



Virtual Group Dynamics and Social Networks

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Constructing the self in a digital world



The question is not what will technology be like in the future, but rather, what will we be like, what are we becoming as we forge increasingly intimate relationships with our machines? (Turkle, 2003)

- Classical studies about media have already described broad ways in which human activity and culture have changed, for good or for ill, due to an influx of technology (Postman, 1993; Rheingold, 2000; Trend, 2001)
- Cultural studies research detail the ways in which a “cyborg” mentality evolves from the intimate fusion of humans and machines (Haraway, 1985; Hayles, 1999).

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Constructing the self in a digital world



**According to the cyborg model: the nature of human activity and psychology fundamentally changes as we incorporate more and more digital technology into our physical surroundings, our daily activities, and even our very bodies through medical and wearable technology
(Haraway, 1991)**

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Martin Heidegger (1954), long before the word “technology” became synonymous with computing, defined it in this way: **“The essence of technology is by no means anything technological ... We ask the question concerning technology when we ask what it is. Technology is a means to an end ... Technology is a human activity. These two definitions belong together”**.

- In recent years, research largely from an ethnographic tradition, has painted quite a different picture than a unidirectional model (Gajjala, 2004; Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004)

The dichotomy that emerged get into account the complex relationships between Influence and Agency from one side, and Technology and Identity on the other.

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

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Self, Development and Learning



- The **evolution of identity spreads across the entire lifespan** (Case, 1985; Fivush & Buckner, 2003; Harter, 1999), and an awareness of self and the ability to critically examine self representations are **considered developmental milestones** on the road to reflective adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1990).

From a developmental research perspective, learning about the self is one of the most important kinds of learning that humans do.

- Furthermore, **identity mediates all other kinds of learning** in some way and can be viewed as an analytical lens for examining learning in general (Gee, 2001; Wortham, 2006).
- If we take the perspective that **learning is situated within communities, then learning and community identification are fundamentally connected** (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).
- As researchers studying identity we must examine not only individuals and their learning but also the **social and cultural contexts, practices, and technologies, digital or otherwise, that shape and are shaped by the development of selves** (Goffman, 1959; Hollande, Lachiotte, Skinner & Cain, 2001).

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

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The “Sane” Identity



A traditional psychological model depicts a healthy adult identity as a coherent set of traits, dispositions, values and beliefs about the self that can remain relatively unchanged across a wide variety of situations and contexts (Harter, 1997; Marsh & Hattie, 1996)

- Although **developmental psychologists describe childhood through adolescence as being occupied with the process of developing a consistent self-concept** (Harter, 1999; Kroiger, 2007; Marcia, 2002)
- In a traditional developmental model, **the intensive period of identity development then mostly halts, and adulthood becomes largely concerned with ensuring that the resulting self-concept is integrated, internalized, and realized through life choices** (Erikson, 1968; Higgins, 1996).

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

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The “Sane” Identity



A sociocultural and anthropological model, however, looks very different. Identities are often described as flexible enactments, which only become visible via individual or joint practices displaying and realigning varying aspects of our selves (Goffman, 1959, Wenger, 1998).

- **Identities are not viewed as static clusters of traits**, but rather they constantly shift and are repositioned in conjunction with social influences: a mutual refiguring of the individual and his or her cultural world (Holland et. al., 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991)
- Some researchers argue that **the very nature of the self is inherently in flux, such that identities are narratively constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed throughout the entire lifespan in the ongoing and everyday process of telling and retelling** stories about ourselves to different audiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ochs & Capps, 1996)

Given the previous two diverging approaches, it seems that identity can be figured as both a developmental construct and a fluid ongoing process.

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Constructing the self in a digital world

This is “Me”



The Self Narratives, the story we tell about ourselves, are not merely reflective of identity, but rather they are identity.

- A sociocultural perspective asserts that **identity development is the process of learning to be “a certain kind of person” within particular local cultures** (Gee, 2001)
- And involves a **continuous negotiation between evolving conceptions of the self and the various communities and contexts one inhabits** (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- **Narrative, organizing hermeneutic conversations among events and actors in complex relation** to one another, is a critical tool in constructing and molding this complicated process as it evolves (Bruner, 1991).

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Constructing the self in a digital world

This is "Me"



The Self Narratives, the story we tell about ourselves, are not merely reflective of identity, but rather they are identity.

- **Narrative interpretations of our pasts are contingent on the perspectives of our present** (Ellis & Bochner, 2003)
- **And the narratives about the self, that are the most powerful, find validation in an audience and can even be constructed with or by others** (Sfard & Prusak, 2005)

Whereas other scholars have described identity as a tool for understanding learning (Gee, 2001), or have described learning as a crucial shaper of identity (Tobin & Roth, 2007), Sfard and Prusak's articulation of the function of identity stories makes it clear: Learning is Identity, and narrative is the glue that holds it all together.

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Constructing the self in a digital world

Digital Story Telling



The digital storytelling is one of the modern multimedia self-expression that present very brand new possibilities for identity formation.

- Screen media have become ingrained in the figured worlds of youth as an **arena of shared experience** (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Jenkins, 2006; Kitwana, 2002)
- Messages communicated through screen media have a **strong impact in shaping youth's opinions about fashion, sexuality, and status** and provide a rich source of **narrative motifs** that young people take up in their own storytelling to address issues in their pwn lives (Diamondstone, 2004, Dyson, 1997).

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Digital Story Telling



The digital storytelling is one of the modern multimedia self-expression that present very brand new possibilities for identity formation.

- Nowadays, a primary use of storytelling is devoted to **support agency and the potential for transformative experience** (Bruner, 1990; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain , 1998)
- The possibilities of multidimensional meanings within digital media **become a vehicle through which youth can “amplify and widely disseminate their social consciousness”** (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008).

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Constructing the self in a digital world

*The transformative potential of
community-based organizations (CBO)*



The transformative potential of community-based organizations as sites for youth development has been well documented (Cole, 1996; Heath & Mc Laughlin, 1993; Hull & Greeno, 2006; Hull & Katz, 2006; Larson, Walker & Pearce, 2005; McLaughlin, 1999; Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2005; Sefton-Green, 2006)

- Novices progress through three predictable stages of expertise: **acclimation**, **competence**, and **proficiency** (Alexander, 2003; Hatano & Oura, 2003; Sternberg, 2003)

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Acclimation, where learners have limited and fragmented knowledge, in the phase where subjects attend to surface-level features of the domain (Alexander, 2003)

Competence, where subjects have a basic working knowledge and are able to begin to think more deeply about their tasks. This deepening knowledge is indicated by the increase of learner interests (Alexander, 2003)

Proficiency is marked by an ability to see patterns, high engagement, and a desire to ask searching questions (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 1999)

Learners move into expertise by changes in values and identity (Hatano & Oura, 2003)

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A key design challenge in creating these conditions for expertise development is finding ways to break down the often-static roles of “teacher” and “learner” (expert and novice) within educational learning environments.

- These opportunities **must involve active collaboration** and dialogue through which participants **negotiate and construct shared meaning** across diverse experiences (Bhaba, 1994).
- The contribution of diverse bodies of knowledge, role types, and practices creates a **space of asymmetrical relationships** in which young people are given opportunities to construct identities as experts that integrate their individual experiences and values (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Turner, 1997).

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- The internet based environments provide opportunities for **creating bridges between youth and adult knowledge and practices**, as well as to **create a space for learners to intentionally challenge and renegotiate the practices that are valued in school** (Gutiérrez et. al., 1997, 1999; Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995; Moje et. al., 2004; Soja, 1996).
- Bhabha and others (Moje et al. 2004) have focused on the potential for internet encounters to **destabilize dominant norms and assumptions by bringing together different interpretations and experiences**.

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*The transformative potential of
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Identity formation is a dynamic process (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), Emergent (Duranti, 1997; Wenger, 1999), and a process that forms and reforms over time through improvisation and self-authoring (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998)

- **Identity in practice is inseparable from participation** in the context of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995).
- The knowledge-building activity with Web 2.0 technologies can be linked to evidence of **increased idea generation, collective problem solving, and knowledge refinement** (Lee, McLoughlin, and Chan, 2007).

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Positive Technological Development



Too often youth experiences with technology are framed in negative terms (e.g., cyber-bullying, sexual predation, invasion of privacy, addiction to videogames or massively multiplayer online games [MMOGs])

- **Cyber-Bullying among schoolmates** (Li, 2007)
- **Videogame addiction and aggression** (Grusser, Thaler mann, and Griffiths, 2007)
- New challenges faced by digital natives, especially regarding **online safety and privacy** (Palfrey, and Gasser, 2008).

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Positive Technological Development



Moreover the literature has pointed many risk factors as correlates to poor choices and negative use of new technologies (Schrock & Boyd, 2008), including:

- Poor home environment
- Lack of parental oversight
- Depression
- History of abuse
- Substance use

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Positive Technological Development The Assessment Tools



Nevertheless even Positive Correlates exist!

Since the early 1960s, the growing field of educational technology has developed assessment instruments to examine how learning with and about computers happens based on the construct of **Computer Literacy** and **Technological Fluency**. From an outsider's perspective, both constructs are similar and both address the questions of what it means to successfully use technology for teaching and learning (National Research Council Committee on Information Technology Literacy, 1999).

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Positive Technological Development The Assessment Tools



Computer Literacy

Computer Literacy is about developing instrumental skills to improve learning, productivity, and performance by mastering specific software applications for well defined tasks, and knowing the basic principles of how a computer works (Luehrmann, 1981, 2002; Hoffman & Blake, 2003; Livingstone, 2004)

Technological Fluency

Technological Fluency includes instrumental skills but focuses on enabling individuals to express themselves creatively with technology (Papert, 1980). It is described even as the ability to use and apply technology as effortlessly and smoothly as people use language

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Positive Technological Development The six C's of positive youth development



The ability to use technology meaningfully in the context of learning no longer rests only on skills but also on a variety of psychosocial and emotional factors. Recent research by Lerner et. al (2005) frames the various developmental assets into the six C's of positive youth development:

- **Competence** - An ability to use technology, to create or design projects using the computer in order to accomplish a goal, and to debug projects and problem solve.
- **Confidence** - A sense of oneself as someone which can act and learn to act successfully in a technology-rich environment and find help when necessary and have perseverance over technical difficulty.
- **Caring** - A sense of compassion and willingness to respond to needs and concerns of other individuals, to assist others with technical difficulties, and to use technology as means to help others.

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Positive Technological Development
The six C's of positive youth development



The ability to use technology meaningfully in the context of learning no longer rests only on skills but also on a variety of psychosocial and emotional factors. Recent research by Lerner et. al (2005) frames the various developmental assets into the six C's of positive youth development:

- **Connection** - Positive bonds and relationships established and maintained by the use of technology
- **Character** - Awareness and respect of personal integrity and moral and social values while using technologies in responsible ways and an ability to express oneself using technology
- **Contribution** - An orientation to contribute to society by using and proposing technologies to solve community/social problems.

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Constructing the self in a digital world

Identities Unleashed



The word Identity, from the latin idem meaning “the same”, is used in many ways, but includes two related but clearly distinct ideas:

- A set of characteristics by which a person is recognizable in different instances
- The persistent essential character of a person.

Each type of identity plays a key role in social behaviour and learning in everyday life. But in a virtual world, rules and roles of identity are different.

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Constructing the self in a digital world

Identities Unleashed Virtual Identities and Social Capital



Because online experiences have become increasingly rich and engaging, they enable new ways of being (Heudin, 2004). The creation of the Digital Self is described by Gee (2003) as a “projective identity” in which a person must “project one’s values and desires onto the virtual character”.

- When people are **anonymous** they have **less incentive for good behaviour and less incentive not to engage in bad behaviour**. (Dibble, 1993; Turkle, 1995)
- **Griefers** is a new term to describe online **players who cause intentional harm to random players** (Dibble, 2008).

Anonymous situation can have some positive effects as well:

- Studies of computer mediated communication indicate that **people have a tendency to disclose more personal information and to engage in more intimate interactions** than in face-to-face communication (Spears, Lea, & Postmes, 2007).

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Identities Unleashed Virtual Identities and Social Capital



Nevertheless, in the online situation there are motivations for people to behave in positive ways.

- **Online behaviour is frequently regulated by the desire to build and maintain reputation and relationships: to increase social capital** (Resnick, 2001).
- **Online reputations are developed through personal interactions in much the same way is offline** (Steinkuehler, 2005).
- **Each Identity allows to participate in the community in a different way and explore what the identity is like** (Bruckman, 1996).
- Lenhart, Rainie, and Lewis (2001) reported that in their survey, almost **a quarter of adolescents who used instant messaging indicated that they had pretended to be someone else.**

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Identities Unleashed Virtual Identities and Social Capital



Researchers are beginning to understand how the limitations and freedoms of online communication affect social interaction

- Spears, Postmes, Lea and Wolbert (2002) found that **the limited nature of online interactions makes group identity information more salient.**
- Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimmons (2002) found that, when individuals unknown to one another were paired, those in the **internet chat condition were more likely to represent their true selves** than in face to face interact condition.
- Studies of learning show **significant learning gains for the students** and increased motivation (Barab, Sadler, Heiselt, Hickey, & Zuiker, 2007).

Reference: Ching, C. C., & Foley, B. J. (2012). *Constructing the self in a digital world*. Cambridge University Press.

Impression management and Identity Online

Impression management online



Impression management

Impression management is the process of controlling the impressions that other people form. Although it is possible to manage impressions of just about anything, from objects and events, to ideas and even other people, impression management typically refers to the process of influencing the impressions an audience forms about oneself. The term ‘impression management’ is therefore often used synonymously with ‘self-presentation’.

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Impression management and Identity Online

Impression management online



As well as visual anonymity, many online contexts explicitly call attention to impression management by inviting and often requiring users to choose a screen name, select a gender and write a description of themselves. In each of these tasks users can make decisions about how to present themselves online.

Researchers have examined each of these three acts as processes of impression management, including:

- the choice of screen name (Bechar-Israeli 1996; Chester 2004),
- gender selection (Turkle 1995; Roberts and Parks 1999; Chester 2004),
- and the role of the character description (Turkle 1995; Chester 2004).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Impression management and Identity Online

Impression management online



Impression management is a concept with wide application, and many variables have been hypothesized to impact on it. Synthesizing these influences, Mark Leary (1995) conceptualized a model explaining how and why people manage their public presentations. According to this model, impression management involves at least two discrete but interrelated processes:

1. impression motivation

2. impression construction

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

What is self-disclosure?



Self Disclosure

Self-disclosure is the telling of the previously unknown so that it becomes shared knowledge, the 'process of making the self known to others' (Jourard and Lasakow 1958: 91). This shared knowledge might exist between pairs of people, within groups, or between an individual and an organization.

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet



What is self-disclosure?

It has a variety of purposes, in part dependent on the context in which disclosure occurs.

- For instance, *within dyads, particularly romantic relationships, it serves to increase mutual understanding* (Laurenceau et al. 1998),
- and *builds trust* by making the discloser increasingly vulnerable (emotionally or otherwise) to the other person (Rubin 1975).
- Since self-disclosure is often reciprocated it frequently serves to *strengthen the ties that bind people in romantic or friendship-based relationships* (Jourard 1971).
- Disclosure within groups can serve to *enhance the bonds of trust between group members,*

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It has a variety of purposes, in part dependent on the context in which disclosure occurs.

- It can also *serve to legitimize group membership and strengthen group identity*. For instance, the admission of a negative identity (e.g. 'I am an alcoholic') within a shared identity group serves both to increase trust by revealing a stigmatized identity and acts as a membership card for a particular group (Galegher et al. 1998).
- *Personal growth* may also be an outcome of honest self-disclosure (Jourard 1971).
- In a study reported by Pennebaker et al. (1988), participants assigned to a trauma-writing condition (where they wrote about a traumatic and upsetting experience for four days) *showed immune system benefits*, compared to a non-trauma writing group.
- *Disclosure in this form has also been associated with reduced visits to medical centres and psychological benefits in the form of improved affective states* (Smyth 1998).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



New technology, and in particular the Internet, might well change the demands upon people to disclose personal information, as well as the possible implications of such disclosure.

A rapidly increasing body of experimental and anecdotal evidence suggests that CMC and general Internet-based behaviour can be characterized as containing high levels of self-disclosure.

- Rheingold (1993) claims that ***new, meaningful relationships can be formed in cyberspace because of, not despite, its limitations.*** He further argues that ‘the medium will, by its nature ... be a place where people often end up revealing themselves far more intimately than they would be inclined to do without the intermediation of screens and pseudonyms’.

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Self-disclosure and the Internet



New technology, and in particular the Internet, might well change the demands upon people to disclose personal information, as well as the possible implications of such disclosure.

- Similarly, Wallace (1999) argues that ***'The tendency to disclose more to a computer ... is an important ingredient of what seems to be happening on the Internet'*** (151).

Self-disclosure has been studied in a number of different settings using computers.

- Parks and Floyd (1996) studied the relationships formed by Internet users. They found that ***people report disclosing significantly more in their Internet relationships compared to their real life relationships.***

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



- Similarly, in their study of ‘coming out on the Internet’, McKenna and Bargh (1998) argue that *participation in online newsgroups gives people the benefit of ‘disclosing a long secret part of one’s self’.*

The results of these studies also suggest that high levels of self-disclosure can effectively be designed out of an Internet interaction e.g. through the use of a video link or accountability cues (Joinson 2001a).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



Further empirical confirmation of increased self-disclosure during CMC comes from the work of Tidwell and Walther (2002).

- They proposed that heightened self-disclosure during CMC may be due to **people's motivation to reduce uncertainty**. According to Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) (Berger and Calabrese 1975), people are motivated to reduce uncertainty in an interaction to increase predictability.
- Tidwell and Walther conclude that **the limitations of CMC encourage people to adapt their uncertainty-reducing behaviours** – they skip the usual asking of peripheral questions and minor disclosure, and instead opt for more direct, intimate questioning and self-disclosure.

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



Surveys and research administered via the Internet, rather than using paper methodologies, have also been associated with

- *reductions in socially desirable responding* (Joinson 1999; Frick et al. 2001),
- *higher levels of self-disclosure* (Weisband and Kiesler 1996)
- and an *increased willingness to answer sensitive questions* (see Tourangeau 2004).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



In a similar vein, survey methodology techniques that tend to reduce human involvement in question administration also increase responses to sensitive personal questions. For instance, compared to other research methods, **when data collection is conducted via computer-aided self-interviews** (where participants type their answers on to a laptop) **people report more:**

- health-related problems (Epstein et al. 2001),
- more HIV risk behaviours (Des Jarlais et al. 1999),
- more drug use (Lessler et al. 2000),
- and men report less sexual partners, and women more (Tourangeau and Smith 1996).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



- Medical patients **tend to report more symptoms and undesirable behaviours when interviewed by computer** rather than FtF (Greist et al. 1973).
- Clients at a STD clinic **report more sexual partners, more previous visits and more symptoms to a computer** than to a doctor (Robinson and West 1992).
- Ferriter (1993) found that pre-clinical psychiatric interviews conducted using CMC compared to FtF yielded **more honest, candid answers**.
- Similarly, automated or computerized telephone interviews, compared to other forms of telephone interviewing, lead **to higher levels of reporting of sensitive information** (see Lau et al. 2003; Tourangeau 2004).
- Joinson et al. (2007) report that **although personalizing the research experience leads to higher response rates to a self-administered survey, it also reduces self-disclosure**.

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Self-disclosure and the Internet



Within the Human–Computer Interaction (HCI) literature, the assumption seems to be that people will avoid disclosing information to commercial web services (Metzger 2004) due to their privacy concerns (Jupiter Research 2002).

An online survey stated that the three biggest consumer concerns in the area of online personal information security were:

1. companies trading personal data without permission,
2. the consequences of insecure transactions,
3. and theft of personal data (Harris Interactive 2002).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Models of self-disclosure online



Explanations for high levels of self-disclosure in person-to-person CMC have tended to focus on the psychological effects of anonymity: 'This anonymity allows the persecuted, the controversial, and the simply embarrassed to seek information – and disseminate it – while maintaining their privacy and reputations in both cyberspace and the material world' (Sobel 2000: 1522).

- Theoretically, it has been argued that ***anonymity in CMC works by replicating a 'strangers on the train' experience*** (Bargh et al. 2002), ***promoting private self-awareness and reducing accountability concerns*** (Joinson 2001a),
- ***creating a need for uncertainty reduction*** (Tidwell and Walther 2002)
- or a combination of the media and the process of interaction itself (Walther 1996).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Self Disclosure, Privacy and the Internet

Models of self-disclosure online



Similarly, explanations for increased self-disclosure to online surveys and web forms have also tended to stress

- **anonymity** (Joinson 1999),
- alongside the **reduced social presence** (and judgement) of the researcher (Tourangeau 2004),
- **reduced vulnerability** (Moon 1998)
- and **increased privacy of the research environment** (Tourangeau 2004).
- Once **privacy is reduced, or social presence increased, self-disclosure also tends to be reduced** (Joinson et al. 2007).

Reference: Joinson, A. (2007). *Oxford handbook of internet psychology*. Oxford University Press.