acting on the basis of those definitions. Symbolic interactionism includes the notion that self concept arises out of symbolic exchanges between individuals and their various associates and is maintained through social interaction. The personal home page may serve as a focal point and medium for such exchanges, providing an intriguing opportunity for people to generate these definitions.

Furthermore, the interactionist concept of the "looking glass self" (from Cooley, 1902) denoting the reflected nature of interaction, is relevant to this project. Cooley explained that the "self idea" has "three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification." (p. 152) Cooley's notion that individuals or groups who are not actually present may have a great social influence on behavior informs the

interactionist concept of the "reference group", defined by Shibutani (1955) as a group whose perspective is assumed by the social actor as a standard for making comparisons with one's own situation or status. These concepts provide a useful framework for understanding the interactive system of the personal home page, wherein the presence of interactional partners may be more of a potential than an actuality.

Erving Goffman is another interactionist whose work provides pertinent concepts for exploring the phenomenon of home page publishing. In Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor for face to face social interaction, everyday life is characterized as a stage on which individual actors engage in the presentation of various guises of self, conveying to each other their intentions, their characters, and their preferred definitions of their shared situation (1959). According to Goffman's metaphor (often referred to as situated identity theory), actors will strategically highlight some personal characteristics while concealing others in the performance of any role in a particular (or situated) social context. Like Mead, Goffman also contrasted expressions "given" (in terms of verbal symbols) with those which are "given off" by nonverbal, behavioral means and which may be intentional or involuntary.

Miller discussed the applicability of Goffman's model to the presentation of self in home pages, and concluded that although Web pages may currently be limited in the depth of information they provide compared to face-to-face interaction, more expressive resources will become available as the technology matures (1995). He commented that there is still room for information about the

self to be "given off," or escape unintentionally, in the way people use the medium:

> The implicit information that does leak through is paralinguistic, rather than non-verbal - a matter of style, structure and vocabulary – or paracommunicational - a matter of how I deal with a Web page compared with customary ways of doing it.

Miller also noted that even though Web pages lack the signals for reception which are essential to face to face interaction, the pages do invite feedback through email and other means.

Following Miller, I assume that pages are part of an interactive system, so Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor can be extended to cover the mediated interaction common to the WWW. Here, people may deliberately set out to adopt particular personas and to manage the impressions they make on others through content and design choices ranging from the inclusion of biographical text, snapshots, lists of organizational affiliations, links to writings, samples of art or sound, or connections to other Web pages. The social actor constructs a particular self-presentation on the digital proscenium of the Web page that is intended for exhibition to others with access to the network. In this respect, the personal Web page acts as an interface for interpersonal agency, in that it is always available to be viewed by anyone with a particular interest in the individual who created it. Furthermore, through the implementation of electronic mail features and response/feedback forms which are built into many Web pages and Web browser applications, the Web interface frequently provides a gateway for readers to escalate their level of interaction with the creator of a given page. Therefore, the

interaction initiated by the act of browsing a Web document is not necessarily limited to the interface itself but instead may be potentially upgraded to a more direct form of interpersonal interaction.

Although home pages clearly do occur in a social context, until now it has not been apparent how authors tend to conceive of either the situation of online mediated interaction, or of the audience who may access their page. Accordingly, another major goal of the research is to gain understanding about Web authors' publishing activities from their own perspectives on this practice: in other words, discovering how they define and act towards the situation of biographical Web page production[12]. In this manner, I will extend Goffman's situated identity theory to apply to situations in which interpersonal agency is delegated to a digital interface.

Regardless of whether it is best to characterize a personal home page as a conscious self-presentation for an external audience or as a genuine expression of disclosure, page production may have important repercussions on how their authors experience and internalize their self-concepts. According to the psychological literature on impression management, self-presentations may eventually become internalized, so people may come to believe their public performances as being truly reflective of their identity (Arkin, 1986; Schlenker, 1980). Consequently, the act of authoring a Web page may tend to reify self-concept, in that the process of choosing particular aspects of one's identity for

[12] The term "definition of the situation" entered sociological discourse in 1927 with the publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki. For a comprehensive discussion of this concept, see Stebbins, 1969.

public dissemination, and excluding others, may affect the author's future expressions of self-identification in a reciprocal fashion. The page may act as a mirror for self-reflection as well as a prism for focusing and refining self-understanding.

Artifactual and contextual identity studies

Although the relationship between identity and the WWW home page has not yet undergone systematic interpretive research, recently there have been several successful explorations of the relationship between identity and other personal documents or artifacts. Letters and diaries, auto/biographies (Bruner, 1990), curriculum vitae (Miller, 1993), personal ads (Willis & Carlson, 1993; Woll & Young, 1989), and photography (Schwartz, 1989; Walker & Moulton, 1989) have been mined to provide rich accounts of individuals' participation in social life. Working within psychology's literature on impression management, Schlenker discussed the ways that props and scenery work to communicate information about people; he found that the images that people wish to claim are often apparent from their office or home surroundings (1980, p. 276). A few recent explorations of the relationship between personal setting and identity have illustrated this. Riggins' venture into performing fieldwork in a suburban British living room led him to assert that "whenever people talk about domestic objects they are articulating and explicating their own selves." (1994, p. 109) Silver interviewed students in their dorm rooms to examine the strategies that they used in interpreting the material possessions that they brought with them to college (or left at home). He found that not only did students seek to manage the impressions

they made on their peers through their selection of artifacts, but that the very objects they brought with them "simultaneously added to and changed their ongoing life stories" (1996, p. 13). Brown, Dykers, Steele, & White also investigated what they called "room culture", exploring how teenagers actively sample cultural symbols and rituals to create identity. They accomplished this by asking the teens to take them on visual tours of their bedrooms while holding a tape recorder and describing everything in the room that had some personal meaning or significance (1994).

Individuals also sample cultural symbols actively and creatively when fashioning homepages to represent themselves on the World Wide Web-- in the form of digital artifacts such as sound files, graphics and hypertext links to other pages. In addition, the prevalent spatial metaphor of fashioning a "home" on the WWW[13] resonates with the concept of decorating a room or an office space. Accordingly, I adopted the approach of driving the interview through touring the home page, using the symbols contained there as probes, in order to encourage informants to reflect on and explain how they present themselves to the world through the medium of the web page.

SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES

This study represents an interdisciplinary effort, interweaving research on mass communication and computer mediated communication with sociological and psychological perspectives on disclosure and self-presentation. As a new

[13] Susan Leigh Star's exploration of what it means to be homed in cyberspace is a compelling interrogation of this metaphor from a feminist perspective.

social practice located at the intersection of these fields of study, the phenomenon of personal home page publishing exemplifies the challenges faced by those studying the contexts of the increasingly convergent media environment and their consequences for human beings. From this perspective, the meanings of the social practices that emerge within the WWW during this first decade of its diffusion are critical because they may create a precedent for all future uses of this potentially empowering technology.

The current attractiveness of the WWW to the business sector is another factor that makes this research relevant. As rhetoric about the Information Superhighway inundates our culture, the interactive and multimedia features of the WWW are increasingly being exploited as an advertising medium and as a framework for commercial transactions such as home shopping. If the meanings and practices of the business sector prevail within the World Wide Web, it could mean that individuals might lose access to the potentialities of using this technology to publish alternative media on a personal scale but to a global audience.

The blanket objective of this study is the creation of a model of the significant conceptual categories and processes that inform the phenomenon of personal home page publishing on the World Wide Web. To that end, the following research questions informed the data collection:

- What factors influence Web users to engage in the publication of biographical materials? What is the trajectory of page production and publication?

- What kinds of personal or biographical materials are included within these documents, and why? What kinds of personal information do authors avoid including on their pages, and why?
- What outcomes do authors expect will result from publication of these materials?
- Who do publishers of WWW information perceive their audience or readership to be, and do those perceptions change over time?
- How does the experience of producing and maintaining a home page influence the self-constructions of their authors?
- Do authors consider the presentations of self on their pages to be accurate portrayals of who they are?
- What factors affect maintenance and revision of home pages? What inspires authors to edit or change them?
- What impact do face to face and/or mediated interpersonal associations have on authoring behavior, as perceived by the informants? To what degree is their authoring activity influenced by responses from those viewing the page and providing feedback?

As the practice of publishing biographical and self-definitional material on the WWW takes root and more people begin participating in mediated interaction through personal home pages, understanding the operation of this reciprocal process should be relevant to social psychologists as well as to media theorists.

Chapter 3: Methodology

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The following section offers a rationale for the choice of an inductive approach to studying the phenomenon of personal home page publishing. It also describes the methods used to collect and analyze the data for this study. Methodological areas that will be presented include 1) the recruitment of informants, 2) the format of the interview, 3) the development of the interview guide, background questionnaire, and other protocols, and 4) the various stages of data analysis.

RATIONALE FOR METHODOLOGY CHOICE

The World Wide Web is less than a decade old and the social contexts of this technology have not yet been subjected to detailed research. Thus, using an etic approach to study the practice of home page publishing—i.e., attempting to develop standardized variables or categories of possible meaning that could accurately assess the phenomenon through survey methods alone—would be futile, at least until the contours and boundaries of this phenomenon are better established and understood. However, the flexibility and reflexivity of qualitative methods are ideally suited to the investigation of novel phenomena. Accordingly, I chose an interpretive, emic methodology in order to document the communication practices of those who use the WWW to publish biographical or personal content and to ascertain their understandings of the home page's social context.

INFORMANT RECRUITMENT

The primary target group for this study was people who had created and published a personal home page on the World Wide Web. People whose personal home pages were aimed primarily at marketing a product or service were excluded, as were those who had created and published pages about some topic without including any biographical or personal information. Due to financial and logistical constraints on the research, recruitment of informants for the study was concentrated in the Northern California San Francisco Bay Area. I expected this area to be a particularly rich site for studying this phenomenon for two reasons. First, because demographic research on the diffusion of Web technology identified California to be a primary locus for early adoption (Pitkow & Recker, 1995) I could reasonably expect some mature perspective from Bay Area informants on their personal uses of the technology. Second, the tendency for social innovations to diffuse inland from regions of high population density such as the San Francisco Bay area implied that those using WWW technology for personal use in that region might well be creating a pattern for later adoption elsewhere in the United States.

At the time I began my research, a few people had already begun to be subjected to a great deal of media attention (including interviews and criticism) because of the depth and detail of personal information they were regularly publishing on the WWW. Foremost among these were two college students: Justin Hall[14], who began keeping a detailed and revelatory Web journal while a

[14] Justin Hall has since become the subject of an independently released documentary called "Home Page," directed by Doug Block and released at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival.

student at Swarthmore College, and Jennifer Ringley[15], who first began streaming a live, 24-hour video feed to her "JenniCam" site on the WWW from a camera she placed in her dormitory room at Dickinson College. I made a conscious choice to avoid recruiting informants who had already received a great deal of exposure in the traditional media, in large part to avoid confounding the limits of the phenomenon of home page publishing with interaction resulting from other channels, but also because I wanted to shift the focus away from sensationalized and over-studied viewpoints.

The study population consisted of eighteen self-selected informants who identified themselves as the authors of personal home pages on the World Wide Web. Of these, seventeen lived in the greater San Francisco Bay Area and one lived in Austin, Texas at the time of their initial interviews. The first informant to be interviewed was an informal acquaintance who agreed to give a pilot interview in order to debug the interview protocol. The eighteenth informant was also a prior acquaintance who had volunteered to participate in the study during its preliminary phase; I chose to directly solicit him for an interview during a subsequent visit to the Austin area since he represented a perspective with potentially great theoretical significance that was underrepresented in the initial group of informants.

While there are some listings of personal home pages on some Web services, (such as the list located at http://dir.yahoo.com/ Society_and_Culture/ People/ Personal_ Home_ Pages/), none of these lists are comprehensive, and

[15] Ms. Ringley has been the subject of several media articles, including "Life vs. Art", 1998.

there are no broadcast mechanisms that would have enabled all of those who met the criteria for inclusion in the study to be selected or notified at random. Therefore, I solicited the remaining sixteen informants through announcements posted on five Internet bulletin boards and discussion groups. These included:

- The ba.general Usenet newsgroup, which serves as a repository for all kinds of announcements targeted to the greater Bay Area,
- The community section of the "craigslist" electronic mail list. This list is named after Craig Newmark, its founder (although it was briefly known as the "listfoundation" e-list) and touts itself as "a way for members of the Bay Area Net community to let each other know about stuff of mutual interest." At the time the announcement was posted, the list had over 6,000 subscribers. Posts and subscriptions to the community list are free and posts are also made available on the WWW at http://www.craigslist.com/.
- The Announcements section of the Yahoo!Classifieds, targeted to the San Francisco Bay Area region. Yahoo!Classifieds are a free web-based service available at http://classifieds.yahoo.com/.
- The San Francisco and Silicon Valley Webgrrls electronic mail lists. Webgrrls calls itself "an international networking organization for women who are interested new media and technology" (http://www.webgrrls.com). During the recruitment phase of this study, there were two chapters active in the bay area and both hosted active electronic discussion lists.

These discussion groups were selected in order to appeal to a diverse population of potential informants. I considered the Yahoo! Classified group to reach

potentially the broadest audience, but the post to it and to the ba.general Usenet newsgroup had the lowest rates of return, probably because they are not directly delivered to a subscribers' list via e-mail delivery. I posted announcements to the Webgrrls lists primarily to enhance my chances of recruiting female informants.

The announcement that was posted read as follows:

> Subject: **Do you have a home page on the WWW?**
>
> If you have a page on the WWW containing personal or biographical information, a researcher from the University of Texas at Austin would like to talk to you! Volunteers are needed who are willing to be interviewed about their home page. The interviews take between one and two hours and can be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you anywhere in the Bay area. You must be 18 or over to participate in this study. For more information, please call (408) 390-8771 or send email to aviva@actlab.utexas.edu.

The telephone number that was provided connected directly to a digital PCS voice mail system.

Most people responded to the ad via email with a request for further information. In this case, I sent back to them a personalized version of a form letter providing further details about the study and the interview procedure; a copy of this letter is included in Appendix A. Those who left telephone messages were called back. In either case, I advised the informants about the nature of the research before obtaining their consent to participate in the study.

Altogether, ten men and eight women were interviewed in depth for this project. The ages of the informants ranged from twenty to fifty-six years of age, with a mean age of 36.1 years. Although the informants were self-selected, their average age and male-female ratio roughly approximated the distributions of

Internet users in the U.S. population according to surveys performed in the same year that the informants were recruited (Cyber Dialogue & Emerging Technologies Research Group, 1998; Kehoe et al., 1998). One of the eighteen informants was married at the time of the interview and five others indicated that they too were living with a partner at the time of their first interview. Four of the eighteen informants had been divorced. One of the informants identified himself as an Asian/Pacific Islander, while two others identified themselves as Spanish/Hispanic/Latino; the others classified themselves as primarily White/Europeans. Like many early Internet adopters, the informants in this study tended to be well educated, with eleven college graduates and six more having attended at least some college.

INTERVIEWS

I conducted the initial interviews in person. I considered several means of conducting the initial interviews remotely, either via the telephone, via email, or in a secure electronic chat room, but chose to reject this approach for reasons both practical and epistemological. From an epistemological standpoint, I felt that engaging in face-to-face interaction with the informants would lead to the fullest condition of participating in their minds and would lead to the richest understanding of their subjective viewpoints regarding home page publication[16]. From a practical perspective, I felt as though it would be difficult to achieve the kind of trust necessary to asking people to talk about self-disclosure on their home

[16] For a discussion of the naturalistic bias towards face to face interaction, see Lofland, 1995 pp.16-17; Blumer, 1969,pp. 1-89, and Berger, 1967, pp. 28-34.

pages in a mediated interview context, since this could lead to discussion of very personal and sensitive topics. Although some researchers have reported that computer administered questionnaires and interviews engender more honest responses about sensitive information than face to face interviews (i.e.: Murray & Sixsmith, 1998 in press; Weisband & Kiesler, 1996), my concern was that a mediated interview format would be more likely to evoke deliberate self presentation than genuine self-disclosure at the beginning of the process. Even though research demonstrates that interpersonal relationships and trust will develop through CMC channels over time and through the accumulation of messages (Walther, 1992; Walther et al., 1994), working towards this goal would be time consuming as well as more demanding for the informant. A mediated interview process potentially would be teeming with opportunities for misapprehension due to lack of nonverbal communicative cues, at least at the outset. In addition, adopting a purely mediated interview strategy seemed to provide a potential invitation for some mischievous informant to perpetrate a deliberate hoax on the researcher[17].

I settled on a compromise strategy of conducting the intensive first interviews in person, and handling follow-up questions through whatever channel was most convenient for the informant. Generally, follow-up questions were handled through electronic mail, but two informants made themselves available for further questions through online chat systems. Using computer-mediated channels at a later stage of the interview process seemed to be a reasonable

[17] I should qualify this by conceding that face to face interviews are also fraught with possibilities of fraud and deception: see for example Garfinkel, 1967, pp.116-187 and pp. 285-288.

compromise, since ostensibly some degree of rapport would be achieved during the initial interview. A practical benefit was that computer mediated exchanges resulted in already-transcribed data so the amount of time needed to prepare it for analysis was reduced.

Since the meaning of the situation of the home page for the informant would necessitate some interaction between the informant, the web page, and myself, I needed a methodology which could accommodate interaction with the informant both about and through their web page interface during the interview. I addressed this issue by adapting the "autodriving photoelicitation technique" documented by Heisley and Levy (1991). This research technique asks informants to comment on their understanding of the situations and behaviors captured in photographic representations of their own environments. This approach was combined with methods garnered from other interview strategies aimed at eliciting discussion about personal artifacts from recent studies of identity, such as Silver's (1996) focus on objects brought from home to college, and Steele and Brown's (1995) method of asking adolescents to give them guided tours of objects within their bedrooms while holding a tape recorder.

Instead of using photos or material objects to drive each interview, I used the informant's own web page to elicit stories about the activities and perceptions involved in the creation and maintenance of the documents. I initiated each interview by asking the informant to take me on an open-ended "guided tour" of his or her home page or pages. This technique augmented the involvement of the informants in the interview process by stimulating discussions about how and

why they chose to create these documents. The detailed tour of the home page also served in lieu of participant observation in the field (the customary procedure employed in naturalistic inquiry), since the web page itself provided the social context of interest.

Most of the interviews were conducted in a public place, generally in a café close to the informant's home or place of employment, although a few of them were conducted at the workplaces or home offices of the informants at their direct request. I chose to conduct these interviews in a neutral, informal place whenever possible. This was done both to encourage the trust of the informants, as they might feel uncomfortable inviting a stranger into their homes, as well as to protect my personal safety, as I felt it might be imprudent to agree to meet self-selected strangers privately. Meeting the informants in cafes also enabled me to offer to buy them each a drink in recompense for their time. Furthermore, I hoped that the informality of the venues chosen would be more conducive to encouraging personal disclosures than more formal settings or at their workplaces where other role requirements were in effect.

In order to access the Internet and view World Wide Web documents in these public places, I brought a laptop computer to the interviews. This computer was equipped with a high-resolution color screen and a wireless Ricochet modem, and it had Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator, the two most popular web browsing software packages, installed on it. The drawback of using this technique is that the Ricochet modem would only function within the limits of the greater Bay Area, so I could not easily accommodate informants outside

this geographical region. When I did meet with informants at their home (on two occasions) or at their workplace (another two occasions), we talked at their desk and toured their pages using their own computer equipment. In all cases the interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

The initial interviews ranged anywhere between 40 and 120 minutes, but most frequently were about 80 minutes in duration. The sessions began with introductions, generally followed by brief chitchat about the location of the interview. Before beginning the interview process, a signed letter of informed consent was obtained from each of the participants. (A copy of the consent letter appears in Appendix B.) At this point, I reiterated that their confidentiality and anonymity would be protected, that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without explanation. I formally asked permission to begin taping the session, thus beginning the formal part of the interview. When assent was indicated I began each session with "I'd like you to take me on a guided tour of your home pages" and let the informant direct the tour as he or she wished.

I employed a flexible semi-structured interview guide (included in Appendix C) to help in directing questioning during the interview. The one-page, checklist format of the interview guide allowed me to mark off topics unobtrusively as the informants addressed them during the session. During some interviews, informants addressed the topics articulated on my interview guide independently during the course of their guided tour with little prompting from me. At other times I solicited answers to the questions in the guide immediately

following their tour, generally referring to elements of the page or accounts of the authoring process brought up during the tour to help focus the inquiry.

When the questioning was concluded, I shut off the recording and asked the informant to complete a short background questionnaire (which is reproduced in Appendix D.) This instrument was primarily aimed at obtaining baseline demographic data and categorical information about his or her use of the World Wide Web. The questionnaire included some items of potential interest adapted from the GVU studies on Web authoring which covered technical issues such as means of Internet access, computer platform and types of software used (Kehoe, 1997; Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996). It also included a scale aimed at identifying informants' involvement with the WWW in the context of needs and benefits which was adapted from measures appearing in the Arbitron/Pathfinder New Media study (1994). I included this scale to help locate the autobiographical publishing practices of the informants within a larger context of their consumption and use of WWW media. At the close of each session, I urged the participants to call me or send electronic mail if they had any additional thoughts or comments that they wanted to share.

DATA ANALYSIS

I recorded field notes containing observations about the informants, physical settings, and my own reactions shortly after each interview. Since Web pages are fluid documents and are often changed or removed from the WWW, I digitally recorded and laser-printed each informant's homepage after the interview to create a stable record for content analysis and follow-up

comparisons. After the interviews, I sent email to the informants thanking them for their participation in the study. In some cases, this inspired an e-mailed response from the informant containing further information or clarifications of material discussed during the interview. In addition, I kept a journal tracking these administrative and methodological tasks.

I transcribed all but five of the initial interviews. Two professional typists transcribed the remaining five interviews, which I then thoroughly checked for accuracy. Field observations which had been previously handwritten in the research notebook that I kept with me at all times were also transcribed, while others had been typed directly into the same laptop used during the interviews. Doing the bulk of the transcription myself allowed me essentially to immerse myself in the data, and frequently led my attention to important features of the interactions that I overlooked during the actual interviews. Interesting characteristics in the data, plus theoretical insights and hunches that emerged during the process of transcribing and proofreading the interview transcripts and field notes were noted down and recorded as memo entries in my research journal.

In accordance with the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) the transcriptions and field observations were coded and analyzed as they were compiled in order to determine patterns of action and plausible relationships between concepts. Coding is an iterative process whereby an initial codebook is continually refined to best represent essential concepts and themes in the data (op. cit.; also see Charmaz, 1983; MacQueen, 1998). Theoretical constructs were generated by first coding incidents in as many

categories as possible during a lengthy period of open coding (Strauss, 1987), and then integrating or separating out the categories based on their properties. In particular, I sought out the metaphors offered by the informants that offered both analytical usefulness and vivid imagery, such as the "therapy" metaphor employed by five of the informants to characterize their relation to their page work. I also employed sociological constructs (such as the concept of "disruption") in coding the data. These were either inspired by my readings in diverse areas of the social science literature or based on my knowledge about the field of computer mediated communication. In order to handle the considerable amounts of data, the task of coding the transcripts and the management of various iterations of the codebook, I employed the AnSWR (Analysis Software for Word-based Records) software package authored and released by the Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention at the National Center for Disease Control & Prevention[18]. The AnSWR package enabled the creation of a hierarchically organized codebook and facilitated the coding and indexed retrieval of the text based records in my data set. (1999).

During the second analytical phase, I systematically compared these constructs across cases using data matrices, frequently going back and revising or adding to the codebook as necessary. The matrices, which I developed in a

[18] Before settling on the AnSWR program, I tested and rejected several other software tools including the Folio Views Infobase manager and the Ethnograph software package published by Qualis Research. I found the first to be too linear and limited for coding purposes (although it proved invaluable for straight text searching), while the second program was unfortunately just too poorly implemented and buggy to be of use at the time I tested it. I also looked at demo versions of Atlas TI and QSR's Nudist, but rejected these programs because of their steep learning curves and extremely high price tags.

spreadsheet format, allowed me to cluster information relating to particular topics of interest from each informant so that I could compare them across cases or for various kinds of salient conditions. Using this method allowed me to continually verify the credibility, plausibility and trustworthiness of the emergent theory during the research process (Kvale, 1995). I continued to record analytical insights and speculations as memo entries in the research journal and I periodically sorted, integrated, and expanded on these entries during the course of the research.

The next phase of the study involved the identification of relevant core categories in the data that seemed to describe most of the variation in the behavior of the informants (Strauss, 1987, pp.34-36). The transcripts were re-examined to test the patterns of variations along with their conditions and outcomes. Some categories that I previously thought of as key (such as target audience) did not hold up under analysis; these were delegated to peripheral roles while other concepts became more pivotal. Redundancy and repetition of codes and categories among the diverse cases strengthened my confidence in the explanatory power of my analysis.

Analysis of the cases continued well into the writing phase. The process of selecting between various organizational frameworks and rhetorical schemes for this written presentation illuminated the emerging theory and cast any deficiencies or discontinuities into sharp relief. This often compelled me to revisit the data in order to reevaluate and amend my conclusions.

The five stages of analysis, including data immersion, open coding, comparison across cases, the coalescence of core categories and the actual writing process were by no means discrete episodes. There was a great deal of overlap between phases and analysis frequently ran a slow and circuitous route. Gradually, however, the analysis progressed towards a coherent culmination.

ISSUES OF REPRESENTATION

While transcribing the audiotaped interviews, I was struck by the fundamentally poetic nature of everyday conversational talk. However, the cadences and inflections of speech, which convey so much meaning during spoken interaction, are lost in ordinary verbatim transcripts. I struggled to find a way to convey this narrative richness to the reader despite the recontextualization required by my analysis. Midway through the writing process, I hit upon the strategy of presenting longer quotations from the transcripts in the form of blank verse: this allowed me to impart some of the lyrical power of everyday speech while foregrounding the storied nature of lived experience.[19]

Interestingly, several of the informants expressed their willingness to waive confidentiality and have their web pages, along with their real names, appear in any published work resulting from the dissertation. However, the requirements of the Institutional Review Board sponsoring this research mandated complete confidentiality, so I was unable to accept these offers. Accordingly, the

[19] My decision to do this was influenced strongly by poetic conventions in the ethnographies of Laurel Richardson and others: see, for example, Richardson, 1992. Additionally, though the interviews were transcribed verbatim, some repetitions, nonword particles (such as "um") and pauses have been edited in this presentation so as not to tax the reader.

informants are identified by pseudonyms in this work. In addition, I have refrained from including any actual excerpts from the informants' home pages in this report in order to maintain this protection of their identities, due to the inherently searchable nature of all Web publications.

REGARDING VALIDITY

Since I did not employ random sampling techniques in this study, the collected data may not be statistically generalized to the entire population of home page authors. The characteristics of those who responded to the solicitations for informants may differ significantly from those who chose not to participate or to those who were never informed about the study[20]. Although I am therefore precluded from making the kind of generalizations here which would be pertinent to a study based on a randomly selected, statistically representative sample, the methodology of the ethnographic interview does permit me to provide a vivid look into the mind and life-worlds of individual informants (McCracken, 1988; Sandelowski, 1995). By closely analyzing a small number of information-rich cases, I have tried to expose the assumptions, categories and logic by which these eighteen informants understood and interpreted their own page publishing practices. As will be demonstrated, their understanding of the audience for their home page publication efforts did not mesh with the routine categorizations of social context that inform most conventional survey methodologies. Rather than

[20] However, even the most randomized recruitment strategy suffers from self-selection problems. In any study where the individuals who are contacted are given the choice of opting out of a study, the generalizability of the study's findings are reduced, since those who decide to participate may differ in some important manner from those who choose not to take part.

being practical and discrete, the informants' characterizations of the social situation of the web page were complex, multiple and fluid. In any event, the stories told by these eighteen informants effectively illuminate the phenomenon of personal home page publishing with a richness and depth that traditional survey methodologies may have obscured. Although these stories are presented here in a rather decontextualized and aggregated fashion, I have attempted to retain as much of that richness as possible without sacrificing the confidentiality of the informants.

Chapter 4: Phases and Conditions of Personal Webpage Publishing

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The focus in this chapter is on the requisite milestones related to home page publication. Essentially, creating a personal home page is a kind of work, and certain conditions must be met and basic tasks must be completed in order to accomplish it. The conditions include an awareness of or exposure to the Web medium, some inducement of the desire to publish, availability of the time required to learn authoring skills and to publish, and finally, access to the Internet. The tasks include learning how to publish hypertext documents on the WWW, deciding what content to publish, and the actual authoring of the page or pages. Usually there is also some revision labor involved, when the published pages are edited, revised, or changed.

Although to lay it out in this fashion makes home page publication sound very linear, in actuality the course of publication work is more accurately described as an process which oscillates between periods of intense activity and periods of minor maintenance or no activity. The various conditions and tasks related to publishing affecting the frequency and amplitude of these oscillations, with some authors entirely ignoring the home page after the original publishing effort is realized.

In this chapter, I articulate the boundaries of the practice of home page publishing. I start by describing the conditions surrounding and influencing the

production of biographical Web documents. I then characterize its trajectory through its different phases, which include learning how to create and publish hypertext documents, selecting content for publication, and the continued revision and maintenance of the home page.

CONDITIONS AFFECTING PERSONAL HOME PAGE PUBLISHING

Exposure to web

Before creating a home page of one's own, one must first be introduced to the technology of the WWW itself. According to the information gathered through the survey instrument administered at the end of the initial interview (included in Appendix D), most of the informants in this study had been accessing the WWW for at least four years at the time of their interview.[21] Also, the informants all claimed that they regularly used the WWW to increase their knowledge of a wide variety of subjects and to stay informed about their special interests or about topics relevant to their careers. Although introduction to WWW technology is obviously an important precedent to creating one's own homepage, there was no other apparent relationship between the length of time using the Web and the length of time these individuals had been publishing personal information through it. Some of the informants in the sample had been consumers of web information for several months or years before deciding to create a home page. Other informants decided to create their own page almost as soon as they learned

[21] Of the 18 informants, 13 indicated that they began using the web at least four years before their first interview.

about the possibility. As one informant explained: “I saw other people's pages and said ‘Wow, that's neat, I want to do that too!’”

In summary, one must have some exposure to the WWW in order for home page authorship to occur. However, the amount of time that passes between initial exposure and actually creating a home page varies widely and is influenced by other factors, which will be discussed below.

Desire to publish

Obviously, not everyone who finds about the World Wide Web decides to create a home page of his or her own. Furthermore, some people who do publish home pages do not choose to create one on their own initiative, but instead may be told to do so by their employers or by some other institution, or perhaps may create one initially at the suggestion of family or friends. For those who do decide on their own to author home pages, two additional conditions must still be met: the author must have some type of initial inducement or stimulus for creating the page, accompanied by a socially constructed belief or value about the WWW or the Internet which holds that publishing a page will positively affect their ability to realize their goals. In some cases like the one mentioned above, the motive may be as simple as wanting to have a web presence because of a belief that being on the WWW is “neat” or otherwise desirable. Although informants reported a variety of catalysts for home page publishing, the impulse to publish was frequently informed by a decidedly positive view of Internet technology and of the Web in particular. Accordingly, I will present an overview of the

informants' initial stimuli for home page authoring and discussion of the beliefs about the WWW that they brought to this endeavor.

A number of reasons were cited by the informants to explain their decision to begin authoring home pages. Several informants initially saw the home page as a likely resource for marketing themselves to potential employers, especially when seeking a job from a distance. Larry said:

> The main reason was to get up some kind of web presence
> because I knew I wanted to get into the computer field
> and also to get the resume available,
> because that meant that people would be able to come and look. ...
> I was in China and I was looking into coming back to the United States.
> And if I found a line on something and I was emailing someone,
> I wanted to have a place on line for them to get my resume
> without having to send it through the Chinese mail system
> which is very, very good, but not swift.
> Having things up on the web makes it very easy.

In contrast, Frank's self-marketing was at first aimed more at potential romantic partners and geared towards making that search more effective. Frank, a physically disabled man who used a wheelchair for mobility, explained:

> I'm trying to do a personal ad
> so I'm trying to get people to email me,
> and I'm trying to be as honest about it as I can.
> I don't want to get into situations where people show up
> and see me in the chair and freak,
> so I tried to be as honest about the disability as I could...
> I think what this is, for me, is just an easier way for me
> to kind of tell people a little bit about me quickly.

A few informants, including Doug, explained that they decided to create personal pages in order to learn the skills involved in authoring web pages for other uses. Doug said:

> I was doing some web development work at a bank,
> and I felt like I really needed to know
> a little bit more about the technology and the mechanics that went into it.
> So I decided that the best way to do that
> would be to actually create a page of my own
> in order to become more familiar with things like HTML and JavaScript.

These informants initially thought that web page design would be a valuable or marketable skill which would open doors for them in the technology industry: creating their own home page gave them a place to learn and practice that skill. Other informants, at first, saw their web page as serving primarily communicative goals, allowing distant friends, family and business contacts to stay in touch. George told me:

> It mostly started because I moved four times within two years
> and changed jobs,
> and friends of mine were losing track of where I was,
> so they were saying, "how do we get in touch with you?"
> And there were also people I was associating with in business who said
> "How do we get in touch with you outside the office?"
> So the very first things I put up were my address and pager number
> and the best ways of reaching me.

Finally, some informants claimed they initially created a home page just to get on the Internet bandwagon. Andy related:

> It seemed like all my friends were totally into that,
> by the senior year of high school, 1994,
> the Web had become really popular.
> I had originally thought about putting up a page,
> but I thought that the web was just a phase and it was going to go away.
> But it didn't, it stayed, so I wanted to be part of it too.

In some other cases, the initial impetus for creating a home page came from outside forces rather than from any personal interest. Holly started work on the first incarnation of her home page when she was asked to test web page

development software by her employer. Before that, she said, " I never had any goal to have a home page, I kind of laughed at home pages." Laura's first home page was created at the urging of friends she communicated with regularly online via Internet Relay Chat (IRC):

> They were all building their own websites,
> and they wanted to know when was I going to build a website
> and when was I going to put a picture up.
> And so I went and found this picture and got it scanned in.
> And it originally it said,
> "This is my home page by popular request-- are you all happy now?"

The chapter following this one will include a more detailed analysis of the vocabularies of motive (Mills, 1940) related to home pages that were described by these eighteen informants. However, I want to emphasize here that whatever the original intention or motivation for creating and publishing a personal home page, the informants' relationship to home page publishing tended to evolve and change over time. Eventually most of the informants discovered additional uses for their home pages or identified gratifications received from the publication process that were outside their initial set of expectations about the medium. Still, each informant was able to articulate some specific motive[22] that initially impelled them to begin the process of home page construction and these motives varied widely according to each individual's unique circumstances and concerns.

[22] I want to stress that I am employing a social-psychological definition of motivation here, as opposed to using the term psychoanalytically or to describe some innate socio-biological drive. Weber's definition of motive as "a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer to be adequate grounds for the conduct in question" and Mills emphasis that motives "stand for anticipated situational consequences" rather than reflecting anything within the individual actor both inform my use of the term.

Values

The initial expectation common to all informants was that publishing a home page on the WWW would be a worthwhile or positive venture. This expectation was buoyed by a strong current of technophilia flowing through most of the informants' narratives. While not all of the informants worked in what is traditionally considered the computer industry, many of them aspired to enter that world more fully. Proficiency with the arcane hypertext markup language was seen by some as the magic key that would open the door to that world for them. Lori, who did ultimately achieve her high technology career goals some months after our first interview, explained it like this: " You know, before I knew HTML I felt like I was on the outside. Now that I know HTML, I'm on the inside... of the whole web tech culture."

Several of the informants identified the California Bay Area as a focal point for both the high technology industry and the pro-technology lifestyle. Michael moved to San Francisco from Los Angeles expressly to pursue his dreams of financial independence through participation in the multimedia revolution, despite the fact that he lacked both training and expertise:

> I had this hypothesis that if I were to go into computers,
> I could be a lot more successful and make a lot more money,
> and would be able to succeed without a degree,
> which I do not have at the moment.
> I want to pursue my education,
> but I took a gamble because I think computers are the way to go.
> So I picked up and moved to San Francisco,
> which from what I had read was the multimedia grotto,
> and as I came up here I didn't know a thing about computers.

Marsha, who had reluctantly relocated to the Bay Area from the East Coast, found herself seduced by the idea of living in an area where the Internet was an accepted part of the social landscape:

> One of the things that occurred to me when I was out here a year ago,
> trying to decide if I could possibly stand to live here,
> I noticed that things that I took for granted—
> like knowing a lot about, for a lack of better terms,
> the Internet, or the cyber-community,
> that have been part of my life for ten years or more,
> and it's just something I took for granted,
> but most of the people I knew in New York weren't really involved in it.
> And it struck me right away that I wouldn't be weird anymore, here,
> by caring about that and wanting to make it a normal part of life.
> It wasn't something that just the weird techno-nerds have to do with here.
> And I liked that approach; that was a positive thing to see.

Thus, creating a home on the WWW denoted a voluntary affiliation with a certain pro-technology attitude and lifestyle for many informants, giving them a kind of credential as a citizen of the so called "cyber-community."

If the home page can be said to serve as a kind of cyberspace membership badge, the personal vanity domain might then be characterized as the ne plus ultra of cyber-community affiliation, and several of the informants went so far as to eventually register their own domains. For the informants who were self-employed, the personalized domain served as a way of marketing themselves and their business. At the same time, they thought it provided some credibility in high technology circles. Leslie explained:

> I got the domain name when I started doing...
> um, I write computer books for a living.
> I'm a freelance writer. I do mostly books.
> But at any rate, I wanted a site that I could point people to
> and could say, "Here, I'm a writer and I can do HTML.

For others with personal domains, having a domain of one's own was seen more as an indulgence or as an expression of personal style. As Laura explained,

> When my roommate set up his webserver provider
> we were kind of kicking around the ideas of getting vanity domains,
> and I had no clue at that time what was involved in doing that,
> but I thought it'd be really cool to have my own dot com."

Larry characterized his personal domain as a kind of extravagant affectation:

> The main thing that I've done between now and when I first started
> was to get my own domain names.
> And that's sort of like vanity plates,
> which I don't have yet on my car because I just got the car,
> but it's one of those things I do because I can.
> You know, I've got the money to spend to buy that kind of thing
> and I've got a place to host it, so that's kind of neat.

In summary, a certain fascination with technology and a positive attitude towards integrating new technologies like the WWW into the ebb and flow of everyday life was a common characteristic of the home page authors in this study. Some of the informants who had moved to the San Francisco Bay Area even did so precisely because of their interest in technology, while some others were at least partially influenced by the Bay Area's reputation as a center for the tech-culture when they chose to move here. Although not all of the informants worked directly in fields traditionally considered part of the high technology industry, those who did not frequently expressed an interest in entering that arena. Thus, a pro-technology attitude was evidenced to some degree as a precondition for engaging in home page publication.

Availability

Any individual who has been exposed to the WWW might conceive of creating his or her own web page, but in order to follow through with this notion he or she must find some time to invest in the publishing process. In traditional studies of media consumption this prerequisite has been called "availability" (Webster & Wakshlag, 1983). It would be inappropriate to equate availability for consuming media with availability to publish web pages, because media consumption is frequently a passive activity (Blumler, 1979) while home page publishing is inherently active and requires the page author's engagement and allocation of resources. Accordingly, conditional factors affecting the amount of unstructured time available to informants had clear consequences on their involvement with home page publishing.

Informants who were employed at the time of the interview discussed working on their pages during leisure periods such as evenings or weekends. They noted that there were often other demands on their time or other more compelling leisure activities that kept them from working on or maintaining their pages. Accordingly, the initial desire to create a page and the actual achievement of that desire might be separated by months or years if time was not set aside. James narrated this experience quite candidly:

> When I first got online I thought, "Boy, I've got to do a website!"
> and of course I thought that for a couple of years
> before I ever actually got around to it.
> It wasn't really that important.
> Actually, I was just too damn busy
> when I was working on a project doing these web page reviews,

> and it was only when that contract was over that I had some free time. Then I took about a month to do the whole site.

One informant, Josh, maintained that he did most of his authoring work during periods of otherwise unstructured time after work in order to fend off boredom. Another, Andy, claimed to work on his site exclusively during periods of insomnia. Correspondingly, several of the informants indicated that they spent much more time working on their home pages during periods of unemployment. For example, Jordan said, "Say I'm off contract for a month, I'll work the entire month on it, because I'm bored out of my skull."

A number of informants implicated some significant episode of disruptive change in their lives when discussing their home page publishing practices. These episodes involved traumatic changes ranging from geographic relocation, the death of a significant other, and divorce. Conceivably, any traumatic disruption in one's life will increase the amount of unstructured time available, in part because one's daily habits of living are confounded by it. This was true for Madeline, who said of her home page, "I worked on it straight through 16 to 18 hours a day when I first did it, when I first moved here." Furthermore, this increase in unstructured time is often associated with the withdrawal of social supports that frequently accompany life disruptions. For example, relocation frequently is accompanied by episodes of loneliness while new social networks are constructed. The experience of Holly, the woman who at first laughed at the idea of creating a home page, exemplifies this relationship between disruptive life episodes and involvement in home page publishing. Her employers' request that

she create a home page to test their web publishing tools serendipitously came at a time when she was recovering from a personal trauma:

> When I first started doing it,
> I was going through this very tumultuous period in my life.
> I had been through a really horrible ordeal,
> which was that in June of 1995
> I married a person I'd known for 7 years, and we moved here in July,
> and in February of 1996 he left me.
> He left me with a big credit card bill, and a new car loan,
> and he just walked away.
> He didn't leave me any money, he didn't have any money,
> he just left me with everything...
> So this all sort of started coming out of that.

Although Holly originally approached her home pages as a professional obligation, it soon began to take on greater personal significance for her as an emotional outlet, and she continued work on her home site even after leaving that company.

Increased involvement in media consumption has previously been implicated as compensation for loneliness and a lack of social support (Kubey, 1986; Smith, 1981). The stories told by the informants in this study indicate that conditions of loneliness play a similar role in driving the practice of home page publishing. However, unlike such passive activities as television viewing, involvement in web page publishing can be a proactive pursuit serving functions beyond merely occupying otherwise unstructured time. These functions will be described at length in the following chapters. But in any event, whether predicated by a major life disruption or merely pursued to fill otherwise empty

hours, at least some time must be allocated for the practice of home page publishing in order for it to take place.

Access to web

Another required condition for home page publishing is some kind of access to the Internet. With the proliferation of services such as GeoCities and Tripod, which offer free home page hosting and electronic mail, and the increasing availability of public Internet terminals in libraries and other locations, it is possible to create a home page even without frequent or regular Internet access. However, most informants in this survey generally maintained a personal Internet account with an Internet service provider (or ISP) allowing them to access the web from their homes, while some of them also had access to the Internet at work. Only two of the informants had access solely through the workplace. Furthermore, only two informants indicated that they sometimes accessed the web through public terminals such as those at a library or cyber-cafe in addition to accessing it at work or at home. These reports are reflective of WWW access in the population as a whole, as measured by the most recent GVU WWW user survey, which indicated that approximately 57% of users accessed the WWW daily from work with almost 78% of users accessing daily from the home and less than 2% of users accessing it daily from public terminals (Graphics Visualization and Usability Center & Georgia Tech Research Corporation, 1999).

Two of the informants hosted their personal home pages on space provided by their current employer, and two maintained home pages on space provided by a previous employer but had plans to relocate their pages in the near

future. Two other informants hosted their web pages on friends' servers, but the other twelve informants paid for their own web hosting space through commercial Internet service providers. Only two of the informants surveyed maintained their home pages on the free hosting services mentioned above, and none of them used commercial online services like America Online or Prodigy for web hosting. I received an impression that at least some of the informants felt these services had a tackiness about them that could potentially tarnish their self-presentations. James complained about GeoCities in particular:

> There's a lot of really lame stuff and also it's a really slow site,
> and you have to put up with advertising.
> And my feeling is it's not that hard and it doesn't cost that much
> to do a web page on a regular service provider.
> Don't be so cheap, you know?
> You can do it for 20 bucks a month, why be cheap?

Similarly, Doug characterized these services as being somewhat puerile, and distinguished them as less sophisticated than commercial ISPs. Although initially he used an commercial online service for access, he explained:

> After I learned a little bit more about it,
> then I realized that I should maybe start paying for some space.
> After I had learned how to use America Online,
> I decided I'm going to get rid of my training wheels
> and I'm going to go with a service provider.

Marsha, who did use a free website hosting service, was somewhat self-deprecating about placing her home site there, and she included a disclaimer on her pages apologizing for the content of the ad banners placed on her page by the service.

Access to the Internet is also essentially a structural condition that must be located in its socio-economic context. In the years immediately following the introduction of the WWW, it was generally easier for students and white-collar workers to obtain access to it, especially those in the science and technology arenas (Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996). Since then, the adoption of WWW technology has proceeded at a phenomenal pace, with Internet access growing steadily worldwide over the past five years (Nua, 2000). However, the educated and affluent members of society are still more likely to have access to Internet technology, in part because it is easier for them to obtain the skills required to make use of it (Nie & Erbring, 2000).

TRAJECTORY OF HOME PAGE PUBLICATION

Learning to author

Authoring web pages can potentially encompass a plethora of skills ranging from the creation of electronic images, sound or video, to the generation of elaborate interactive effects achieved through the implementation of programming or scripting languages (such as perl or JavaScript.) However, the most fundamental requirement for publication of a home page seems to be some knowledge about basic hypertext markup language, or HTML. Even though there are several widely available editing tools that prepare documents for the WWW by adding the required HTML codes and a variety of these were employed by the informants, all of them claimed at least some familiarity with HTML and reported doing at least some of the markup themselves.



Illustration 1: An example of the difference between how a web page appears in a browser and the HTML source code used to create the page. On the top of this page is an excerpt from an HTML home page as it appears in a Netscape Web browser application. On the bottom is an excerpt from the source code corresponding to the same web document.

There was much variation in the degree of technical expertise manifested by the informants. Some pages were visually rich or robustly interactive, while others were simple documents consisting of mostly text with perhaps a few simple graphic elements. Regardless of the level of technical sophistication evidenced in the page, all the informants claimed that learning the skills required for homepage publishing posed no great difficulties for them. Leslie's experience was typical:

> It was really scary at first.
> I thought it would be really hard, like programming,
> but the first lessons I had were how to make a link,
> how to make an image, how to make paragraphs ...
> I got that instantly.
> Once I actually got past the first stumbling block of saying
> "OK, this is what I want to learn how to do"
> it was easy.

Although the informants identified several different means for obtaining information about how to author web pages, including friends or coworkers, books, and classes, the WWW itself was by far the most frequently relied on source of expertise for web authoring. Web tutorials about authoring were frequently referenced, but generally the informants reported learning how to author web pages by viewing (and sometimes borrowing) the source code of others. As George admitted:

> I almost certainly, at some point,
> went over the source code in somebody's site
> and tried to jump into it by robbing some of their HTML...
> I'm generally one of those people
> that grabs the source code from someplace else,
> and starts fiddling with it and finding out why it breaks.

Web page content and authoring skills

There was a definite relationship between the Web authoring skills learned by the informants and the kinds of content included on their home pages. However, the reports of causality in regard to the relationship were inconsistent. For some of the informants, the acquisition of certain technical skills gave them a better sense of the Web medium's possibilities, enabling them to improve their pages or to create different kinds of content for them. Jordan showed me a complex interactive art composition, which he called his "magnum opus," a work in progress that he planned to add to his home pages in a few months. When I asked him when he began developing it, he said:

> One year ago, almost today.
> After I'd already had a great deal of web experience.
> Because it was only in knowing that it was possible to do certain things,
> having a knowledge of how these things work,
> what was possible and what was plausible,
> that I began to be able to put together the design principles.

For others, a desire to publish certain kinds of content to or achieve certain effects inspired them to learn the skills required for their implementation. Larry said:

> I've learned more about PhotoShop,
> so that I can make nifty little buttons and things...
> I had to learn how to make that background GIF this time,
> the part that you fill in, and how do you change the canvas size,
> and it gave me a chance to learn some more things in Adobe PhotoShop.

For a few informants who had largely instrumental orientations towards home page authoring, learning particular web design skills tended to be associated more with a desire to demonstrate ability in the skill itself rather than with any

concern with content. Lori illustrated this concern when she talked about her future goals for her home page:

> One thing that I'd really like to have that's not up there is some JavaScript,
> but I have to teach myself JavaScript first.
> And I was in the process of learning that when I got this last job,
> and now I'm looking for a job.
> So when my life stabilizes again,
> then I'd like to go back and learn JavaScript,
> and I would add that, definitely, to my site.

In summary, the informants in this study agreed that at least some knowledge of basic HTML was necessary to Web page publishing, but they characterized the skills associated with home page publishing as easy to learn. Generally, some relationship was in evidence between the kinds of content included in the home page and the publishing skills acquired by the informant. However, sometimes the acquisition of those skills were motivated by an instrumental desire to publish certain kinds of content, while at other times they were viewed intrinsically as an end in and of themselves.

Patterns of involvement with home page publishing

Some home page authors publish a page quickly and then move on to other things, while for others publication is more of an process that unfolds and changes over time as the author discovers unanticipated uses for the site or new gratifications associated with publishing. For most informants, the workload associated with publishing a home page is more intense at the outset when the page is first created and published. Then it may diminish to occasional episodes of involvement for revisions and updates or else even cease entirely. This pattern

was especially apparent in the publishing trajectories of those informants who had instrumental orientations to home page production. For them, publishing activity tended to taper off sharply once their initial goals were realized. Lori, who created her site mostly to demonstrate her mastery of the skills associated with web design, explained:

> It was important for me to put a lot up there quickly.
> And now that it's up there,
> it's just maintaining it and maybe changing it now and then,
> but basically everything I can do is up there.

Antonio's experience was also typical of this pattern. When I asked how much time he spent on his site, he recalled that:

> ...at first I was here hours and hours after work,
> working on my website...
> you spend more time digging (for other sites)
> than actually working on the web pages.
> Now I can honestly say probably, collectively,
> maybe 8 hours in a month, if even that.

A few informants reported a loss of enthusiasm for their home page after achieving their original goal, resulting in little further involvement with the project. As Andy admitted:

> I lose interest in these as I run out of ideas.
> People have home pages and all they talk about is themselves,
> and I really wish there was something else I could talk about
> but I don't know very much!

For the informants with a more intrinsic relationship to home page publication, especially those who characterized their home pages primarily as a forum for self expression or exploration, the workload tended to start off small, expanding as involvement with the project increased. Jordan described this

process: “I made something, a small little thing, and I kept it--it was basically a link thing--and I added some stories to it, and I just kept adding more and more, and more, and more, and more.” Laura also described how the scope of her home page expanded over time:

> Initially, I thought I could talk about some of the things that interest me.
> I've been to a lot of places the past year or two,
> so I put pictures of places I've been,
> and I'll talk about what I do professionally,
> and it just sort of started growing.
> I'd be online talking to somebody
> and we'd start this conversation about books, or movies, or something,
> and I'd go off and do research that would sort of pique something.
> I'd go off and do research and find all of these interesting sites and say,
> “Oh, I want a page that holds all of this information.”

For some of the informants, actual publication work was preceded by a long period of consideration or planning. Wanda described contemplating various ideas for her home page for several months before beginning it:

> ...kind of like on the back burner of your brain
> where you just don’t really know...
> Like, I’d kind of like to put up a page but I don’t know why,
> I don’t have anything I really want to say.
> And it took, I don’t know, it was close to a year afterwards
> that I finally put something together.

When she did set out to create her home page, she accomplished it over a relatively short period:

> I actually did it in a weekend or two.
> So it was kind of done quickly when I did it.
> Getting around to it was the hard part,
> but once I sat down to do it, I just did it.

Even those informants whose home page authoring activities were initially spurred by instrumental goals tended eventually to discover new uses for the home page which influenced later additions to it and other revisions. Larry explained how his conception of his home page evolved beyond just marketing himself to potential employers, and how he began gearing parts of it towards his friends and family:

> I actually had a pretty good idea when I first started it
> that the main reason was to get an introductory page to the resume.
> I then added the bio, and the animated GIFs, and some links.
> And then I added photos. I'm not a photographer—
> I tend to buy cameras, use them for one trip,
> forget about them and eventually give them to my parents and my brother,
> because I don't like messing around with carrying them.
> But I started realizing that a lot of my friends
> had never have seen these places and will probably never see them.
> Same with a lot of my family.

Content choices for personal home pages

The types of content which were selected for inclusion in the home page varied according to each informant's primary orientation to his or her publishing activities, although as evidenced in the above examples they often changed over time. As one might expect, those with instrumental orientations tended initially to create pages with content directly addressing their particular goals. For example, resumes were often the first documents posted by those who initially conceived of their home pages as resources in their search for employment. In such cases, the addition of more personal information was often an afterthought. This was also true for Lori, who originally designed her pages primarily to display her competence in web design. She said, "The most important thing was to get up

information that showed I knew the technology, and later on I filled it in with friends and pets and the more personal things." Those who took a more intrinsic approach to page design often began by creating content that either discussed salient events in their lives, or emphasized significant relationships with romantic partners, family or even pets. Marsha told me how she began this process:

> I started to think about what I was going to tell people.
> And I said, well, what's the big thing in my life recently?
> Well, I've moved.
> I'm trying to adjust to being a Californian,
> or living in California, living west of New Jersey,
> and I'm not adjusting terribly well yet, so let me start pouring that out.
> So I started writing things, and then little by little
> I'd go around and find the pictures of things that I would store,
> and started by using a map of California-- how hokey!
> I'll put it right into my text here.
> So I started writing about things and said,
> "All right, I've lived all my life between Washington D.C.
> and upstate New York, and it's been an adjustment.
> Well, that's the big thing in my life."
> And I started to write long sets of thoughts here about it,
> and I said "No, no! No, we're gonna put that on another page."

All of the informants, to a greater or lesser degree, reported practicing a kind of electronic bricolage, appropriating material from elsewhere on the Internet which were later incorporated into their own home pages. Sometimes this appropriation was negligible, like the borrowing of a useful bit of HTML code or an image used as a background texture. At other times it was more pronounced, such as reproducing a poem by a favorite author or the lyrics of a popular song. Another common practice among all of the informants was the repurposing of already-extant original content for inclusion on their home pages. This included the publication of essays, poetry, and letters written either by or to the informant,

and existing photos or other artwork. Several of the informants eventually went on to create personalized content especially and solely for publication on their home pages. However, all of them reported including information that they already had available in some other format but which could be readily digitized for web publication.

The most frequently cited criterion that informants reported using to determine whether or not something would be included on their page, out of the several criteria identified, was originality. Nearly all of the informants claimed that they wanted their home page to be somehow unique, and the inclusion of original content was frequently identified as a way of distinguishing themselves and their creations from the run of the mill. Antonio explained:

> I'm still building new stuff,
> because one of my biggest critiques has always been,
> even though I was guilty of it too, even though I did have some content,
> is "what's the point of all these web pages on the web
> if everybody's just pointing to each other
> and there's nothing there to read except pointers to each other?"

Some informants also reported that they sought out new twists on established ways of creating home pages. This included both the reframing of certain kinds of content thought of as stereotypical web page elements, and the modification of common design strategies. James said,

> Everybody puts pictures of themselves up, and I think that's kind of hokey.
> So I thought, "Well sure, I'll put pictures up—
> but I'm gonna have fun with it,
> because I don't ever want to do anything
> that's just like what everybody else is doing.

Similarly, Laura explained:

> I like to do something that's out of the ordinary,
> and I don't like to follow the path that everybody's beaten with the Web...
> and sometimes that's why it takes me a while to redo my site
> because I don't want to do what everybody else is doing.
> Even if I'm reusing the same JavaScript,
> I want to implement it in a different way.

To sum up, a variety of strategies were used by the informants to create content for their pages, including both the appropriation of content available elsewhere on the Internet and the repurposing of previously created original content which could be adapted for the digital medium of the WWW. Additionally, despite the propensity for outsiders to critique most personal home pages as relatively consistent in terms of the kinds of content included, the informants in this study commonly identified uniqueness as an important criterion for determining what would be included in their own pages. Generally, they took great pains to point out during the interviews those elements contained within their pages that they considered original.

Involvement and the importance of audience response

As noted earlier, the pace of working on the home page often slows once the original goal is reached, or it may even stop entirely if the author loses interest in the page. This slowdown was more common among those informants who chose not to publicize their page at all, to either existing family or friends or through submitting the URL to a WWW search engine in an attempt to gain a wider audience for it. However, informants who reported receiving responses from others about their home pages seemed to stay interested and to persevere longer with page publishing. As Jordan declared,

> There's no point in screaming if nobody's gonna hear you.
> I guarantee that this would not have moved
> to beyond its incarnation number two
> if I hadn't had people actually look at it.
> And now, it's the biggest time suck in the world.

Several of the informants specifically sought out feedback from others on ways to improve their home pages. Some of them reported asking friends and coworkers to review their work, while others wrote to members of online web design interest groups such as the HTML Writer's Guild or Webgrrls. Frequently the responses they received tended to address structural issues rather than content concerns, encouraging them to revise the organization of the site or to enhance its navigability by adding buttons or menus. Sometimes people offered stylistic suggestions as well; for example, warning against the overuse of animations or including the prosaic "Under Construction" sign so often seen on web sites. When Larry solicited suggestions from his colleagues, he said:

> One of the points that was brought up by my friends and my coworkers
> was that the previous site had no organization.
> It was just a big blob of stuff that you found things on kind of by accident.

He responded to this feedback by changing the way his site was organized and creating a better way to navigate through the material on it.

Some of the informants who chose not to advertise their home pages still often received feedback from close friends who encouraged them to enhance their sites with additional content. Holly explained how a close friend suggested that she use her home pages as a place to publish her own compositions, even though she was somewhat nervous about letting anyone else see her work:

> This was my real brave thing that my friend encouraged me to do,
> that I should write more, I should write about things,
> and then I should publish them on my page.
> So I didn't have that much writing that I was doing
> when I started my page,
> but I had this whole collection of poems
> that I wrote when I was in college.
> I had in these old, ancient Word documents, like Word 4 or something,
> and that was the first thing I put up there...
> So it's stuff that I've actually written, that I put up there in great trepidation hoping no one will really never look at that...
> And like as far as putting my own poems up there,
> I never would have done that in the beginning.
> I only did that because my friend was encouraging me to do it.

Although the WWW has been praised for empowering everyday people to publish creative work while circumventing the obstacles in traditional distribution channels, informants sometimes characterized the practice of publishing original work as risky. A few also expressed some anxieties about the kind of response that might be elicited by their work. Jordan compared his concerns with:

> ...the jitters that you would get before going on stage, or something.
> I'm about ready to put up this new thing,
> and I think it's cool as hell, you know, the writing,
> but, is it going to be well received,
> am I going to get my point across?

George, an informant who developed an essentially civic orientation to his home page publishing over time, explained why comments from people inspired him to continue his efforts at publishing. He said:

> ...there are other sites out there which are good and very useful to me,
> and I want again to contribute back to that.
> And that's why I want to get feedback from somebody who says
> "Hey look, your resources were really helpful to me."
> That's impetus to say "Oh, I should really update this page."
> So when the person sends me mail saying
> "I really liked your links on this topic but here's these other two links,"

> the very first thing I did, within five minutes,
> I went back in and updated his two links.
> And so that's when I will do an update as quickly as possible.

As these examples above illustrate, feedback from others was implicated as the most important factor for the authors' continued involvement with home page publishing, regardless of their initial impetus or later orientation towards their site. This relationship between authorial involvement and the responses of others to the web page illustrate the fundamentally interactional nature of the home page phenomenon. Jordan's pre-publication jitters, the trepidation described by Holly, and George's hopes for positive feedback are each indicative in some way of the imagined and reflected self explicated by symbolic interactionists (i.e. Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1902).

Although the research interview itself can not properly be considered a part of the normal trajectory for home page authoring, I found it interesting that a number of the informants claimed that the circumstance of the interview worked to stimulate further work on their home pages and thus might also be characterized as feedback. Some informants, including Doug, agreed to the interview in hopes that the interest of an outside party (namely, me: an interested researcher) would rekindle their own dimming enthusiasm for publishing. At the end of our first interview, Doug commented:

> You know, I have ignored it for the last four or five months.
> In fact, one of the reasons I wanted to get back into this,
> is I thought that maybe this interview would inspire me to work on it,
> and it has somewhat.

For other informants, like Leslie, the mere anticipation of the interview, knowing that someone else would be looking at the home page, was enough to goad further revision of the web site. Leslie acknowledged this by saying:

> Just that the fact that I'm talking to you right now,
> actually inspired me to update it
> and I think I'm actually going to keep updating it now
> because I felt so guilty
> that I stayed up till 4:00 in the morning working on it last night....
> it knocked some sense into my head.
> It's like, more than one person is actually looking at this
> and everyone is seeing that you have “last updated March, `97”
> so I do need to update the site.
> And so that's kind of brought me back into reality,
> like if I'm going to actually bother paying
> for the service of having a website
> I might as well take care of it.
> It's kind of like a house plant.
> You have water it or it's going to die on you.
> You're just going to be left with a pot full of brown leaves
> that you're never going to throw away.
> That's what a lot of sites turn into - it's like a pot full of brown leaves.

These informants chose to participate in the interview because it offered an opportunity for dialogue with an interested person about their home page work. This interaction (or in some cases, the expectation of it) inspired additional consideration and revision of their home pages, in much the same way that other kinds of feedback encouraged them to persevere with home page publishing.

If, as Jordan said, “There's no point in screaming if nobody's gonna hear you,” then at some point a message from some channel will be needed as confirmation that your scream has been heard. Without some kind of feedback or response, either from strangers who visit the home page, or friends, family or coworkers, or even (in this case) from an interested researcher, a personal home

page is, as Tracy's metaphor articulated so eloquently, likely to wither and die of neglect. As a rule, a lack of feedback tended to be correlated with the informants' loss of interest in the page, but any kind of acknowledgement tended to enhance their involvement in and commitment to home page publishing.

SUMMARY

The basic conditions which must be met for home page publishing to take place include some awareness of or exposure to WWW technology as well as some kind of motivation to publish a home page. This motivation can be external or internal, instrumental or intrinsic. With internal motivations especially, a positive attitude towards the WWW specifically and towards new technologies in general is also implicated as a basic condition for engaging in home page publishing. Finally, the home page author must be able to gain access to the Internet and must have some time available to work on the home page in order for publication to occur.

The trajectory of this phenomenon generally includes mastering at least some HTML and may also include the acquisition of additional electronic editing or computer programming skills. Home page authors select content for their personal pages, either by appropriating material from elsewhere on the Internet, by repurposing existing material for Web publication, by creating new content specifically for publication, or (more commonly) by some combination of these approaches. Feedback from others about the home page is implicated in maintaining the interest of the author in the ongoing practice of Web publishing. Assuming that one has an awareness of the WWW, a motivation for publishing,

access to the Internet and some availability for engaging in home page publishing, continuing involvement with the home page can be described as a function of the authors' availability to work on the page and the feedback or response the author receives to the published home page. In other words, involvement with home page publishing seems to increase with additional feedback, ostensibly to the limit of the authors' availability to work on the homepage. The nature of the audience imagined by home page authors for their publishing efforts, and the consequences of the practice of home page authoring for the construction of the self, will be explored in more depth in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Defining the Situation of the Personal Home Page

CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

At the time I began my graduate studies, Meyrowitz was exhorting researchers to "go beyond the most common conception of media as conveyers of information and begin to think of them as types of social settings or social contexts" (1995 p. 121). Within the symbolic interactionist approach to communication technologies, even mass media technologies have long been acknowledged as creating contexts for human interaction as well as serving as conduits for information delivery. Despite this, most mainstream communication research has largely dismissed the WWW as more of "a form of publication rather than a channel for interactive communication" (Walther, 1996), thus de-emphasizing its significance as a social setting. Understanding the social and relational conventions of the practice of publishing personal home pages necessitates an exploration of the how home page authors organize their experience of these documents. Accordingly, this chapter represents an attempt to explore the role of the WWW home page as a context for (and sometimes focus of) social interaction in the lives of their authors, by exploring how those same authors define the social situation of their personal home pages.

Despite increasing acknowledgement of the superficial nature of traditional contextual divisions[23], the determination of the social context of any given media technology is still a prevailing concern in communication technology

[23] See, for example, Livingstone, 1998, and the current editorial statement of the journal Communication Research.

research. Historically, these contexts have been defined using a mechanistic Sender/Receiver model to describe the originators and intended audiences of messages mediated by a given media technology, thereby analyzing the levels at which that particular medium operates in society (McQuail, 1987, p. 6). The levels identified customarily included the follow categories:

- Intrapersonal: communication to oneself

Within personal home pages, this might include publishing a telephone directory for one's personal use.

- Interpersonal: communication in dyads

This is often described as point to point when it occurs in a channel mediated by some communication technology. Leaving a message targeted specifically to a significant other on one's home page would exemplify this.

- Small group: usually between 3 and 25 people

Sometimes this is characterized as (multi)point to (multi)point, such as in a telephone conference or for an online chat system. An illustration of this level common to personal home pages is found in the practice of publishing a collection of family photographs intended for viewing only by one's close friends and family.

- Large Group

This is where the concept of the "mass" (a broad, anonymous audience) is traditionally located, although the more inclusive term "public" is also used to describe communication along these channels. Technologically mediated, point

to (multi)point cases of public communication include radio and television delivery through broadcast or cable channels.

The WWW has frequently been characterized as yet another mass media technology because materials published through it are essentially available to anyone with Internet access just as broadcast technologies are available to anyone with a radio or television set[24]. However, the interactive nature of the WWW also allows it to function as a personal medium or as a niche medium (Schwartz, 1997), as the materials published online may be obscured from view from the public, or else targeted for use by specific audiences[25]. Accordingly, one can also characterize the WWW as a medium for intrapersonal, interpersonal and group communication, as illustrated in the examples above. Given this flexibility, discovering how publishers of WWW home pages conceived of the audience for their home pages and how those conceptions guided their publishing efforts were major concerns of this research project.

Still, the term "audience" itself is a problematic one. Within normative mass media theory, the term "audience" is frequently understood to mean an aggregate of passive media consumers (McQuail, 1987, pp. 150-154). This definition is inadequate for the two-way, many-to-many communication channels

[24] See, for example, Morris & Ogan, 1996

[25] Corporate sites often turn the WWW into a narrowcast medium through the use of password scripts or other log-in procedures that limit access to the material they publish or even customize it for use of a particular individual. Another, "low tech" approach to narrowcasting was demonstrated by several of the informants who sometimes published materials in directories that were not linked to public areas of their home page. For example, if I created a home page located at http://www.polysemy.com/~aviva, I could create a page located at http://www.polysemy.com/~aviva/secret/secret.html. If I do not link the secret web page to the rest of my web site or to any other site on the WWW, and I only tell a select few of the URL of the secret page, I can essentially narrowcast to that selected audience.

of the WWW. However, there is another conceptualization of "audience" more germane to the communicative complexities of the WWW home page. This alternate perspective within symbolic interactionism comes from the dramaturgical tradition that originated with Burke (1935) and Goffman (1959; 1974; 1982). Essentially, the dramaturgical perspective uses a theatrical metaphor to characterize human behavior in terms of performances. According to this approach, people actively perform particular roles in order to influence their audience to adopt a particular definition of a given social situation. These performances, supported by settings, costuming, and props, parallel theatrical performances-- except that the audiences in face to face encounters also take their turn as actors on the interactional stage[26].

Using this perspective, I may characterize the Web page as a digital proscenium where performances are staged. However, unlike typical face engagements, interaction through the WWW page interface is usually mediated and asynchronous, so the intended audiences for these online performances are not always obvious ones. This led me to ask, "who are the intended spectators of these online performances, and how do the actors, or the authors of these online performances, define the situation of the personal home page?"

The phrase *definition of the situation*, used by Goffman frequently to characterize the mental organization of individual experience, deserves to be explicated in some detail. It first appeared in the work of Thomas & Thomas,

[26] This characterization is also more in tune with recent, situated conceptualizations of the audience such as *discursive formations* (Ang, 1991) or *interpretive communities* (Jensen, 1991), although the individual focus of this study precludes a truly detailed analysis of discursive, situated action.

who wrote, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (1928). The “Thomas Theorem” suggests that self-determined human activity is always preceded by some kind of process of reflection and forethought. During this process, individuals balance their own unique and personal definitions of any given social situation with the cultural norms and orientations consensually shared and recognized by those around them. The definitions which are selected direct the individuals’ actions in a particular situation, at least until a reinterpretation occurs (Thomas, 1931).

Goffman employed the Batesonian term *frame* to denote the basic elements contributing to an actor’s subjective definition of a given situation. He used *frame* as a metaphor for those unstated rules or principles set by some other entity which implicitly govern interaction, and coined the phrase *frame analysis* to describe the examination of how experience is organized for an individual actor (1986). Accordingly, this chapter will include a report on some of the more common frames which informants used to understand and give meaning to their Web publishing experiences.

To that end, this chapter consists of two sections aimed at explicating how WWW home page authors frame the situation of the personal home page. The first section consists of an exploration of the vocabularies of motive associated with personal home pages. In this section, I discuss the social construction of these rhetorical constructs. I also provide some examples of how home page authors borrow familiar schemata from traditional media to characterize their publishing efforts in terms of particular audience levels. In the second section, I

demonstrate how the paradoxical participation frameworks of personal home pages can lead to unanticipated or undesirable consequences. Finally, I discuss some of the strategies used by informants to control the flow of interaction engendered by their home pages.

FRAMEWORKS: VOCABULARIES OF MOTIVE

This section will explore the motives and orientations used by informants to define the social situation of their personal Web pages. Rather than attempting to classify every possible individual motivation for creating home pages on the WWW that was articulated by the informants, I will offer here an examination of the *vocabularies of motive* (Mills, 1940) used by people to frame their publishing activities to themselves and to others. Following Burke (1935), Mills forwarded a view of motives at odds with the normative characterization of them as biological or psychological drives. Instead, he defined motives as rhetorical constructs that impose meaning onto social interaction and define action with respect to particular social contexts. According to Mill's rhetorical perspective, motives function as terms in a vocabulary that provide, both to the actor and to observers, adequate explanations of an actor's present, past, or future conduct. They are accordingly used to influence others to accept the actor's definition of the situation (Mills, 1953, p. 253, cited in King, 1998). Accordingly, the focus of this section is on the motives used by informants to frame the social situation of the home page.

The interactionist concept of framing has been applied previously to studies of mass media contexts, both in terms of attributes of the media itself and

in terms of individual-level cognitive structures (Scheufele, 1999). In audience research, framing theory has largely been concerned with how messages are packaged and presented in the news media (i.e. Gitlin, 1980; Iyengar, 1991). However, Entman demonstrated that framing also is implicated at the individual level, in the reception and processing of media messages (1993). Individual audience members process media elements in order to create their own meanings and according to their own particular frames of reference, just as news reporters frame media stories in order to package them for the audience.

How individuals act towards the situation of their own personal web page is similarly grounded in the frameworks that they employ to interpret other WWW home pages. These interpretations are taken into account whey they decide what kinds of information are appropriate for inclusion within their pages and what kinds should be avoided. The problem home page authors face when constructing these mental representations is that the cultural definitions and norms for this activity are still emerging since the WWW is, after all, a relatively new context for social interaction. Although it is rapidly becoming a common practice in certain segments of the population, authoring a personal home page was by no means yet a routine or commonplace activity at the time I performed the first interviews for this study[27]. Because of this, individual authors have a great deal

[27] This was evidenced by the facility with which most of the informants volunteered accounts explaining or justifying their publishing practices. Scott & Lyman (1968) pointed out that "an account is not called for when people engage in routine, common sense behavior in a cultural environment that recognizes that behavior as such." Accordingly, the facility with which informants volunteered justifications for their publishing activities, as described in the previous chapter, demonstrates that home page publishing was not a practice generally taken for granted at the time these interviews were conducted.

of freedom in defining the social situation of their personal home pages in accordance with their own unique visions and circumstances.

Scheufele recently linked the production and adoption of individual and media frames, integrating them in a constructivist process model that conceptualizes framing as a continuous feedback loop between individual frames and media frames (1999). Though it was ostensibly aimed at journalists, Scheufele's continuous loop model of framing is also relevant to personal home page authors, since those who use the WWW to publish biographical information are also regular consumers of Web content. In the survey administered after the initial interviews, all of the informants in this study reported that they regularly browsed the web either for entertainment or for reasons that were more instrumental. In addition, as illustrated in the previous chapter, informants commonly reported that the WWW itself was their primary source of information when learning how to author Web pages, and most of them reported that they reviewed other peoples' home pages before creating their own.

Informants used these other sites as templates or models on structural and technical levels as well as a source of ideas for content. Some informants even wrote their first home page by using the built-in capacity of the web browser to copy the hypertext markup language from someone else's homepage, and then edited the duplicated HTML source by substituting their own content. Antonio followed this trajectory when he began to author web pages:

> I played with the buttons on the Mosaic browser,
> and it said "View Source."
> So I looked at the source,

> and I'm not saying I'm brilliant or anything like that,
> but I'm like, "Well, that's how it works:
> I could put my own little code here and my own little text here."
> I figured out how to operate it, and then from the source code,
> I just substituted my own little words and addresses
> and that's how I started.

The widespread practice of borrowing source code from already published pages is one example of how home page authors' understanding of the social situation of their home pages is socially constructed from pre-existing frameworks in a continuous feedback loop. Several informants also reported drawing on their experience of reading other people's home pages when deciding what content to include or leave out. When they browsed the web pages of others, the home page authors that I interviewed were, in a mediated sense, interacting with the authors of those others' pages by proxy. When they used those pages as models for both the content and the structure of their own efforts, they were adopting certain expectations and understandings about the meaning and purpose of those pages along with the source code.

As indicated in the previous chapter, however, the social construction of the framing of the personal home page was not exclusively limited to interactions mediated through the WWW interface. Many of the informants reported that their perspectives about the social context of their pages were affected by their discussions with other people. These interactions were facilitated both by the "mailto:" feature coded into the home page itself (which, when clicked, invites browsers to send email to the creator of the page by popping up a pre-addressed email form on the screen), and through face to face interaction with friends, colleagues and significant others. Holly's narrative demonstrated how both direct

interaction and browsing the home pages of others helped shape her own definitions of the social situation of her home page:

> My boyfriend told me that he just didn't understand
> why I had such personal things on my page.
> And then another person that I work with made a comment to me,
> that he was reading some of the things on my page
> and he really felt like he didn't know
> if he should really be reading this stuff or not.
> And I started feeling weird about it then.
> But since then I found some other pages
> where people publish their journals and stuff.
> And... it is something that it's okay to do if you're comfortable with it.

Holly weighed the concerns from her significant other and coworker about the amount of personal disclosure on her home site with her interpretation of other home pages she had read where intimate details were shared. In light of these experiences, she continued to define the social situation of her home page as an intrinsically private space where she felt comfortable discussing her emotional life, despite the possibility that others might read those intimate revelations. Holly saw the amount of personal disclosure on other home pages she had browsed as a model or normative guide for her own behavior, although she recognized that not everyone would feel comfortable with the same level of self-disclosure she engaged in on her web site.

Still, the packages of expectations gleaned from direct interaction and from reading the home pages of others were not the only sources of interpretive schema. Williams, Phillips & Lum (1985) asserted that users of new media are inclined to apply normative frameworks and expectations to the innovations which are borrowed from more established media formats. A recent study by

McQuivey (1996) found partial support for this assertion with regard to World Wide Web users. He found that Web users borrowed symbolic representations and expectations from other familiar frameworks and applied them to their WWW browsing experiences, although not all of these frameworks were derived from other media. Similarly, I found home page authors to model their WWW publishing activities in terms of a variety of symbolic frameworks borrowed from more established media types and from other experiential realms.

During the interviews, most of the informants described their use and understanding of their WWW home pages by volunteering analogies with more familiar types of media. The following list of similes and metaphors includes the more common frameworks used by the informants to characterize their home page use:

- a notepad or scrapbook
- a filing cabinet or rolodex
- a diary or journal
- a photo album or gallery
- a portfolio
- a newsletter
- an advertisement

Each analogy provided a framework or metaphor which worked rhetorically to define the situation of the home page, accounting for its application in familiar terms and invoking a particular perceived social context for the material published within it.

Intrapersonal frames

Analogies with notepads, scrapbooks, rolodexes, photo albums and file cabinets, all denoting places where information was kept, organized and stored, were primarily used to denote instrumental exploitation of the WWW home page for personal aims. Many of the informants used the home page as a universally accessible personal data file which they could access from home, the office, or anywhere they could get access to the Internet through a web browser. Laura, who maintained an extensive directory of her favorite businesses on her home site, explained:

> Personally, it's like a big filing cabinet for me,
> and it's easier for me to just put it all on the web.
> And frankly I don't really care
> if people go look at my personal page or not.
> It's just sort of a way for me to catalogue my information.

This set of analogies accentuates the way that the personal home page can function as a kind of external memory or archive, allowing easy retrieval as well as safe storage. Some informants, like Holly, explained that they kept their original creative work online in case a catastrophe struck their home systems: “If my hard drive on my computer ever crashes or something, it's just like storage.” Others, like George, emphasized the convenience of being able to access the materials on the page without having to carry them around physically:

> It's one place where I find information, it's my notepad.
> If I'm out visiting somebody
> and I need to pull a piece of information about something,
> it's there. I don't need to haul my laptop around.

Informants tended to reserve the diary and journal analogies for denoting a deeper and more ritualized type of intrapersonal home page use than those encompassed by the storage and archive frames. The terms "diary" and "journal" are more or less interchangeable[28], both denoting regular commentaries on one's intimate thoughts, reflections and experiences which, taken as a whole, create a kind of coherent narrative or a sense of continuity (Elliot, 1997). The ritualistic, periodic aspect of journal writing seems to be an essential part of this frame. George illustrated this when he explained why he did not think the journal frame provided an altogether appropriate characterization of his use of his own WWW home page:

> ...I try to keep just adding to it and saying here's a little bit of history.
> So that way it's sort of an online journal for me,
> but I don't put enough into it to say it's really an online journal.

Although some diaries or memoirs are created explicitly for publication, in general these documents are intended primarily for the private use of the author (Elliot, 1997). This is also true for many online versions of these documents. For example, when I asked Holly who she thought might be looking at her home pages, she expressed some discomfort and embarrassment about others viewing the very intimate material she sometimes included on her site, saying:

> I really don't do it for anyone else; I do it for me.
> And I go under the assumption no one's really looking at it.
> I know my mom looks at it,
> and I wish she wouldn't because sometimes that constricts me,

[28] On page 1 of his frequently cited literary survey of historical personal chronicles, Mallon (1984) avers that the terms "journal" and "diary" are "hopelessly muddled"; following his example, I will not try to forcibly disentangle them here.

and I know some of my friends look at it,
but I don't think that anyone else in the world looks at it.

However, even the most intimate journal includes an interactional component: they are narratives written with an implied audience, whether that audience is conceived of as one's future self or as posterity (Mallon, 1984, pp. xvi-xvii). Accordingly, while the contextual implication of the diary/journal frame is inherently a personal one, it is still intrinsically intersubjective. Like the anthropomorphic "Dear Diary" addressed within the pages of many conventional diarists, the implied potential of an audience delivered through the technology of the WWW acted as a catalyst to those informants who invoked the diary frame to engage in narrative construction within the space of their home pages. As Jordan explained:

What's the point of writing something down,
unless there's somebody else who can read it?
So I set it up.
If you want to look at it, here it is.

The diary frame was frequently invoked by those informants who used their home page to achieve personal growth or to work through dysphoric mood states. It was particularly relevant for those informants who were working through the aftermath of a major disruption in their lives such as relocation or a divorce. For example, Wanda used this frame to characterize a part of her site created when her marriage fell apart:

It's just some writing that I was doing as sort of a writing,
maybe, or journal.
It's a little therapeutic too, I suppose,
just like writing in a journal....

> I organized it for the site but actually I guess I did write it for the site.
> Instead of in a journal. I wrote it for this online sort of thing.

By providing a forum for airing negative emotions, the web page helped these informants acknowledge the grief and frustrations they felt because of their changed situations. As Marsha explained:

> I was trying to find something that I could just
> pour some of my thoughts and concerns and self into,
> instead of just holding them in.
> And that's what I started using it for.
> I said "If I'm gonna be sad, I'm just going to say
> this is really making me feel sad.
> And maybe I can use it constructively to find
> the good things in where I am and what I'm doing,
> and use some humor with it or something."

As Marsha's quote demonstrates, the home page authoring process also helped some of these informants achieve some perspective on their distress by providing them with a place to make sense of what had happened or was happening to them. By attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives created for publication on the home page, the informants who used the home page as a journal reported being able to reach equilibrium in their changed situations.

The ontological role played by these online narratives of self will be explored in more depth in the following chapter, which focuses more directly on issues of identity and self-presentation. At present, I merely want to stress that the interactional intentions of home page authors, especially those invoking the diary frame, were not necessarily aimed at a mass audience despite the broadcast capabilities of the WWW. However, the potential audience implied by the

extensive reach of Web technology did sometimes play a symbolic role in encouraging the creation of personal narratives for this frame, "just in case" anyone else might be reading.

By imagining themselves in mediated dialogue with possible readers through the interface of the WWW, these home page authors found a means to engage more readily in a dialogue with themselves. In this way, the home page was implicated as a communication channel with an internalized, generalized other (Mead & Morris, 1934, p.155), in that the authors characterized their potential audiences in terms of their similarities with themselves. At some times these imagined readers were represented by existing acquaintances or family, corresponding to the organized social group described by Mead or to Cooley's (1902) primary reference group. As Andy explained, "I know that there's a lot of people viewing my page that I don't know personally, but I'd like to think of it as sort of my friends, my acquaintances, my family, as a community."

At other times the content of the home page was directed towards some unknown individual who might identify with the emotional experiences disclosed therein. For example, Madeline explained her sense of her audience in terms that were explicitly interactionist:

> I think that the audience is really those of us that feel the way we do.
> My housemate laughs, because I told her that when I was ten,
> I was calling myself "we".
> So it's "we" in the sense of "me" in the broader sense,
> those of us like me.

Despite the possible, "just in case" audiences imagined by the informants, the "actual" audience expectations that the informants held for these personal

narratives were sometimes quite limited. Indeed, a few of the informants maintained that the personal materials contained in their homepages would most likely remain private despite the potentially broad dissemination via the channels of the WWW. These informants tended to be selective about sharing the materials with others, choosing not to advertise them publicly through search engines and Web directories. As Wanda explained:

> So the same time that the Internet
> is putting something personal out in public,
> only certain people are going to see it.
> And if these other people come across it by chance—
> it's just not very likely.
> And then if I thought they were going to see it I wouldn't put it up.
> It's like putting your diary up, your dirty laundry out on the line.

Josh expanded on this idea of online public anonymity by framing the social context of the Internet as a vast, complex simulacrum of human society:

> In many ways, the Internet is a lot like the real world.
> You're bound to find all kinds of horrible stuff
> if you look in the right places.
> If you go poking around in an alley somewhere, you can find a dead body.
> Well, in a big city ...
> On another note, if somebody you know draws a neat picture
> and leaves it in their room, who's gonna see it?
> The person who breaks into their room. That's it.
> If they put it in their window, maybe they've advertised it
> and more people can see it.
> If you just do a site and put it up, no one's gonna see it,
> unless somebody's you know actively looking ...
> If you want somebody to actually see your site,
> you go publish it in search engines.

Due to the sheer volume of online material, these informants thought it unlikely that anyone would chance onto, let alone abuse, the personal information contained in their home pages.

On the other hand, some informants explicitly rejected the diary/journal framing precisely because they understood the WWW to be an inherently public milieu. As such, they felt that home pages were inappropriate places for intimate self-exploration. As Leslie said:

> All personal home pages are self indulgent to a certain degree.
> But I don't want it to be grossly self indulgent in a sense, like
> "Here's every detail about my life and here's why you should care."
> I mean, I don't like reading those web pages
> and I certainly don't want to make one ...
> Because it's not like this is a private journal.
> I mean, I'm putting it up on the Internet.
> Anybody in the world can look at it.

Those informants who defined the social situation of the personal home page as essentially private and personal found, paradoxically, that the promise of the audience implied by the WWW provided them with a setting for self-exploration, or a catalyst to the construction of the types of narrative self examinations usually associated with personal journals. However, that same potential audience deterred others from including intimate self-disclosures within the content published on their home pages, because they felt that this transgressed the normative expectations of conduct within public settings. This paradoxical tension between the public and private social contexts of the personal home page will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Targeted communication

Many of the informants discussed their home pages in terms of frameworks that emphasized interpersonal or small group communication contexts. Several informants pointed out information published on their web sites for the benefit of particular target audiences. They used a variety of familiar frameworks to characterize these web pages, including the bulletin board, the photo album, the newsletter, the gallery or portfolio, and the classified advertisement.

The bulletin board framework accentuated the point-to-multipoint capabilities of the World Wide Web. Generally, informants who used this framework emphasized the web's relative convenience or economy relative to other means of broadcasting information to a select group. As George said:

> I run rafting trips with some friends of mine and I send them email,
> and they say "Oh, where was that email message that you sent me
> about the directions to the trip" or something.
> So I said, "Okay, forget it,
> I'll send you one URL which is easy to remember,
> or just go to my home page, it's got all the directions for you."

The photo album and family newsletter frameworks were also frequently portrayed in terms of convenience. Several informants, like Michael, emphasized the expedience of their home pages over more conventional means of sharing pictures and news with distant loved ones:

> I had this vision of eventually my family getting on the web,
> since I don't live near them,
> for them to actually see samples of what I'm doing in my spare time.
> It just recently happened a month ago. My father finally got on line.
> It's amazing. I never thought I would see the day...

> So the fact that my father's on the web, it's a lot easier for us
> to communicate via email and for him to see some of my photography.

However, these frameworks are associated with more than just conveying information to a select group. The photo album and family newsletter are potent personal constructions which are generally intended to be shared among a small, selective audience, and which create a special relationship between their creators and their viewers or readers. (See Walker, 1989 for a detailed discussion of the narrative role and presentational logic of photo albums.) Accordingly, the newsletter and photo album analogies were employed frequently by those informants who defined the social situation of their home pages as a context for group communication between friends or family members.

Some explained that they used their home page as a substitute for the traditional digest of the year's events sent out during the holiday season. Rather than including pictures of her family in her Christmas cards, Marsha used her home page to augmented her holiday greetings: "I gave out the main URL to this as a kind of a footnote on the bottom of our Christmas letter, and said 'Take a look, we'll try to keep our photos and things here so go take a look.'" A few informants reported that the news included on their home pages entirely replaced their annual holiday mailings. Laura admitted:

> In the past, I've written newsletters
> and sent out a bazillion Christmas cards with this newsletter in it.
> Last year I went, "Oh, well, hell—
> I'd just as well put my Christmas card on the web
> and send email to everybody I know and say
> 'Here's your Christmas card.'"

The targeted frameworks of the newsletter, photo album and bulletin board delineated the social context of the personal home page as essentially a private space maintained for focused interaction.

In contrast, the informants who defined the personal Web page as a primarily public medium tended to use analogies like “gallery” or “portfolio” to characterize collections of their creative works included on their personal Web sites. Online galleries, like galleries in the real world, are expected to attract or appeal to visitors, although the target audience for these displays may be narrow in either setting. Michael, who pursues photography as a hobby, characterized his home page as a way of marketing himself to other artists, to find people interested in collaborating with him. He described how his online gallery helped in that process:

> My photography has always been there from the beginning.
> It's the one thing that I wanted to do....
> It has provided me with a lot of contacts with other photographers.
> It's amazing how many people I have actually come in contact with
> by just speaking to friends and saying, "Hey, I have a website."
> They are able to blurt out my website address
> and people take a look at it and get in contact.

The portfolio analogy was frequently used by home page authors to imply an even narrower and especially critical audience: potential employers. Many of the informants reported using their Web pages at one time or another a resource in a job search, either by inviting employers to examine their work by including the URL of their home page in a cover letter, or to augment listings placed in online employment services. At times this type of self-marketing was the main goal of the home page. Leslie said:

> I needed a site to say, "Look, I'm a real person,"
> and to point people to it and show that I could do HTML,
> and to let people know that I had written books and stuff like that.
> So it started out as a modest publicity thing,
> but basically I wanted something to put on a business card and letterhead.

In these cases, the home page was defined as a way to communicate ones' creative abilities to a specific audience for economic reasons rather than affiliational ones. For informants who sought employment in Web related industries, the home page also served as a portfolio of their digital design and coding skills. In these cases, content and design choices were made accordingly, to display these skills. Lori pointed out the different demonstrations she included during our initial tour of her homepage:

> I'm thinking that when I'm trying to get work in HTML production,
> people will want to know can I do certain things.
> So under this section I have frames,
> because they'll want to know if I can do frames.
> Under here, I have client pull,
> because they'll want to know if I can do client pull.
> This area has form elements, that one has an image map, and so forth...

Some informants recognized that the personal information included on their home pages might provide personal background to potential employers as well as an indication of their skills and saw this as a boon. Larry characterized this function of the home page as being "sort of like halfway between an interview and a resume." Andy explained:

> I think that it gives employers a chance to see
> what kind of person that the individual wants
> to present himself as to the general public,
> and can kind of tell if they're going to get along well with the group
> and if there are any potential problems.

Though some informants expressly denied using their home pages to seek out new friends or romantic partners, others took advantage of the public accessibility of their home pages to achieve these kinds of goals. These informants sometimes invoked the rhetorical frames of the advertising and marketing milieus, although they often evoked elements of the portfolio frame as well. In a few cases, informants reported using the home page to augment an online personal ad by providing greater detail and background to potential partners than could be included in the limited space of the ad itself-- much as a click on a banner ad might lead a Web surfer to a corporate prospectus providing details and background information on the advertised product or service. For example, Frank's disability made writing difficult for him, and he saw the home page as a way of saving time and effort in his romantic quest:

> I get onto these personals things,
> and you've got to write a book each time,
> and you're always trying to be impressive,
> and I wanted a way to shortcut that if I could.
> And it was really nice to have a place:
> "Look here, this is who I am,
> and if you're interested give me a call or email me."

By placing ads in a number of different personal ad services and pointing readers to the wealth of detailed personal information on his home page, Frank hoped to conduct his search for partners more effectively.

Framing of the home page in terms of an advertisement for oneself was widespread. However, this frame was generally invoked in reference to specific target audiences, such as potential employers or romantic partners, rather than mass audiences. Rather than seeing the home page as a kind of billboard on the

information highway viewable by an undifferentiated mass of potential web surfers, informants who used advertising frames tended to characterize their sites in terms of a direct advertising campaign aimed at a particular market niche.

Large group communication

Curiously, despite frequent acknowledgements of the Web's public accessibility, few of the informants interviewed for this project used analogies taken from other mass media technologies to frame the social context of their home pages. As an advertisement of one's self, the home pages were sometimes aimed at potential employers or artistic collaborators, and sometimes directed at casual acquaintances or potential romantic partners who might like more background before escalating a relationship, as in the examples above. Nevertheless, few informants in this study began authoring their first home page with any expectations that it would become a path to celebrity. Those few who did make this connection did so in ironic tones:

Aviva: When you first started creating web pages,
who did you think your audience was?
Who did you think was going to read it?

Josh: When I first started, the world! I would be famous!
I would be a star!
I mean, you know, not really,
but that's what everybody said back then.
I was, like 16, 17, something like that.
What 17-year-old kid doesn't want to be on TV?

By ridiculing his earlier expectations as naive during the interview, Josh was in effect creating role distance[29] between himself and his previous framing of the

[29] See Goffman, 1961, pp.105-110, for a discussion of role distance and self-mockery.

web page as a means of achieving fame and mass recognition. The characterization of the social context of the home page as being essentially limited (especially in comparison with traditional broadcast media) was echoed by most informants. While the WWW was seen as an intrinsically public medium, home pages were rarely characterized as likely to achieve mass exposure. Instead, frames such as a gallery exhibition, a magazine, and a library were adopted by those few informants whose pages reached large audiences to characterize the social context of their home pages. While these metaphors denote public availability and access, they differ from mass media frameworks in that they are likely to be patronized or subscribed to by a niche audience rather than by an undifferentiated mass audience.

Those few informants in the study who created home pages that did ultimately attract large audiences (scoring hit rates in the thousands or higher), did report obtaining some measure of online recognition from this exposure. However they tended to reflect on this notoriety with some astonishment and characterized the large audiences as beyond their wildest expectations for their homepages. Madeline said:

> It's bigger than I ever thought.
> It's like a friend of mine said,
> "Madeline, when did you ever do an exhibition
> that thousands of people saw?"

Even with mass exposure, the comments that were most salient for these informants were the messages they received from strangers who viewed their work and expressed some identification with the emotional content contained in

their pages. Jordan believed that this kind of emotional validation was the root cause of the popularity of his site:

> This is why I get comments.
> There are other people like me who achieved the same feeling.
> Maybe through different means.

Although the authors of each of these popular pages acknowledged that their home pages served a large audience, there was a paradoxical relationship with it in that the audience each of them were addressing themselves to was, manifestly, themselves. Antonio put it bluntly:

> This Web page is supposedly, it looks like it's all about me,
> but part of it is I was searching for Latino resources,
> so really I was searching for me on the Internet,
> but me in other people and in other Web sites.

Attempts to reach out to a mass audience were repeatedly implicated by these informants as primarily a means of achieving some understanding of one's self or one's identity. Therefore, even those pages that were ostensibly aimed at the public served an essentially intrapersonal function. This search for self through the process of home page publishing will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

TENSIONS BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CONTEXTS

As illustrated by the previous section, a variety of framing metaphors were suggested by the informants, each associated with a particular type of perceived social context for the personal home page ranging from the intrapersonal level through large group contexts. Although most of the informants were quick to identify particular audiences for the materials published on their home pages, they

showed a tendency to move fluidly between both the frameworks they used to characterize their web publishing activities and their assessments of the audiences interacting with them through the site. As Goffman admitted, "there is the embarrassing fact that during any one moment of activity, an individual is likely to apply several frameworks" (1974, p. 25). At times, the informants made assessments that they claimed reflected their "typical" or primary uses of their home pages, but sometimes they highlighted particular aspects of the site that were salient at a given moment during the interview process. Also, as noted in the previous chapter, the relationships of the informants to their home pages tended to evolve over time, and revisions in the content were made in accordance with these transformations.

Although not every informant reported exploiting the potential of their home pages at every possible level of the social context pyramid, they did report adjusting their relationships to their home pages when particular contexts became more or less relevant. As such, I did not necessarily find consistency of framing either within or between interviews for a single informant. Despite this fluidity, almost all of the informants reported having some primary audience in mind for the materials they published on their sites even if their sense of that primary audience changed over time. Yet they all recognized that their home pages--even those pages published originally for their own personal use--potentially could be viewed by audiences at other contextual levels beyond those they targeted due to the open access permitted by the technology of the WWW. Correspondingly, the narratives of the informants frequently alluded to a kind of dialectical tension

between home page frameworks that were private, or self-directed, and those that were more public in nature. The following section of this chapter will discuss the implications of this perceived tension within the social context of the personal home page.

Frame transformations

The contradictions inherent in posting information primarily for personal use in a fundamentally public environment transformed familiar frameworks, imbuing them with new meanings. For example, traditional diaries and journals, as places where one keeps a record of one's innermost thoughts and feelings, are commonly associated specifically with intrapersonal applications. As works in process, they are generally not left out in public places for the delectation of others during their authors' lifetimes. Yet those informants who characterized their home pages as being "like a diary" sometimes acknowledged that people other than themselves could and sometimes did view these materials, so they took on social consequences not generally associated with traditional diaries.

Sometimes these personal explorations evolved into a way for families to share events in their lives and keep in touch. Holly's home pages provide an example of this type of trajectory. Holly was inspired by the birth of her nephew to begin keeping an online journal containing her thoughts and feelings about, as she put it, "all the little milestones that I share with him" as well as pictures of her nephew and his family. She explained:

> He's the first child I've really had a close relationship with
> and I don't have any children and I don't plan to,
> so he's like a big deal to me....

> Almost every time I see him,
> I come home and write something about it.

Though the journal, like the rest of her web site, is something she created primarily for herself, this part of her site took on new significance as a place for her family to share pictures and news about the baby:

> My brother and his wife think it's really cool,
> and her brother in Chicago looks at it,
> so it's like a way for people far away
> to read about what's going on with “the boy”, as we call him.

Influenced by their positive feedback, she created a guestbook connected to this part of the site which allowed visitors to post messages to her baby nephew, and added links to pictures and poems written for him by other members of her family. While this part of her home site began as a place where Holly could explore her own feelings about this child and her new role as an aunt, it soon became a way for her to strengthen her relationships with other members of her family through the joint celebration of the life of its newest member.

The public milieu of the WWW can also give the personal home page immediate self-presentational consequences beyond those usually encountered by the traditional diarist. Material published in an online Web journal can easily be reviewed by curious family members, employers or acquaintances interested in learning more about the author, and several informants recognized that associates might view their home pages as a discreet source of personal information even if the pages were not originally created with those viewers in mind. For example, Jordan told me that his extensive and intimate site sometimes received visits from:

> ...chicks that wanted to have easy access to information about me
> without having to be scared or anything...

> to find out more about me
> without actually looking like they were trying to find out more about me.

Some of these diarists eventually decided to exploit this practice by including the address of their home pages in correspondence with associates, with the tacit hope that their home pages might serve as calling cards inviting others to pursue closer affiliations. Marsha, who said that at first she did not think she would show her site to anyone else, commented:

> I've given it to a few people at work who I know in a working context
> but don't yet know in a personal context.
> It's almost like, "Go here if you want to know some more about me."

Within traditional journals, the performance and exploration of self is usually a private endeavor. However, engaging in this type of personal exploration online via the medium of the personal home page had important consequences for interaction as well for self-presentation and the construction of personal identity. These consequences will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Just as web pages using the diary frame went beyond the traditional social context of that frame because of the public accessibility of the WWW, personal home page applications framed in terms of media aimed at small group interaction also had unanticipated consequences. For example, the personal photo albums that some informants initially posted online to share with friends or family members were sometimes revised or contextualized to make them more accessible to broader audiences. In one example of this evolution, Larry explained that the photography he published on his home page was geared originally towards his friends and family. However, when he asked his colleagues for their opinions about his home pages, they suggested that he reorganize his site to give more

prominence to his travel photography, which had greater public interest than his snapshots of his friends and family:

> The big thing that everyone pointed out to me
> was that the one thing on my site that isn't on a lot of sites,
> is some of the photos of places that I've been.
> And so I've kind of created this site that divides my photos up into
> my family, my friends, and more importantly,
> for a lot of people, the places that I've been.
> Most people aren't going to care about my family and friends
> except other family and friends.
> But some people might be interested in my trips to Asia.

The comments that Larry received about his initial site encouraged him to rethink the framing of his home page. His sense of the social context of this part of his site changed, and he moved from the photo album frame (geared towards intimates) to the more public gallery frame.

In a related case, Laura's awareness of the social context of her home page also changed, as she became aware both of the World Wide Web's pervasiveness and its growth potential. Her framing of her home page changed accordingly, from the photo album frame to the public but targeted portfolio frame. Originally, she said, her home page was aimed primarily at friends she met and chatted with online via Internet Relay Chat:

> I think when I started building a web page
> I didn't really have a concept of what that meant.
> And I think I sort of had a concept that this is like my photo album on line
> and I can just tell my friends to go look at it,
> and I didn't have a concept that there were billions of people
> that have web access that can access this information.

Later, as she came to realize that the WWW would give rise to an entire new industry, Laura became interested in pursuing a career in Web design. She revised her framing (and her web site) accordingly:

> I think my sense of audience changed,
> because I did start taking it seriously as a professional,
> and wanted people to look at it because I want them to hire me.

Like Laura, all of the informants in these examples eventually re-framed their understandings of their personal home pages as their understanding of the accessibility of the medium changed. Their rhetorical frameworks were altered as a result of their own experiences, through direct interaction with others about their own pages, and mediated interaction via browsing other WWW sites. As they shifted to new frameworks, they often revised or reorganized their home pages to reflect the new definitions of the social contexts of their pages.

Fears

For most of the informants interviewed, awareness of the public context of their WWW home page was a two-edged sword. On one side, the promise of exposure to broad audiences could encourage narrative personal accounts, and sometimes pointed to possibilities for recognition or new relationships (as described in some of the examples above.) However, many of the informants acknowledged that the ubiquity of the WWW could also provoke negative outcomes, given that their home page might reach some readers with undesirable intentions towards them or bring about otherwise unanticipated responses. The possibilities for negative consequences that the informants in the study sample articulated covered a variety of apprehensions, ranging from concern about

possible abuses of their personal information to anxiety about how others would respond to their self presentations.

Informants often voiced the concern that publishing telephone numbers or addresses on their personal home pages might invite unwanted or undesirable attentions from potential readers ranging from a deluge of unsolicited junk mail to violations of their personal safety. Leslie's comments illustrate both of ends of this spectrum:

> I get so much spam just from having my email address up
> because I have a domain name and because I'm listed with Yahoo.
> I don't think I would have my snail mail address or my phone number
> because that would be, I mean I don't need,
> I have enough strangers contacting me by email.
> That's all I need.
> And ... when I made this page I had an ex-boyfriend
> who was sort of stalking me
> and I didn't want him to be able to find me.
> He knew I was in San Francisco but that's as far as I wanted it to go...
> There are people who get obsessed and think
> that your email friendship with them is more important than it actually is
> or it's more important to them than it is to you.

Leslie, like many other informants, felt that giving strangers her email address presented little risk but that publishing her home address or phone number in the public context of the WWW might have unpleasant or even dangerous consequences. During the interviews, the social construction of these practices as dangerous were frequently indicated: several informants reported that they did not consider the potential hazards of publishing direct contact or other personal information on their home pages until others raised concerns about it to them. In

one typical account, Madeline told how she was encouraged to revise her web site when her daughter expressed anxieties about it:

Madeline: I took out all of our names,
because she was afraid that there were kooks out there**.**

Aviva: Did that concern you at all, when you first put the site up?

Madeline: Well, I guess I didn't think about it,
but she thought about it real fast.
So then I thought, well, that could be a problem.
So I took out everybody's names and changed their birth dates.

A few of the informants in the sample who did include personal contact information in their home pages acknowledged during the interviews that publishing this information might have unpleasant repercussions. However, they explained that the potential positive outcomes from this practice (such as connecting with old friends or potential employers) were worth the risk, as long as they did not publish inflammatory or polemical material on the site that might invite negative attention. In Goffman's terms, these informants were observing the situational proprieties for maintaining decorum in a public setting (1963, pp. 21-24). Both men and women discussed making this kind of risk assessment, yet some of the men in the sample went out of their way to explain that they felt this risk was acceptable for them personally simply because they were men. These same men opined that publishing contact information online would be dangerous for women under any circumstances[30]. George's explanation was typical of these kind of gender based risk assessments:

[30] Perhaps these men felt that femininity was sufficient, in and of itself, to attracting unwelcome attention from some males.

> Putting contact information on there,
> that was one of the first things I did,
> because I want my friends and I want other people
> to be able to get ahold of me,
> and if I was a woman, I wouldn't do that.
> There's just way too many weird people running around...
> it'd be a lot more attention than I'd want. ...
> But being male, being pretty self confident,
> and not putting anything on here
> that would attract bizarre or abnormal behavior,
> I don't worry about it.
> If I put up a bunch of information pro NRA or anti NRA,
> or pro abortion or anti abortion,
> or pro Catholicism or something like that, then I might take that out.
> But this is not controversial stuff.

However, none of the women polled in the sample expressed this type of gender-role related double standard in making their own assessments of the potential risks involved in publishing on the WWW. This striking difference in the ways that men and women viewed the social context of the personal home page reflects more widespread, paternalistic biases in the social construction of risk in offline as well as online environments.[31]

The fears that informants expressed about the potential risks of making poor impressions on others because of their web pages bolsters the characterization of the personal home page as a digital proscenium for social performance. Goffman wrote that "Life may not be much of a gamble, but interaction is" (1959, p. 243), since there is always some risk of embarrassment or "losing face"[32] whenever one presents a performance of self. This maxim applies as equally to interaction mediated through the context of the home page as it does

[31] For an overview of risk-taking behavior as a gendered performance, see Lupton, 1999.
[32] Goffman defined "face" as "an image of self," or "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact"

to interaction within everyday offline environments. Most of the informants articulated at least some face concerns about how others would interpret their online self presentations, and they were selective about what they published on their sites in accordance with the particular fronts they wished to convey to readers. The jitters that Jordan acknowledged when I asked if he had any fears about publishing personal content in the public medium of the WWW (as cited in the previous chapter) exemplified these kinds of apprehensions. Apropos to Goffman's theatrical metaphor, he equated them to stage fright. He clarified his concerns about how his online presentation might be perceived:

> I want to make sure that people can understand it.
> And I pay a lot of attention to the words I use,
> because I know that sometimes the wrong word
> can make a complete wrong impression,
> and I would prefer that that not occur.

In addition to concern with information given (such as by personal photos or biographical information), most informants were also cognizant that factors such as the language used, the choice of the Internet service provider[33], or even the design and formatting of the home page also gave off information that could negatively affect others' impressions of them. Accordingly, they often reported orchestrating their online performances-- that is to say, making choices about these factors-- according to how they thought those aspects might be interpreted. For example, they picked the most flattering of their personal photos, or perhaps strove to convey a professional look and feel by using frames, tables and toolbars in their design. These choices were complicated by the fact that quite a few of the

[33] As discussed in the previous chapter.

informants framed their home pages in terms of showcasing their proficiency in web design to potential employers, so these presentations of self were simultaneously demonstrations of skill. I will consider the self-presentational aspects of the personal home page further in the next chapter.

Delimitating strategies

The personal home page creates a kind of dynamic tension between personal and public social contexts. At times, (as illustrated above) informants characterized their home pages in terms that denoted "front region" participation frameworks, or places where performances were presented to an audience. At other times, informants characterized their home pages as "back regions"--places where they could experiment with various kinds of self-expression and prepare performances for public presentation (Goffman, 1959).

In order to exert control over access to these online performances and to convey their definitions of the situation and accompanying expectations to potential readers, home page authors employed a variety of management strategies. Some of these strategies used were aimed at encouraging interaction with those visiting the page, or at accommodating potential public access of the home page. Other strategies were aimed at limiting public access to personal information or otherwise avoiding unwelcome interactions entirely given the public milieu of the WWW.

Table 1: Some strategies for controlling the definition of the situation of the personal home page.

1. Inviting interaction through:
    a. “mailto” attributes inviting e-mail from readers
    b. forms requesting input from readers
    c. guest book and bulletin board scripts
2. Accommodating the public through:
    a. contextualization of personal materials
    b. site design and organization geared towards public access
3. Restricting and censoring disclosure through:
    a. avoidance of intimate disclosure
    b. not publishing contact information for oneself or others
    c. avoiding contentious or controversial content
4. Obliquity and indirection: fictionalizing intimate disclosure
5. Aggressive disclosure: distancing through inundation

Strategies which invite interaction

The technology of the WWW has many attributes that allow page authors to solicit comments or other kinds of interaction from those reading their web page. For example, including the *mailto:* attribute on a home page allows browsers to open a pre-addressed email window merely by clicking on a hyperlink. This feature was by far the most commonly employed strategy used by the informants to invite communication by readers. Another example of an attribute built into the hypertext markup language is the Web form, which lets a reader input information into a Web server where some action may be performed on it. Usually a specialized program or script is required to process information

entered via the form, and creating these forms is somewhat more difficult than basic HTML coding and requires a degree of access to the Web server disallowed by some internet service providers. Perhaps in consequence of the additional effort involved, form attributes were less common on the personal home pages I reviewed in this study.

However, a few of the informants took advantage of ready-made scripts made available by their service providers to create *guest-books* or *bulletin boards* on their home pages. These scripts employ forms which allow readers either to send a private message to the author or to post a message that would be readable by other visitors to the site, thus inviting an escalation of interaction. In an example mentioned previously in this chapter, Andy recognized that strangers could potentially access the album of photos he kept online to share with friends. Still, he chose to define the social situation of his page in explicitly affiliational terms, "as a community." Inviting visitors to sign his online guest book constituted his attempt to include them in his community.

Strategies for accommodating the public

Home page authors who recognized that their personal web pages might potentially reach broad audiences often tried to accommodate these audiences by anticipating their possible needs, interests, expectations or reactions and constructing (or revising) their web pages on the basis of those expectations. For example, many informants described how they contextualized some of the material published on their home pages in order to make it more intelligible to other readers. In one example of this strategy, George explained why he wrote an

introduction to the list of books he kept on his home page for his own personal use:

> **George:** I started in the last six months trying to present it,
> in case somebody else wants to read it,
> and that's why the prose exists,
> to explain here's the context for it.
>
> **Aviva:** So the prose is really saying, “If you happen to be here,
> and you're looking at this, let me explain why this is here?”
>
> **George:** Right, exactly.
> I think I just started doing that because I wanted to do it,
> but somebody may have at some point have said
> "so what's this all about?"
> And again a part of it may also come from
> looking at other people's web pages
> and watching them explain what they're doing.
> And thinking, “Oh, okay. You know, that's a good point.
> I should really go explain what I'm doing.”

This excerpt illustrates the reflexive processes involved in accommodating a new definition of the social context of the page that goes beyond the intrapersonal level. George was able to imagine the confusion of those who might read his home page, so he adjusted it in accordance with his perception of their general expectations for home pages. These perceptions were shaped by his interactions with (and interpretations of) other peoples’ home pages on the WWW.

Other informants tried to imagine what might be interesting, entertaining, or useful to the public and shaped their home pages accordingly. As noted earlier, Larry acknowledged the potential for public access by specifically including photos that might appeal to a broader audience along with his more conventional snapshots and organizing his site accordingly. Thus, Larry was able to define his

home page as a social space shared by different constituencies through the creation of specific areas on his site which were aimed at different and distinct target audiences. This structural reorganization constitutes a kind of bracketing between frames, and is comparable to the episoding conventions Goffman identifies in collectively organized social activities (1974, pp. 251-269). Larry also explained how he strove to accommodate the special needs of some browsers: "I try to make my site speech friendly so that, say, visually impaired people with a text editor that just reads the text out to them would be able to go through the site." By employing the HTML *alt* attribute to specify written descriptions of the photographs published on his site that could be displayed instead of images, Larry was able to adapt his site to the needs of any visually impaired browsers who might visit it.

Strategies for restricting or censoring disclosure

Other informants who recognized the public context of the World Wide Web not only attempted to anticipate the possible interests of the public, but also actively restricted the amount of personal information included on their home pages in order to avoid potential face threats. Many told how they carefully avoided publishing intimate or sensitive personal subjects when creating content for their home pages particularly because of their public accessibility. Laura told me the kinds of things she specifically chose not to include on her site:

> ...really deeply personal stuff that I just wouldn't put on a website
> and wouldn't make public knowledge....
> Like the dysfunctional family I grew up in,
> like some of the personal tragedies that I've gone through,

> I just don't see a need to bleed those all over the web
> and all over everybody else,
> and I keep those very personal.
> And if I get to know somebody
> and we start sharing families and childhood backgrounds,
> I might tell them, you know, "I came from this abusive family."
> But I don't really see a need to do that on a website.

She went on to characterize her web page in terms of a cocktail party— a framework where one might disclose some personal information to new acquaintances, but would limit exposure by restricting conversation to the innocuous topics which Goffman designated "safe supplies" (1963, p. 159).

As discussed above, several informants were afraid that publishing contact information beyond an email address might encourage stalking or other unwanted attentions from some readers. As I noted earlier, many of them purposefully avoided including this type information on their homepages, and took steps to protect the privacy of other people mentioned on their sites. In one example, Doug took great pains to blank out his girlfriend's name and address on some postcards to her that he included on his site. He noted: "When I scanned them into PhotoShop, I just didn't think it was the right thing to do to be posting her address all over for the for the whole world to see."

Although some informants expressed indifference about the possible negative repercussions of publishing contentious material on their home pages, several others reported that they chose not to publish opinions or other types of material on their home pages which might be considered controversial or antagonistic. Some informants avoided controversy because they did not want to risk direct consequences such as a deluge of angry email. Others seemed to think

that publishing rancorous or malicious information was simply discourteous and as such was avoided in a defensive means of saving face. As Holly explained:

> Sometimes I've been tempted to talk about other people
> who I have bad things to say about or whatever,
> like this other woman my boyfriend was involved with
> who ended up moving here and coming to work where we did,
> just to make the plot thicken, and who was a very vindictive person.
> So I think it's uncouth to put something on your web page like that...
> But she did that once on her web page.
> I looked at her web page one day and it said
> "San Francisco is a great place, there's some really special people here,
> and there's some really stupid ones."
> "Stupid" was a hyperlink to my boyfriend's page.
> And I thought, "That is just so low and tacky."
> I would never do anything like that.
> But I used to get so mad sometimes that I wanted to!
> I tried just to not put anything really negative up there.
> Like I wouldn't use it to harangue some company that pissed me off.

The strategy of limiting negative comments within the personal home page is akin to avoiding the social faux pas of gossiping to non-intimates. The strategy of restricting the material on the home page to relatively shallow, non-intimate topics serves to maintain the affective level of the page to a general orientation stage more appropriate for public social contexts than for intimate exchange.

Strategies of obliquity and indirection

Whereas some of the informants chose to omit personal information on their home pages, and others ignored or downplayed their public accessibility, two of the informants chose a different approach to managing face threats on the WWW. Rather than avoiding intimate disclosure entirely, they employed a

strategy of indirection and anonymity, in essence "thinning out"[34] interaction by fictionalizing their intimate revelations so that the authors themselves were not implicated by them. These two women had home sites that were at once curiously intimate yet impersonal. Wanda demonstrated how she employed this strategy on her home page:

> The way I had it set up with this was under "Tales tall and true,"
> which is to say, some may be true and some may not be,
> and I'm not saying which are true and which are fiction.
> It could all be fiction-- I mean, some theoretical character.
> Or it could be true tales....
> I wanted to make it uncertain.

This strategy allowed her to feel that she could engage in explicit affective disclosure about sensitive topics in the public milieu of the Internet without the threat of being discredited or embarrassed. She also avoided including any information on her home page, such as her full name, which might link it with her personal identity.

Madeline employed a similar strategy of evasion. She did have a section on her site which included personal data such as one might find in a curriculum vitae, containing terse information about professional and personal accomplishments-- specifically, she said, for use by potential employers reviewing her work. However, this part of the site was bracketed off from the rest of it by color and style and point of entry to the information. The rest of the site, which in all respects was like an interactive art installation, was (like Wanda's site) simultaneously intimate and detached. During the interview she discussed

[34] See Goffman, 1963, p. 139.

how she could talk elliptically around personal issues but could not or would not address them directly in the context of the web site:

> I would have liked to have gotten more into this,
> with more intimate personal exploration.
> Instead it's become more of a taking people out of my life
> and creating this imaginary character....
> I can't say, on the web, this is how I feel inside out!
> You know, what this image looks like, how horrific this is,
> this is me inside.
> I'm not going to say that. And I haven't figured out what to say.

Madeline said that she thought that someday she might be able to reveal herself more fully within the ambit of her personal home page. In the meantime, the creation of this "imaginary character" allowed her a way of engaging in deep intrapersonal self exploration through the linking and organizing tools bestowed by WWW technology without violating the situational proprieties she associated with public conduct.

Aggressive disclosure: the strategy of reverse distancing

While Wanda and Madeline managed to maintain personal boundaries through distancing themselves from the intimate material they published on their sites, two of the men interviewed during the study employed an opposite approach towards limiting their accessibility. This strategy, which I have termed "aggressive disclosure", paradoxically involves publishing an enormous amount of intimate and detailed personal information on the home page specifically to reduce the risks generally involved in self disclosure and to dissuade readers from initiating direct contact. Antonio explained his reasoning behind this approach:

> I'm the kind of person that to push you away,
> I give you all the information that I think you need to know.
> So you don't have to ask what are my hopes and dreams,
> what are my fears, that kind of stuff.
> I provide a lot of information externally,
> so you would be more convinced that you really know me.

The implication was that providing a plethora of personal information at the outset made it less likely that people reading his page would try to engage him in the kind of exploratory affective exchange which normally characterizes relationship development. In effect, he hoped to maintain his privacy by effectively relinquishing it, at least in areas he deemed appropriate.

In a similar case, Jordan also published intimate material on topics ranging from traumatic childhood experiences, emotional relationships and his struggle with alcohol addiction on his home pages, in addition to providing mundane personal information such as contact information and a work history. He offered the metaphor that publishing such intimate personal accounts on his home page was tantamount to "giving people bullets but not giving them a gun." He reasoned that the only people who could really hurt him with this information were people he already knew. These people were already part of daily life and already privy to the personal and intimate details he included on his Web site, so he did not feel as though he could be harmed by publishing it more broadly. Engaging in full disclosure on his WWW pages ensured that his personal front always remained consistent.

I found it interesting that no women in the study sample appeared to use aggressive disclosure as a strategy of managing the social context of their home pages, and that none of the men in the sample employed the strategy of

indirection. While the sample size precludes me from reading too much into this distinction, it does seem to echo the informants' different assessments of the risks involved for men and women when publishing personal material online. It also offers further anecdotal support for the claim that women and men have markedly different communication styles and value different kinds of interactions in computer mediated environments.[35] Perhaps men generally feel more secure in asserting their personalities in public than women, both in mediated and non-mediated contexts. These differing discursive practices are rooted in cultural constructions of safety, embarrassment and risk that are beyond the scope of the current analysis, but which deserve further consideration.

CONCLUSIONS

How people act towards the social situation of the personal home page is dependent on how they understand and define this medium. Their expectations of its social penetration, their assessments of how they should present themselves within the page and how others should interact with them through it or about it—these are all a part of the "definition of the situation" of the personal home page. While the dramaturgical perspective on interaction characterizes people as performers who try to influence others to adopt a particular definition of a given situation, those who find themselves in those situations ordinarily are not faced with the task of creating those definitions out of thin air. Rather, they attempt to assess what the definition should be, and then they act in accordance with that

[35] Herring argued this point by analyzing aggressive rhetorical strategies such as "flaming" on electronic discussion lists .

assessment. However, the personal home page, as a novel communication environment, presents a challenge to interaction because it can support a bewildering variety of situational definitions. As I demonstrated in this chapter, it can be defined in terms of a number of possible communication frameworks addressing multiple contextual communication levels. It may be seen as a framework which supports intrapersonal communicative goals, or conceived of as a targeted medium directly aimed at a particular small group, or characterized as a means of broadcasting information within a broad public milieu— or even put to use at all of these levels concurrently.

As a multi-leveled medium which is capable of supporting a wide variety of situational frameworks, beliefs about the situation of the personal home page can be quite fluid and may shift over time to accommodate multiple layers of experience. As a social context which is ostensibly personal but which nevertheless is publicly accessible, whichever definition is selected may be subjected to the tensions that result from unexpected interactional consequences. As in any social setting where the definition of the situation is subject to negotiation between participants, the tensions between these competing definitions give rise to a number of strategies, both inclusive and exclusive, which authors use in order to assert some control over how their web pages are socially defined and over what kinds of social interaction they engender.

Until now, the mass frameworks typically employed by researchers to characterize the World Wide Web have obscured the inherently social and interactive nature of the personal home page. Since these documents reside in the

broadly accessible environment of the World Wide Web, biases about "normal" operational levels of public media led previous investigators to dismiss the interactive capabilities of the WWW (Walther, 1996) and discount its expressive capabilities (Miller, 1995). The emic approach used in this study has revealed a richly expressive dialectic between the personal and public social contexts of the personal home page. This dialectic would have been obscured by a research model that forced subjects to identify a single relevant social context from an artificially constrained list of pre-determined categories.

By illustrating some of the possible frameworks supported by this technology and focusing on the authors' subjective experience of the audience of their personal home pages in this chapter, I have explored the role these pages play as contexts for (and sometimes as foci of) social interaction at a variety of levels. In the following chapter, I will explore how the self of home page authors is shaped by the interactions enabled within the proscenium arch of the personal home page.

Chapter 6: The Self, Identity, and the Personal Home Page

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The previous chapter, which explored the frames used to characterize personal home pages, emphasized how the home page is used as a resource for managing interaction. This chapter will focus on how personal home pages are also a resource for managing identity; that is, how informants use them for purposes of impression management and as a *technology of self* which supports self exploration, self determination and self expression. It will conclude with a discussion of the potential and actual outcomes of using the personal home page as a technology for managing identity.

Self and identity

The meanings of the terms *self* and *identity* are both passionately contested. Romantic notions of the self as a stable, enduring phenomenon –a "root persona"-- have been challenged by postmodernist approaches that characterize the self as a mobile, dynamic pastiche of subjectivities or as constructed through a continual re-ordering of self-narratives.[36] Traditional positivist psychological approaches frequently define the self in terms of measurable attitudes and evaluations. However, in social psychological

[36] Cerulo (1997) provides a recent, useful review of sociological research on identity which discusses various conceptualizations of these terms, while Gergen (1991) offers an overview of how notions of the self have changed over time. In the interpersonal communication research arena, competing conceptualizations of the self were the topic of debate in the 1994 issue of Communication Yearbook (see Carbaugh, 1994; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Harre, 1994; Shotter & Gergen, 1994 and commentaries in that issue).

approaches, the self is often characterized as a structure of internalized roles (Goffman, 1959) or else as a dynamic process of viewing and responding to one's own behavior through a transactional relationship between the speaker and a generalized other (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Strauss, 1959/1997). These approaches both frame the self as dependent on interaction, as one's possible role positions or identities are established in relationships.

Viewed in this light, *identities* are packages of rules and resources that function as a map, guiding one in one's interaction with others. However, these packages are not complete or static. Instead they are always in process, and always subject to revision as new information and expectations arise in interaction (Hall, 1990, p. 222). *Identifications*, however, are those specific, often observable behaviors that indicate our attachment to other individuals, groups, institutions or value systems.[37] Identity is implicit within home pages, while identifications often explicitly take the form of references (in text or graphic format) or links to other people, pets, organizations, institutions, practices and even products that the authors define themselves in relation with or otherwise value.

In the last chapter, I drew heavily on Goffman's situated action theory to explore how informants framed their home pages. This dramaturgical framework privileged both the informants' views of the audiences they expected to reach through these documents and the informants' own roles in relation to those audiences. Goffman's theatrical metaphor for social interaction provided a useful set of metaphors for analyzing the frames that the informants employed to

[37] A review in a recent Communication Theory article (Scott, et. al., 1998.) clarifies these distinctions.

characterize their web authoring practices. The body of research on impression management that Goffman inspired is also especially pertinent to understanding personal home pages which have been set up as deliberate or strategic self presentational performances and are targeted to specific audiences.

On a theatrical stage, sets are constructed and props are employed to help convey information to the audience about the motivations and characters of the actors. In everyday interaction, people use interactional settings and objects as props to help manage the impressions that others form about the roles they occupy, thus providing a tangible documentation of self. Objects and artifacts are often used as entry points for telling stories about the self and the personal relationships which help define identity, or as foci for structuring these life stories; whenever people talk about these objects, “they are articulating and explicating their own selves" (Riggins, 1994, p.109). Recent sociological studies of interactional settings have demonstrated the relationships between the physical spaces where people enact role performances and the meaningful objects those spaces contain (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Riggins, 1994; Silver, 1996). In particular, these studies found that relationships are established, maintained or changed within particular physical spaces, which are comprised of meaningful objects.

While the personal home page is not a physical environment, the textual and graphical elements that are selected for inclusion within it still have all the expressive and explicative power of tangible objects. The elements which home page authors include in the design of their web sites similarly aid them in

managing impressions and in introducing or constructing personal narratives. To that end, the first part of this chapter will explore the ways in which the web page allows people to convey particular impressions of self by selectively including various graphical and textual elements and links to other pages.

However, Goffman's work on impression management does not necessarily provide a strong analytical framework for those situations in which identity is problematic for the actor as well as for the audience. Yet in the current historical moment (which has been called postmodernity or sometimes "high modernity,"[38] identity is increasingly problematical. According to Giddens (1991) and Gergen (1991), the new communication technologies which pervade our culture expose us to a bewildering diversity of cultures and perspectives within a variety of social and geographical arenas. This multiplicity of evocations, which Gergen elsewhere refers to as immersion in a "relational sublime" (1996) effectively create a destabilization and de-centering of the self. The social saturation common to contemporary life infuses individuals with a plethora of partial identities, which are reflected from their various social surroundings. This "populating of the self"-- a vertiginous "plurality of voices vying for the right to reality"-- results in a multiphrenic condition, in which moral certainties are replaced with a myriad of competing potentials for action and belief (Gergen, 1991, pp. 48-80). Though Gergen does not suggest it, this

[38] In a rejection of the prevalent postmodernist assertion that the current era represents some kind of break from the industrial era and postmodernist critiques of conventional notions of rationality, Giddens uses the terms "high modernity" and "late modernity" in order to characterize our era as the ultimate expression of the modern period. He asserts that there is no basis for interpreting contemporary society as manifestation of a radically new sort of social world since social life is still molded by fundamentally modern concerns (1991).

ontological fracturing of the self corresponds to the mental state culminating from the social condition of relative normlessness which Durkheim, a hundred years ago, referred to as anomie (1893/1997, 1951).

The data recounted in the previous chapters illustrated that social dislocation and anomie often shape individuals' relationships with their personal home pages. The traumas of relocation, rapid career changes and failed marriages that many informants described are each symptomatic of failures of the supposedly stable structures of modernity. In the wake of these misfortunes, the informants turned to the WWW for solace or relief. This turn is ironic since the WWW is one of the very communication technologies implicated by critics as a source of contemporary distress and anomia (see, for example, Nie, 2000).

Yet, perhaps the turn to the Web is more serendipitous than it is ironic. Allucquère Rosanne Stone has claimed that communication technologies have evolved at least in part along with peoples' efforts "to enact and stabilize a sense of *presence* in increasingly diffuse and distributed networks of electronically mediated interaction, and thus also as ways to stabilize self/selves in shifting and unstable fields of power (Stone, 1995, p. 88, italics hers). Individual appropriation of WWW technology for purposes of self-exploration and self-determination certainly represent attempts to use this technology to stabilize the self, or at least to make its representation intelligible. Accordingly, the second part of this chapter will also focus on how the personal home page is a tool that allows its authors to search out or construct a coherent sense of self.[39]

[39] I am purposefully avoiding here the question of whether or not there actually is an ontologically real self, or whether that self should be characterized as monolithic or multiplicitous, as this

To achieve this, I will base this part of the analysis on the narrative approach to the study of social phenomena (see, for example: Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Somers, 1994.) This perspective views narrativity as being ontologically inseparable from social life, since "it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narrative and narrativity that we constitute our social identities" (Somers, 1994, p. 606). It eschews Goffman's rationalist, rule oriented approach to understanding how social realities are constructed and negotiated, and instead focuses on how stories guide action and help people make sense of their experiences. Within this perspective, the "self" is characterized as the storyteller or constructor of narratives about life. The self is viewed "not a static thing, or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one as been but also anticipates what one will be" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150). The stories that people tell each other serve to locate actors in their relationships, in life episodes, in cultural practices and within institutions. Through these stories, people continually discover their own social identities in any given situation; the social world is perceived and made legible by integrating the events in one's life into one's own ongoing narrative (Somers, 1994, pp. 613-614). Therefore, the self is not something that can be apprehended directly; instead, it is a construct created by reflection (Bruner, 1990, ch. 4).

Given that many people create home pages using an informal writing style that mimics conversation, the narrative approach is particularly appropriate for the

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project is unable to shed much light on those philosophical debates. Instead, I intend to keep the focus of this chapter on how self and identity are subjectively experienced in everyday life.

study of personal home pages. As Josh explained, "When I write stuff like this, personal stuff, non-business stuff, non professional stuff, I write as if I'm talking to somebody." That "somebody" is the potential audience for their home page. Whether the audience is real or imaginary, it gives home page authors someone to tell their stories. Through an analysis of both the stories told by informants to account for their home page publishing practices and the types of material included in the web pages themselves, this chapter will discuss how the personal home page helps people to organize and comprehend the myriad identifications which help define who they are. By giving people a public, yet intimate, forum for narrative self exploration, and providing them with hypertextual tools for arranging these narratives, the World Wide Web provides home page authors with a practical, accessible and flexible "technology of self."

According to Michel Foucault, technologies of the self:

> ...permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p.18).[40]

The personal home page is a technology of the self, because it couples a set of tools and resources for understanding, organizing and managing personal identity with an interactional context for engaging in these processes of self-definition.

[40] In the years before his death, Michel Foucault was working towards a simple way of classifying various technologies. The lecture he gave in 1982 about the technologies of the self also included the following classifications:

1. Technologies of production, permitting us to produce, transform, and manipulate things;
2. Technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; and
3. Technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination through an objectification of the subject.

THE HOME PAGE AS TOOL FOR MANAGING THE IMPRESSIONS OF OTHERS

As noted in previous chapters, critics have largely dismissed home pages as primarily oriented towards managing the impressions of others.[41] While the ultimate goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that the home page is more than simply a place to craft intentional self-presentations, the utility of the home page for such purposes cannot be ignored. In his classic studies of face to face interaction, Goffman characterized everyday life as a stage on which individual actors engaged in the presentation of various guises of self, conveying to each other their intentions, their characters, and their preferred definitions of their shared situation (1959). Goffman's theatrical metaphor emphasized the deliberateness of the roles people perform in interaction. This stage metaphor is particularly apt for describing some personal home pages, especially those that are self-consciously fashioned and targeted at particular audiences for instrumental purposes like obtaining a job from potential employers or connecting with possible romantic partners. The personal home page tends to be experienced by viewers as a more static kind of self-presentation than is normally encountered either in playhouses or in everyday interactional settings, and most informants recognized that personal home page could serve as a kind of virtual tableau vivant where particular presentations of self might be staged for others' benefit.

[41] In one example of this kind of classification, Judith Donath, a member of the Sociable Media research group at MIT, declares all personal home pages to be "deliberate self-presentations, places where people present their credentials, whether as established research scientists with impressive vitae and selected bibliographies, or as electronic trend-setters with eclectic web links and obscure lists of outrageous bands" (1997). However, in the same paragraph, she notes that some pages are "embarrassingly personal, detailing the owner's emotional states and family psychodramas" without questioning why anyone crafting a deliberate self-presentation should choose to disclose such intimate and potentially discrediting information in the public context of the WWW.

Those informants who reported making deliberate attempts to manage the impressions of those viewing their home pages were careful to select elements for inclusion within their sites accordingly. For example, when I asked Lori about the criteria that she used to select photographs and other materials for her web site, she explained: " I wanted to show that I'm intellectual and sensual and creative." She included her professional information as well as poetry she had written and photos of herself she considered flattering, imagining the impression that viewers would form about her after viewing her web site:

> They would see my resume,
> and they would see that I'm a publishing professional.
> And then they would see this very exotic side of me with the sexy photos.
> They would see that animals are very important to me
> because I have pictures of my pets...
> They would see that I like poetry, that's a very important thing to me....
> They would see that I have HTML skills
> because obviously I've produced this whole site.

The theatrical metaphor is doubly germane to home page authors who, like Lori, are seeking employment in Web related industries, since their personal sites also give them an opportunity to stage demonstrations of their Web design skills. As Laura said, "My personal stuff is also important to me to get up, because it's also my portfolio where I can show off these tricks that I've learned." Given the competitiveness of the job market and the rapid pacing of the modern world, the personal home page was seen as a valuable resource for self-promotion.

The home page allows authors more control and flexibility than is ordinarily possible within the confines of other instrumentally targeted self-presentations such as resumes or personal ads. In one example, Andy discussed

how the self-presentational capabilities of his home page might have helped him during a job search:

> I noticed that when I interviewed for the position I have now,
> they had noticed that I put my URL on my resume when I submitted it,
> so they had a chance to look at it and see what I'm all about.

When I asked him if he thought that helped him get his job, he said:

> I think so.
> I think that it gives employers a chance to see
> what kind of person the individual wants to present himself as
> to the general public.
> And can kind of tell if they're going to get along well with the group
> and if there are any potential problems...
> Especially since interviews are often really short for contractors.
> I mean generally there's a five minute phone screen
> and then they decide in that five minutes
> whether they want to call you back for an in-house thing
> and then you have interviews run about twenty minutes,
> thirty minutes long at the most...
> So trying to pack as much information about yourself to them
> in that limited amount of time is generally what people's goals are.
> And I think the web page is a good way of doing it.

The personal home page is always available through the WWW, so it may create more lasting impressions than quick telephone calls or brief face to face encounters do in the minds of recruiters. It also has the potential to be disseminated to more potential employers (or romantic partners, or other targeted audiences) than would ordinarily be economically feasible through traditional self-promotional channels. And like identity itself, it can undergo continual modification and always seems subject to being “under construction.”

Professional personas and presentations

Several authors used terms like "professional" to denote a well-executed personal home page, and they often strove to achieve "professionalism" in their own self-presentations. Even authors like Marsha and Holly, who claimed that their home pages were geared exclusively towards personal use, judged their own authoring efforts according to standards culled from the marketplace. Holly told me of her plans for future revisions of her home page: "I want to change it, I want to make it like real professional and stuff, like other people have personal home pages that are really professional, and I could show you ones that I aspire to be like." I asked her what it was about those pages that she thought was appealing, and she said, "It's the graphics, and it's the way they're designed--even though they're personal pages they look very professional. Like a web designer did them. Whereas mine doesn't." Then through a self-deprecating laugh she said " I think mine's kind of like folk art. Very simplistic." Marsha struggled to explain this criterion when she told me what she wanted to accomplish in future revisions of her home site:

> I'd like to retain some of the warmth that I've tried to put in it,
> and personality,
> but organize it better, and make it look less amateurish...
> I don't want it to look clinical, I don't want it to look flashy,
> I want the content and the warmth and the caring to come through.
> I want who I am to come through.
> But I'd like it to look a little more professional.

The use of "professionalism" as a prevailing criterion of value for judging the intimate expressions found on individual home pages illustrates how quickly frames of reference taken from commodity capitalism have permeated the

networks of the World Wide Web. Perhaps the proliferation of slick and stylish Web sites that are geared towards electronic commerce and corporate identification and which are produced by specialty design firms have raised users' expectations for web page design.

In his book Modernity and Self-Identity, the British sociologist Anthony Giddens warned that under the conditions of late or "high modernity," the project of the self can become heavily commodified, with consumption replacing the development of coherent narratives of self-identity (1991, pp. 196-202). On the Web, however, the commodification of the project of the self plays a reversal. The self-narrative is packaged for presentation as though it too is a commodity, and the same design standards that are used to judge commercial web sites are uncritically applied to personal home pages.

The veracity of self presentations on personal home pages

The amount of control that home page authors can exercise over their self presentations often inspires anxieties about the warrantability (Stone, 1995, p. 87) and credibility (Donath, in press) of these documents. If one is browsing home pages on the WWW, one often cannot tell if the author of a given home page is misrepresenting his or her personal information, or even if an actual embodied person is associated with the home page in any sense. Although a small number of informants thought they had been too vague or elliptical about their personal lives on their home pages to convey much of an impression, most of those who volunteered to be interviewed for this study asserted (albeit with a few qualifications) that their online self presentations were reasonably factual.

However, most also acknowledged that their home pages might provide a perspective that was either somewhat exaggerated or partially incomplete.

In some cases, this incompleteness was intentional. Josh purposely toned down his online self-presentation because he felt it might impede his ability to achieve his instrumental goals of finding romance and marketing himself professionally: "I'm a lot more rambunctious that I let on--- that sort of turns people off."[42] In other cases, omissions are not so much a matter of tactics as they are of hopefulness. For example, when Andy and I talked about aspects of his personality and personal life that he chose not to discuss on his home page, he explained, "I left some of that stuff out, but it's not so much because I'm ashamed of it, as because the person I presented myself to be online is who I'd like to be." In other words, he purposefully decided to edit potentially disconfirming personal information (such as his poor performance as a student), thus creating an online version of himself intended to represent the person he hoped he was at his best.

Frank, an informant who began his home page with the hope of finding romantic partners, admitted that he had strategically embellished his self-presentation somewhat. He talked about how he had padded the list of his favorite books on his home page, remarking:

> I'm also very insecure and I also want people to think
> that I'm much more well-rounded than I sometimes am…
> so at least on the books I took a little bit of license with that
> and I actually did add several books--
> there's not by any stretch a lot of them--
> but there are a few books in here that I put on there that I haven't read yet.

[42] He then illustrated this by making a "boingy, boingy" noise with his finger to his lips and then laughing to indicate insanity.

> Basically I wanted to show people that I had breadth
> and there's a lot of things that I'm interested in.
> And it's not that I'm not interested in them,
> I just haven't read those books.

However, most of the informants claimed that they sought to provide as comprehensive picture of themselves as they possibly could, even if that meant revealing some of their character flaws. George even published a letter on his home page that he had received from his sister because he thought it imparted a "pretty honest" and "completely unbiased" perspective on his personality:

> ...It's part of presenting yourself to people,
> and I try to be really honest about myself.
> She had some good things to say about me in there,
> but she also said "Hey look,
> he can be really stubborn or restless also."

Nevertheless, even the most forthcoming informants acknowledged that the impressions made by their home pages were necessarily imperfect. George elaborated on what readers might learn about him by reading his page:

> … if they applied a little bit of insight
> they would find out some of the things that are important to me…
> Actually, they would assume that these things on here
> were the three most important things to me,
> which is not necessarily accurate.
> There are bunch of other things I like doing
> which I didn't bother sitting down and saying,
> "Here's what I like doing."

Some of the informants suggested that readers who exercised that "little bit of insight" when reading homepages were more likely to form an accurate impression of their authors. Goffman differentiates between "expressions given"— deliberately stated messages which indicate how an individual wants to be perceived-- and "expressions given off," which he regards as subtle, often

unintentional nuances of action and behavior (1959). When informants were asked if a person looking at their home pages would get any sense of who they were, they sometimes replied in terms of the impressions given off by the page rather than in terms of actual content. For example, Leslie answered:

> I think so. I mean, it's quirky and weird. It's lazy. It's very irreverent.
> It's almost the opposite of a serious homepage,
> like a site where someone says,
> "here are my very serious interests in vegetarianism," and whatever.
> I mean, I think people would definitely get a good sense of me.

Within personal home pages, many elements are capable of giving off impressions. The design and color scheme, the expressive style of the text, the choice of images and links, even the hosting service provider or the type of HTML editor used, can convey impressions to viewers that may have been unintended by the authors of the page. Readers interpret the tacit and explicit cues founds on the personal home page in accordance with their own expectations, understandings and experience, in order to form an impression about the person presented on the site.

On the other hand, the impressions that home pages give off may be subtly and deliberately manufactured. James, who characterized his home pages as largely a means of marketing himself in the new industry of commercial web page design, consciously took advantage of the dramaturgic possibilities of the Web when he set out to create his personal site. He claimed that he essentially intended to promote himself as an "Internet persona":

> ...and this is one way to do it, you know:
> create my little own theater around it....
> I mean that's what I'm doing, It's advertising and promotion.

> And since I'm starting with this whole web-design,
> writer business fairly late,
> I mean I'm fifty-six, that's late to be starting,
> so I have to slam it, I gotta do it really fast
> and I have to sort of create the illusion of a web persona
> and that's all what this is doing.

He explained that his choices about the content, design and breadth of his site were actually purposeful attempts to control his self-presentation. His approach to controlling the subtext of his web site was based on his understanding of the impressions he formed when reading others' web pages, and by projecting himself into the mind of the reader and imagining the impression they would form when encountering his web site. He commented:

> If somebody was halfway perceptive,
> they'd learn a lot about me from the site…
> there's a lot of indirect stuff you can learn
> without my actually telling you.
> There's a lot of subtext to it…
> I mean it's obvious if you look at it
> that I've had a very diverse background,
> that I've had an interesting if unusual childhood,
> that I've done a number of things that are all very different
> and I've done them all pretty well.
> So that should tell somebody that this guy's pretty bright,
> that if he can master (all these skills)
> and he's a writer and a graphic designer,
> he must be smarter than the average bear….
> I want people to look at the site and go,
> "Jesus, this guy is really brilliant."

Given that some authors are, like James, conscious enough of the subtleties of page design to exploit it in crafting their online presentations, it may often be difficult for the casual reader to know which expressions are intentionally given off and which are accidental.

Overview of self presentation and the home page

The personal home page has several attributes that appeal to those who wish to exploit it for purposes of impression management. It offers the author enhanced distribution as well as more flexibility and control over appearance and more persistence to comparable self-presentational documents such as the personal advertisement or the resume. Most informants in this study asserted that the impressions created by their home pages were likely to be reasonably accurate reflections of them, although they might be somewhat distorted.

Informants who actively used the home page as a means of managing the impressions of others described consciously choosing content and design elements in order to convey particular impressions. These presentations of self may be intended to convey role identifications as well as aspects of personality and appearance. However, unlike face to face self presentations, which are rarely intended to demonstrate one's impression-management skills, many informants found home pages to be useful for demonstrating one's abilities at crafting web pages and used them to convey their digital design or programming talents to targeted audiences. The criterion of professionalism in design and presentation was cited by several informants as a measure of the quality of a personal home page, even when the home page was not ostensibly aimed at marketing one's professional web design abilities. The pervasiveness of this kind of appraisal may indicate an increased commodification of WWW self-presentations; this trend may be related to the ongoing colonization of the Web by corporate interests.

THE HOME PAGE AS TECHNOLOGY FOR SELF-EXPLORATION

While the World Wide Web allows authors tremendous opportunities for crafting and publishing strategic self-presentations aimed at specific audiences, the personal home page is also an extraordinary resource for self-exploration and personal growth. As I have noted previously, the theories of symbolic interaction which inform this project embrace the notion that the self-concept arises out of symbolic exchanges between individuals or between an individual and his or her conception of others (see for example Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1902; Mead & Morris, 1934; Strauss, 1959/1997). Since the self emerges dialectically through reflection of the ideas about oneself that one attributes to other people, identity cannot be constructed in isolation. Others are always present, at least psychologically. The personal home page provides a functional framework that allows these dialectical exchanges to take place. Accordingly the home page is, in effect, an adaptable, accessible and substantive expression of Cooley's "looking-glass self." As Cooley wrote,

> In a very large and interesting class of cases the social reference takes the form of a somewhat definite imagination of how one's self--that is any idea he appropriates--appears in a particular mind, and the kind of self-feeling one has is determined by the attitude toward this attributed to that other mind. A social self of this sort might be called the reflected or looking glass self:
>
> > "Each to each a looking-glass
> >
> > Reflects the other that doth pass."
>
> As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our

> appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it (1902, pp. 183-185).

Like a looking glass, the home page offers its authors a means of observing presentations of their own design, and in seeing and crafting these presentations, imagining how others perceive them because of it. Madeline addressed this symbolic relation between herself, her audience, and the home page directly:

> I think that in a way your audience is yourself, because it's all a mirror.
> I mean the whole world is a reflection, from certain perspectives,
> and I guess I have that perspective.
> So it's a way of communicating, and simultaneously,
> it's an incredible possibility for checking in on your own reflection.

While the mirror metaphor does invoke imagery of deliberate impression management, such as the self- conscious primping and preparations that ordinarily take place in backstage regions[43], it can also imply a sense of withdrawing from direct interaction and devoting time to self-contemplation.

As I established in the previous chapter, the personal home page is both framed by authors in terms of both back regions and front regions, sometimes even concurrently. Yet even when the authors of these documents insist that their creations are primarily self directed rather than targeted at a particular audience, the WWW home page remains fundamentally a relational phenomenon, a way to reflexively imagine the self in interaction. Sometimes the acts of publishing and contextualizing the material on the home page for potential readers is what makes

[43] Cooley also noted that the looking-glass metaphor fails to adequately suggest the essential element of the onlooker's imagined judgement

it legible to the authors, and allows him them to incorporate it into their ongoing narratives of self. As Madeline reflected:

> I think I've done the whole site to "find out" rather than to "present."
> And then I go back in and try to present it, and contextualize it.
> But for me, it's all been a wonderful way of finding out what I mean.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the exploitation of the public milieu of the WWW for this self-exploration can be linked theoretically to the anomic conditions of contemporary social life. The mass media qualities of the Web are perhaps crucial to its utility as a tool for self-reflection in the current era. As Kellner has suggested, "modernity also increases Other-directness… for as the number of possible identities increases, one must gain recognition to assume a stable, recognized identity" (Kellner, 1992, p. 142). Engaging in self-exploration and self-definition in the public space of the Internet provides home page authors with countless potentials for recognition and affirmation among those who browse the Web. Of course, there are other channels available where people can engage in self-disclosure and self-determination in the presence of a mass audience. The television talk show is one prime example (see Priest, 1995). However the personal home page provides more control over one's self presentation than is usually available to guests on television talk shows or similar tell-all mass media formats, where stories are often sensationalized by the producers to increase audience share.[44]

[44] See Priest, 1995 for examples of how the stories of panelists on Donahue and similar talk shows are exaggerated or otherwise exploited by the shows' producers.

In addition to providing ready-made social contexts or access to reference groups for reflection, the technology of the Web provides additional self-exploratory resources. While letters, journals, diaries, scrapbooks and photograph albums also allow people to compose coherent narratives of identity, the technology underlying Web documents sets it apart from these other types of personal media on several counts. The flexible hypertext markup language that underlies the WWW provides authors with a framework where the different identifications and episodes that together comprise a narrative of self may be laid out, arranged, connected and re-arranged. One can conveniently archive aspects of one's life, edit them, revise them, and link them to things which define oneself, all in the presence of an implicit reference group, in ways that are not available in any other format. The hypermedia qualities of the home page can support linear, chronological narratives, but unlike diaries and autobiographies, they also lend themselves to a more episodic, situated and associational organization of materials that may be quite diffuse thematically or even spatially. Hyperlinks on a home page may connect it to information existing physically on the drives of widely dispersed computers anywhere on the Internet.

Madeline described the work she did putting her home page together as an "exploration or excavation" of her identity. The process of reviewing a lifetime's collection of artistic works originally created for other settings and media, and repurposing it into a new synthesis for the WWW, became a kind of an archaeology of the sedimentary layers of her self:

> It’s really a way of discovering your own language,
> and with a richness that you didn't even know you had.
> And it's a very poetic experience of not knowing ‘til you see it...
> but as a process for doing, for seeing yourself reflected on a screen,
> being able to draw connections where their weren't connections
> is really rich.

The unlimited bricolage and revision permitted by hypermedia makes the home page an appropriate tool for making sense of the self in the ontologically precarious circumstances of the current era. It enables people to manage the shifting, fluid multiple identifications that they face in day to day life by associating them in ways that are equally indeterminate and partial, yet still recognizably bound together in some kind of unity.

Since identity is often a matter of relations as well as of roles, the links and pictures of significant others (including family, friends and even pets) and the references to current and past employment settings which are found on most personal home pages situate their authors in webs of social relationships and provide frameworks that can support their self-definitions. For example, Holly dedicated part of her home site to her nephew and devoted another section of it to her pets. These pages included pictures, poetry, and her thoughts about being, respectively, an aunt and a pet owner. Although (as discussed in Chapter 5) she described the section about her nephew as a kind of a gift to her brother’s son, she also recognized that the focus of the writing in this section was largely on herself and her relationships to the growing child and their shared family: “It's about him, but a lot of it's about me too, really.” The same held true about the material about her pets. Exploring her role as an “aunt” and as an animal owner in a public context demonstrated her commitment to her family and her beloved pets.

Similarly, she felt it was important to include some references to her current boyfriend, and accordingly included a link from her home page to his. She explained:

> I thought if I'm saying who I am, I should talk about him
> because he's part of who I am now.
> I live where I live because of him,
> I live in the house I live in because of him.
> So I should include him on my "who am I" page.

These identifications provided her with a stable foundation on which she could construct a coherent sense of self.

Disruption and reconstruction: the home page as a therapeutic intervention

In my interviews of those informants who primarily characterized their home pages as a technology for self-exploration and personal growth, a common theme emerged. Each of them experienced some significant crisis that derailed the expected trajectory of their lives. This disruption may have come in the form of a traumatic divorce or cross-country relocation, the death of a close friend or long periods of unemployment, or sometimes even a combination of these events. Many of these informants claimed that working on their personal pages had a therapeutic quality which seemed to help them to adjust to, and reach equilibrium with, the transformed circumstances of their lives.

Anthony Giddens defined therapy as a methodology for life planning, a way of allowing individuals to develop self-understanding and to harmonize present concerns and plans for the future. He noted that in the current historical moment, modern therapies and self-help movements offer aid to those who want

to construct and reconstruct their life narratives, thus enabling them to establish a reliable sense of self in the context of a seemingly hostile and threatening world (1991, pp. 179-180). Catastrophic life changes often induce people to review their lives and even to re-negotiate their identities as they strive to incorporate those changes into coherent life narratives. Giddens dubbed these disruptions "fateful moments" where routines are disturbed and individuals must "rethink fundamental aspects of (their) existence and future projects" (op. cit., pp. 202-203).

In her phenomenological treatise on disrupted lives, Becker examined cultural constructions of normalcy and investigated how disruptions to the orderly, planned course of one's life can bring about renewed efforts at self discovery and highlight concerns about how the self is portrayed to others:

> …when expectations about the course of life are not met, people experience inner chaos and disruption. Such disruptions represent loss of the future. Restoring order to life necessitates reworking understandings of the self and the world, redefining the disruption and life itself (Becker, 1997, pp. 3-4).

Informants in this study who were forced to cope with the unanticipated consequences of significant life disruptions found the personal home page to be a useful tool in the struggle to restore order and meaning to their lives. The mediated environment of the home page provided them with an instrumentality or protected space for recalibrating their identities in the wake of their personal calamities.

Jordan's poignant story exemplifies this kind of disrupted life. He stumbled onto the World Wide Web shortly after he relocated to California from a

small town in the deep South. He desperately needed to reconstitute himself after a severe episode of depression and withdrawal that followed the deaths of several of his childhood friends:

> My oldest friend had cancer when she was 17.
> And that incident sparked off this long cycle of people dying in my life,
> and I think that directs a lot of it—
> trying to make something permanent.
> I discovered that the rest of my life
> was completely out of control and pointless.
> I couldn't understand any of it.
> I mean there was nothing that made sense.
> I had to re-figure all that stuff out.
> That was just chaotic, that was bad.
> But I did have this little laptop
> and I just sort of crept into its corner for six months.
> And I slept on my parents' couch.
> And I was very depressed. For a long time.
> And I didn't talk to anybody.
> And I don't think I changed clothes more than four times.
> It was very horrible.

Retreating into the world of computers and web design gave Jordan a safe place to reconstruct himself after the metaphoric death of his previous persona:

> I got into computers as a therapeutic method.
> Machines were something I could control...
> It's like if everything that you know is a house of cards,
> everybody goes through life and usually you pull out a card
> and pieces of it fall down and you've got to build it back up again...
> This was all taking place pretty much after that,
> so what I consider happening
> was that the person that I was then is dead now.
> Because there's very little of who I am now,
> very little of my beliefs and understandings
> and ways that I deal with people
> that was like it was before.

Over time, Jordan's personal site evolved into a huge collection of pages ranging from biographical material, presentations of his creative writing and artwork, a section devoted to satire and another devoted to sharing computer resources. Writing down his feelings and memories and assembling a presentation of them for his web pages allowed Jordan to confront and resolve his emotional distress enough to venture out into a social world he formerly perceived as unstable and meaningless.

Given the widespread cultural dissemination of psychoanalytical memes, perhaps it is not surprising that the informants who used their web sites as a technology for self exploration and self-control commonly described them using therapeutic terminology. Marsha, another informant who used her home pages both to express and to clarify her emotions, explicitly used this terminology when she characterized her home page work as a way of dealing with her feelings about her family's relocation to California:

> I wanted it almost as therapy for myself,
> to help me break away the connections
> that I still felt back to the East Coast.
> I decided to approach it as therapy for myself.
> It really is therapy,
> and it's a chance to pour out my concerns about things that bothered me,
> and open up to people that I know and don't know.

Marsha made the following observations about the connection between her interest in web publishing and the circumstances of her disruptive cross-country move:

> I don't think that, still living in New York and not having relocated,
> I would have had the motivation to pour myself out into something,

> sort of to reaffirm who I was and what I cared about,
> and that it was still the same,
> even though I was in a very different place physically.
> I wouldn't have had the motivation to do that.
> I was very comfortable, very satisfied,
> very happy with everything that was going on,
> I had no desire to change it. ...
> Moving to a place where I had to make so many changes,
> I needed a way to convince myself I was still okay
> and the things that were important to me are still important.

The personal home page gave those informants who were trying to pick up the scattered pieces of themselves in the aftermath of traumatic life experiences a place to put those pieces in order. By providing a forum for airing negative emotions, the web page helped these informants acknowledge the grief and frustrations they felt because of their changed situations. At the very least, work on their home pages provided them with a respite from the frustrations they were facing in adjusting to their changed status, while in some situations the Web explicitly granted a space to reconstruct a sense of self and to re-establish a sense of continuity and control over their lives. Writing the home page also helped them obtain some perspective on their distress that allowed them to resolve it positively. As Wanda claimed, "it helped me think it through and get through some of these things."

In addition, the public context of the WWW home page provided informants with a means of validating their personal experience that would not have been available through private mechanisms of self-reflection. The symbolic importance of the audience for personal home pages in this process of self presentation was critical, as the impetus for continued page production was

ultimately that some reader or public might eventually see and respond to the materials published on the WWW. Even those informants who claimed to have begun home page publishing exclusively for themselves acknowledged this. As Madeline confessed, "I get a complete charge out of an email a week, or whatever it is that I get. One person out there seeing it, and being prompted to write back, that's all I need."

Some of these informants perceived the potential of recognition from visitors to their personal home pages as a source of validation that could improve their self-esteem. Marsha imagined that someday her conception of her target audience would broaden as she gained confidence in voicing her own opinions:

> If I get any feedback about it that says,
> "Oh wow, I was really touched"
> or, "what a great story" or something...
> it might encourage me to add more of not just those external things,
> but things that come from me.

The idea of having something to say that would be of interest to a broad audience was a goal that Marsha moved towards cautiously in her continued search for self-esteem and kept her involved with her publishing project. Similarly, publication of personal material also became a way for Holly to prove her self-worth, by putting her own work on the line:

> Do I have the guts to put something I wrote on this place
> where anybody in the world can see it,
> even though I really don't believe that they will?
> But I put it there and people can read it
> and I have to answer for it if they question me or whatever.

The public nature of the WWW was a necessary and integral part of its function as a channel for identity construction for these informants. The implicit but removed audience of the Web lends a kind of liminal quality to the act of assembling a representation of the self for presentation through this medium. The time spent authoring a personal home page is essentially a *psychosocial moratorium*[45] where one can take time out to construct a representation of the self that is both recognizable and personally meaningful.

Even when informants characterized their personal home pages as a personal medium rather than as a means of communication with others, they implicated the public social context of the WWW as a prime catalyst for self-exploration. While a few of them seemed somewhat embarrassed by this aspect of home page authorship during the interview, others embraced it more explicitly. As Antonio asserted:

> My philosophy is that if people have a Web page,
> whether it's for a department for a university,
> for a business, or just a personal page,
> that the reason you're there is because you want to present yourself...
> whether it's for vanity's sake, or informational purposes,
> or for selling a product.
> But a lot of people are kind of adverse to doing any kind of ownership of
> "oh, look at me, look at me, look at me,"
> which is what we all want, but we don't always admit it.

Antonio's characterization of all personal web pages as a plea for personal attention points, however cynically, to an important aspect of this phenomenon: it is essentially a public medium, regardless of how it may be exploited for private

[45] Erik Erikson characterized the *psychosocial moratorium* as a period of adolescence "during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him" (1959).

aims. The hypermedia qualities that are exploited by WWW home pages do not actually require public dissemination for their operation. Home page authors could have easily used the digital editing tools provided by the Web for self expression without making their revelations available to the public, and in fact a few of them did say that they worked off-line for a time before publishing their creations. However, the public milieu of the WWW is an important resource for those who exploit it for identity work. The personal home page creates a symbolic gateway to imagined or real reference groups that serve as potential sources of validation or self-confirmation.

The home page as a technology for self-control, self-determination and self expression

In addition to serving as a technology for self-exploration, the personal home page can be an important resource for self-expression and self-determination. In the disorienting fog of social possibilities present in contemporary life, the home page can represent an anchor for the self as well as a claxon for proclaiming one's distinctiveness through myriad thunderous waves of competing voices. Even the terminology of the home page is rooted: building a home in cyberspace suggests creating a safe harbor, a sanctum for the self that is accessible from almost anywhere.

Its virtual accessibility makes the home page the perfect technology for modern nomads. In earlier chapters, I related the stories informants told of using the home page as a way of staying connected with distant friends or for archiving material for personal use they could reach from any place. It also provides a

refuge of stability in a destabilized world. Holly talked about how her personal home site gave her a sense of familiarity and orientation: “It's like something I'm really comfortable with now, like a picture that I have hanging on the wall that I see every day.

Giddens claims that familiarity and routine provide a means of combating the anomia of contemporary life, although in ways he sees as relatively brittle and shallow because they sustain ontological security by sidestepping potentially disturbing existential questions (1991, p. 202). Some informants believed that the routine of their home page publishing work provided them with the security and distraction requisite to overcoming depression and other dysphoric mood states. This was especially apparent for those informants who were trying to overcome the dislocation and depression caused by recent personal crises. In addition to providing them with the space to reassess and reintegrate their disrupted personal narratives and linking the authors to sources of potential affirmation, the WWW also served a more mundane function. Work on the home page helped fill the otherwise unstructured time that often accompanies relocations, unemployment, or the loss of significant others. Marsha provides an example of this in her description of using her home page as a technology of self-control. Afraid that she would slide into a deep seasonal depression intensified by the loneliness and dislocation caused by her West Coast exile, she determined to distract herself through work on her home pages. She declared her approach a complete success:

> I really didn't have that seasonal depression that I usually have.
> And anytime I felt myself getting kind of surly and queer about it,
> I would just sort of walk around with a digital camera

and take some more pictures of something
and upload them and figure out what to do with them.

In yet another example of the use of the home page for purposes of self-mastery, Madeline described how working on her web site kept her going despite the challenges and frustrations inherent in seeking a new career:

I just got turned down for my umpteenth millionth job application
and I was so depressed I got back into it.
And it was with this web site that I began to realize
that I could work and keep myself together
when I was really wanting to fall apart.
So it's been very therapeutic....
I do it when I'm under the most stress.

Madeline found that the intense concentration and labor involved in creating a web site distracted her from the depression that threatened to engulf her as she adjusted to a new life in a new city. In addition to providing her with a practical means of reaching potential employers, her web site work gave her a sense of accomplishment. It enabled her to moderate her stress level as well as providing her with a means of reviewing her past and putting it into some kind of perspective.

Other informants reported using the home page as a source of self-control in more mundane circumstances, such as relieving boredom or alleviating insomnia. In one example, Andy claimed that the only time he worked on his web pages was during the late night hours when he was unable to nod off:

... it makes my mind kind of go a lot faster
than I can actually get things down,
and then that wears me out.
And so I'll just save it, or decide,
"No, I'm not going to deal with this,"
and shut off the machine and go to sleep.

Although habitual web page authoring may be criticized by some as a shallow response to anomie, the routine of working on a home page is perhaps a more productive way of filling unstructured hours than other pervasive methods such as watching television or playing video games. Even if home page authoring does not directly address the causes of isolation, loneliness or other dysphoric mood states, it can provide a means of enhanced social engagement or even result in the acquisition of new skills related to digital design.

Mastering these new and eminently marketable skills, which can lead one's life in new directions, is another important form of self control imparted by the personal home page. The explosion of the "dot com" economy has created opportunities for workers experienced in web design and digital editing. As illustrated previously, many informants characterized their work on their home pages in terms of career advancement, either in terms of a practice canvas where they could acquire web related skills, or as a portfolio for demonstrating their mastery of them. Acquiring and demonstrating their digital design and editing skills was seen as a possible route to higher paying, more rewarding jobs and economic security. For example, Laura recreated herself as a web designer after "burning out" in her previous career as a travel agent:

> I started really taking some hard looks
> about what I wanted to do in a perfect world,
> how I would make a living...
> I've been writing home pages for 3 or 4 years,
> and it was only about a year or so ago that I got the opportunity
> to sort of start over again from scratch,
> and this is what I want to do.

Since the personal home page is under the direct control of the author, it provides a safe realm for learning and experimenting with these skills. As Larry explained,

> ... it gives me a place to practice things that I need to do,
> because I'm doing web development work,
> and if I do something that doesn't work quite right on my own site,
> it's no big deal.

The design, coding and editing skills that were developed and displayed on these personal home pages provided opportunities for advancement, and new visions for personal success along with improved feelings of self-worth.

Home pages as a technology of self-expression

Not only does the personal home page impart the ability to define oneself to others; it also allows its authors to insist on their individuality while potentially gaining recognition for it. Regardless of the initial impetus for creating the home page, about a third of the informants claimed that the central motivating factor for their work on their personal home pages was related to the fulfillment of some personal need for self expression. The ability to creatively express one's personality and assert one's uniqueness in a public context is a special quality of the World Wide Web making it especially suited as a technology of individuation.

Holly was one of several who discovered that the home page gave her a chance to express her artistic side. She pointed out the original pictures and poetry she included on her website, saying:

> I sort of became addicted to it when I first started doing it,
> because when I was younger I used to paint,
> and then I did a lot of writing when I was in college.
> And since then I haven't done anything,
> and I never had any creative outlet,

> and I didn't think I had any creativity left in me.
> And when I started doing this, it started all coming out;
> it sort of becomes my creative outlet.

The potential audience insinuated by the public of the Web context is just as instrumental in encouraging the publication of these creative expressions as they are in encouraging self-construction. In a sense, the World Wide Web is like a refrigerator door where members of a household proudly post their latest accomplishments, generously sharing them with others or, possibly, hoping for recognition and approbation. Even those authors who consistently claimed that their home pages were expressly personal in nature acknowledged the importance of these implied onlookers. Wanda was one of these:

> That's really the main reason I did it,
> just as self expression for the fun of it.
> Not to sell a product or even to have an audience.
> It's kind of an interesting idea though,
> what if you did that and no one ever looked at it? Ever?
> Why would you bother doing that?

Although Wanda claimed that she would still continue to work on her home page even if no one else ever looked at it simply because she enjoyed the process, the possibility of interacting with others (even indirectly) through the instrumentality of the home page inspired her continued revision of the site:

> ...other people might find it similar to their own experience---
> I find that sort of thing very supportive,
> to know that I'm not the only one in the world with a problem.
> So I figured maybe somebody would appreciate it from that standpoint.

In addition to offering validation to those who might relate to the feelings expressed on the web site, the communicative properties of the home page also work in reverse. Disclosing emotional content on a home page potentially

enables authors to make connections with others who feel the same and who might respond to the page by e-mail and validate the authors' expressions, too.

By providing a forum where individuals can express their individuality by publishing documents that essentially compete with mainstream, corporate and hegemonic messages for attention, the WWW also offers home page authors an accessible site for political and cultural resistance. Just as the ability to speak out, to claim one's voice, is a necessary part of the process of self transformation, it can also provide those who are used to being defined by others (as a consumer, a woman, a member of a racial or political minority, or anyone who has been marginalized) with an empowering chance for self definition.

Antonio described how his frustration at being marginalized on the WWW as a member of a Spanish-speaking minority group inspired his initial home page publishing efforts:

> ...I was looking for Latin American resources on the Internet
> and I couldn't find any, and I was really, really upset about it.
> Because I kept on hearing all this hype, like the "global village"
> and how everybody can be connected and everything is going to be equal,
> and that's a lie.
> It's only true if you speak English.
> So I got upset...
> I was looking for other people that were my color
> or listened to my kind of music or spoke my family's language,
> so when I was looking for the people
> that were Latino or Latin American or Spanish-speaking,
> I was really looking for a part of me out there
> that I could make contact with.

Articulating these definitions of self in the public arena of the Web can be seen as an illustration of what bell hooks calls "talking back." In her book by that

name, hooks discusses how the process of recounting the story of one's life to others validates and certifies one's experience, triggering the self-analysis which can provide the necessary perspective for establishing a critical consciousness. "Moving from silence to speech," she insists, "is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (1989, p. 9). The WWW home page provides those on the periphery with a means of certification and validation by allowing them to make connections with others that share their perspectives and can relate to their experiences. Thus, they may learn that they are not as alone and powerless as they may have originally believed. Antonio, for example, received positive responses from Spanish speaking people all over the world, thanking him for making Spanish language references available. He said that these responses were instrumental in making him realize that he was part of a bigger community that he had initially thought, and that this gave him new ways to define himself: "I realized that I wasn't just part of the Chicano community, I was part of a more global community of Latinos."

Creating and maintaining a personal home page offers a variety of avenues for achieving mastery and self-determination, from merely diverting the author from dysphoric mood states, to enabling the author to become proficient in new skills which can provide new employment opportunities, and even suggesting new associations and self-definitions. By creating a safe public venue for individual expression that is accessible from anywhere, the personal home page enables its authors to obtain a sense of stability, ownership and control or self-determination.

Simultaneously, it provides authors with a chance to gain outside affirmation of their personal experiences by broadcasting them to others who may relate to and authenticate their feelings, allowing them to feel connected rather than isolated.

Outcomes experienced from using the home page as a technology of self

A few of the informants interviewed for this study rejected the idea that publishing a personal home page had any consequences for their self conceptions or for their relationships with others. However, these informants tended to have the most limited involvement in home page authoring either in how long they had been publishing, or how much effort and time they had put into their pages. Most of the informants claimed that their home pages had contributed to an improved sense of well being, or to the attainment of interpersonal or occupational goals, or both. Laura, for example, characterized her work on her home page as an instrumental part of her struggle to overcome relational crises and dislocation, empowering her to achieve her personal goals:

> It's astonishing the things that I've survived
> and how I've come out the other end of it,
> and the things that I've learned about myself
> and how I'm much more strong and confident about myself
> since I've started writing this.
> And I don't know necessarily that it's a function of the web site,
> but the web site has certainly been integral into that process.
> It's been one of the tools that I've used for that process.

Jordan's experiences provided another example of the potential of the personal home page as a potent technology of self. He was still in the process of re-inventing himself as a computer programmer and professional web site designer at the time of our initial interview. Not long afterwards, he attained a position as

a lead web designer at a prominent design agency, largely on the strength of the skills he developed and demonstrated while creating his web site, and has since achieved a substantial measure of professional success in this field while continuing to maintain his sobriety. These stories illustrate how the home page can provide the means to a conscious and reflective re-creation of self, which can affect life beyond the confines of the computer screen.

Although the majority of those interviewed for this study reported that their experiences with publishing a home page had been chiefly positive, the practice does not seem to be entirely without hazards. In a few of the interviews, informants revealed an almost compulsive relationship with home page authoring, becoming fixated on it for hours. For example, Madeline described her initial experience to home page authoring by saying, "I couldn't stop myself. It was like if people are addicted to the Web, I was addicted to this work." The language of obsession that informants sometimes invoked to describe their home page publishing is somewhat troubling, due to the fundamental self-absorption necessary to producing these documents of self. Indeed, several informants ironically characterized their home page work as essentially egotistical endeavors. As Lori said, sardonically, "The whole thing is just a vanity, an exercise in vanity."

Twenty years ago, Christopher Lasch argued that the bureaucratic, consumption-driven realities of modern life were cultivating cultural trends towards pathological self-involvement (1979). When viewed as a representation of the commodification of the individual in virtual space, the phenomenon of the

personal home page also seems indicative of modernity's pathological concern with appearances and with individuation. Giddens characterizes the reflexive project as both a struggle against and embracing of commodification; he also warns that the "individual who has to be 'different' from all others has no chance of reflexively developing a coherent self-identity" (1991, p. 200). Thus, while the personal home page can potentially offer dislocated individuals an important tool for self-determination and self-expression while enabling them to make connections to others that can validate their experiences, there are certain risks involved. By offering the pleasure of tinkering incessantly with one's self-presentation, the home page might seduce the author into insidious and pathological self-obsession. There is always the danger that some home page authors may find themselves stuck in webs of their own making, and this risk should be ascertained before blithely recommending home page publication as a therapeutic pastime.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON SELF AND HOME PAGES

The personal home page can serve as a billboard for self-marketing or as a proscenium for staging demonstrations of talent and skill. But however vain or self-serving these autobiographical exhibitions might appear to the casual viewer, personal home pages are often more than just a tool for managing the impressions of others. The home page can also serve as a rehearsal studio where new skills are mastered, as a blank and limitless canvas for self-expression, as a potent symbol of resistance and self determination, or even as a workshop where identity can be investigated and sometimes reassembled. In all these cases, however, the

personal home page is also, fundamentally, a mirror that reflects back the imagined regard of others. The "looking glass" Cooley described is just as relevant to creating an experience of the self today as it was a century ago.

The act of designing a personal home page that will ultimately be available for public viewing on the WWW requires one to make decisions about the type and content of the information they will incorporate into their document. This forces people to think deeply about some important questions, ones like "who am I?" and "what do I want my audience to think about me?" Whether this audience is conceived of as existing acquaintances, family and friends, or whether it is visualized in terms of some faceless stranger browsing the WWW, the home page was implicated as a symbolic link to some real or imagined interactional partner. As demonstrated above, the public and potentially interactive contexts of the World Wide Web were essential to these reflexive processes of self-presentation and self-exploration.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

I begin this chapter by summarizing the findings of this study. I then address several lingering questions about the personal home page publishing phenomenon, and discuss the limitations of the work presented here, suggesting directions for future research. Afterwards, I will reconsider the significance of this research, and offer a few final thoughts.

SUMMARY OF STUDY FINDINGS

Since I first became interested in researching personal home pages, the WWW has become increasingly ubiquitous. Undeniably, the technology of the Web has had fundamental social, cultural, and economic ramifications, and it reaches an audience that is increasing constantly across all sectors of the United States population. Furthermore, the WWW now pervades all aspects of the media landscape. Television programs invite viewers to visit Web pages to "enhance" their viewing experience, radio stations trumpet their URLs to listeners, print media are increasingly backed by searchable or even customizable Web sites, and advertisers on all these media invite the audience to visit their "dot com" sites for more information on any product or service one can imagine. Yet while commerce has increasingly come to dominate the WWW, one still can find personal expressions intermingled online among its more commercial applications.

When I began this project, my goals were straightforward: I wanted to understand the social and relational conventions related to the practice of World Wide Web page production. Specifically, I hoped to develop a model of how individuals used the WWW as a site for identity performance and self-representation, and to explain why some people chose to create identity texts in this public medium. By comprehending how authors of personal home pages managed self presentation and identity disclosure within this new media landscape, I hoped to learn more about how identity is understood and experienced. At root, a very simple question galvanized my inquiry: why, I wondered, would anyone go to the trouble of articulating a presentation of self for public consumption via the World Wide Web? The answers I have found in response to this question have demonstrated that the phenomenon of personal home page publishing is, interactionally speaking, far more complex than I initially realized.

A large part of this study involved describing the factors that influenced web users to publish biographical materials on the WWW and characterizing the trajectory of personal home page production and publication. In Chapter 4, I described the basic conditions for home page publishing, which included some initial exposure to the WWW medium, access to the Internet for publishing, and some kind of catalyst for publishing a personal page. This catalyst could be external, such as a request from an employer or friends. Or it could be internally motivated, stemming from either the realization of the practical, instrumental applications of a home page (for example, communicating to certain audiences for

specific goals such as obtaining employment) or related to more symbolic functions where the home page was valued for representing a figurative connection to cutting edge technology or some other neoteric inclination.

The actual tasks related to publishing personal home pages (learning to author, selecting content, actual publication and ongoing revision) were explored in some depth. Overall, my analysis revealed that the informants' involvement with their personal home pages was, fundamentally, a function of their availability to work on the sites and of the feedback they received about the sites from others (whether those responses were received directly or mediated through the Internet.) It appeared that involvement with the home page could fluctuate greatly over time, but in general, active participation increased as feedback increased to the limit of each author's availability to work on his or her site.

Another part of the project involved discovering how home page authors characterized the audience for the materials published on their personal web sites. My exploration of the authors' vocabularies of motive for their home page publishing efforts confirmed that a variety of frames borrowed from other media settings were used to characterize the social context of the home page. Furthermore, I demonstrated that the choice of frame was affected both by direct and mediated forms of interaction with others, through conversational exchange and by browsing the home pages of others. Informants also defined the framing of their home pages at various contextual communication levels and even used multiple levels simultaneously; the pages support intrapersonal communicative goals but can also target specific small groups or broadcast to wider audiences.

Finally, I learned that home page authors often paradoxically invoked frames denoting very personal social contexts despite the fact that these documents reside in a widely accessible milieu. These coexisting, contradictory definitions of the social situation of the home page often created interactional tensions for their authors, and frequently led to unanticipated social consequences. The tensions posed by publishing personal information in a public setting sometimes elicited anxieties about the potential misuse of that information. Thus, certain publishing practices were sometimes considered risky, especially for women. Accordingly, in this chapter I described a variety of strategies used by home page authors to manage the paradoxical definitions of the social context of the personal home page and to reduce the hazards they associated with publishing home pages.

Since the World Wide Web is essentially a public milieu, all personal home pages have a performative aspect and as such are often interpreted as deliberate presentations of self. However, the interview data revealed that the self-presentational aspects of Web page publishing were not always the most salient ones for the home page authors themselves. The personal home page undeniably functioned at times as an arena for self-presentation, like a billboard of individuality on the information superhighway. Yet, the multimedia technology of the WWW also afforded home page authors a number of useful tools for identity exploration and construction as well as for performances of self. The hypermedia aspects of the WWW enabled people to use their home pages as a workbench for sorting through the "multiple and disparate potentials for being" (Gergen, 1991, p. 69) present in contemporary existence. Here they could

continuously select and assemble a variety of materials and links into a meaningful, mutable bricolage of self, reorganizing the shifting, fluid and multiple identifications they face in day to day life.

Though some informants explicitly emphasized the pragmatic self-presentational aspects of their home pages, others asserted that their publishing projects were anything but deliberate attempts to convey certain impressions. Instead, they characterized these works as fundamentally self-directed or reflexive, and described them primarily in therapeutic terms of personal exploration and growth. However, even in cases where informants anticipated no outside interest in their Web publishing efforts, the implicit public context of the WWW suggested at least the possibility of an audience for their efforts.

It is the implied audience which enables the home page to serve as a kind of "looking glass" (to use Cooley's idiom) for the self. Direct, face to face relationships-- those that Cooley termed "primary" and "secondary" relationships-- are increasingly being displaced by the indirect relationships which new information technologies make possible. In the absence of those stable reference groups, the home page provides an alternative framework for interaction. Within that framework, home page authors can imagine how their online self-presentations might be judged by the potential audience implicated by the WWW. The importance of feedback in the model of involvement in web page publishing, which was established earlier, further demonstrates the relevance of this medium as a focus for symbolic interaction and identity construction.

LINGERING QUESTIONS

In this section, I want to discuss some lingering questions regarding the phenomenon of personal home page publishing and its dependencies to constructions of personal identity and to the prevailing structural and cultural conditions in North American urban society. Do the thousands of home pages springing up on the WWW represent tiny insurrections against hegemonic social practices by people who are choosing not to be defined by others, but instead are endeavoring to define themselves to the world via this relatively inexpensive and ubiquitous channel of communication? Or do these pages represent the widespread co-optation of individuals into the logic of commodity capitalism: a construction of the self as yet another product that must be shilled to a mass audience amid loudly competing messages from the consumer marketplace? At this stage in my analysis, both possibilities seem equally true.

The emic, interpretivist research approach I chose for this project perhaps tended to overemphasize individual agency at the cost of neglecting structural factors. However, I do not mean to suggest that the situation of the personal home page can be fully apprehended without reference to these structures. For example, social stratification will certainly limit access to the resources (such as literacy, computer skills and access, and leisure time) which must be available before any kind of Internet interaction can occur. Unfortunately, this project was not able to explore fully the impacts of these structural factors on the phenomenon of personal Web authorship. However, I want to discuss at least a few issues of the larger social context of this phenomenon in closing.

How does the personal home page inform the project of the self?

The literature of cultural criticism is replete with portrayals of this particular moment in history as lacking in a certain depth and transcendence in communicative processes. Some critics have denounced the proliferation of networked communication technologies, accusing them of erasing the essential self by transforming it into yet another mere terminal of the network (Baudrillard, 1981; 1993; Gergen, 1991). According to this perspective, the overwhelming surfeits of information and the myriad competing subject positions interpellated by the complexities of modern life can cause the self to fracture under stress. This fracturing creates a crisis of identity, making adolescents of us all (Erikson, 1956). Meanwhile, other commentators entirely reject the concept that we have an ontologically real core persona that is even capable of fracture. Instead, they argue for a view of self which is partial and multiplicitous, and they extol the opportunities inherent in the multiplicities which are sustained and given substance by these same new technologies (i.e. Haraway, 1991; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1995).

However, the interpretivist and interactionist perspectives which inform this research sidestep such philosophical debates about the nature of the self, emphasizing in its place a pragmatic perspective which focuses on how individuals make sense of the world during the course of their everyday lives. Scholars working from this perspective maintain that, regardless of where the self resides or what it is, the self is largely experienced through the reflexive monitoring and interpretation of past, present and anticipated future experiences.

That is to say, individuals experience the "self" by constructing coherent life stories or personal narratives. (For examples, see Denzin, 1989 and Shotter, 1989). While similarly avoiding philosophical debates about the existence of a core self, this project has shed some light on how informants experience and manage the project of maintaining a coherent sense of self in light of increasingly fractured social circumstances. The hypertext technology of the home page enables people to create narrative structures following traditional linear paths if they choose. However, it also makes it possible for them to assemble narratives characterized by multi-dimensional constellations of associations and affiliations, or even to synthesize collections of fragments or vignettes of episodic experience which more accurately reflect the fractionality of modern urban social life.

Regardless of what design approach is adopted, the home page provides its users with a place to assemble and link these narratives into a coherent assemblage. In a world where social structures such as family and community are increasingly and confusingly destabilized, the personal home page employed as a "technology of self" (Foucault, 1988) provides a flexible solution to the problem of organizing the multiple associations and subject positions which shape who we are. In particular, the home page was shown to be useful for those informants faced with the task of rebuilding fractured narratives and renegotiating their identities in the wake of catastrophic life changes such as geographic dislocation, divorce or career changes. As a familiar, controllable space where one can routinely keep and organize personal materials, the home page provides those whose personal narratives were derailed by circumstance with a way of orienting

themselves against new and confusing social landscapes. Mastery over the virtual domain of the home page serves as a bastion of security against the existential trauma inflicted by rapid change.

As a home page author invests increasing effort in creating and revising a personal home page, more of that author's "self" becomes invested within the document. While I do not intend to conflate the home page with any philosophical understanding of the "real self" of the individual home page author, it can and does represent an extension of that author's agency or instrumentality. Stone refers to such technological extensions of personal will as "prostheses." She raises important questions that this project can only repeat: Where does a person stop? What are a person's boundaries and edges? (1995, pp. 4-5.) As I have tried to demonstrate in this project, the personal home page represents yet another front or prosthesis for interpersonal agency. As the WWW becomes as pervasive and as quotidian as television, the opportunities for human and machine inter-permeability move past the privileged domain of geeks, nerds and engineers, and into the reach of the masses-- courtesy of America Online and other access providers and their user-friendly home page templates. And as the language of addiction used by some of the informants demonstrated, there is always the risk that occasionally some home page authors may be seduced by the pleasures of working on and perfecting their digital representations-- falling in love, as Stone might put it, with their prostheses-- to an extent which might be characterized as pathologically narcissistic. This leads me to my next question.

Are home pages fundamentally narcissistic?

The cultural trends towards increasing narcissistic self-involvement, along with a seeming devaluation of individual privacy in favor of personal candor, have been common themes in cultural criticism for at least the past thirty years. Although some have blamed therapy-oriented "pseudoscientific" professions for this push towards public confession and self-obsession (for example, see Lasch, 1979), others have condemned the broadcast media for the apparent rise in egotism and loss of privacy-- especially television's relentless gaze and hunger for celebrity. (See, for examples, Baudrillard, 1981 and Meyrowitz, 1985 and 1995.) In any event, we have drifted towards a culture of openness that wholeheartedly endorses public self-disclosure and even rewards those who are willing to engage in scandalous public confessions on televised talk shows with a certain measure of fame (Priest, 1995).

The yearning for inclusion in the realm of celebrity (especially through the grace of television) has been attributed to the rampant experience of anomie that characterizes modern life:

> In a society where conditions of anonymity fertilize the desire to "become somebody," the dream of identity, the dream of wholeness, is intimately interwoven with the desire to be know; to be visible, to be documented, for all to see...when "being no one" is the norm.... Becoming "someone" is a gift bestowed upon people by the image machine. (Ewen, 1988, pp. 94-95).

Now, the World Wide Web home page provides a more democratic access to the potential celebrity that was previously the near-exclusive domain of broadcast media. Moreover, the technology of the home page provides more control over one's narrative than one would normally achieve on other paths to celebrity for

everyday citizens, where one's personal account may be sensationalized or otherwise transformed in accordance with the program producers' needs.

The overlapping of back and front stage regions which occur in many personal home pages complicate the problem of defining the situation of the home page. Imagine walking by a dark window, and seeing a woman through it who is checking her makeup in its reflection on the other side. This brief glimpse of a necessarily self-involved process might lead you to promptly label this woman as vain or conceited, given her preoccupation with her face in that particular moment. Similarly, the home page is a mirror that coincidentally frames a particularly narcissistic view of self to browsing strangers. "Narcissism" is a convenient and au courant explanation for the kind of self-involvement required in constructing and maintaining a biographical home page. However, it is evident that the phenomenon called by experimental social psychologists the *fundamental attribution error* (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross, 1977) plays a critical role in the interpretation of personal home pages. The fundamental attribution error--underestimating situational influences and overestimating dispositional influences when judging others' behavior-- is easy to make when we read these documents from the perspective of an outsider. The reader's impulse to attribute narcissistic traits to web authors is exacerbated by the fact that identification through the web page is often a fluid, ongoing project which the authors themselves relate to in terms of planned revisions. Of course, some home pages are constructed as strategic self-presentations, but others are oriented more to processes of self-understanding than to self-presentational goals. However,

when outsiders access the home pages of others on the WWW and interpret the presentations contained within them, they are capturing frozen slices of that process of self-involvement. Correspondingly, it is all too easy for critics to view the home pages of others as banal or narcissistic, while excusing one's own self publications in terms of therapy, artistic expression, or the accomplishment of some particular objective.

Do home pages represent capitalist co-optation or resistance?

Although the vanity label is one that is often ironically suggested by the home page authors themselves when accounting for their publishing efforts, this term might be a short-hand expression obscuring powerful forces which are less consciously accessible. The inclination of some authors to characterize their own home pages as egotistical or narcissistic demonstrates their ability to step back from their work and imagine how they might be perceived by others viewing their online self-presentations. In other words, the personal web page enables these authors to view themselves in the light of a generalized other, one whose reading of their home pages is not necessarily sympathetic.

The imperceptible contextual factor being camouflaged by attributions of narcissistic characteristics to the authors of personal home pages on the WWW is, principally, the embedded ideology of capitalism. The chapter on framing and the discussion of "professionalism" as a criteria of quality in the last chapter both demonstrated how the underlying context of consumer culture influences the presentational logic of the personal home page. The effects of this factor may be more responsible for the home pages' apparent narcissism than any personality

disorders of the individual authors. Informants often strove towards "professional-looking" presentations and framed their publications in terms borrowed from other established commercial media formats. At the same time, they reportedly took pains to make their home pages somehow unique, thus individuating them from other publications on the Web. As Giddens observed a few years before the diffusion of the WWW, self-narratives are unavoidably influenced by the commodification of consumption even though they are always, paradoxically, engaged in struggle against those same influences (1991, pp. 200-201). On the World Wide Web, the creation of a polished, distinctive home page (one which preferably meets the design standards of corporate advertising agencies) allows one to market the self by calling attention to its uniqueness in a crowded marketplace of personality. As such, the home page appears to be a discernable commodification of selfhood.

Yet simultaneously, the Web epitomizes a new front in the struggle for individuality, promising to provide a means of making their voices heard to those without access to participation in more traditional, mass media discourses. Accordingly, the phenomenon of the WWW has great promise as a locus for hegemonic resistance. As a public place where individual voices share space on an almost equal footing with corporate messages, the WWW invites home page authors to engage in what bell hooks calls "true speaking" (hooks, 1989). Creating an autobiographical statement for publication on the WWW is therefore potentially a political act rather than merely an instance of creative expression. The flexible medium of the HTML document invites the author to begin a process

of self-transformation, to move from an oppressed place of being defined by others to an empowered place of defining one's self. The ability to speak out in a public forum is requisite for personal empowerment. The WWW provides anyone with computer literacy and computer access an available public forum where these personal articulations can be realized.

In light of Neuman's (1991) prediction that user habits and corporate mechanisms will work to suppress the diversity and richness of content empowered by new media technologies, I find the informants' widespread adoption and naturalization of corporate design standards for personal homepages to be somewhat disturbing. In a study related to this one, which examined how Web page consumers frame their web browsing experiences, McQuivey argued that alternative voices are likely to be discouraged from exploiting the WWW if users become conditioned to expect Web content that mimics magazine and television formats (1996). Since Web authors are also customarily Web consumers, who model their own publication efforts according to existing Web content, the corporate colonization of the WWW is likely to continue to influence content that is produced for it by individuals. This will ultimately reduce the ability of the WWW to serve as an alternate forum or as a locus for emancipatory self-realization.

While the personal home page does have great potential as a technology of liberation, I do not mean to suggest here that the mere fact of exploring one's personal consciousness is, in and of itself, a political act. Self-definition through the medium of the WWW can potentially serve as an important step towards

political emancipation. However, as I am reminded by hooks (1989), home page authors must consciously work to link these personal narratives into a framework which recognizes the larger material reality and which actively resists cultural domination. Without this kind of critical awareness, self exploration via the home page will either remain fundamentally stalled in self-obsession, or else it may devolve into mere exhibitionism-- so much cheap spectacle conforming to consumerist ideas of pre-packaged identity and a hungry marketplace's voyeuristic fascination for the exposé. Consequently, finding and using one's voice through the personal home page requires a balancing act on the knife-edge of the interface, between the pit of solipsistic self-absorption and the petulance of narcissism.

What are the implications of increased social and political control over the WWW for the personal home page phenomenon?

Corporate control over the WWW raises concerns beyond the adoption of marketing logic for online self-presentations. As Stone and other scholars have already pointed out, the increasing investment of self into networked communication technologies that are operated and controlled largely by corporate entities escalates already existing problems regarding the social and political control of those same technologies. As the new communication technologies make it increasingly possible to separate agency and geography, the continuing delegation of social functions to personal home pages (especially functions that previously were handled through embodied interaction) has inspired legislation

aimed at protecting the accountability and warrantability of online communications.[46]

Indeed, legislative efforts to protect commerce and other corporate interests are steadily increasing at the expense of individuals' rights of free expression. The rights of individuals to hold vanity domain names for personal reasons, whether for artistic expression or for purposes of satire, were recently challenged by several corporate lawsuits or litigation threats aimed at individuals or artistic collectives who use domain names similar to existing corporate trademarks. The legal action recently threatened by online retailer eToys.com against etoy.com, an art collective based in Switzerland, is one example of this kind of corporate intimidation. Other policies in the legislative pipeline which support corporate "reverse domain name hijacking," such as the recent House bill entitled the Trademark Cyberpiracy Prevention Act (H.R. 3028), would make it illegal for individuals to anonymously register domain names and would also place individual Web users at a significant risk of having their existing domain names expropriated without compensation or due process by the corporate holders of competing trademarks. Additionally, the passage of this act may make domain name holders who engage in public satire or in online criticism of corporate trademark holders legally liable for damages related to the dilution or debasement

[46] One example of a recent U.S. legislative attempt at social control of Internet interaction in this arena is the Digital Commerce Act. (S. 761/H.R. 1320) This act, passed in late 1999, promotes and standardizes the acceptance of digital signatures for electronic commerce and other applications by giving electronic authentication the same authority as paper and pen signatures within contract law.

of those trademarks. This legislation could have a chilling effect on individual free expression on the WWW.

Another threat to free expression and the exchange of ideas on the Web relates to social controls aimed at restricting children's access to online materials considered harmful to minors. Although the Communications Decency Act of 1996, enacted to protect minors from "indecent" and "patently offensive" online communication, was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, attempts to censor the Internet have continued at Federal and at local levels.[47] Continued legislative attempts aimed at protecting children from controversial or graphic material by imposing appropriateness standards (which effectively restrict adults' access to constitutionally protected Internet speech) may also serve to discourage free adult expression within the scope of the World Wide Web home page. Restrictive "Terms of Service," such as the one enforced by popular access provider America Online that prohibits the publication or transmission of any adult content through its system, standardize and reinforce this restriction of expression even without legislative activity.[48] However, as the Federal courts

[47] Enforcement of the Child Online Protection Act, sponsored by the 105th Congress, was prohibited recently by a preliminary injunction. The Department of Justice has appealed the injunction . An injunction was also recently granted by the Federal court against a New Mexico State law, which banned online speech characterized as "harmful to minors." However, the 106th's Congress Children's Internet Protection Act, which mandates the use of Internet content filters at all publicly funded libraries and schools, recently was passed by both the House and Senate in different forms and is, at writing, currently in conference committee.

[48] America Online (AOL) has a Terms of Service (TOS) Agreement which states, in part, that "AOL Inc. reserves the right to prohibit conduct, communication, or Content which it deems in its discretion to be harmful to individual Members, the communities which make up the AOL Service, AOL Inc.'s or other third-party rights, or to violate any applicable law." The language of the document also prohibits the transmission of any material which AOL deems (again, in its discretion) offensive. Other providers of Internet access and home page location services such as Yahoo's GeoCities and Xoom.com have similarly discretional and restrictive Terms of Service;

have noted, materials deemed harmful to children often have valuable social importance or utility for adults. Given the potentially therapeutic and beneficial applications of free expression within the context of the WWW home page, I feel strongly that adult discourse in this medium should continue to be granted all relevant Constitutional protections. Many home page location service providers, such as AOL, Xoom.com and others, also prohibit anonymous memberships in their service agreements because they confound electronic commerce applications and make it difficult for them to exploit user information for marketing purposes. However, the positive outcomes of on-line disclosure reported by the informants of this study suggest that technologies enabling anonymous WWW publishing should be encouraged rather than restricted. In this manner, the perceived and actual risks of online disclosure will be reduced while still enabling Web authors to gain the benefits of public self definition and its concomitant possibilities of empowerment and self determination.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Beyond an essential neglect of structural concerns, which I have attempted to redress somewhat in the above discussion, this study had other limitations related to its methodological approach. In any research project, the issue of how to contact and recruit participants is formidable. I employed a non-probabilistic sampling methodology in this project, and concentrated my attention on a

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see http://www.xoom.com/TOS/index_popup.xihtml and http://docs.yahoo.com/info/terms/geoterms.html for examples. These service agreements also typically prohibit anonymous communication and explicitly require members to provide their legal names, addresses and other contact information.

relatively small group of informants found mostly in a single, affluent urban geographical area. While this approach engendered rich interpretive data, it also limited the generalizability of the findings, particularly in the way this term is understood in traditional survey research.

In large part, financial constraints imposed the geographic limitations on recruiting. Traditional positivist approaches to research methodology rely on random population sampling to insure that the results may be statistically generalized to other populations beyond the study sample. Since random sampling techniques were not employed in this study, the collected data may not be statistically generalized to the entire population of home page authors. Additionally, the characteristics of those who responded to the solicitations for informants may differ significantly from those who chose not to participate or to those who were never informed about the study.

Another methodological limitation is related to the duration of the interview sessions. Since I was essentially reliant on the cooperation and patience of the informants, I was reluctant to make major demands on their time. The length of the initial interviews limited the amount of data I could explore fully, and given the time constraints of the interviews, the original focus of the study was perhaps too broadly defined. The close scheduling of the initial interviews also limited my ability to revise and refocus the interview guide following an analysis of each previous interview, in accordance with normative approaches to grounded theorization.

A further limitation of the methodological approach is related to the salience of the self-absorbed or egotistical stereotypes of home page publishers. The analytical focus on the responses of individuals who were usually removed from their customary social contexts at the time of their interviews may have intensified aspects of narcissistic self involvement, or it may have obscured some of the essentially interactional aspects of the home page. The act of authoring a personal home page already requires a certain self-awareness, and inviting informants to report on this process may have created a certain positive feedback biasing the analysis in this direction. Still, by starting from an analysis of the subjective meanings of the personal home page, as held by those who engaged in the practice of publishing them, I hope to have avoided this bias.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study was successful in illuminating some of the boundaries of the home page phenomenon, there is still a great deal yet to explore. One area requiring further study is how readers-- both those acquainted with the author of a particular home page and those who are complete strangers-- interpret the home pages they come across on the WWW. Understanding how these documents are actually perceived by those who do not themselves necessarily engage in home page publishing is crucial to determining whether or not home page authors conceive of their audiences in ways which are accurate or if they are largely informed by self-deceit. Another inquiry related to how readers interpret home pages is exploring how they are used by strangers and acquaintances to find out background about people that they want to meet or with whom they already

interact regularly. How does the presence of a home page affect the progress of relationships? Are the impressions formed by those who viewed someone's home page before meeting a person, or during an early stage in a relationship, somehow different from the impressions formed by people without access to the page, and do those impressions have a lasting effect? In a related vein, the communities of online journalists (who chronicle their daily lives on their web pages), and those who record their daily lives through broadcasting video on the WWW via so called "web-cams"[49] have not been treated in any depth in this project, nor is the role of the community-linking service known as "Web-rings"[50] well understood. These practices also deserve further phenomenological investigation.

The theoretical model presented here, which describes authorial involvement as a function of the home page author's availability and the feedback received from others about the page, should be tested further, perhaps experimentally. Moreover, I still have lingering questions about the duration of these effects. While many informants reported favorable outcomes resulting from their publishing efforts, those effects may be short-lived at best. Investigation of the duration of effects of home page publishing deserve further exploration, particularly in light of the therapeutic efficacy claims made by those who used home page publishing as a means of overcoming disruptive life episodes. A

[49] Jennicam (currently hosted at http://www.jennicam.org) is a particularly well-known example of the phenomenon, although there are a growing number of web-cams online. Angus Kidman's reviews of Jennicam in the Australian Personal Computer Magazine are especially pertinent, as he documents Jennifer's early struggles to define her home page as an essentially "private" space located in the public medium of the WWW.

[50] The Web-ring service (http://www.webring.org) allows people to link Web sites according to topics or common interests, by providing a directory and an interface that enables web users to jump from site to site within the ring in exchange for advertising considerations.

longitudinal research approach would be useful in determining how the home page plays a role in creating and sustaining identity over time. Given the inherent dangers of spiraling from productive self-examination into maladaptive self-obsession, a more detailed examination of the long-term effects of publishing should take place before it is widely recommended as a therapeutic intervention.

The question of how home pages are used tactically by specific groups is also worthy of additional research. This is especially true of adolescents, given the developmental tasks of establishing independence, interdependence and personal identity that are pertinent to this age cohort. Additionally, while the limited geographical reach of this study did include a number of informants who had moved to the California Bay Area from distant regions, further examination of the role played by the personal home page in other territories is warranted. The virtual grounding of the self in the technology of the WWW may hold entirely different meanings for those who are socially isolated by geographical distance. Finally, the phenomenon of the home page may have increased ideological significance in those arenas where free, untrammeled personal expression is not a natural right or a naturalized expectation. Further exploration of the possibilities of the home page as a technology of liberation should be pursued— possibilities which may resist the further commodification of the self as yet another entertaining spectacle competing for attention within a crowded informational landscape.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although this study was initially conceptualized as a simple study of self disclosure in a new context for computer mediated public communication, it eventually developed into an interdisciplinary project which drew on the combined literatures of media studies, sociology, social psychology and cultural criticism. Accordingly, this study provides a link between these diverse literatures and offers some original perspectives on how people are using the medium of the World Wide Web to achieve personal goals. Significantly, I found that home page production is more than merely a virtual stage for the presentation of deliberate or calculated identity performances. Instead, it appears that the mobile, mutable, accessible-from-anywhere technology of the WWW home page can also provide a practical solution to the problem of constructing a coherent account of the self in the tumultuous social circumstances which pervade modern urban life.

My adoption of an interactionist and social constructionist perspective on the role that personal Web publishing plays in the lives of those who engage in this practice also represents a change in direction from the traditional approach of the uses and gratifications approach to media studies. By attending to users' vocabularies of motive for Web page construction instead of merely identifying and quantifying the psychological motivations for home page publishing, this project placed individuals' use of this technology within its larger social context and permitted a richer exploration of what home page publishing means to those who engage in it. Furthermore, by focusing on how active users produce media

for the WWW, rather than only exploring how Web media is consumed, this project pushes the boundaries of new media theory past the traditional limitations of "audience theory." New technologies of communication such as the WWW demand that we at least confront the possibilities of widespread public participation in the construction of media messages.

This project also extends symbolic interactionist theory to the virtual realm of the home page, moving it from face to face interactions where the home page is a topic of conversation, to interactions where communication is asynchronously mediated through the technologies associated with the home page. Most significantly, it demonstrates how the personal home page provides a new way of conceptualizing the "looking glass self" in interactions which are truly virtual; that is, symbolically implied by the technology instead of actually realized.

CODA

In our socially saturated world, one must constantly negotiate one's role and subject position in response to the cacophony of outside stimuli. Like Alice in Wonderland, each of us has changed several times since we got up this morning: it is easy to lose track of who we are. The personal home page gives people an opportunity to play Alice, to travel through the looking glass and imagine how they look to the people who live on the other side. In a world that sometimes seems as nonsensical and bewildering as the wonderlands Alice visited, home page authors are empowered to explain themselves. Moreover, by

imagining how those on the other side of the glass will interact with their explanation, these authors are able to make some sense of who they are.

Having changed proportions and roles several times during the course of her adventures, Alice emerged from her journeys through Wonderland with new perspectives and new stories to tell. The lessons learned in Looking-Glass-Land may be vital ones and the time spent there may be quite restorative, but there are fabulous monsters in Looking-Glass-Land; it is best not to become so enthralled with one's own reflection that one never returns. Just like Alice, one must remember to get on with one's ordinary life. But despite the dangers, the looking-glass-land of the personal home page is a useful resource for identity work, whether that work is bound up with deciding what mask to show to the world at large, or alternatively, with discovering exactly who it is that is wearing the mask in the first place. However, it remains to be seen whether the adventure of discovering and revealing ourselves in this Wonderland of the World Wide Web will result in a wholly new social architecture that will allow our wildest dreams to come true.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: INFORMANT RESPONSE LETTER

Hello _____ -- thanks for responding to my post. Let me tell you a little more about the study so that you can decide if you would like to participate.

This is a research project aimed at exploring how self-disclosure is achieved in the Web page design process and at documenting how people use Web page publishing to manage personal goals. In general, I'll be looking at how people use the WWW as a medium for self expression. The conclusions from this study will be published in the form of a doctoral dissertation.

The initial interview will last approximately ninety minutes, but in any event will be limited to two hours. I would like to schedule a meeting with you in person, at a place and time convenient for you --perhaps at a local cafe- and have you give me a guided tour of your personal Web site.

If we meet at a cafe, I'd be glad to buy you a beverage to thank you for your time. I will bring a laptop with a wireless modem equipped to allow us to access your home page from pretty much anywhere. With your permission, I may request a follow up interview or two, although if that's needed it's more likely to take place on the phone or even via email. At the end of the interview, I'll be administering a brief background questionnaire. If you decide to participate, you will not obligated to answer every question in either the interview or in the questionnaire, and you may withdraw at any time.

I will be audio-taping your interview for analysis. However, any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your express permission. All data generated in the course of this research, including the audiotapes and questionnaires, will be kept under lock and key.

I regret that I can't provide monetary compensation to you for your participation. However, all participants will receive, at their request, a copy of the final report prior to its publication.

I hope that you will choose to participate! If so, please write me back and let me know when you might be available, and I will write or call back (your choice) to schedule a time and place for the interview.

If you have any additional questions I will be very happy to answer
them, and can be reached at aviva@actlab.utexas.edu or aviva@splode.com.

Thanks again--

~~~~~~

Aviva W. Rosenstein
ACTLab, University of Texas at Austin
aviva@actlab.utexas.edu aviva@splode.com
~~~~~~

APPENDIX B: INFORMANT CONSENT FORM

Aviva W. Rosenstein
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Texas at Austin
1111 W. El Camino Real Suite #109-331
Sunnyvale, CA 94087
(408) 739-3974
aviva@actlab.utexas.edu

This letter outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant. You are encouraged to keep a copy of this letter for your records.

My name is Aviva Rosenstein and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin in the College of Communication. This project will be published in the form of a doctoral dissertation.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: (a) To document how people use Web page publishing to manage personal goals through the systematic categorization and disclosure strategies which are a part of the Web page design process; and (b) to explore how the WWW is used as a medium for self expression.

EXPECTED DURATION OF SUBJECT'S PARTICIPATION: The initial interview will last approximately 90 minutes. Up to two follow-up interviews may be requested, with the informant's permission.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES: The primary procedures will be interviews with informants, questionnaires, and content analysis of WWW home pages. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS TO INFORMANTS: Informants are not expected to incur any physical or psychological risk and should experience no discomforts resulting from the research procedures.

CONFIDENTIALITY PROCEDURES: Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. All data generated in the course of this research, including audiotapes, transcripts and questionnaires, will be locked in a secure location at the researcher's home office. The identities of the informants will not be disclosed to any unauthorized persons.

COMPENSATION: Informants will receive, at their request, a copy of the final report prior to its publication, and may provide feedback or suggest changes to the researcher at that time. No monetary compensation will be provided to subjects for their participation.

INFORMANTS: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your present or future relations with The University of Texas at Austin in any way. You are making a decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are not obligated to answer every question, and you may withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have any additional questions later, I will be very happy to answer them, and can be reached at the address above. If you prefer, you may contact Dr. Allucquere Rosanne Stone, the Chair of my dissertation committee, at The Department of Radio TV Film, Campus Mail Code: A0800, University of Texas, Austin, TX, by phone at (512) 471-6499 or by email at sandy@actlab.utexas.edu.

INFORMANT:

I, _____, consent to participate in the research study under the direction of Aviva W. Rosenstein, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas at Austin.

INFORMANT'S SIGNATURE: _____
DATE: _____

INVESTIGATOR:
I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the informant has consented to participate.

INVESTIGATOR'S SIGNATURE: _____
DATE: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. I would like you to take me on a tour of your page. Can you tell me about your site?

• What motivated you to do a home page?
• was there a specific person or another site you emulated in creating this site?
• specific material you wanted to publish?
• specific affiliation you wanted to publicize?

B. AUTHORING

Tell me a little more about how you learned to author Web pages.

• What sources of information did you use to learn how to publish a web page, and what did you learn from each?
>>Probes: Books or magazine articles , friends or family, workshops or classes online information, someone else authored it
• How hard was it to learn how to publish?
• Where do you work on it? (home, office, friend's, elsewhere…)

C. AUDIENCE

• When you created your page, did you have a particular audience in mind…
• Who did you think would be viewing your page?
• How has your sense of that audience changed over time… who are you writing it for now?
>>Probes: do you have a hit meter? do you check logs to see who's looking at it?
• Do you or have you advertised the page anywhere? Announce it? Where/to whom?

D. FEEDBACK

• What kind of feedback have you gotten on your pages?
>>Probes: from strangers via email response? Friends/coworkers via email? Family?
• Tell me about a time that you revised your page in response to feedback you've received
>>Probe: what else prompts you to make revisions?
• How often did you/do you revise your page?
• Has this frequency changed over time?
>>Probe for why revision schedule has changed
Did response to your page meet your expectations? >>Probe for details/examples

E. SELF-PRESENTATION

• Do you think that someone looking at your page would get an accurate or inaccurate view of the kind of person you are (your personality, your interests, etc) you are? Why?

>>Probe for what might be missing….

• Are there things that you decided not to put on your page, or that you wouldn't be allowed to include? Can you describe these?

• What kept you from including them?

• Did you have any fears about publishing personal information?

• Do you think you've changed much since you began publishing a web page? (How?)

• Are these changes reflected in the content?

F. RESOURCE INVESTMENT

• How much time do you think you spend working on your page every week? Every month?

• Are you spending more or less time on it now than you did at first? (Probe for reasons for change)

• Approximately how much money do you think you've invested in publishing the site?

• Was that for equipment, or software, or access or expertise…? (probe for relative amounts)

• What would be your ideal homepage, if you had unlimited expertise or equipment or time?

• How likely are you to make these changes?

G. CONCLUSION

• If you were to revise your page today, what might you do differently?

• Is there anything else you'd like to tell me, or anything we've missed that it would be important for me to know?

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your home zip code? _____

2. Approximately when did you first begin posting personal information on the WWW?

_____

3. What was your age at your last birthday? _____

4. What is your marital status?

( ) Married
( ) Widowed
( ) Divorced
( ) Living with partner
( ) Separated
( ) Single, never married
( ) Rather not say

5. What is your primary ethnic background?

( ) White/European
( ) African American
( ) Native American/Inuit
( ) Asian/Pacific Islander
( ) Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
( ) Other _____
( )Rather not say

6. What is the highest level of schooling you've completed?

( ) Grammar school
( ) High School
( ) Vocational or Technical School
( ) Some college
( ) College Graduate
( ) Post graduate degree
( ) Other _____

7. What is your primary occupation? _____

8. Where do you normally browse the WWW?

( ) Home
( ) School
( ) Office or workplace
( ) Other _____
( ) Library
( ) The home of a friend or relative
( ) A cybercafe

9. Please read through the list below and show how well each statement generally describes why you use the WWW.

	Describes me or my opinions:				
I use the WWW:	**Yes, exactly**				**No, not me**
To communicate with people I already know.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To meet new acquaintances or make new social contacts	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To increase my knowledge of a wide variety of subjects	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To keep informed about my special interests and/or hobbies	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To keep abreast of local community and/or civic information	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To access government documents	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To access financial information	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To read online newspapers or magazines	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

To find out what shows or events are scheduled	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To get information about consumer products or services	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To make purchases	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To be entertained	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To find out about celebrities or performers I like	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To keep up with my work or business	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To perform academic research	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
To relax or unwind	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Because I have nothing better to do	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Because I want to be on the cutting edge	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Because all my friends do it	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

10. Do you think that the WWW has had:
( ) mostly a positive influence on the quality of your life
( ) no appreciable effect on the quality of your life
( ) mostly a negative influence on the quality of your life

11. How long have you been using the WWW?
( ) Less than 6 months
( ) 6 to 12 months
( ) 1 to 3 years
( ) 4 to 6 years
( ) 6 years or more

12. Who provides your WWW connection? (check all that apply)
( ) A commercial online service (America Online, Compuserve, Prodigy,etc.)
( ) A local commercial Internet service provider
( ) A government or military agency
( ) A nonprofit organization
( ) Your school or university
( ) Your workplace or company

13. What Web browser(s) do you currently use to access your home page(s)? (check any that apply)
( ) Microsoft Internet Explorer
( ) Netscape Navigator
( ) Netscape Communicator
( ) Other _____
( ) Lynx
( ) Spry Mosaic
( ) NCSA Mosaic
( ) Netcruiser
( ) IBM WebExplorer

14. What computer platform do you generally use to create or make changes to your personal WWW page(s)?
( ) DOS
( ) Macintosh
( ) NeXT
( ) OS2
( ) Unix workstation
( ) Other _____
( ) PC running Unix
( ) VMS
( ) Windows 3.x
( ) Windows NT
( ) Windows 95
( ) Amiga
( ) Atari
( ) WebTV
( ) Terminal/vt100
( ) I don't know

15. Do you operate your own Web server?
( )Yes ( )No

16. Did you use any Web page authoring tools to help you build and/or maintain your homepage? Which ones?

_____

This page will be filed separately from your responses to the questionnaire.

What is your name?

_____

What is the URL for your home page?

_____

If you'd like to receive further notification about this study, or if you would like to read it when it is published, please provide email address here:

_____

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Vita

Aviva Wendy Rosenstein was born in Long Beach, California on August 17, 1965, to Lynne and Neil Rosenstein. After completing Millikan High School in Long Beach, California in 1982, she entered the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she attended for one year. She then transferred to the University of California, Berkeley, where she received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in May 1986. After a year of working and traveling through Northern Europe and the Middle East, she enrolled at Brandeis University in Massachusetts where she earned her Master of Arts degree in 1989. During the following four years she was employed as a community educator and administrator, and led programs for families and teenagers in several nonprofit institutions throughout the Northern California Bay Area. In September 1993 she entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin.

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