

**Creating Community:
Theorising on the Lived Experiences
of Young People**

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**This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree**

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Technology, Sydney

2009

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work of this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been produced without the thoughts and ideas, encouragement and support of innumerable people. I am grateful to the twenty-four young people who shared their thoughts and experiences of community online and offline with me. I hope that I have re-presented them as they would have wanted. I also acknowledge those young people who were enthusiastic enough about the study to recruit others to take part even if they themselves were unable to, and the very many others whose thoughts and actions led me over time to think about what community might mean today.

I would like to thank Professor Jenny Onyx, my supervisor, for her guidance, enthusiasm and patience throughout the project. Associate Professor Gael Walker read my drafts, and gave me new perspectives to consider. They are both excellent role models as scholars and as activists. I acknowledge the assistance of Maureen Henninger with the 'representation of the web of significance' and Michael Wall with the final proof-reading.

Without my friends and family, I would certainly never have begun this research project, and without their encouragement and that of my colleagues and fellow students, finishing it would have been more difficult.

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ABSTRACT

Community is a term used to convey a range of ideas, from a sense of belonging to contributing to a collective to sharing ideas and values. An analysis of the literature suggests that community is used interchangeably with notions of identity, social relations, social capital and civil society.

This ethnographic study of the lived experience of community online and offline of members of Generation X and Generation Y engaged in civil society shows community is important to them. It is important to feel that they belong, that they are part of something larger than themselves and that they are making a difference in their world. In being part of something larger, they are making individual choices, but for a purpose recognised and shared by others. This community is conspicuous when it relates to embodied, associational or collective actions, but it can be inconspicuous when people interact online or when it is based on the intangibles of trust and credibility.

They are creating their identities as they become adults, reflecting on their growth and development, and finding a sense of self through writing and other forms of expression and through interaction with others, in circumstances where public and private worlds collide. They place emphasis on the techniques for establishing and maintaining social relations online and offline. They acknowledge that friendship, based on having some emotional connection with others, is important but also recognise that satisfying relationships can be formed through the sharing of information. Most are aware that the relationships they develop can be commodified and traded as contacts, but they acknowledge the need for acting from a moral position. They value authenticity in relationships but may not be deterred by not knowing who they are interacting with online. They create their own agenda for action, based on their own interests and concerns; online they may be passionate about issues but offline they may prefer not to take part on collective action.

A theorisation of this lived experience of community indicates that participants in the study have a vocabulary they can use to discuss notions of community that comprises words not necessarily associated with community and containing potentially contradictory orientations.

Finally, this study indicates that further research is needed on whether the concerns with community expressed by these participants arise from the privileged position of the university-educated and on the paradoxical relationship between public and private, a tension which underpins much of the findings.