Creating Community:

Theorising on the Lived Experiences of Young People

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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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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.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Introducing the study

The world in which we live has changed significantly in the past twenty or so years. Some of these changes have been fostered by changes in communication technologies, such as the widespread use of the internet and phone technologies. These have made the world seem smaller by compressing time and space, and they have turned some of what was extraordinary into the commonplace. The media bring pictures and sound from distant places into living rooms around the world; in Sydney, London or St Vincent in the Windward Islands we can watch the French Open Tennis Tournament at more or less the same time. What might once have been scientific problems, such as the rate of increase of the hole in the ozone layer or the destruction of rainforests in the Amazon, become social problems of significance to people living around the world. In such a world, people can expect to move between countries to live, study and work, and form social relations wherever they are. Communication technologies can keep them connected, no matter where they are at any given time, thus leading to a sense that social relations exist across the world, independent of physical location and face-to-face interaction. At the same time, these changes are perceived to put social relations under strain, weakening face-to-face connections and undermining the social fabric of community and associational life.

Giddens defines globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (1990, p. 94). The existence of worldwide social relations leads to discussion about the conditions of society worldwide. Organisations in civil society such as Amnesty International or International Rivers (formerly known as International Rivers Network) have flourished around the world in response to problems which are constructed as common social concerns and can be easily communicated. Social movements such as Greenpeace have used communication technologies to develop and maintain a global presence. Established organisations are thought to have

used information and communication technologies such as the internet and the world wide web to extend their reach and the frequency of their contacts with members, and even to foster dialogue with and among their members (Naughton 2001). New organisations have been created to work towards positive social change, some existing only through information and communication technologies (Boeder 2002). And individuals have used internet technologies, such as blogs, to express their own interests and concerns, gather support for issues and attempt to make changes in the world around them (Smith, Kearns & Fine 2005).

Giddens argues that a good society is one which balances government and the market economy with a developed civil society (Giddens 2000). For Bauman, a good society, a just society, is one where each individual has "the ability to influence the conditions of their own life" (2000, p. 51), although for him there is something of the utopian and nostalgic about this notion. If we as citizens are to understand what others mean by a 'good society', and we as activists are to put our efforts into working towards this, it is important that we as scholars conceptualise or reconceptualise some of the key concepts of our fields, which have been changed by the impact of globalisation. The concept of community is one such concept. It was declared obsolete by scholars in the 1970s, but remained a topic of fascination for researchers of social interactions, with research and discussions continuing to appear in the literature. Changes in realities and perceptions of time, space and place have renewed interest in the ways people interact. New constructs like 'communities of practice', 'virtual communities' and 'distributed work groups' have arisen and a range of concepts such as civil society and identity have come to the fore. The notion of community is intrinsically linked to these constructs and concepts. Albrow and Eade (1994) caution against the idealisation of older concepts such as community, whereas Wellman asserts that the question of community may remain significant "to the end of time" because of its "importance to humankind and accessibility to public discourse" (2003, p. 4 of 29). If the concept of community is to be reconceptualised, it is important to heed the warning to avoid idealisation and to maintain a focus on its importance. This would seem to imply the need for a focus on lived experience from which theory can be derived.

Contextualising the study

This is a study of young people's relationships to community.

It would be easy to claim that this study grew from specific experiences in my everyday life but this would not be an adequate reflection of the intellectual processes through which curiosity expressed itself. There was no 'Eureka' moment when circumstances brought questions of how young people relate to notions of community to mind. There was, rather, a slow accumulation of understandings from readings of scholarly literature, workplace experiences that showed that this literature could reflect conceptualisations of those experiences, overheard conversations on the bus that challenged some of these conceptualisations, and discussions about the relationships between lived experience and theory. There was also the pressing nature of some of that lived experience and, to that extent, it is possible to identify experiences which acted as a kind of catalyst for this study.

The first relates to young people and their engagement in community. In late 1999, a young colleague introduced me to a friend of his who was developing a project and who had limited experience in developing the policy infrastructure for such an undertaking. The project involved the challenge of bringing together young people from around the world to share experiences and set agendas for positive social change in their local communities. And this began an involvement with the project that lasted more than six years. One of the first tasks, drawing on my professional and academic experience in career planning, was to develop collaboratively an approach to action planning which would sustain the heart of this project. The project became a successful event, known as the International Youth Parliament (IYP), held in Sydney in late 2000. Its focus was the development of individual and collective endeavours – action plans – during the event, which was attended by around two hundred young people aged between fifteen and twenty-eight from around the world.

The event showed the volunteers and others who worked on it that it was possible to bring people together to work collaboratively on actions for positive social change and that participants in the process were eager to continue to learn and develop as

individuals and as young activists. Thus it was decided to develop an online program aimed to build capacity in the young people who had attended the meeting and others with similar values and plans. This project was known as the Skills Centre, and I took on responsibility for its development and implementation, through a number of consultative mechanisms. We read voraciously, an approach developed in the planning for the original IYP event, sharing our readings on activism and learning and using them to establish common ground and principles for action. The program of activities was agreed upon in discussion with participants in the IYP 2000 event, and soon came to include their friends and colleagues engaged in other youth-run activities. The planning for a second International Youth Parliament event in 2004 placed a strong emphasis on skills development, with participants being able to take part in a number of workshops and discussions before they arrived in Sydney. My engagement with young people through the Skills Centre activities of online peer group discussions and online workshops seemed to show that these young people very easily created relationships with each other, sharing knowledge and experiences, exchanging ideas for projects and even establishing parallel projects for social action in different countries.

The second experience relates to notions of civil society online and the possibilities that access to information and to the mechanisms for exchanging information can lead to changes in the world around us, including changes in policy. In 2005, I had been involved in teaching an undergraduate subject on information policy and was keen to bring the learning experiences within the grasp of students. Thus, I arranged for the students to take part in online discussions being held by TakingITGlobal as part of the National Youth Campaign on the Information Society, one of the activities of the World Summit on the Information Society. Young people I had met through IYP were involved in setting up this campaign and moderating the discussion forums. Subsequent discussions with students showed a range of experiences with social action online. Conversations with professional colleagues involved in the Australian input to the World Summit on the Information Society also showed a range of experiences. The following year, 2006, circumstances led me to reflect on these discussions and wonder what opportunities organisations in civil society provided for people to engage in civil society online. I was familiar with the work of Naughton (2001), Levine (2004) and Surman and Reilly (2003) and was keen to be able to discuss what opportunities were

available for people in Sydney to become engaged in social action online, especially if they were not particularly skilled in the use of information technology. As a consequence, I carried out a preliminary analysis of the 210 organisations listed in the ActiveSydney website http://www.active.org.au/sydney/. As a result of this analysis, twenty-eight active websites were identified from organisations involved in working for social change and another seven websites were added to the list by the four Sydney-based activists who checked the resulting list for completeness. The results of an analysis using the literature of social action, active citizenship and civic engagement showed that most of the websites extended the work of existing organisations in civil society, providing information about issues and events and soliciting donations. There were opportunities for civic engagement and some opportunities to develop the skills of active citizenship, although relatively few websites provided opportunities for participants to take part in discussions or play a role in setting the agenda in the way I had observed young people involved with the IYP doing (Yerbury 2007a, 2007b). And few of the young people I knew through my various activities in civil society were aware of most of the websites in this study, although they were firm supporters of some of them.

The third was a series of comments from the first half of 2005, each of which I documented. First, the daughter of a colleague phoned me to say "I've decided to take action" and that she was going to take part in the Easter demonstration at the Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia. For her, this was her first action in civil society, and a significant and effective one. A few days later, Gerard Henderson, a conservative political commentator, said on ABC Radio National that the Baxter protest was "meaningless; it's just symbolic action". He criticised it as ineffectual and even harmful. A few days later, I overheard a conversation on the bus which struck such a chord on that day that I recorded it too. A young woman said to a work colleague: "This is the issue: If you try and solution it [*sic*] with just one solution, it won't work because you've got Gen X and Gen Y people in the team and they've got different perspectives." From this, I understood that young people do not necessarily see social action in the same way as mature adults do, and that young people may draw generational differences between themselves and those slightly older or slightly younger than them.

Probably, none of these experiences alone would have propelled me to formalise a study on young people and their relationship to community, but taken together with other understandings and experiences, they were sufficient to lead me to articulate my interest in such a study.

Significance of the study

This study, then, will investigate lived experiences through which the concept of community may be re-examined. These lived experiences will come from young people, members of Generation X and Generation Y, as they explore how they create and maintain a sense of community. Practically, this study will explore the differing perspectives of a group of young people who are active in civil society, engaged in creating a 'good society' and linked through communication technologies such as email, online forums and social networking sites where they share information and experience, formally and informally.

This will be a case study using an ethnographic approach, informed by the work of Denzin (1989) and Geertz (1993) and emphasising the organic nature of the process of creating community. Thus it will be an inductive study, rather than a deductive one. It will embody the criteria of a good ethnographic enquiry, which according to Clifford are experience, interpretation, dialogue and polyphony (Clifford 1999). To emphasise these, the study will be reported, following Richardson (2000), as a 'sandwich text'. This will give the possibility of highlighting aspects of the study that might otherwise remain hidden. It will also permit the theorising stages of explication and interpretation to remain "close to the ground" (Geertz 1993, p. 24). Thus, as a deliberate act, those parts of the text that carry the researcher's personal voice will be written in the first person and other textual devices will be used to signal the voices of other participants.

This study will make a contribution to the literature, adding to the understanding of community, as it will expand the contemporary understanding of a vexed concept. Further, it will provide a documented analysis of the ways a group of young people say they create community, adding to existing studies of young people who use information and communication technologies in their interactions. The study will be of value to any

organisation in civil society, especially in the context of creating a model of a 'good society'. It will increase the empirical literature on the involvement of young people as active citizens and underline the ways in which young people in Generation X and Generation Y interact. Finally, the study is significant because the participants in the study are young people whose thoughts, ideas and behaviours are infrequently included in the establishment of social constructs (Vromen 2004).

Framing the study

At the heart of this study are questions of what participants in the study think community is and how they experience it, of civil society and social relations, of identity and how they view the presentation of self in social contexts, and of social action and how participants create a 'good society'. In this study, I have approached these questions from a sociological perspective, although others might have approached them from a perspective of social psychology. Given the broad scope of this study, I frame these statements of research question as a starting point for the investigation. This is a study which aims to explicate the field rather than to provide a simple answer. The research question and the sub questions can be stated as follows:

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y, who are active in civil society, create and understand a sense of community?

- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y create their identity and how do others react to this?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y understand social action and how do they experience it?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y create community through social relations?
- How are members of Generation X and Generation Y engaged in the process of creating social capital?

- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y perceive and live civil society?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y intellectualise and live community?

The study is an ethnographic exploration of the lived experience of Generation X and Generation Y online and offline to deconstruct the concept of community for them. This will be an inductive study, not seeking to test a specific theory or set of theories. Theoretically, the consideration of the questions at the heart of this study is informed by ideas from a number of theorists, including Clifford Geertz, Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Barry Wellman and Jürgen Habermas. However, the purpose of this study is not to determine whether a particular abstract representation of community, proposed by a key theorist, can be recognised among the thoughts and lived experiences of participants. I will take an inductive approach to exploring a new – or at least a renewed – concept of community. Each of the research questions listed above will be addressed in a chapter in the findings. There are a number of conflicting approaches in the literature, such that sociologists in the past gave up on the possibility of using community as a measurable construct. Nonetheless, sociologists still need such a concept, and other disciplines, such as anthropology, have continued to use the concept of community. It seems impossible to discuss social relations without it, and as we move into a world where globalised social relations are the norm, it will be important to develop conceptual tools to support scholarship engaged with the realities of this world.

Framing the context

The context for the study is the world of a group of young people, some from the so-called Generation X (born in the 1970s and early 1980s) and some from the so-called Generation Y (born from 1982) (Wyn & Woodman 2006, p. 501). Some of these are young people I have known for a while; we have worked together in various ways – through the Oxfam International Youth Parliament, in workshops to develop skills in facilitating online discussions and learning opportunities, in Scouting activities and in community-based activities such as bush regeneration. Those I did not know are friends who have been brought into the study through the 'snowball' technique. While I have

been involved as a peer with quite a number of these young people in a range of activities and projects, by age I am not part of the group.

These young people claim to be active in civil society and are users of the internet. They have lived and/or undertaken university studies in Sydney, New South Wales, and they are linked with others around the world through information and communication technologies. As young people keen to create a 'good society', they are active in civil society and likely to be users of the websites of organisations, groups and social movements. Some of these websites are listed in ActiveSydney, an online listing of organisations in civil society. Others are websites of organisations that have been established since the ActiveSydney listing data was collected. These websites provide a range of opportunities for working towards a 'good society' and engaging in civil society, and were taken as representative of the instruments people could use in their attempts to create a 'good society'; in other words, they can be seen to represent at least in part the context for action.

Most of these organisations use their website to carry out the same range of activities as they carry out in their physical manifestation. The majority disseminate information to people who might not otherwise be able to gain access to it, giving them an insight into social issues and notifying them of events to attend in the offline world. A few of these websites attempt to develop skills in active citizenship through modelling effective behaviour for social change, such as how to write a letter to a politician. A small number of organisations have no physical presence, existing only or mainly through their websites (Yerbury 2007a, 2007b). These organisations are also likely to use social networking sites, such as MySpace or Facebook, and perhaps to use media-sharing sites such as Flickr or YouTube.

Framing the research

Clifford Geertz used the metaphor of the spider's web to evoke the concept of culture, the notion of our relations in the societies in which we live. He wrote that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz 1993, p. 5). One could argue that the idea of 'webs of significance' has been over-used to the point where it has become devalued; it has certainly been used by thousands of scholars and

practitioners. Nonetheless as a metaphor for framing a study about creating a sense of community it is a powerful tool. And as Geertz himself referred to this statement as a "doctrine in a clause" (1993, p. 5), there would seem to be room for interpretation and the embellishment of meanings.

The interpretation of this framing metaphor is not a straightforward process. The web of interpreting thoughts seems all too easily to resemble cobweb rather than a fresh web ready to entrap its prey or to sparkle in the light of a new day; cobweb, the stage a spider's web reaches as it ages, loses its elasticity and its strength, folds in on itself, collects dust and collapses under its own weight. Even in this state, some of the anchor points of the original web hold strong. But cobweb can never be rejuvenated in the way that ideas can be re-spun.

And what of the spider? Each of us is a spider for Geertz, as each of us is actively engaged in making sense of the world around us and in bringing others into contact with us and our understandings. Here, I am the spider and so I will start to spin my own web. I represent myself through my words and my actions, choosing who to be and creating an identity, a voice for the reader.

An individual has the capacity to act and the ability to make some change. We can have some impact on the world around us – we can choose whether to act or not and we live with the consequences of those choices. Not choosing and choosing not to act are still choices. I have chosen to act. As a citizen, I seek to be part of a 'good society' and, as an activist, I take steps to garner support for my view of this 'good society'. As a scholar, I am trying to find meanings and make new meanings from the thoughts, ideas, experiences and behaviours of others.

As individuals, we make decisions on whether to act and how to act on the basis of what we know. The more we know, the more trust we can have in others and the less risk is involved in our decisions. However, what we can know or understand is only provisional or temporary – it can be changed at any time by some new piece of information or some action by others. What we know and experience takes on an existence separate from us as soon as we record it or share it. We have no control over

these expressions of our thoughts once we have recorded or shared them. Information takes on a life of its own (Popper 1972, p. 118). It is not an absolute, a fact with the same meaning for all; however, there is often a sense of collective agreement that a fact or topic is worthy of consideration (Buckland 1991). Information is socially constructed and different people will create different sorts of understanding from the same information (Dervin 1983). The web I am spinning is a manifestation of this social construct. Through it, readers may also come to understand the impact of collective agreement, as the propositions echo those they have read in other contexts or considered themselves.

My web, then, is a web of significance, a web of meaning. But it is also a web in which I am suspended, much as a fly might be suspended, trapped in the web. For we make our own meanings, our own cultures, our own communities, and at the same time are part of them, unable to escape their influence. There are the rules and protocols we have developed for our shared existence; the vocabulary we use among ourselves and which allows us shortcuts to communication; the ways we interact, our shared values and understandings. These hold us together. In the same way that the silk of the spider's web is recognised for its elasticity, for its lightness and its strength, so the threads of shared culture are elastic and strong. When an insect flies into a spider's web, the web absorbs the impact; it does not bounce the fly off, nor does it break. Similarly, our social interactions can place significant stresses and strains on the ties that bind us together, yet it is rare for an individual to be ejected or for social relations to break down in the same way that it is also unusual for the silk of the web to break without some external intervention.

I am spinning this web of significance in an environment which favours a notion of social space akin to Habermas's public sphere (Habermas 1989). The advantage of adopting this approach is that the public sphere is a metaphorical place where issues can be discussed and opinions formed. It is separated from the dogma of government and religion and the imperatives of trade as well as being separated from domestic or family life. It could be argued that this is the space where Weber's associational community exists. If that were to be the case, the pattern for my web would be set and I would be implementing someone else's ideas rather than creating new understandings.

Like Habermas, I am optimistic about the potential of this space. The attraction of the notion of the public sphere in the context of this study is that it provides an environment where individuals and groups can exchange ideas, information and experiences without having to follow someone else's agenda. It is a place where new understandings can be formed and from which commitments to action can be developed. In a globalised world, it offers the possibility of transcending the local or national. It is a not a single space, nor is it a unidimensional space. Ideally, these spaces exist at a range of societal, institutional, physical and intellectual levels. Ideally, too, the ways to access these spaces and the ways to participate in discussions and debate are common knowledge. These are essentially political spaces, operating on principles of democracy and freedom of speech. Individuals and groups come to these spaces to seek and disseminate information, to research and understand their own issues and contribute to the understanding of others' issues, to find common threads of concern and to speak with many voices on those common concerns. Individuals also come to these spaces to plan real or symbolic action in the hope of bringing about changes in the rules and protocols or in the decisions and actions of those who may hold more power, perhaps in the belief that as part of a group we can have a greater impact or make further-reaching changes than we can as an individual (Keck & Sikkink 1998). Yet I also have to acknowledge that there are circumstances where there seems to be nothing an individual can do to effect any social change, because globalisation has moved centres of power and control out of the reach of individuals and local communities.

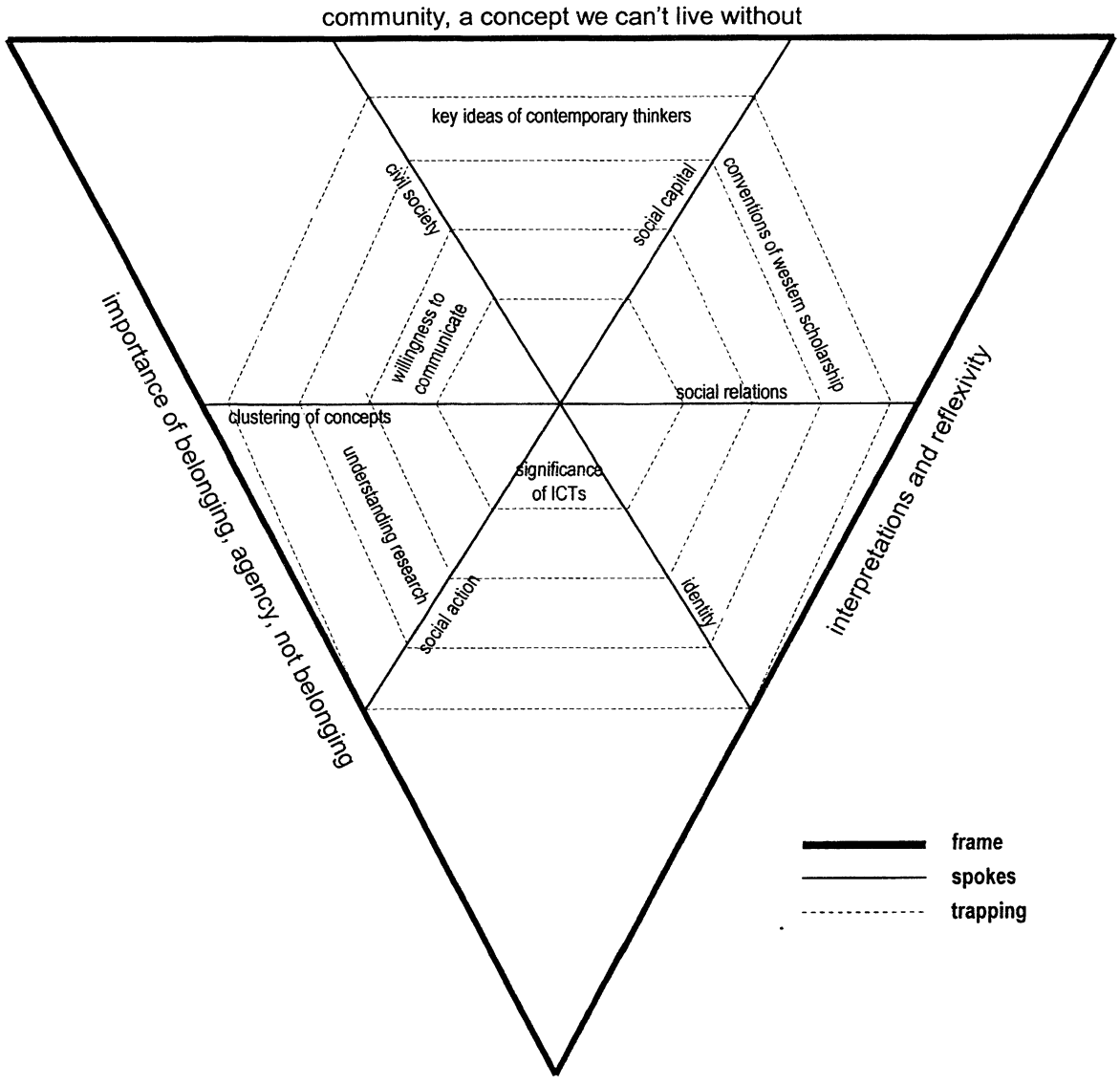
Webs of significance, like spiders' webs, need anchor points to attach them to their environment. The orb web on which this metaphor is based has three elements. It has frame lines, lines that seem like spokes in a wheel and the trapping lines (http://www.pestproducts.com/spider-webs.htm). The frame lines are derived from our way of viewing the world, what we know, what we have learned and what we believe. In the web, the frame is like an upside-down triangle, with a bridge line that supports the whole web forming the base and two anchor lines. Threads from these frame lines often remain long after the web itself has disintegrated.

My bridge line is fixed by the recognition that community is a concept and a reality which we cannot live without. This is reinforced by the sense that questions of community will always be significant, because of this fundamental importance and because these are questions that we can share our opinions and ideas on, communicating and recording them in any one of a variety of ways.

My first anchor line must be able to encompass a number of thoughts and ideas so that the web will be strong. As I begin to spin the thread, I acknowledge that I can know my world only through my own interactions with it and with other people. We are caught up in an interplay between ourselves and our own beliefs and interpretations and the systematised beliefs and interpretations which bring about social interactions. As a researcher in this study, I am part of what I study and my interpretation of this is partial and provisional. I strive to write in a reflexive way. I acknowledge the influence of Geertz, and with this acknowledgement I am able to fix the first anchor line for the frame.

My second anchor line must be able to match the first, neither too close nor too far, and join the first to create the frame. I am concerned with notions of belonging. Appadurai has asserted that a sense of belonging can overcome distance and can be fostered through the use of contemporary technologies such as email and internet discussion boards (Appadurai 1990). Thus, being 'disembedded' at a local level is no longer necessarily significant (Giddens 1990). As I begin to spin this thread, a gust of wind catches me, dragging me towards Tönnies concepts of community as *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Tönnies 1974). I reject the way in which Tönnies defines community. The distinction between the social relations of the family and immediate geographic community on the one hand and the social relations between members of associations on the other is dated and has always been problematic, with nostalgia for the one and anxiety to achieve the other clouding many discussions. For a moment, I contemplate how associational memberships became almost a defining characteristic of civil society in the late twentieth century. I consider 'civil society' to be a problematic construct because for many people it assumes an institutional or associational focus to social relations, leaving little or no space for the institutionally unaffiliated to play a part.

Diagram 1 Representation of my web of significance



I see more clearly now that this second anchor line is formed from the importance of social relations. Good social relations are based on the willingness to assume shared values and understandings. A sense of community is based on trust and on tolerance. 'Good social relations' do not only apply to face-to-face, local interactions. They also exist at a societal level and at a global level. Social relations no longer assume relations of physical proximity. The communities of which we are a part are not necessarily communities of location. We can be 'disembedded', separated from others in time and space, and yet still maintain relationships, still feel a sense of belonging. Giddens explores how we shape the values and structures of our institutions and how shifts in our understandings of time and place mean that we can become disembedded from our physical communities and yet still maintain the social relations that enable us to communicate at a level of symbols (Giddens 1990). I hang on to the thread, acknowledging the influence of Putnam, Giddens and Bauman. Here, then, in the notion of social relations is the anchor point for this thread. And the frame is complete.

I turn to the 'spokes' of the web. These are fashioned from the scholarly literature and can be labelled in a variety of ways. I have chosen to label them in a way that shows differing emphases on community and how it is perceived. These are the labels: from community to civil society; sharing ideas and creating community; from community to social relations; from community to identity; from community to social action; community and the clustering of concepts. The thread I use to spin these spokes is not sticky; this allows me to give shape to the web without entrapping myself.

Now I must fashion the trapping lines, those cross-threads which are the substance of the web and which give a web its appearance of regularity. At a glance, it may seem that the trapping lines are circular, perfect feats of engineering. But in reality, they are separate threads, not necessarily linking together but giving the appearance of doing so. They repeat in series, although rarely symmetrical. Sometimes they are closer together and sometimes they seem to have a larger gap between them. But they reinforce the pattern and they reinforce each other. The act of spinning them reinforces them as they are part of my lived and thought experience. Wherever I or someone else becomes entrapped, the reverberations run through me and can be felt throughout the whole web.

These trapping lines are the norms and standards for interactions in and around this web of significance. They include the conventions of Western scholarship in the early twenty-first century; an understanding of what research entails; a willingness to communicate across cultures, including age and ethnicity; an acknowledgement of the significance of information and communication technologies in our social relations; and a familiarity with the ideas of key contemporary thinkers. To go further at this stage would be to pre-empt the study.

Framing the thesis

Geertz's metaphor of weaving a web of significance is useful for exploring how a study of social interaction may be created both conceptually and practically. The metaphor of a spider spinning a web in which to trap prey is a challenging one for representing the text of a thesis that has been written from this metaphorical stance. However, metaphors indicate elements of similarity, rather than suggesting mirror-image representations. Thus, the intention is not to overpower or entrap the reader, but rather to produce a text that engages the reader.

Conventionally, a thesis is presented in clearly defined sections: Introduction, a Literature Review that situates the research question, Methodology, Findings, Discussion and Conclusion, in all of which the researcher acts as a detached observer and the writing is impersonal. As an ethnography, this thesis adopts some conventions from this genre. It will begin with the conventional Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology chapters of a thesis. However, its chapters of findings and discussion will take an ethnographic approach in the style of Geertz and be written as a sandwich text. Here, the review of scholarly literature will be followed by chapters with findings and interpretations based on the researcher's understandings of the literature, leading to the development of theory. The intention in this study is not to test theory. This is an inductive study and the resulting theory can be tested by others in other contexts. The creation of theory will follow the approach of C. Wright Mills and Clifford Geertz. Within each chapter of findings, the explications will present the voices of the participants, whereas the interpretation will be reflexive, drawing on the literature and written in my voice, the voice of the researcher. The concluding chapter, based around explanation and theorising, will maintain that personal voice.

The Literature Review (Chapter 2) gives an overview of the concept of community, moving from the time when it was considered obsolete through its conceptual shifts in focus and emphasis to studies of its application in the context of the use of information and communication technologies. It sets out shifts in the conceptualisation of community, from the shifting of the boundaries, to the impact of information and communication technologies to the shifts in focus of the concept itself. The literature on social relations and interactions using information and communication technologies marks a recognition of differing perspectives on the nature of these interactions, as put forward for example by Turkle and Wellman. The shifts in focus on the concept of community include the shift from community to civil society evident in the writings of Etzioni and Putnam; the shift from community to social relations, explored by Giddens and Bauman; the shift from community to identity, again explored by Giddens and Bauman; and the shift from community to social action, set out in the writings of Beck and Giddens. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the clustering of concepts and the way in which a language can develop around the term community.

The chapter on Methodology (Chapter 3) presents the study as an inductive one which takes the form of an ethnography. It starts from Alvesson and Sköldberg's position (2000) that intellectualisation of method is important for reflexive research. Geertz's method, including 'thick description', is presented as central to the ethnographic approach (1993), and the process of writing considered significant for authenticity in ethnographies by many, including Clifford (1999), Richardson (2000) and Ellis (2000) is explored. Data collection is seen in Geertz's terms as 'inscription' and the various methods of collecting data are described. The data analysis techniques, including social network analysis, content analysis and pattern coding, are described.

There are six chapters of findings (Chapters 4–9) that present the voices of participants, sandwiched with my reflexive interpretation, that of the researcher, and drawing on relevant literature. The findings are presented with a logic that introduces the reader to the participants and then works outwards from the participants and their experiences of identity through their experiences of social relations, social capital and civil society to their intellectualisations of community.

Chapter 4 introduces the participants and describes their social interactions with each other and with me, their embodied interactions in civil society and their online interactions in civil society, as well as providing an overview of the social actions they engage in, including creating opportunities for others to take part in social actions. In this chapter, social network analysis is used to examine these interactions more closely and to present them diagrammatically. Chapter 5 addresses questions of identity. It shows how participants express their sense of self or seek to develop their identity through social interaction, maintaining a sense of integrity and authenticity, both seeking recognition from others and sometimes concealing their identities. Chapter 6 emphasises the importance of having the skills and techniques to create social relations and is concerned with the types of social relations the participants engage in, from the importance of friendships to the pragmatic recognition of the effectiveness of associations or other goal-oriented groupings and the collectivities of the tribe and the brand. Chapter 7 analyses the ways in which participants create social capital through developing trust, sharing information and experience, using approaches which range from starting conversations to trying to make a difference in their world. It also examines their understandings of what social capital is. Chapter 8 explores the conceptions participants have of civil society and the ways they engage in it, considers the implications of belonging and exclusion inherent in these conceptualisations, and takes a reflexive position on interpreting understandings of civil society. Chapter 9 explores different ways that the participants have conceptualised and experienced the notion of community. Using stories from participants, it shows how their conceptualisations and lived experiences overlap with and diverge from the concepts of community documented in the literature. It then takes my voice, the voice of the researcher, categorising community as conspicuous and inconspicuous.

Chapter 10 completes the theorising, a process which draws from the work of Mills (1959) and Geertz (1993). It builds on the explication and interpretation in Chapters 4 to 9 and attempts to move to a level of explanation of how and why the perceptions of community are so. Further, it seeks to establish a vocabulary for expressing community through evaluating the interplay between the thoughts and ideas of earlier theorists as

set out in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, and the explications and interpretations of Chapters 4 to 9. It concludes with some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 COMMUNITY IN THE LITERATURE

Introduction

"What do you mean by 'community?'" This has been a challenge posed by sociologists and anthropologists for several decades. One can struggle to act in the modern scientific paradigm to provide a definition, using an approach which Sartori (Sartori 1970, pp. 199-201) called 'conceptual stretching', that is, resorting to vague and amorphous conceptualisations. On the other hand, one can accept that it is not possible to conceptualise community as a 'scientific construct' which can be objectified, defined, hypothesised and studied, and acknowledge that community's strength is in its lived reality.

Sociologists abandoned the concept of community as a focus of theoretical development in the 1960s and 1970s (Bell & Newby 1974), and yet the volume of research and writing on social relationships in groups from the 1980s to the present day has shown that it is a concept we cannot live without. The impact of information and communication technologies which change the ways we interact with each other and other processes of globalisation, from the migration and the movement of peoples around the world to the speed of air travel to interconnected processes of industrialisation and global agri-business to satellite broadcasting and the rapid exchange of news of political events and natural disasters, are bringing about a reconsideration of the concept of community and positioning this as a legitimate focus of study and theoretical development.

Community's origins and development

Community had been one of sociology's core ideas because of its importance to some of the earliest writers. It might be assumed that at some time in the past there was an accepted definition, yet an analysis of early writings in the field show that there was no

attempt to establish a shared definition of community. The meaning of community was to be taken as each writer stated it. For example, although Durkheim, Tönnies and Weber were each concerned with a notion of community based on social relations, each developed an individual approach to the topic.

For Durkheim, 'solidarity', a set of social relations, was at the heart of community. He was concerned with the breakdown of social relationships as a result of the move of rural workers to urban centres during the industrial revolution and the resultant anomie which led to an increase in suicide. Anomie "springs from the lack of collective forces at certain points in society; that is, of groups established for the regulation of social life" (Lukes 1975, p. 198). In his view, contemporary society was moving from one set of social relations to another. In traditional societies, one found what he dubbed 'mechanical solidarity', where communities are held together by common bonds of life and work. He argued that in contemporary societies, as the division of labour increases, so individuals become more interdependent. He believed that '[s]ocial life comes from a double source, the likeness of consciences and the division of social labor' (Durkheim 1933, p. 226). This form of social life he called 'organic solidarity'. Thus, he concluded that the increasing division of labour and consequent increased interdependence meant that society was becoming one big community.

Tönnies, on the other hand, drew a distinction between 'gemeinschaft' (which is usually translated as 'community') and 'gesellschaft' (usually translated as 'society'). He favoured 'gemeinschaft', the private and familiar life, over 'gesellschaft', public life, noting not only that "[o]ne goes into gesellschaft as one goes into a strange country" , but also that although one could experience bad gesellschaft, "the expression bad gemeinschaft violate[d] the meaning of the word" (Tönnies 1974, p. 7). He reinforced this distinction, describing gemeinschaft as traditional, rural, a living organism. Tönnies has identified three types of gemeinschaft, which he dubbed gemeinschaft by blood, gemeinschaft of locality and gemeinschaft of mind. Kinship, neighbourhood and friendship are the derivations of these categories. Gesellschaft, established in opposition, is new, created. It is the grouping of people who may have some relationship with each other yet nevertheless remain independent of one another as in

membership of an association. Gesellschaft is individualistic, with each person striving for his or her own advantage.

Weber was concerned more broadly with social action and the relationships within which 'a course of social action' could occur. A social relationship is where one could have an emotional sense of belonging (Weber 1962). He identified several different types of social relationship and argued that, although social relationships could be ideological, most social actions are related to the economy. A community is formed from ongoing social relationships, whether these are based on communality or conflict, on market relationships or formalised representative relationships or other types of relationship. Thus, at the heart of community for Weber are the notions of belonging and of a course of social action. Weber's view differed from Durkheim's because for him the possibility of social action preceded the sense of belonging and the freedom of individual action outweighed the constraints of communal behaviours.

Community's failure as a scientific construct in sociology

Over the years, empirical studies did nothing to consolidate or refine the notion of community. In 1955, Hillery analysed 94 definitions and found sixteen different ideas or elements in the literature, leaving him to conclude that he would not use the word because it "embraces a motley assortment of concepts and qualitatively different phenomena" (Stacey 1974, p. 15). In the 1960s, researchers debated the validity of the concept; Butterworth and Weir considered community a "god word", noting that "we are expected to abase ourselves before it rather than define it" (Bell & Newby 1971, p. 16). Bell and Newby attempted to bring to an end more than a decade of discussion of the study of community as they showed that, at that point in the 1970s, the concept of community was no longer valid in sociology. By this, they meant that there was a lack of agreement on what was meant by community, with quite different phenomena being studied and differing methodologies being developed. They noted that community was a concept which had been amorphous and malleable (Bell & Newby 1974, p. xliii) and which had stood for an ideal, what society *should* be like. They claimed that community has encapsulated the notion of 'the good life', and it had become a term from which it is difficult to separate the emotive overtone of desirability. This claim finds its echo in the assertions of Bauman that community is all about nostalgia. From Bell and Newby's

perspective, this lack of an agreed definition meant that community could not exist as a scientific construct. However, they acknowledged the need which scholars had for such a concept when they wrote that "[a]lthough put to death by several writers on the subject, [the concept of community] still refuses to lie down" (Bell & Newby 1971, p. 42).

The desire for the evolution of a scientific construct of community was taken up outside of sociology in the three seemingly unrelated areas of psychology, human geography and social networking. In 1974, the same year that Bell and Newby published a collection of readings, *The Sociology of Community*, whose contributions demonstrated that there was no agreement on the key sociological idea of community, Seymour Sarason published a book introducing a psychological sense of community. It was extremely well received and led to research from which theoretical and empirical development did follow (Sarason 1974). Significant among the theoretical developments from Sarason's work was the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986), which proposed the concept of 'sense of community', made up of four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The work has been influential in part because of the Sense of Community Index, a research tool, developed by Chavis, Hogge, McMillan and Wandersman (Chavis et al. 1986) and used in many contexts.

Human ecology and human geography, fields which have developed and expanded their spheres of influence since the 1970s, have regarded solidarity and shared interests as a function of common locality (Bell & Newby 1971, p. 33). The link with Durkheim and his focus on solidarity is apparent here, although the Durkheimian position that social facts could only be explained by social facts was countered by Catton and Dunlap, who believed that physical and biological facts were important influences on social structure (Catton & Dunlap 1979). The rise in popularity of environmental studies has contributed to the increased influence of this approach to community, and the consequent emphasis on spatial relationships has had an impact on the development of studies in town planning and most recently in studies of 'virtual cities' on the internet.

The third area, which also came to prominence around the same time, was that of social networks. A social network is a social structure between people and indicates the way they are connected, with no assumption that groups form the basis of society. Social network analysis is a key technique in fields from sociology and anthropology to organisational studies. Social network theory, popularised by the work of Mark Granovetter (1973), showed the existence of strong ties and weak ties in social networks and the significance of weak ties in the spread of new ideas and practices.
Among scholars, social network analysis has become a popular field, with its own academic association, the International Network for Network Analysis. A number of network analysis tools are available online, so that it is relatively easy now to represent network analyses graphically, and this has increased its popularity.

A concept we can't live without

In spite of the predictions of Bell and Newby and others in the field of sociology in the 1970s and 1980s that community had failed as a scientific construct, the notion of community survived and continues to survive in the literature, although this is not the community of community studies that Bell and Newby championed. It is no longer a single, scientific construct. It has developed and changed psychology, human geography and social networking, the fields which adopted it when it fell out of favour in sociology. Yet, its traces have remained in sociology too, where its expression follows the approach of the early scholars of sociology, especially Durkheim, Tönnies and Weber, each being quite clear on his own interpretation of the idea. Durkheim's concern was with solidarity and social relations, with being linked with others, through shared interests and shared values, which is reflected in contemporary theories on how and why people create groups based on shared interest. His belief in the increased interdependence among and between individuals in an industrialised context is mirrored in the acknowledgement of the potential for globalising universality through information and communication technologies. Tönnies similarly had a concern with social relations. His notion of gemeinschaft of the mind finds expression in the concern for interest and the sense of being linked to others through shared knowledge and understanding. Gesellschaft, the notion that individuals will join an association to further their individual goals, finds its resonance in contemporary literatures on civil society and activism. Weber's interest in social relations and social action similarly are

reflected in literatures concerned with various approaches to social change and social action.

Thus, contemporary readers can find community expressed in a number of ways in the literature of sociology and other fields. They may find it expressed as a construct of social relationships viewed from the outside or from the inside. They may find that community is expressed through another concept that acts as a surrogate. They may also find that community is expressed as a notion which exists as part of a cluster of concepts, incomplete without consideration of those other concepts. The forces of globalisation and the impact of information technologies have shaped the interpretation of the notion of community since the mid-1990s.

Shifting the boundaries

The concept of community has been variously described as having a 'solid core' and 'fuzzy boundaries', and the use of these terms symbolises conceptual issues from the past. The term 'fuzzy boundaries' uses the metaphor of location to express the idea that the concept of community is not experienced in the same way by everyone. Originally, it was used more literally to indicate that members of a locally based community interacted with individuals from outside of that community. Now, the same phrase is used to indicate that the very ideas that make up the notion of community interact with other ideas, that different terminology is used, and that at the edges there may not be agreement that a word or an idea is actually a part of the notion of community. The metaphor of the 'solid core' suggests something unyielding, unchangeable, dependable, and expresses that there is something essential to the notion of community. The 'solid core' usually refers to a sense of something shared – ideas, beliefs, values, information. It also incorporates a notion of togetherness, as community is as much a process as an entity. The ideas behind these two different metaphors pervade much of the literature of the 1980s and 1990s.

Looking outwards from the core

Anthony Cohen, a social anthropologist, encouraged scholars to set to one side their own preconceptions of the term community. He argued that community still existed and

had not been rendered 'obsolete' by the various changes and challenges (Cohen 1985, p. 117). He proposed that the most effective way to understand the notion of community is to understand how people use it, not to analyse its structure from the outside but to "look *outwards* from its core" (1985, pp. 20, emphasis in the original). He argued that "people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity" (1985, p. 118). In his view, the value of symbols for constructing a sense of belonging is that they are 'imprecise' (1985, p. 21), so that people who wish to belong can find a way to acknowledge the shared symbolism and overlook the differences.

Cohen explored the relationship between community and identity, suggesting that people find both commonality and difference in their "occupancy of the community's social space" (1985, p. 109) and that through their outward focus they become aware of the boundaries which separate them in their community from others who are outsiders. Thus, for Cohen, the term community marked both belonging and exclusion, symbolising both the group's solidarity and its contrasting identity and relationships with other groups. It was this contrasting which "makes the notion of 'boundary' so central to an understanding of community" (1985, p. 109).

Looking inwards

There is a strong scholarly tradition supporting the notion that community can only be known or explored by being inside it and focusing on others who are also or who could be inside. When people began to oppose what they perceived as the fragmenting effects of liberalism and capitalism and to rethink the values which guided public and private life, they placed a renewed emphasis on the importance of sharing, and a number of books and articles focusing on communitarianism and supporting the notion of civil society were published (eg Etzioni 1995, 1997). The focus of these works was a lament for the potential loss of values and a sense of insecurity for the future (Putnam 2000). Putnam's writing brought the phrase 'civil society' into popular use and sparked reconsideration of notions such as democracy, the role of government agencies and community agencies, and reinforced ideas that through associational membership people could take part in activities of civic engagement.

Community from a distance

Benedict Anderson's work established the notion that community could be created by using various media to disseminate or share information. The two editions of his book (1983; 1991) entitled *Imagined Communities: the Origins and Rise of Nationalism* popularised the phrase 'imagined community' and were important for the conceptualisation of community as he showed how a sense of relationship could be established through the sharing of ideas. In particular, he showed how what people read and what ideas they share can shape a community or a nation. Although Anderson's starting point was the introduction of printing with movable type in Europe and its contribution to the creation of nationalism, and he was concerned with instruments such as legislation, the census, museums and mapping, the principles have carried across easily to the impact of other media which link together people who may never know each other in person irrespective of any geographic relationship. The widespread availability of information and communication technologies has changed the ways in which people relate to each other, helping to remove barriers of time and place as people read the same media content, listen to the same music, see the same video clips and experience similar marketing and other policy strategies.

Community and the internet

According to Jankowski, "[i]t is safe to say that the concept of community is as central to present-day studies of the internet as it was during the earlier years of sociology. The main difference seems to be re-direction of emphasis from geographic place to a feeling or sense of collectivity" (Jankowski 2002, p. 37). This tension between place and a sense of collectivity has existed since the nineteenth century, when Durkheim (1933) saw the key element of community as solidarity, which could only grow as people became members of more and increasingly broadly based groups, and Weber was concerned that the development of industrialised society would lead to a loss of community based on the shared values of place and shared living conditions. Following this tradition of tensions, community has had the notion of social interaction at its core. This interaction has assumed bodily presence and a location, placing emphasis on the social element.

It is apparent, however, that while some contemporary scholars are more concerned with the notions of collectivity or of social relations, others scholars consider the internet a space or place. Whether their concern is with the internet as place or as a catalyst for collectivity, others again consider that the internet provides communications and interactions which are in some way lesser. They may use comparisons with 'the real world' or focus on 'disembodied' communication. Slater disagrees with separating the online and the offline, finding that "people integrated the various Internet media into existing social practices and identities" (Slater 2002, p. 540), and is critical of those scholars who take the reductive approach that one can only understand the online in the context of the offline (Slater 2002, p. 543). Turkle, writing mainly in the context of gaming, considered that the online and offline worlds were separate and that to maintain one's mental health it was important to maintain the distinction between the two. For her, knowing how to present oneself online is a social accomplishment which involves sophisticated and reflexive use of communication technologies (Turkle 1996).

Baym notes that the focus on disembodied identity in studies of interaction on the internet reflects theoretical interests and "the lure of the exotic rather than an effort to understand the typical" (Baym 2002, p. 67). Mediated interaction, with communication by letter or telephone, was considered by Schutz and Luckman (1974) a second order of social interaction, although still in their view a bodily interaction. Communication through the internet would have been considered in a similar way, that is, still a bodily interaction. However, Freire (1999, p. 85) argued that one did not need bodies for community, but only presence; that is to say, one only had to be able to conjure the existence of the others involved in the discussion or action.

Habermas's notion of the public sphere has been widely adopted in relation to the internet. This appears to assume location, although Habermas (1989) avoids this by placing emphasis not on bodily interaction but on the speech-act which linked people. Through this and the influence of writers such as Foucault, the emphasis in conceptualising community has seen a shift from social interaction as an embodied set of relationships to social interaction as communication. Here, expressions of ideas and statements about actions become the basis for understandings about those actions, and understanding itself is created through shared meanings. With the rise in importance of

online dialogue on the internet, the significance of the communication element of social interaction has increased.

Rice also notes a perceived difference between interactions online and interactions offline. He refers to the work of Schement, who like Schutz and Luckman considers community to be made up of primary and secondary relationships, with primary relationships being those in which people know each other in multiple dimensions and secondary relationships those in which people only know each other in a limited number of dimensions or even a single dimension. Internet communities, thus, "are really made up of secondary relationships" (Rice 2002, p. 112). Walther (1996) also argues that relationships online were qualitatively different from those conducted face to face offline. He proposed that computer-mediated communication could be 'hyperpersonal', a kind of communication which emerges when people "experience commonality and are self-aware, physically separated and communicating via a limited-cues channel that allows them to selectively self-present and edit; to construct and reciprocate representations of their partners and relations without the interference of environmental reality" (Walther 1996, p. 33).

During more than a decade of research, Barry Wellman (Wellman et al. 2003; Wellman et al. 2001; Wellman et al. 1996) has found that people engaged in what he terms 'computer-supported social networks' have established both specialised and multiplex relationships, they have exchanged information and provided emotional support to each other, and they can develop a sense of belonging to a group of others they hardly know. He has noted that it is the "sociable, supportive and identity-giving interactions that define community, and not the local space in which they might take place" (quoted in Jankowski 2002, p. 42). This focus on interaction allows Wellman to champion social network analysis, using social ties as an indicator of community, and to focus on the density of relations, the similarity between people in a network and the impact that positions and connections within a network can have on action. He acknowledges that community appears to have been privatised when he writes that "The fact that people are not interacting in formal organisations or visible public spaces does not mean that they are in isolation … Their civic involvement may increasingly be taking the form of e-citizenship, networked rather than group-based, hidden indoors rather than visibly

outdoors" (Wellman et al. 2003, p. 6 of 29). Since the internet is embedded in the daily lives of people in much of the developed world, he also explains how individualism becomes the basis for community because computer-supported communication, with its personalised, wireless portability, gives access to 'I-alone', wherever 'I' may be (Wellman et al. 2003, p. 17 of 29).

The strong ties of face-to-face relationships can be formed online (Hiltz & Turoff 1993 quoted in Preece 2000, p. 177) and these are evidenced by the sharing of information and experience. Weak ties, which in face-to-face community are linked with a shift towards individualism (Granovetter 1973), become equally important online because they lead to the diffusion of new ideas (Cross & Borgatti 2004, p. 140). In newly formed online groups, those motivated by their own interests may be more likely to show the eagerness that leads them to share their ideas to others, thereby contributing more to the development of common bonds than those more orientated to group goals and cooperation (van den Hooff, de Ridder & Aukema 2004, p. 173). In other words, traits associated with individualism and the potential breakdown of face-to-face community may actually enhance and strengthen a sense of community in the internet.

The notion that community can exist online has been acknowledged from the earliest days of online discussion groups. From 1993, when Howard Rheingold coined the term 'virtual community' and posed the question of whether "virtual communities could help citizens revitalise democracy, or ... be luring us into an attractively packaged substitute for democratic discourse" (2000, p. 295), there has been vigorous debate both about the label of community and about the role of information and communication technologies in supporting civil society and democratic practices. Acknowledging Mansell's criticism that the word 'community' was intended to refer to a broader concept than Rheingold's 'network of friends' (Mansell & Steinmueller 2000, p. 84), Rheingold himself has said that if he had been familiar with the work of Wellman, he would probably have used the phrase 'online social networks' instead of 'virtual communities' (Mansell & Steinmueller 2000; Rheingold 2000, p. 359). However, the term community has stuck and is commonly used to denote people interacting through the internet.

From differing theoretical positions, there are other arguments that communities can exist online. Online communities require an act of imagination; they can exist if people accept that they can exist (Rheingold 2000, p. 54). This mirrors the approach of Freire (1999) and is also reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983; 1991).

Baudrillard (1994) has argued that there can be no such thing as community on the web, because there is no reality. For him, the internet is a world of hyperreality where the real has been replaced merely by a sign of that reality, a simulacrum, which does not add to the real world in any way but rather disowns it and establishes itself in the place of the real. Umberto Eco (1986), however, is more optimistic about the fakery of the hyperreal, asserting that it is not the authenticity of the context that matters but rather the quality of the experience that people have in the context. Following Eco, it does not matter whether the internet presents a reality or not, as long as people have an experience which for them represents the social interaction of community.

Much of the literature on the design and development of online communities presents them as very much a feature of the real world. Jenny Preece, for example, uses a working definition with three elements: people interacting socially, shared purpose, and the computer systems "to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness" (2000, p. 9). Preece draws a parallel between building a physical community and building an online community (2000, p. 26), including establishing the requirements for joining and a code of conduct. Fostering sociability, which is based on factors such as a sense of belonging and the opportunity to contribute, reciprocity, trust, privacy and security, is crucial. Salmon, whose widely cited work has focused on creating the conditions for effective online learning communities through the use of moderators, has noted that the moderator uses a range of skills to facilitate the development in participants of the technical and social skills needed to play an active part in the learning community (Salmon 2000). Wilson and Peterson (2002, p. 456) note that it is counterproductive to focus only on interactions which take place online as, among other reasons, this denies the "multiple identities and negotiated roles individuals have" in a variety of contexts.

Mark Poster (1995) has acknowledged different ways of considering the internet. He distinguished between using the internet as a tool for instrumental ends, which he considers a modern interpretation, and viewing the internet from a postmodern perspective as a space of transformation which has the possibility to differentiate through its possibilities for mediated communication and the creation of multiple identities and to integrate these identities again through mediated communication.

Shifting the focus

As the boundaries of the concept of community shift, so the focus of community has shifted. The introduction of the internet and the use of information and communication technologies have led scholars and researchers to consider the impact of these technologies on community. In this literature, there has been a reconsideration of a number of aspects of community as noted in the previous section. These have included notions of social interaction and collectivity, of the public sphere and the creation of public opinion, of social capital through the relationships between strong and weak ties and tensions between public and private, of individualism and the creation of identity and of networking and social action. The aspects of community highlighted in this literature also bear the traces of ideas from the early scholars of sociology. There had been a desire for an essentialist concept of community (Bell & Newby 1974), but approaches to sociology and social theory in the last quarter of the twentieth century have been prising apart the notion of community, arguing that is complex and multi-layered and that its theoretical interpretation must lie in the way it is lived and used. The next sections of this chapter will explore shifts in aspects of community which have been claimed by some as a consequence of globalisation and the use of information and communication technologies (see for example the following edited collections: Huysman & Wulf 2004; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002; Schuler & Day 2004; Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002).

These shifts, which will be explored in the next sections of this chapter, are from community to civil society, from community to social capital, from community to social relations, from community to identity, and from community to social action. A further shift is that instead of the concept of community shifting towards another concept, what

is happening is that the concept of community has fragmented and reformed as a cluster of concepts. These shifts shape the analysis of findings and are represented in the chapters presenting the results, although the order has been changed in the results section. Here, the discussion starts from the broader terms of civil society and moves to those related to more closely to the individual, whereas in the report of findings, the analysis begins with the individual and moves out to the broader terms of civil society and community. Social action, which can be considered at both the overarching and the individual level, is explored in the context of the participants of the study.

The shift from community to civil society

When community as a concept was no longer based on locality and a predictable set of interactions, and the everyday experiences of individuals in creating the basis for a communal life showed the importance of clubs, societies and associations, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the position that collective life through associations and formalised groups was lesser than that of the neighbourhood and that it was the political element of this engagement in communal, civic life that diminished it. Different types of communities were acknowledged (Cox, Patrick & Abdullah 2003, p. 245), with communities of interest often positioning their members in civic life.

This acknowledgement that community could be categorised in several different ways, some of which involved engagement in civic life, meant that when the phrase 'civil society' (which had existed for a very long time in a political context) was popularised through the writings of scholars from such different ontological approaches as the liberal Robert Putnam and the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas in his elaboration of the public sphere, it was soon adopted more generally, especially in Europe and the US. There it is generally identified with the collective interests of people outside of the influence of government, although its use has not been common in Australia (Monash University Centre for Community Networking Research 2003). In Australia, an attempt was made to agree on an operational definition of civil society in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society. The resulting Australian Statement on Civil Society (Australian Round Table on the Civil Society 2003) included in its definition of civil society: trade unions, religious groups, foundations, community organisations, social movements, non-government organisations and non-profits, volunteer

organisations, charities, cooperatives, professional associations, educational institutions, clubs, public media and others. This associational approach mirrors that taken by Putnam.

In his work, following the liberalist approach, Putnam has linked associational membership with community, where associationalism is considered a way for a pluralistic society to operate and individuals holding differing views to co-exist. He has been interested in the ways in which membership of locality-based or interest-based organisations foster a sense of a communal life where the qualities of tolerance, reciprocity and trust were to be found, and he concluded that, as the membership of such organisations declined, so communal life and its associated values also declined. In *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), he conveys the sense of loss, longing and hope which, he argues, arise as a result of the decline in participation in community organisations. His writing also sparked reconsideration of notions such as democracy and the role of government agencies and community agencies in creating communal life. His writings reinforced the idea that through associational membership people could take part in activities of civic engagement, a fundamental aspect of civil society.

Around the same time as Putnam's work was attracting attention, the work of Amitai Etzioni, also an American writing in the 1990s, sparked an interest in new ways of re-establishing a society based on a shared sense of morality (Etzioni 1995, 1997). Etzioni's concern with community has a political edge to it, but not one that can be labelled conservative or radical. He has dubbed his approach a 'third way' (2000), referring to the work of Anthony Giddens (1998), which proposed a 'third way' that was neither the socialist nor capitalist, neither left wing nor right wing, and which had such an influence on the government policies of former Prime Minister Tony Blair in Britain. Community thus regained a political dimension. Whereas Putnam has been criticised for fostering a nostalgic desire for life in the 1950s, Etzioni's view of civil society has been criticised (eg Gutmann 1985) for its potential for creating a climate of moral group-think.

Ulrich Beck's notion of civil society does not require associational membership, nor political engagement of the kind envisaged by Etzioni. Instead, Beck, a sociologist, emphasises that civil society can be established or re-established through the action of individuals working together as active citizens. However, he notes that our understanding of political freedom, citizenship and civil society is changing (Beck 2001, p. 157) and expresses his concern that globalisation puts "everything we have … at stake" (Beck 2000, p. 62).

Habermas's view of civil society is also concerned with civic engagement, and similarly does not require associational membership. Indeed, it is based on the involvement of the private individual, who interacts in the public sphere, a forum that exists between the realm of domesticity and that of state authority. In this forum, a civil society emerges from interactions based on rational discussion that include as many people as possible. Civic engagement derives from this rational discussion, which should be based on the widest range of inputs so that, as a collective view emerges, individuals are aware of having made an active choice.

It is Habermas's concept of the public sphere that is linked to civil society on the internet. It plays a role in promoting civic participation and provides a space "where people act as citizens by discussing the issues that concern them" (Rheingold 2000, p. 385), even though Poster argued that Habermas's concept "is systematically denied" in the internet because the internet denies embodiment (1995, p. 8). Rheingold's early experience in the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, a computer conferencing system) had shown him that it was possible to develop online the "collective goods" of social network capital, knowledge capital and communion (2000, p. xxix). This early optimism and enthusiasm for the capacity of online interactions to create a sense of community has been tempered by the need for "close and sceptical examination" of the "notion of authentic community and civic participation through online discussion" (2000, p. 348).

Yet support remains for the internet as a kind of public sphere and a place where democracy may flourish and community can be created. The statement by Kofi Annan (1998), a former UN Secretary General, that communication technologies are "a great

democratising power waiting to be harnessed to our global struggle for peace and development" is frequently quoted in the context of assertions of the importance of the internet in creating a global civil society. An interest in the capacity of information and communication technologies to foster and develop e-democracy, e-citizenship, civic engagement and social action has emerged recently. Governments have sought to engage more broadly with their citizens, acknowledging the increasing diversity of populations, the increasing complexity of problems and issues, and the increasing significance of international relations. Organisations in civil society have taken account of the need to continue to engage people in discussions and actions around the creation and maintenance of civil society and have developed websites which allow them at the very least to proclaim their existence.

John Naughton is a supporter of information and communication technologies (Naughton 2001). He believes that the internet benefits the development of civil society in several ways: it makes access to information and to published data much easier; it makes it easier for groups and even individuals to publish materials and thus to operate outside of traditional methods and processes, bypassing 'traditional cultural gatekeepers'; it aids rapid global communication; it supports the sharing of information resources; and it helps people to create and maintain communities of interest and facilitates collaboration between organisations with shared concerns. Naughton has had a longstanding interest in the relationship between communication technologies and society and for a number of years was the non-executive chairman of One World International, the company which operated www.OneWorld.Net, the world's largest civil-society web portal, intended to provide these opportunities and benefits.

Levine, on the other hand, presents a pessimistic view of the influence of the internet in civil society (2004). He believes that it creates barriers to successful interactions between people and he notes that it minimises the possibility of genuine democratic participation because of its inequities of access, of language and of origin of contribution. He argues that its use has the potential to fragment society, replacing strong social bonds with weak and ephemeral ones, and that it minimises the possibilities of public deliberation as it is easier to leave an online debate than to disagree or to work through differences.

Both Levine and Naughton acknowledge merit in the other position. Levine, in spite of his concerns about the possible damage that the internet can do to civil society, also holds that, through programs of civic education and specific initiatives aimed at developing civil society, it may be possible to overcome some of the more detrimental effects of the internet technologies. Naughton encourages us to "retain a sense of perspective" about the internet and its capacities ((Naughton 2001, p. 147). For him, the consequences of a world increasingly dependent on networked information are that economic gains will flow mainly to the wealthy and a significant number of the global population will be denied the right to freedom of information.

There has been intense scholarly debate around what is meant conceptually by civil society. Edwards (2004, p. 10) has recently provided a useful categorisation of the debate, identifying three ways of conceptualising civil society. These are: the notion of civil society as associational life, as indicated by Putnam; the notion of civil society as a good society, similar to Beck's view; and the idea of the public sphere, with the capacity to debate democratically and form a collective view, as proposed by Habermas. Edwards' own position is that each of these conceptualisations is inadequate to cover the entirety of the concept, but that taken together they point to three factors which are at the heart of civil society:

- the notion of the collective and belonging, which counters individualism;
- the notion of creativity and the contribution individuals and groups can make to their society; and
- the notion of shared values and values-based action, which, although not necessarily universally accepted, opposes both state ideology and the power of the market in some measure.

These three factors reflect aspects of community noted in the work of early scholars in sociology.

The shift from community to social capital

The origins of social capital may be seen to emanate from Durkheim's notions of solidarity and anomie; broadly speaking, it was connections to others, trust, shared values and common ways of being that were an inherent part of solidarity and that were lacking in the state of anomie. It can also be linked to the theories of Weber and Marx, and is found in psychology and literature relating to social development and exchange. It is a term used by many scholars in different contexts with no common definition (Adam & Roncevic 2003). Among the many possible approaches, two have been particularly influential, that of Robert Putnam, a liberalist, and Pierre Bourdieu, a critical cultural theorist.

Robert Putnam popularised the phrase 'social capital', which he saw as "social connections and the attendant norms and trust" (1993), although it had been in use for some time . His work reflected the communitarian perspectives of other American scholars of the 1980 and 1990s. Many scholars appear to work from a similar basis to Putnam, but even among these there is no consensus on how to define social capital, although it is generally considered to be a multi-dimensional construct. Following Putnam (2000), social capital can be concerned with moral obligations and norms, social networks, and social values such as trust, tolerance and reciprocity, which can lead to benefits for people. Bryant and Norris (2002) list other dimensions, including social participation, civic engagement and perceptions of community in their measurement of social capital. Shah, McLeod and Yoon (2001) add information resources to the mix and assume that collective action or the achievement of common goals is the anticipated outcome. Thus, social capital is either concerned with social relations, probably transacted face to face, that lead to social good because they stem from benefits to individuals or its focus is social good in a broader sense of collective action for collective good.

This collective action is often seen to be achieved through associations, because of the ease of measurement of social capital in this context, and membership of associations has been taken as a surrogate for social capital, again because it is easy to measure. Putnam reinforces this notion through his emphasis on involvement in sporting clubs and the activities of cultural organisations as indicators of social allegiances. Bourdieu

emphasises the capacity of community organisations to become mouthpieces for interest groups and to be considered legitimate representatives of a point of view.

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) explored the notion of capital from a concern with power relations in a society. Whereas Putnam viewed social capital in the context of a communitarian civil society, Bourdieu considered that social capital did not necessarily lead to a 'good society' but rather was a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion, working to reinforce the structures of power. He identified three types of capital: the economic capital that can be equated with material wealth and the power which derives from it; the social capital that can be seen as the resources and power that people can access through their social networks and connections; and cultural capital, which is the knowledge and skills that individuals develop formally or informally. Social capital thus could be seen as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248), something that helps an individual improve his or her position or advance his or her interests and that has two components, group membership and social networks (Bourdieu 1986, p. 249) and that could be extended to include mutual cognition and recognition (Siisiäinen 2000, p. 11).

Clubs and societies in Bourdieu's view are "deliberately organised in order to concentrate social capital" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 249) and he likens the social relationships which ensue to investment strategies, although he acknowledges that individuals may not follow these strategies consciously. The entry of new members into a group has the potential to weaken the social capital of the group, thus groups may protect the social capital of the group by restricting entry. As noted above, community groups can be seen as representing a particular set of interests, with the symbolic power of that group potentially being vested in the spokesperson. Thus expressions of social capital may lead to social conflict as competing claims are aired.

However, both Bourdieu and Putnam would also recognise that defining social networks through membership of an association puts an unnecessary limitation on the concept. Among those who have attempted to identify indicators of social capital from the responses and behaviours of people who live in defined areas, Onyx et al. (2005) have

been particularly successful in their work in rural New South Wales. In particular they have been able to demonstrate that not only is associational membership not necessarily considered an indicator of social capital, but that the indicators identified by youth differed from those identified by adults. "Participation in the community", with indicators such as attending a community event or taking part in a community activity or acting as a volunteer, was important for both adults and youth, as was "connections with friends". An indicator that was important for young people was what Onyx et al. referred to as "unstructured social participation". They considered this potentially a kind of "youth social agency", quite different from the adult social agency of taking the initiative in social settings and related more to feelings of self-worth and engagement with others in an individual sense (2005, p. 24).

In spite of the evidence that membership of an association is not necessarily an indicator of social capital, Putnam's emphasis on associational membership has been influential, and his conclusion that television watching has been largely responsible for the decline in associational activity and thus in social capital has been taken up by others. Exploring this concern in the context of another communication medium, some studies have shown that the introduction of the internet is detrimental to social capital, particularly by isolating individuals and preventing face-to-face social interaction (eg Nie, Hillygus & Erbring 2002). Others have shown it is effective in facilitating social inclusion when there are shared interests to build on (eg Hopkins et al. 2004). A third group of studies has shown that it can enhance social capital especially through providing another avenue of communication and broadening social circles (Quan-Haase et al. 2002; Rainie, Cornfield & Horrigan 2005; Wellman et al. 2001).

In earlier studies, little consideration was given to differences in the relationships between internet use and civic engagement among differing age groups (Jennings & Zeitner 2003). However, some scholars, such as Shah, Kwak and Holbert (2001), assert that the trends in decline of civic participation through associations "appear to be based as much on generational differences as on individual changes" in use of media and that use of the internet is a significant tool for Generation X to develop social capital. Onyx et al. (2005) have shown that young people may view social capital differently from mature adults, particularly in the dimensions of the importance of belonging to a

friendship group and acting according to moral principles. O'Neill's study of the civic engagement of young people in Canada shows that young people may not participate in associational activities and may appear to ignore political activities such as voting in favour of non-political activities such as "signing petitions, participating in a demonstration and boycotting or buycotting products" (O'Neill 2007, p. 11), a pattern noted in Britain by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003). Vromen (2003), similarly, concluded that young Australians are not necessarily apathetic and do become involved in those issues that concern them. Giddens also pointed to a generational shift in approaches to social action and the creation of a 'good society', one that balances government and the market economy with a developed civil society (Giddens 2000) . He noted a shift away from a concern with what he called emancipatory politics, which had engaged previous generations in causes aiming to eliminate exploitation, inequality or oppression to the "creation of morally justifiable forms of life that will promote self-actualisation in the context of global interdependence" (Giddens 1991, p. 215), which he has labelled 'life politics'.

Social capital can be conceptualised as something which brings individuals together and as something which sets groups apart. As this study is concerned with how individuals come together to create a sense of community, and because Putnam's approach dominates in the consideration of social capital in the literature discussed in earlier sections of this study, it is this communitarian perspective on social capital which will colour analyses of data in this study, although Bourdieu's approach cannot be ignored.

The shift from community to social relations

Zygmunt Bauman has commented that community is something we consider fondly; it is the "kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly love to inhabit and which we hope to re-possess" (Bauman 2001, p. 3). He notes that communities are "projects, rather than realities, something that comes *after*, not *before,* the individual choice" (Bauman 2000, p. 169). That is to say, community is something we create, "a unity put together through negotiation and reconciliation" (2000, p. 178). The survival of these communities is likely to be precarious, and Bauman dubs them cloakroom (or peg or carnival) communities. He is critical of these cloakroom communities because they effectively prevent real collective undertakings,

"scatter[ing] … the untapped energy of sociality impulses" and substituting instead something which is not intended to last (2000, pp. 199-201). He argues, "because of our loneliness … we crave togetherness" (1995, p. 71), whether this be the mobile togetherness of the shopping mall, the tempered togetherness of our workplaces, the manifest togetherness of a protest march, the postulated togetherness of an imagined community, or the matrix togetherness where we design our encounters (1995, pp. 44-48).

It is this togetherness that is referred to as social relations. The term 'social relations' has also always been a potentially ambiguous one, as the debate among Porpora, Varela, King and Elder-Vass (Elder-Vass 2007) has shown. It is used in two different senses. Elder-Vass refers to the first as '*relations-as-wholes*' and the second as '*relations-as-connections'* (2007, pp. 464, emphasis in the original). The 'relations-as-wholes' are entities comprising both the people and the connections between them. This ambiguity adds another layer of complexity to the consideration of the conceptual shift from community to social relations.

Anthony Giddens tends not to use the word community and has omitted it from the glossary of his textbook *Sociology* (2006). He has approached the issue of changes in the nature of community from the perspective of the wider society and the phenomenon of globalisation, which he defines as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (1990, p. 64). He notes that people live a life of discontinuities because of the scope and pace of change in society and constantly find their sense of security and trust challenged by danger and risk (1990, p. 4 ff.). In this context, people have become 'disembedded', separated in space and time from others, yet he proposes that social relationships could be 'disembedded' and still continue to exist regardless of the constraints of time and place. For Giddens, re-embedding requires trust, that is, a form of commitment. Trust becomes essential in situations where people do not have full knowledge and face risk. It can be built through person-to-person interaction, where it evolves through a process of getting to know each other, what Giddens refers to as 'facework commitments', or through the 'faceless commitments' which we make when we are confronted with expert systems, because

we cannot do otherwise (1990, p. 80). Without trust, we cannot be re-embedded and are thus unable to re-establish relationships.

Whereas Giddens focuses on the separation and the re-embedding, which brings about new relationships, Appadurai (1990) is concerned with a sense of continuity. Appadurai (1990) has studied ethnic minorities and local communities in Britain and has introduced the notion of the diasporic community, where formerly integrated and potential close-knits groups of people related by ethnicity or language have moved or been relocated to many different communities but have still managed to maintain social interactions and maintain a sense of community with those who are not geographically close to them, often through the use of information and communication technologies.

Howard Rheingold (1994) is concerned with the role of information technologies in creating community, and claims that community, by which he means affiliation, support and a sense of belonging, can exist online among people who are not linked in other ways except by interest. For him, "[v]irtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on ... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold 1994, p. 5). This definition from Rheingold carries echoes of the work of Clifford Geertz and shows a close relationship between community and culture. Manuel Castells sees the relationship between technology and people differently and is concerned that, as there is an increasing reliance on information and communication technologies and as the global economy creates what he calls the 'space of flows', individuals in their local communities may become increasingly disconnected from one another (Castells 1996-1998, 2004).

Kinship, social duty and traditional obligation have traditionally been considered the building blocks of social relationships. These have largely been replaced by friendship, where relationships are based on choice (Bauman 2004, p. 91; Giddens 1991, p. 6) . In a context where longstanding relationships no longer exist and the individual is 'dis-embedded' from the structures of social life, friendship is "often a mode of re-embedding" (Giddens 1990, p. 119). Here trust is built up in personalised relationships that contrast with the anonymity of much of contemporary life. Friendship is an

example of what Giddens refers to as a 'pure relationship', one which is not dependent on "anything other than the rewards the relationship provides" (Giddens 1991, p. 90). For him, a friend is "not someone who always speaks the truth, but someone who protects the emotional well-being of the other" (Giddens 1990, p. 119). Bauman, taking a more pessimistic view than Giddens, refers to friendship as a lifeboat or lifejacket (Bauman 2004, p. 91). Friendship and the notions of trust and intimacy it encapsulates (Giddens 1990; 1991) precede the establishment of other social relations and are fundamental to community.

Durkheim's notion of solidarity pervades much of the literature on the practices of creating community. It appears to influence the dichotomous 'thick' and 'thin' communities of Bruce Bimber. Bimber is a political scientist concerned with the role of the internet in the political processes of democratic societies. He summarises his view of the difference between thick and thin communities by stating that "[i]n thick community, the personal is dependent upon the public, while in thin community the public interest is dependent upon the convergence of personal interests" (Bimber 1998, p. 11 of 25).

Durkheim's oppositional categories of mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity are reflected in Granovetter's strong ties and weak ties (Granovetter 1973). Groups with strong ties are close-knit and coherent. They often have a strong sense of group identity, sharing norms and values, and they share information among themselves, finding the solutions to problems usually from inside the group. Acquaintances form weak ties, sharing information and opening ways to innovate, while maintaining a sense of individuality. This allows people with weak ties to belong to many groups at the same time. The bonding and bridging aspects of the creation of social capital are conceptually similar to strong and weak ties (cf Putnam 1993; 2000).

Integral to the notion of solidarity is that of collectivity. People get together to form groups for many different reasons. These groups are easily recognised and labelled and have been conceptualised in many different ways, a number of which are relevant to this study. They range from the organic nature of the tribe to the constrained setting of the 'small world' and the instrumentality of the community of practice.

Michel Maffesoli introduces the idea of tribalism, which he sees as a logical outcome of the development of sociality, based on organic structures (1996, p. 6), and as a "guarantee of solidarity" (1996, p. 97). Using the metaphor of the tribe allows him to "account for the process of disindividuation", with its shift away from the individual and their function in society to the person and their role in a social group. He proposes that affinity groups, emerging as structures of communication, are evidence of "tribalism at work" (1996, p. 69) as these networks are engaging in mutual aid and professional support, socialising and eating together, as well as taking part in common activities and events. Drawing on the work of Troelsch, he argues that members of these affinity groups are "active participant[s] in the invisible communion of believers", held together by something greater than them. Tribalism brings with it affect and passion, potentially balancing the rationality of autonomy (1996, p. 127) as the pendulum swings between tribalism and the massification of individuals. Individuals can be members of many tribes, putting on and taking off 'masks' as they move between the affinity groups that make up their network (1996, p. 147).

Szerszynski, following Weber rather than Durkheim, suggests that "sociality within the modern sacred" is to be found in aesthetic communities (2004, p. 7 of 10) and refers to Zygmunt Bauman's view that the aesthetic community "has no other foundation to rest on but widely shared agreement, explicit or tacit" (2001, p. 65). Bauman argues (2000, p. 200; 2001, p. 71) that the aesthetic community (also referred to as cloakroom or peg communities (2001, p. 16) or carnival communities) does not lead to ethical responsibilities and long- term commitments. Cloakroom communities, are brought together through a shared experience which is unlikely to last much past the ending of the attendance at the shared spectacle or to turn into a group interest. In noting that "carnival communities seems to be another fitting name" (2000, p. 200), Bauman writes pessimistically that "they offer temporary respite from the agonies of daily solitary struggles" but "[t]hey scatter instead of condense the untapped energy of sociality impulses" (2000, p. 201). Both 'tribalism' and 'cloakroom communities' acknowledge that an individual can have many identities, but whereas 'tribalism' seems to involve emotional attachment, 'cloakroom communities' are more often seen to be based on ad hoc rational arrangements.

Muniz and O'Guinn introduce the idea of brand community (2001), which is, like other communities, "marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions and a sense of moral responsibility" (2001, p. 412) but which is framed in a commercial, media-focused setting. This shared consciousness is a common way of thinking about things, a recognition that one belongs with these other people (Weber 1978 in Muniz & O'Guinn 2001, p. 413). The brand (and the symbolism which surrounds it) is created both by marketing departments and by consumers/participants (2001, p. 428). Bauman's cloakroom or carnival communities and brand communities arise in the context of consumer culture.

Elfreda Chatman took the concept of the 'small world' from Schutz and Luckmann as a central theme in her research and developed the theory of normative behaviour. By 'small world', she meant "a world in which everyday happenings occur with some degree of predictability" in the company of "people who share physical and/or conceptual space within a common landscape of cultural meaning" (2000, p. 3). Her theory of normative behaviour, by which she means "that behaviour which is viewed by inhabitants of a social world as most appropriate for that particular context" (2000, p. 13) comprises four concepts: social norms, worldview, social types and information behaviour. Social norms give people "a sense of balance" and "point the way to acceptable standards and codes of behaviour" (2000, p. 11). Worldview is what "gives a collective approach to the importance of things" and comes from "learning in concert with others" (2000, p. 11). The concept of social types allows for a typology of people based on certain behaviours, defining the roles a person plays in their social world . Information behaviour is "a state in which one may or may not act on the information received" (2000, p. 12). Although behaviour in the 'small world' can be explored from a perspective on the inside, in her own research Chatman has been more concerned with the circumstances in which people choose not to act outside of the potentially closed 'small world'.

Etienne Wenger's communities of practice are groups of people who share an interest in something and are keen to learn to engage with it better (Wenger 1999). Yet, just being a group of people, such as members of a club, does not lead to a community of practice.

Rather, there are three factors essential to the existence of the community of practice. The first, Wenger calls the domain. Those involved in the community of practice share the interest and also have a common or accepted knowledge base or expertise that is acknowledged within the group. The second factor is community, that is, the notion that people engage in joint activities and interact to help each other to learn and solve problems. The third factor is practice, the shared repertoire of experiences, stories, tools, ways of working that build up over time, through sustained interactions. Communities of practice usually exist within an organisational or quasi-organisational context and become apparent through the variety of questions and interactions that people have, from discussing developments to seeking experience to re-using knowledge assets or seeking information.

Albrow and Eade take a different approach to the creation of social groups (1994) when they create a parallel between the concept of community and the concept of culture. They note that this relationship between community and culture was inherent from Tönnies' (1974) distinction between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft and was reinforced by Raymond Williams' definition of culture as a way of life (1961). Williams' conceptual development, which acknowledged that culture could have one of three meanings – culture as the process of human perfection; culture as high culture and culture as a way of life – strengthened the link between culture and community for many writers, including Clifford Geertz.

Wittel argues that a new form of association is emerging which can be understood in its contrast to 'community' and which will become "the paradigmatic social form of late capitalism" (2001, p. 71). He dubs this 'network sociality', where the focus is likely to be on exchanging information or 'catching up' (2001, p. 51) and links it to the disembedded social relationships identified by Giddens. He proposes that network sociality comprises five features. The first, individualisation, a consequence of the disintegration of traditional community, means that people have to create their own relationships with others, developing social bonds through work or through their interests and constantly maintaining them. The second, transience and intensity in social contacts, fostered by the ease of travel and possibly stemming from a work-based focus on projects, means that people rarely spend much time with others. Closely related to

the consequences of social interactions existing around the demands of mobility and time pressures is the third, the shift to a focus on information, a mode of communication which is quick and focused but which has no place for stories, for narratives created over time. The fourth feature is the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure time, with work contexts becoming playful and work colleagues being seen as friends. The fifth feature is technology, without which the de-localised interactions of network sociality would not be able to take place. These include transport, information and communication technologies and those technologies which support relationships with friends and colleagues, replacing address books.

This brief overview of a selection of approaches to conceptualising social relations demonstrates that individuals seek to align themselves with others in friendship, through their interests, through their work; that the groupings they form can be based on affect and emotion or on instrumental action or can even be seen as a commodity; that they can be intended to last for a short term, to be ad hoc or to require a long-term commitment; and that they can be open to external influences or members can see themselves as 'insiders'. Individuals tend to choose to establish a range of differing social relations, reflecting their varying roles and interests.

The shift from community to identity

The shift from community to identity is marked in the move from recognition of the person through role to recognition of the person as an individual. In the context of community, roles facilitate communal life as individuals take responsibilities for tasks and functions. As individuals, people have distinctive characteristics. Bauman argues that identity, through the individual, is a surrogate for community, because roles, behaviours, culture and belonging are no longer vested in social institutions but in individuals (2000, p. 171; 2001, p. 15). He explores the relationships between community and identity (2004) and identifies two kinds of community. "There are communities of life and fate whose members 'live together in an indissoluble attachment' and communities that are 'welded together solely by ideas or various principles' … The question of identity only arises with the exposure to 'communities' of the second category" (2004, p. 11). He states that "*The idea of 'identity' was born out of the crisis of belonging*" (2004, pp. 20, emphasis in the original). For Bauman, the

claiming of identity marks the end of the 'universalism of humanity' as groups strive to define themselves and vie for support. The process of creating unity involves each individual identifying their values and beliefs in an ever-changing environment. Here, identity is the identity of identity politics. Claiming identity also leads potentially to fragmentation of the self because "committing oneself to a single identity for life or even for less than a whole life but for a very long time to come is a risky business. Identities are for wearing and showing, not for storing and keeping" (2004, p. 89). Thus, identity is not only a way of representing ourselves to others, it is also a way for others to recognise us. To emphasise the fragile and tenuous nature of the identities of individuals, Bauman uses the metaphor of motel accommodation as compared with the "permanent (mortgage repaid) home" (2000, p. 178).

The questions of who we are, how we present ourselves, how we interact with others and how others perceive us are often brought together as questions of identity, as though they were part and parcel of the one concept. Yet these questions can lead us down different paths, as Mead noted in his discussions of the I and the me (1934). On the one hand, we position ourselves at the centre, with or without regard for others. On the other hand, we acknowledge our sociality and the views of others in answering the question of who we are. The notion of identity has been romanticised as a constant, an unchanging essentialised core of selfhood. We talk about 'being true to ourselves', hope that others will be constant in their support for us, and value sincerity as an indicator that our actions and behaviour are in good faith. From this, it could be assumed that the features of identity include consistency, integrity and coherence, and that unity is part of its foundation.

Yet, this word 'identity' has no single, consistent meaning. It is used as a technical term in different fields, including philosophy, psychology, social anthropology and sociology. From a philosophical perspective, personal identity is usually seen to be vested in consciousness, in the way an individual thinks, and continuity, persistence and responsibility for the consequence of actions are aspects of personal identity. From a psychological perspective, identity may refer to those things which distinguish one person from another, which are idiosyncratic, which make each of us unique. It relates to self-image and can also include the awareness of self and self-reflection as people

work out their purpose in life, gain a sense of direction and learn how to establish relationships (Tajfel 1981). Sources of identity from a sociological perspective can include gender, nationality, ethnicity and social class (Giddens 1984). An important aspect of identity in this context is that groupings identified in this way can be given a name. Identity may refer to social identity, where characteristics come from membership of groups and where identity may be perceived as the playing of social roles. These roles are learned through experience and may be negotiated through interactions with others.

Erickson's view of psychological development underpins much of the discussion of identity in the literature. For him, the focus of early teenage years is crucial to the development of a sense of identity, as it is at this stage that one develops a sense of who one is and how one fits into one's society. This is a stage of trial and error when young people try out roles that help them to create a sense of self. Those who have succeeded will be able to make a positive contribution to their community. The focus of development in the early twenties is intimacy, the ability to establish relationships with others. These stages of development can overlap, and Hall argues that in fact the stage of developing identity is never complete (Hall 1996). Later scholars (eg Turkle 1996, pp. 203-204) have suggested that as the changes faced by the individual at this age are so enormous, it may be appropriate to introduce other, simultaneous stages of development, such as the formation of group identity, the notion of being like others or belonging. The psychological perspective on identity is particularly relevant to the participants in this study as their chronological ages suggest that they are developing their sense of identity and also learning how to establish relationships with others.

Giddens explores the engagement of the individual in social relations, explaining that this has seen a fundamental change. He introduces the notion of self-identity, to distinguish this change from the sociological notion of identity. He notes that identity "still presumes continuity across time and space" (1991, p. 53), but his real concern is with self-identity, which he defines as "*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography*" (1991, pp. 53, emphasis in the original). Identity is "not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*" (1991, pp. 54, emphasis in the

original). It is through the ongoing development of this narrative that a stable sense of self-identity emerges. Keeping the narrative going has a psychological dimension as well as a cognitive, physical and social dimension. Trust is particularly important in creating the stability that allows a narrative to proceed, allowing the individual to filter out threats to the integrity of self-identity. Trust itself is based on being able to accept the authenticity of another, where authenticity involves "being true to oneself" (1991, pp. 77-79). Giddens states that part of the process of creating self-identity is self-actualisation, which includes the moral requirement of being able to act in a way that is "true to oneself" (1991, p. 78) and that "the more the individual seeks reflexively to forge a self-identity, the more he or she will be aware that current practices shape future outcomes" (1991, p. 129).

As individuals take on the challenge of living authentically in the world, they are confronted by four dilemmas, as Giddens labels them. The choices an individual makes around the first dilemma, unification versus fragmentation, may lead to rigid traditionalism or to a kind of "pseudo-self" (1991, p. 191), where the individual does what is expected, what is deemed appropriate by others. The second dilemma is that of powerlessness versus appropriation. In its pathological state, powerlessness leads to an individual feeling that they are helpless in the face of external events, whereas its opposite, appropriation, leads to a sense of omnipotence, the assumption that one can dominate one's world. The third dilemma is that of authority versus uncertainty. An individual, confronted by a choice among conflicting authorities, may take comfort in a single overarching set of rules or become immobilised through doubt and unable to choose. The fourth dilemma is that of personalised versus commodified experience. On the one hand, an individual may make such choices to maintain their individuality, and to be different from others, that they cease to reflexively develop a coherent sense of self. On the other hand, the influences of commodification can lead to a kind of packaging of the self, which Lasch refers to as narcissism, where appearance becomes all important (Giddens 1991, pp. 196-200).

Giddens contends that reflexively created self-identity is fundamental to life politics, that is, a politics of life decisions. It "concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation in post-traditional contexts, where globalising influences

intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realisation influence global strategies" (1991, p. 214). Life politics marks a shift away from a concern with the "elimination of exploitation, inequality or oppression" and obedience to the "imperatives suggested by the ethics of justice, equality and participation" towards "the creation of morally justifiable forms of life that will promote self-actualisation in the context of global interdependence" in a context which favours the development of "ethics concerning the issue 'how should we live?'" (1991, p. 215).

Stuart Hall, from a sociological perspective, has proposed that essentialised concepts like identity are no longer "good to think with … [but that] as there are no other entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them" (1996, p. 1). However, he sets down certain conditions for a revised concept of identity. In particular he proposes that the essentialist concept of identity should be replaced by a "strategic and positional one" (1996, p. 3) which is constructed discursively. By its very nature, this concept of identity creates that foundational sense of unity artificially, because it sets out to exclude and makes clear to the excluded what it is they lack. The resulting identity politics introduces the concept of identification, which Hall defines as "a construction, a process never completed" (1996, p. 2) through which a sense of self can be achieved.

Bauman argues somewhat nostalgically that "as long as 'belonging' remains their fate", people will not consider 'having an identity'" (2004, p. 12). Identity, then, for him, is second-best to community, but it is nonetheless something which relates to being part of a group, rather than to being an individual. He notes that it is "a 'hotly contested concept'. Whenever you hear that word, you can be sure that there is a battle going on. A battle field is identity's natural home" (2004, p. 77). Whereas Giddens and Hall consider the constant creation and maintenance as fundamental to identity, indeed what makes identity, Bauman seems to view the process as a chore. "I'd say … that despite all this we will have to confront the task of 'self-identification' over and over again and that the task has little chance of ever being brought to successful and permanently satisfactory completion" (2004, p. 98). Using a quote from Stuart Hall, Bauman cautions the reader that, although there are dangers inherent in attempting to construct an identity of our choice, for example that we may not like where this takes us, a bigger

danger lies in refusing to engage with the world around us and to live with a closed sense of identity (2004, p. 98).

Internet technologies are considered to have made significant changes to the way that identities and the self are understood. Turkle (1996) has shown that as the internet separates the body from the self, it allows people to express different aspects of the self, creating more than one self in role-playing games. Rheingold (2000) and Jones (1997) go further, arguing that identities online may not only be multiple, but they may also bear little relation to the person creating them. Merchant (2006) proposes that there are facets in identities that we call on as we construct our selves, which he labels 'anchored identity' and 'transient identity'. These should not be seen as a binary opposition, but as points on a continuum, with the anchored aspects (gender, religion, age and so on) being ones we are less likely to change and the transient aspects being ones that change over time, influenced by many factors in our context. Knorr Cetina (1997) argues that 'nonhuman apparatuses' such as the internet play an integral part in the construction of self, shifting the emphasis away from the construction of identity through interaction with other people. Thus, there can be a disjuncture between the embodied self and the self as represented through the internet and, further, the notion of self may no longer be created through interaction with other humans.

Merchant (2006) echoes Bauman's anxieties over identity and its presentation, detailing threats to identity which may exist online and noting that one of the threats to our own identity is the anonymity of the person we are interacting with or our uncertainty about whether they are who they say they are. If we are not interacting with a 'real' person but with a figment of someone else's imagination, there is not only no identity but no community either. Another threat is that, if we reveal too many details about our lives, others can take on our identity or use it to damage our reputations. Kennedy (2006) found that people do not necessarily feel threatened even when they reveal information about intimate aspects of their lives and concluded that anonymity is complex, best understood as it is lived rather than as a fixed concept. Callero however has argued that, in spite of threats from postmodern scholarship and from significant changes in the historical, cultural and political context, the concepts of identity and the self continue to be significant as an "object and force in society" (2003, p. 128).

The shift from community to social action

Ulrich Beck notes the shift from community to social action. He considers that community is less tied to place than in the past and views it as "niches of activity and identity" which permit "a new mode of conducting and arranging life" (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994, p. 35). Fundamental to this new mode is an emphasis on the individual, and young people experience this new mode differently, for the young people of the early twenty-first century are "freedom's children". They expect to act according to their view of political freedom. They "hate organisations for their formalism and their convoluted and dishonest calls for 'selfless' commitment … Those who want to get involved go to Greenpeace rather than join a political party" (Beck 2001, p. 158).

Social action in social theory is traditionally recognised to be some activity carried out by one person and intended to provoke a response from another person, often following Weber's instrumental rational action or value-oriented action. Instrumental actions are those where the method and outcome are planned, whereas value-oriented actions are those where it is the outcome that is valued, and the means to achieve it are not taken into consideration. It is the first of these that has informed some contemporary views of social action, with many organisations and associations in civil society taking an instrumental rational approach. More recently the phrase 'social action' has come to be linked with advocacy and carries with it the sense of intended societal change. Social actions are those actions aimed at creating a context which is closer to one's desired world.

Beck argues that the action young people engage in is unlikely to be identifiable as instrumental rational action. Instead, they "practise a seeking, experimenting morality that ties together things that seem mutually exclusive: egoism and altruism, self-realisation and active compassion, self-realisation as active compassion" (2001, p. 159) and "create something like a *cooperative or altruistic individualism*" (2001, pp. 162, emphasis in the original). This involvement, this practice of morality, is an example of social action. Giddens also notes a shift away from collective instrumental action, noting that the decisions of the individual aimed at creating their desired world in a

framework of politics are political actions. The process of self-actualisation can go far beyond the individual, even having a global effect (1991, p. 214).

In the context of instrumental action, the internet has been perceived as a tool through which organisations in civil society can carry out their activities or through which individuals can play an active part in civil society. It provides a means for disseminating information and managing the actions of an organisation's members and others. It also can support people in their development as active citizens and increase the opportunities for civic engagement. Here the links between the creation of social capital and social action are apparent.

To support this notion that the internet fosters instrumental action, there have been several approaches to categorising the activities available through the websites of organisations (Srinivas nd; Surman & Reilly 2003). Srinivas (nd) shows that NGOs used the internet for information collation, for networking, for collaboration and partnerships, for participation and exchange, for communications and more recently for creating, maintaining and dynamically updating web-based databases and for running discussion forums, each of which can be seen as a way of creating social capital. Surman and Reilly (2003) have identified four major classes of activity, which they label publishing, mobilisation, collaboration and observation. Publishing includes provision of information, from access to factual information, press releases, and policy statements to the full text of reports and books. It also includes aspects of 'self-publishing', for example through diaries or blogs. Mobilisation is related to 'online efforts to move people to action', and indicators of online mobilisation include online fundraising, online petitions and lobbying and links to real events. Collaboration is indicated through the existence of e-lists, evidence of joint policy development, joint document development, online meetings, project coordination, discussion forums and identification of partnerships. Observation is concerned with systematic information gathering and research, and its indicators include data mining, information pooling, distributed data collection, the existence of a research network, network monitoring and involvement in open source technologies. This categorisation shows the potential for a clear link between the development of social capital and social action.

The world wide web is not necessarily a tool that has brought innovation in social action. Smith, Kearns and Fine (2005, p. 10), for example, have found that, since the introduction of the world wide web, most non-profit organisations and foundations in the US have focused on using the internet to improve their existing ways of 'doing organisational business' rather than as a new tool to develop new activities or different ways of carrying out continuing activities. These existing ways of doing business have tended to focus on information exchange, as Surman and Reilly's work indicates. However, in their much-cited work (1998), Keck and Sikkink demonstrated the power of the internet as a tool to create links among people with common interests, based on information, research and the communication and sharing of knowledge and experience. Their research demonstrated that sharing information and the consequent social capital can lead to significant actions for social change, even when that support comes from people who are unknown and far-removed geographically.

The websites of organisations in civil society can also be used to support the development of active citizens. Active citizens are seen to be a necessary prerequisite for the functioning of democratic society and for social action. Much of the literature on the development of active citizens focuses on civics education, especially in high schools, so that active citizenship is conceptualised in educational terms. In Australia, there has been a concern with the effectiveness of this education. Surveys carried out during the 1990s showed that, although Australian young people seemed to have a low level of knowledge about Australian politics and the structure of democracy, at the same time they seemed to have a high level of concern about issues of discrimination and justice. That is to say, they were not completely lacking in the skills of active citizenship (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood 2001).

Flanagan and Faison, who explore the notion that the civic development of young people is essential to the concept of active citizenship, propose that the process of developing active citizens has three elements to it: the development of civic literacy, the practising of civic skills, and an active attempt to build a sense of community through civic attachment (2001). Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles and Larson (2004) have explored the implementation of these three elements in websites. Flanagan and Faison define civic literacy as referring to knowledge about community affairs, political issues

and the ways that people can ensure that changes happen (Flanagan & Faison 2001, p. 3). In the context of a website, Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles and Larson (2004) argue that civic literacy involves learning about a problem, often in a staged, didactic way reminiscent of a school textbook, with information about the 'responsible agent', including contact details, and an example of the kind of contact one might make with that 'responsible agent', usually through a letter or email. Civic skills are, in general terms, the competencies involved in reaching shared goals (Flanagan & Faison 2001, p. 3) and, according to Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles and Larson (2004), they can be provided through skills training online or other programs that represent a specific attempt to build the skills of civil society. Civic attachment refers to an emotional connection to a group, and suggests that an individual has a stake in what happens in the wider community and wishes to be a part of that community (Flanagan & Faison 2001, p. 3). For Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles and Larson (2004), the indicators of civic attachment in a website are related to ways to build a sense of community, for example through direct appeals to shared values invoking group identity, through the use of icons, through providing opportunities for group-based involvement or through providing a facility for members of a group to message each other.

The websites of organisations can also be used to provide opportunities for social action through civic engagement. Surman and Reilly argue that organisations in civil society are set up for one of two reasons, either to oppose the beliefs or actions of others or to find a solution to a commonly acknowledged problem (Surman & Reilly 2003, p. 55) and it is from these distinct reasons that quite different approaches to social action can develop. Avoiding the stereotyping inherent in analysis using two opposing categories, Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley elaborated a concept of civic engagement based on the perceptions that people have of what they do (2003).

Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003) developed their model of civic engagement through a principal components analysis of face-to-face interviews with individuals across Britain. They identified three distinct dimensions of civic activism, which they labelled individualistic activism, contact activism and collective activism. Individualistic activism is linked with activities such as donating, fund-raising and signing petitions. Contact activism is concerned with contacting those in authority, such as public

officials, or the media or an organisation. Collective activism is linked with taking part in public activities, such as meetings or protests or setting up a group. They note that these are quite different types of civic activism which can involve different people at different times (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003, p. 448).

Barraket (2005) used Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley's conceptualisation of civic engagement to analyse the websites of Australian third sector organisations in one of a few studies about the ways Australian organisations provide opportunities for social action. She concluded that an organisation was seen to have a strong possibility of mobilising civic engagement if its website gave the opportunity to undertake five or more of the eight activities she linked with activism, and a weak possibility if two or fewer of those activities were available. These activities included online donation, provision of news and information, online merchandising, the option to sign up to a newsletter, the possibility of contacting the organisation by email, the opportunity to comment on the functionality or content of the website, information on how to get involved in events either online or offline, and the possibility of taking part in online interactive activities, such as discussion forums or surveys.

Vromen (2007), in studies which focus on the participatory practices of young people in Australia, concluded that the internet facilitates information sharing for community building and for social action. She is sceptical of claims that the internet can facilitate the creation of a universal public sphere because of the diversity in approaches to use. She notes that there is no basis for asserting that young Australians are apathetic or cynical about engagement in politics, and affirms that much of the information that sparks their enthusiasm for action is "political information that has been generated by young people themselves" (Vromen 2008, p. 94).

Community and the clustering of concepts

Concepts are ideas that we have derived from specific instances and abstractions that allow us to refer to a generalised idea. Because concepts are mental creations, we can sometimes use one in place of another, as Bauman indicates when he suggests that identity has become a surrogate for community. Sometimes, instead of a substitute concept, we use a group or cluster of concepts to convey the diversity of thought related

to a single contested concept. Conceptual clusters arise when there is general agreement about the meaning of an abstraction but disagreement about the way it is substantiated or where a number of cognitive models converge to constitute the concept. A number of concepts related to social activities can be identified as cluster model concepts, including social capital and community.

Albrow and Eade (1994) have taken such an approach with community and proposed that one should understand community and the shifts in meaning within a cluster of concepts. They argue that globalisation has transformed the key concepts in sociology of community, milieu and culture, which they see as interrelated and at the heart of social interactions. The de-territorialisation brought about by globalisation has literally changed the notion of boundary, which was previously significant for each of these concepts – community, milieu and culture – and created a cluster of concepts where the presence of one of these concepts can be taken as a referent for the other two.

Albrow and Eade focus on the impact of the loss of place as a key definer in each of the concepts. For community, they note that scholars such as Hall and Appadurai had shown that geographic proximity and close-knit ties to others were not necessary. They argued that the concept of milieu, the individual's inter-subjective experience of the world, (according to Schutz), is not bounded territorially or geographically but by the values or perceptions of relevance of an individual. This means that as individuals become more mobile, have greater access to communication technologies or have more interests in their lives, they can become part of more milieux. They indicate that when a concept like culture is 'disembedded from its territorial base' and then re-embedded into contexts that have no real territorial connections, it becomes 'ephemeral and manipulable' (Albrow & Eade 1994). They imply that it is culture that is the core of the dispersed and polycentric new forms of association, "with different temporalities and spatialities, fleeting forms of encounter, in which dense and varied meanings flow" (Albrow & Eade 1994, p. 8 of 19).

Taylor has similarly noted the clustering of concepts within 'ideas of community'. She links community, civil society, social capital, empowerment, participation and networks in a language, referring to them as "'community' and the terms that surround it" (2003,

p. 2). However, she does not argue that one can be taken as a referent for the others. Rather, she proposes that "these 'ideas of community' are underpinned by organising principles of networks, trust and reciprocity" (2003, p. 47) and that the slippage in popular usage of community and the other terms has tended to reinforce the normative aspects associated with these terms – solidarity, participation and coherence (2003, p. 34). These concepts also appear in the literature, associated with "integration and social cohesion, trust and reciprocity, autonomy and plurality and with the flexibility to negotiate the enormously complex tensions of post-modern society" (2003, p. 47).

Community in this study

The study reported here assumes, as Taylor (2003) does, that the concept of community is part of a language and that in this context it will be surrounded by other concepts. It starts from the point that community is a concept we cannot live without, exploring through the lived reality of young people, members of Generation X and Generation Y, what is understood, enacted and experienced as community. Its purpose is to explore how young people create community and to understand which concepts they link together and how they link them both through their lived reality and through their reflections on their thoughts and experiences. The concepts that emerge here will derive from empirical evidence from interviews with these young people, from blogs and discussion forums they participate in, and from the websites of organisations in civil society that they use. Following Geertz's approach to the development of theory, these concepts will be presented as a vocabulary through which one can understand the social human behaviour of creating 'community' (Geertz 1993, p. 27).

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

Requirements for a research method

Choosing a method to explore a research question has often been seen as a pragmatic decision, a matter of picking one or more techniques that can be applied to the available data, often in a quantitative/qualitative dichotomy. Today it is more common for research methods to be derived from views of the world and what is perceived as the best way to explore the relationship between the research question and the research object (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000), and the specific techniques are usually secondary to notions of happenings in that world. Alvesson and Sköldberg argue for the intellectualisation of method, for research that is reflective or reflexive empirical research. They propose four elements to consider in this process of intellectualisation: the existence of a well-reasoned logic in interacting with empirical material, the priority given to an interpretive method which cannot be separated from theory, an awareness of the political-ideological character of research, and reflection on the relationship between the researching subject and the researched object.

In this study, these four elements will be cast slightly differently, and two other elements will be added. The elements used to intellectualise the research methods of this study are:

- the existence of a data-driven method, allowing for many voices;
- the possibility of interpretation driven by insight;
- the possibility of interpretation based on reflection, self-reflection and reflexivity;
- communication and decision-making based on transparent and ethical processes;
- an awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity; and
- the possibility of the development of theory.

The research question for this study and its sub-questions are:

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y, who are active in civil society, create and understand a sense of community?

- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y create their identity and how do others react to this?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y understand social action and how do they experience it?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y create community through social relations?
- How are members of Generation X and Generation Y engaged in the process of creating social capital?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y perceive and live civil society?
- How do members of Generation X and Generation Y intellectualise and live community?

This is an exploratory, inductive study. The data for the study will come directly and indirectly from young people involved together socially and through interactions with civil society organisations, and from the websites of organisations in civil society. The findings from this study will be based on my interpretation of the discourse, perceptions and experiences of these young people and analyses of the discourses and possibilities for action and interaction in blogs, social networking sites and the websites of organisations. The reality to be explored is not an external reality, but a personal, perceptual reality. There is no single truth to be found here, but rather truths constructed through the process of interpretation.

The role of the researcher is not to identify cause and effect, nor correlation, but rather to explore a range of subjectivities and inter-subjectivities, with the aim of illuminating the concept of community from different angles and demonstrating possible links with

other concepts. Thus, this study will not be undertaken from a positivist perspective. A positivist world view assumes an objective approach to understanding and the possibility of building a universal theory (Miles & Huberman 1994). It identifies problems and seeks practical solutions, often with the purpose of giving people greater control over their situation.

Nor will this study use a critical theory approach. The critical theory approach, also referred to as the radical humanist approach, assumes that people create the social order they live in and that they are actively involved in changing it. It also sets aside the authoritarian structures which can be seen to distort people's consciousness so that they are no longer able to realise their full potential. It is designed to provide a critique of the status quo, and its key concerns are with modes of domination, emancipation, deprivation and potentiality (Burrell & Morgan 2000).

For similar reasons, this study will not take a radical structuralist approach, as it is not concerned with structurally imposed limits to freedom and ways to take action against bureaucracies and other authority structures which can lead to social subjugation. The young people involved in civil society may take one of these approaches in their actions for social change but this study does not have an emancipatory purpose.

Interpretivist approaches

Rather, this study will use an interpretivist approach. Like the critical theory approach, this approach assumes that people create the social world they live in and it seeks to reveal the order of that world. The interpretivist approach assumes that all knowledge is socially constructed (Schutz & Luckmann 1974) and that meaning and significance can be understood only by the individual in his or her own context. This approach leads to a deeper understanding of a situation in its context and thus is not appropriate for studying concrete problems and does not usually lead to general theoretical frameworks, except possibly at a meta-level.

In an interpretivist approach, the position of the researcher is important. The values and interests of the researcher will influence the ways in which data is interpreted and

meaning develops, as will the closeness between the researcher and the participants. Closer relationships between the researcher and participants and a greater number of links are likely to lead to the advantage of clarity of interpretation because the researcher brings an insider's understanding to the interpretation of the data. At the same time, there is a greater risk that the researcher will unwittingly distort the interpretation because he or she is unable to clearly articulate his or her own perspective.

The research methods that were considered for this study are all within the interpretivist approach and are concerned with social interactions. They include phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography. As Lincoln and Guba noted (2000, pp. 165-166), in selecting a method it is important to be aware of its ontology, its epistemology and its methodology. Stating this in other words, it is important to be aware of the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it, the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known, and how the enquirer can go about knowing what can be known. Lincoln and Guba categorise the ontology of constructivism as follows:

- It is based on relativism, with realities constructed at the local level or specific to particular circumstances;
- Its epistemology is transactional, that is, knowledge is only created through interactions;
- Although it is inter-subjective, knowledge is created only for the individual and the research findings are created or interpreted through the researcher's understandings; and
- Its methodology is hermeneutical, seeking to interpret.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of the three interpretive approaches. It is concerned with the study of the life world, the world of lived experience, and is an interpretive approach. Its focus is on how we experience the world around us (Schutz 1967). Alfred Schutz was a leading phenomenologist, influenced in part by Weber and his insistence on the separation of the social sciences from the natural sciences and in part by Husserl. He sought to go beyond both to develop an account of consciousness, motivation and

action. Significantly, he examined the structure of the social world, identifying four types of relationships, which he labelled 'consociates', 'contemporaries', 'predecessors' and 'successors'. Consociates are those who share the same time and space; they share the bodily lived experience. Contemporaries are those who share time. Predecessors and successors share neither time nor access to each other. He argues that a 'we-relationship' develops among consociates which involves among other things each building the experiences of the other, whereas the relationships with contemporaries are more distant, based on recorded communications and running the risks of misunderstanding. This 'we-relationship' is at the heart of shared understanding. It is based in part on a common sign or symbol system and in part on an interaction which allows two people to share as it were a common stream of consciousness.

The purpose of phenomenological research is to understand how we interpret our own actions and the actions of others as meaningful and to show how those meanings arise from "intersubjective communication" (Outhwaite 1975, p. 91). According to Potter (1996), the conceptual tools of indexicality and reflexivity are often used in the construction of that understanding, one indicating that meaning of what people say is dependent on the context and the other that what people say is related to their interactions.

The basis for phenomenological research is the construction of a text. The production of this text is both the process of research and the product of the research. According to Van Maanen (1988), there are six aspects of phenomenological enquiry that lead to the production of the text. These include: identifying the phenomena to be investigated, and formulating the research questions; investigating the experience of the phenomena, that is, how we live it; reflection and analysis on the text produced to identify essential themes; establishing the outline for the written description; and the processes of writing and re-writing.

In phenomenological research, meaning is often conveyed through metaphor. The text produced is crucial to the research process. The language used has to be concrete so that the reader can connect with the writer's description of the experience, finding familiarity while at the same time constructing the experience as something unusual.

The language also needs to evoke feelings and emotions in the reader, again creating connection through familiarity and separating by strangeness. The writing must contain many layers of meaning, such that each layer understood calls forth the potential for deeper understanding. The writing has also to connect readers and their experiences to the text and through that process create a collective experience of the phenomena. Thus, the relationship between the knower and what can be known is an iterative one of expression, reflection and analysis. Each iteration is a clarification and intensification of understanding.

Grounded theory

In phenomenology, the understanding of some aspect of everyday existence is developed through detailing collective experiences and through the creation of text. In grounded theory, the understanding emerges through the analysis of a number of texts gathered by the researcher. Grounded theory was first documented in a book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, by Glaser and Strauss, in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss 1967); since then two separate methodologies have emerged. It is the methodology of Strauss which is better known in the early twenty-first century. Strauss was a student of Harold Blumer and the debt to symbolic interactionism in grounded theory is clear. Grounded theory holds that we understand reality through our perceptions of the social world and this reality can only be revealed by empirically investigating this social world. This reality is encoded in our descriptions of events and phenomena in the social world. Common threads in our descriptions of these events or phenomena provide evidence of a common or shared reality which can be understood by others outside of the experience. These common threads form the basis of theory, whose purpose is to explain and predict.

Theory in this context is a statement of relationships which is provisional and which changes over time in the light of new knowledge. It can be of two types and is inductively derived. Substantive theory is relevant to a specific area of sociological enquiry. Formal theory is developed for a conceptual area. Formal theory is built from a number of substantive theories. Theory emerges from the collection, coding and analysis of data. Theory "consists of plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts" (Strauss & Corbin 1999, p. 80).

For Strauss and Corbin, the application of the methodology in a systematic way and the establishment of criteria to validate the research findings are crucial to the research process. The methodology requires text-based data, such as interview transcripts, documents, the researchers' notes, and anecdotal evidence from others. The process of constant comparison allows similarities and differences in the data to be identified. These form the basis for the theoretical memos which document the relationships emerging within the data. The constant comparison of the data allows a coding frame to develop, where each code represents a concept. This approach is known as open coding and allows theoretical understanding to emerge directly from the data. It is not uncommon for researchers to use axial coding, where they interrogate the data using a set of theoretically oriented questions. The coding phase of grounded theory, which is exceedingly complex, is usually carried out using the software package NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd 2006).

Unlike many other research methods, where decisions on sampling are made before the research process begins, in grounded theory, additional data is collected until the point of 'theoretical saturation' is reached. That is, more data is collected and analysed until redundancy begins to appear in the concepts and no new instances or perspectives appear through the analysis.

There are three main principles that guide the application of the methods of grounded theory. The first is a continual interplay between differing levels of analysis so that each affects and validates the other over time. The second is that analysis begins with the raw data and proceeds systematically to higher levels of abstraction until theory is generated. The third is that the theory has applicability because it is grounded in real-world data. And according to Strauss and Corbin, "if elsewhere similar conditions obtain, then approximately similar consequences should occur" (Strauss & Corbin 1999, p. 81).

Strauss and Corbin note that grounded theory has been widely adopted by researchers of social phenomena and there are very many analyses of grounded theory and its application to research. These researchers will have been influenced by other

intellectual trends, such as feminism, postmodernism and ethno-methodology. In so far as the grounded theory method is based on openness, it is appropriate that these intellectual trends should be incorporated into a study using grounded theory. However, Strauss and Corbin also identify the dangers of this wider adoption. When methodologies become 'fashionable', important elements are overlooked and, for Strauss and Corbin, too many people focus on the coding aspect of grounded theory without doing 'theoretical coding' and without developing theory (Strauss & Corbin 1999, p. 78).

Ethnography

Ethnography is about understanding and interpreting human life, about human relationships, about how people live in the world around them. Like phenomenology, it is both a process and the product of research. Although some would say ethnography is *a* or even *the* method of anthropology, a method for describing the social and cultural worlds of a given group, Fitzgerald considers it a "frame of mind" (1997, p. 52), an exploration and interpretation of the phenomenon of interest, a description of real life phenomena which is clear and straightforward but does not betray the complexity of human phenomena. As a product, ethnography is the medium through which an understanding of this culture can be conveyed; an ethnographic narrative may be unlike other research products in that it is unlikely to be segmented into sections headed 'method' or 'results' or 'discussion'.

In ethnographic research, the phenomena of interest include social networks, social behaviours and the creation of culture. For Geertz, culture is a system of thought, expressed in symbolic form, through which people communicate and develop their knowledge and understandings of life. Following Weber, he believes that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" and "[he] take[s] culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1993, p. 5). Culture can only be known from the inside, as it is a set of lived beliefs, knowledge and experience. In the same way that grounded theory has become 'fashionable', the writings of Clifford Geertz on ethnography have also been fashionable, having been

cited more than two thousand times. There is a risk that his definition of culture could be used as a convenient scholarly decoration rather than be rigorously applied.

Ethnographic methods have been documented and discussed since at least 1874, when the British Association for the Advancement of Science published its *Notes and Queries on Anthropology.* The key data-collection method of contemporary ethnography, fieldwork, with its expectation of participant observation, was documented by Bronislaw Malinowski in 1922 (Tedlock 2000, p. 457). Fitzgerald notes that ethnography is a "bricolage", a term which Denzin and Lincoln had used to describe a "pieced together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation" (Fitzgerald 1997, p. 53).

Geertz states that it is the ethnographer who creates the text that becomes the focus of analysis in the research process. "The ethnographer "inscribes" social discourse; *he* [sic] *writes it down*" (Geertz 1993, pp. 19, emphasis in the original). In this process of inscription, the ethnographer turns what he or she has observed from a 'passing event' into 'an account'. Berg (2001, p. 135) considers that this orientation towards text is 'traditional' and, like Fitzgerald, accepts that there is no one technique for gathering data in ethnography. According to Van Maanen (1982, p. 103), ethnography involves "extensive fieldwork of various types including participant observation, formal and informal observation, formal and informal interviewing, document collecting, filming, recording and so on". It could be argued (as Geertz himself does in a footnote) that these are all methods of "inscription" and it is the notion of an inscribed text being words on paper that is traditional, as the newer methods of recording lead to 'texts' in other forms (Geertz 1993, pp. 19, fn 13).

Significant for Geertz was the need to develop description which encapsulates the essence of the phenomenon of interest, both for those whose culture is the subject of observation and for readers of the ethnography. Geertz noted that, for description to be meaningful to the outsider, it needed to be 'thick'. To explain the notion of 'thick description', Geertz compared the blink and the wink, the blink constituting thin description of a physical act but the wink representing a communication of meaning, which in its turn can be understood, parodied, changed as it is part of a culture of

meaning. He notes that thick or ethnographic description has three components to it: it is interpretive, is based on social discourse and aims to prevent elements of this social discourse from perishing (Geertz 1993, p. 20). He refers to specific examples of thick description, such as the now iconic cockfight as "enacted statements of … particular ways of being in the world" (Geertz 1999, p. 14).

There is a risk that researchers adopt the term 'thick' description without adopting the methods which lead to a description which is meaningful to outsiders. Strauss and Corbin (1999, p. 74) note that Geertz's thick description is different from the 'conceptual density' of grounded theory, as this latter is concerned with the "richness of concept development and relationships" arising from familiarity with the data, whereas the former places its emphasis on the process of description (and interpretation).

Ethnography has been adopted by researchers in fields such as education, nursing and organisation studies. According to Chambers (2000, p. 857), for those researchers who are likely to be part of the group they are studying, the challenge may not be to study particular cultures but rather to study the cultural processes that occur in response to a particular change. He dubs this 'applied ethnography' and notes that it is by its very nature "interventionist and culturally intrusive" (Chambers 2000, p. 859). He argues that applied ethnography may use micro and macro analysis, that is, both quantitative and qualitative data, and notes that some current approaches to applied ethnography grow out of earlier action research approaches or models of advocacy. The purpose described by Chambers seems to be "to resolve particular social problems", and so this approach would seem to be more closely related to a radical structuralist approach than an interpretivist approach to research method (Chambers 2000, p. 859).

What Ellis has dubbed the 'new ethnography' allows the researcher to be positioned within the research context, but without the intention of solving some social problem. This approach to ethnography allows the researcher to focus on his or her own experiences. It is known by many terms, as Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739) demonstrate, including self-stories (Denzin 1989), lived experience (Van Maanen 1990), self-ethnography (Van Maanen 1995), ethnographic memoir (Tedlock 1995) and autoethnography. Alvesson (1999) states that in self-ethnography, "the [researcher] is

thus not an ethnographer in the sense of a professional stranger or a researcher primarily oriented to studying the specific setting … the idea of a self-ethnography is to utilise the position one is in also for other secondary purposes, i.e. doing research on the setting of which one is a part" (1999, p. 8). The challenge of the 'new ethnography', and self-ethnography in particular, is not to 'break in' to a culture, but rather to 'break out' from the assumptions and behaviours which one takes for granted. Being already on the inside gives the 'new ethnographer' the advantage of excellent access to information and insights, and their deeper and more profound knowledge of the setting may lead to greater theoretical insights, as they are more firmly grounded in observation and experience. However, it also can lead to the formalisation of the ethnographer's preconceptions and cultural inclinations unless they are challenged through wide reading, through reflexivity or through a deliberate effort to take different positions on the topic.

Alvesson cautions against the mere adoption of the label of ethnography, emphasising the demands of the method by quoting Van Maanen, who asserted that "ethnography is no longer pictured as a relatively simple look, listen and learn procedure but rather as something akin to an intense epistemological trial by fire" (Alvesson 1999, p. 7).

Intellectualising the 'research object'

As Alvesson and Sköldberg note, research methods are derived from two factors: views of the world, and the best way to explore the relationship between the research question and the research object (2000). As discussed above, the research question in this study is based around community, a concept that has no agreed definition. An exploration of the 'research object' shows that it is not a single, monolithic entity. The relationships among and between a group of young people are ever-changing. The links between them are based on types of interaction which change over time and which vary in intensity depending on the purpose of those interactions. They may interact with each other synchronously or asynchronously, based in the same physical location or separated geographically, identifying themselves or acting anonymously.

Thus the research object in this study is difficult to grasp and, without some way of working with its multiple facets, the relationship between it and the research question is ever-changing – there is no adequate way to explore it. Stake offers a way out of this dilemma of how to fix the research object when he states that what we choose to study is a 'case', that this 'choice' indicates there could be other cases and this case, like other cases, has boundaries and limits to it (1998, pp. 86-87), although those boundaries and limits may be more or less closely defined. According to Creswell, it may even be necessary for the researcher to set "contrived boundaries" if boundaries and limits are not clear (1998, p. 64). Yin has asserted that when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context, the case study is the "method of choice" (2003, p. 4).

Case study then becomes the study of a 'case'. Stake refers to Geertz's work as a 'case report' (Stake 1998, p. 94) and he concludes that the case study's best use is "for adding to existing experience and human understanding". He quotes Von Wright as stating that a case study approach is useful when information is "holistic and episodic" (Von Wright in Stake 2001, p. 136). Both of these are characteristics of the group of young people in this study. The study of a case assumes multiple perspectives and multiple sources of data, and one of its strengths is the use of these multiple sources in triangulation as a confirmatory analysis (Stake 1998, p. 96).

Triangulation includes the protocols needed to ensure that we 'have it right'. In his discussion of triangulation, Stake refers to Denzin's categorisation of these protocols as: data source triangulation, where the researcher attempts to ensure that what he or she is observing and reporting can be interpreted in the same way regardless of the setting; investigator triangulation, where another researcher observes the same phenomenon; theory triangulation, where different conceptual or theoretical approaches are used in the interpretation of data; and methodological triangulation, where more than one method may be used to gather data on a phenomenon (Stake 1995, pp. 107-115). Stake also favours the use of what he terms 'member checking', another approach to triangulation. Participants can provide valuable observations on the researcher's interpretations and may be given the opportunity to comment on the interpretation the researcher has made of the data. 'Having it right' in an interpretive study may imply that

the protocols lead to additional interpretations rather than to the insistence on a single interpretation.

Explaining the choice

To return to the context of this study, which is how a sense of community is created and understood, and the elements identified earlier to intellectualise research methods, it must be acknowledged that the research object is a 'case' and that consequently this must be a case study.

But to conclude there would be to ignore one of the two factors that Alvesson and Skoldeberg consider to be important for deriving an appropriate research method. One cannot move straight from this acknowledgement of a relationship between a research question and a research object to a decision about technique. Rather it is important to discuss the three interpretive approaches, which encompass ways of viewing the world. In making the statement that this is a case study, none of the three approaches is rejected outright as each will contribute to the overall research method. Phenomenology provides the overarching theoretical framework for the study, and aspects of grounded theory techniques are entailed in the data collection and analysis. Ethnography will play a part in the data collection and the writing of the product of the research.

Creswell notes the overlap between ethnography and case study, emphasising that the major differences between the two are that in a case study the researcher works with a smaller group to explore an interest in a range of topics, while in ethnography the researcher uses anthropological concepts, such as stories, descriptions of behaviours and social structures, as key concepts (1998, p. 66). This overlap has a significant influence on the way the method for this study has been conceptualised.

Case study is a data-driven method. The following data collection techniques can be used for this study:

- transcripts of interviews with members of the group;
- notes of discussions and other interactions;
- emails;

- the text of blogs and discussion forums;
- the websites of organisations in civil society and social networking sites; and
- (possibly) photographs found online.

I am working in what others might call a 'knowledge-rich' environment, with no shortage of data. Wherever possible, using one of the basic techniques of ethnography, I am aiming for the 'inscription' I make to use the words of the participants in the study. The 'voice' of these inscriptions is all the more significant in creating and representing the notion of community, as this carries across the different contexts in which people interact.

Ethnographic approaches allow for ambiguity, while the focus on case study seeks to reduce that ambiguity. The collection of data from many people, the inclusion of multiple perspectives on a topic, will undoubtedly uncover ambiguities for the researcher. Further, ethnography is a method that, like other interpretive methods, has a tolerance for ambiguity, being based on perceptions, and this is significant for the research. The use of multiple sources will provide the triangulation that will help to ensure that key findings reflect the data.

There are no simple rules to follow for the analysis of data collected through a case study using an interpretive approach. Geertz's essay on 'thick description' provides an object lesson in how insight into possible meanings of actions can aid interpretation. Berg proposes a systematic approach to content analysis similar to the grounded theory approach (2001, p. 164), but this seems to separate the process of research from the product of that research. He further identifies other techniques for analysing the data, such as the development of typologies, the use of sociograms and the use of metaphor. The use of sociograms could be of some relevance to me, as the technique allows the researcher to make assessments about the strength of relationships among and between members of a group. The analysis of figures of speech and other techniques of literary analysis are always useful for understanding the deeper meanings that participants attach to their utterances. Whereas Berg presents analysis as a logical, systematic process, for Clifford, it involves transforming "unruly experience" into an "authoritative written account" (Clifford 1999, p. 283). He describes the process as a "continuous

tacking between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts" (Clifford 1999, p. 290). Clifford acknowledges the dual position of the researcher and, through the metaphor of moving between the inside and the outside and the comparison he makes with the literary interpreter, he emphasises the importance of techniques to maintain a 'critical distance'.

It is no longer possible to consider the interpretation of data without at the same time considering ourselves and the other participants as part of this process. Giddens (1976) suggested that to fully understand social interactions, one has to acknowledge the need for 'double hermeneutics', the interpretation of interpreting subjects. The first is the interaction with empirical material, focusing on accounts in interviews, observations of situations and other empirical materials. The second is interpretation, which focuses on the underlying meanings in the empirical material. These are the core of Geertz's thick description and will be the stages of interpretation used in this study.

The final requirement for a research method is the possibility of the development of theory. Proponents of every research method would claim some relationship to a change in what is known or understood, but there is not necessarily agreement in what this relationship is. Geertz believes that theory grows from what is already documented in earlier scholarly literature (Geertz 1993, pp. 25 - 28), whereas Glaser and Strauss and Strauss and Corbin assert that theory emerges from the data. A case study using some ethnographic methods and a level of reflexive interpretation is able to use both approaches to developing theory.

Thus, taking an approach that intellectualises the choice of research method, a case study using ethnographic techniques, has been identified as the most appropriate method for the exploration of how young people perceive that community is created.

Seeking quality

The next question to be addressed is what it means to speak of quality in a case study and how can the researcher ensure that the research study will be deemed acceptable by other scholars. The ways in which the quality of a case study using ethnographic

techniques can be judged are significant, as are the particular demands of writing an ethnographic case report.

The discourse of creating new understandings has been the discourse of the sciences since the Enlightenment. The language used to explicate the processes of research demonstrates their origins in logical positivism. The criteria for ensuring quality are rigour, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and dependability.

Noting positivist criteria

In the positivist tradition, studies must be 'rigorous', that is, logically accurate (according to the OED). 'Rigour' carries with it a notion of strictness, as well of an approach that reflects care and thoroughness. Lincoln and Guba (1999, p. 397) write that 'rigour' is not part of naturalistic research methods and that the research carried out in naturalistic settings is often criticised as being 'sloppy' or 'undisciplined'. They are referring to 'rigour' as a technical term used in quantitative research, indicating that a study meets the requirements of validity and reliability.

If it is not always appropriate to claim that a scientific study should be rigorous, there is another quality it should possess and that is trustworthiness. As Lincoln and Guba remind their readers, a good scientific study is a trustworthy one. The term 'trustworthiness' brings a moral dimension to the notion of quality and acceptability of research. The trustworthiness of a positivist research study's findings is demonstrated through its 'truth value', its 'applicability', its 'consistency' and its 'neutrality'. These abstractions are operationalised as "internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity" (Lincoln & Guba 1999, p. 398). Lincoln and Guba state that, although these criteria are inappropriate for studies carried out in naturalistic settings, there are parallel abstractions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which can be used instead. They make "a small plea against the constitution of a neo-orthodoxy in the use of these criteria" (Lincoln & Guba 1999, p. 432), but have set out in some detail how each of these abstractions could be implemented in a study, thereby establishing them as necessary as determinants of quality.

Credibility is the ability to make others believe in the findings. Credibility can be achieved through 'prolonged engagement' in the field site, which leads to a sense of trust, through 'persistent observation' and through using a range of sources, methods, investigators and theories. It can be boosted through peer debriefing, so that the researcher, on a regular basis, talks to someone outside the project about the findings to moderate the possibility of bias or assumptions affecting the findings. It can also be supported by 'referential adequacy', the existence of original recorded materials such as videotapes and audio recordings, and by 'member checks', where people from the 'stakeholding groups' check the data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba 1999, pp. 407 - 418).

Decisions on transferability, the possibility that the findings are relevant in some other setting, are the responsibility of the reader. Lincoln and Guba state that it is the responsibility of the researchers only "to provide the database that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (1999, p. 420) and that this database is itself based on the principles of 'thick description'.

Dependability is intrinsically linked to credibility. It might be argued that a study which is credible is also one which is dependable. However, a study's dependability could be made more obvious through the use of an 'inquiry audit', a systematic analysis of the data, data collection techniques and the research processes by someone external to the research study. An 'inquiry audit' can also be used effectively to demonstrate the criterion of confirmability, meaning that the findings can be checked through access to the data and methods of analysis to show that they are derived from the data rather than from the perspective and biases of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba set out in some detail Halpern's approach to an inquiry audit (1999, pp. 421 - 428). Halpern's audit trail focuses on "raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information" (Lincoln & Guba 1999, p. 423). They note that a researcher could be "overwhelmed by the apparent complexity" of this audit process (1999, p. 428) and propose that a simpler method and one perhaps more in keeping with the demands of a naturalistic enquiry could be the keeping of a reflexive journal (1999, p. 429).

Lincoln and Guba's small plea not to found a neo-orthodoxy in identifying criteria for establishing quality in ethnographic research is taken up by Smith and Deemer (2000). They begin from Putnam's argument that there is "no God's-eye point of view" (2000, p. 879) in research, and that this casts doubt on the claim that any research method can be neutral or objective. They identify what they call the "quasi-foundationalist response", which has treated qualitative research as though it were quantitative, positivist research, and are critical of it because it has led scholars to formulate other, potentially parallel, criteria for judging the quality of research. The existence of criteria for judging quality suggests a fixed and known standard against which to measure each research study. Qualitative research does not acknowledge the existence of such a standard and so is often charged with 'relativism'. Relativism, which is of such concern to positivist research, is "not a problem" for Smith and Deemer, who argue that "the issue of criteria for judging inquiry is a practical and moral affair, not an epistemological one"(Smith 2000, p. 894). Therefore, they propose that it is possible to create a list of features that "we … more or less agree at any given time and place, characterise good versus bad inquiry" (2000, p. 894). This list can be added to, changed or altered as appropriate.

Exploring interpretivist elements of quality

In exploring the interpretivist elements of quality, I have already acknowledged the importance of Stake's notion of triangulation (see page 67 above). Here I will follow Stake further (1998, p. 94) and will acknowledge Geertz's work as an ethnographic case report. This will enable me to elaborate on Stake's position that the researcher "seeks ways to protect and substantiate the transfer of knowledge [about the case]" (1998, p. 146) and to draw the criteria of quality for my study in part from the literature on quality in ethnography.

Whereas Lincoln and Guba focused on the moral concept of trustworthiness and its operational indicators of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, Golden-Biddle and Locke (1999, p. 370) argue that the hallmark of good ethnographic enquiry is that it is convincing – a social criterion – and that there are three major dimensions through which ethnography can convince:

- authenticity;
- plausibility; and
- criticality.

Authenticity

Scholars in the field have paid the greatest attention to authenticity (cf. Geertz, Van Maanen, Clifford, Hammersley, Richardson). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1999, p. 373) state that an ethnographic text makes a claim of authenticity when two conditions are met. The first is that the reader is assured that the researcher was there. "You are there, because I was there" is identified by Clifford as the predominant way of claiming authority in ethnographic field work (1999, p. 282). The second is that the researcher was true to the experience in writing up the report, which Clifford refers to as the researcher's ability to construct an "ethnographic present" (1999, pp. 287-290).

In a case study where individuals are giving an account of something from the past authenticity has another dimension to it. This is the problem of retrospectivity. Rüsen has called retrospectivity "the open door through which non-empirical elements" can enter a study (Rüsen 2005, p. 66). These non-empirical elements include an individual's subjective interests and their faulty memories. According to Denzin, although memory distortion is seen as a key problem by some, as people forget or reinterpret events, thoughts and feelings, this should not be considered a problem for a researcher conducting an interpretive study, because authentic "meaning structures … result from a re-interpretation of past experiences and feelings" (Denzin 1989, p. 89).

Plausibility

Plausibility is the second dimension through which ethnography can convince and this is "the ability of the text to connect two worlds that are put in play in the reading of the written account" (Golden-Biddle & Locke 1999, p. 374). Plausibility centres on the reader and the reader's relationship to the subject matter. It is important for a text to convey a "sense of familiarity and relevance" as well as "a sense of distinction and innovation" (1999, p. 374). The techniques Golden-Biddle and Locke identify for invoking plausibility include what they call:

- 'normalising the method or methodologies', in other words, making some concessions in the way the article is presented, so that readers can follow some of the conventions of scholarly discourse found in the majority of [positivist] articles;
- 'drafting the reader' by using 'we' and 'us';
- 'legitimating the atypical' by activating the reader's personal experience, so that unusual claims are not dismissed as being irrelevant or far-fetched; and
- 'smoothing the contestable', that is, making assertions that could be problematic in ways that are more acceptable, for example through appeals to authority.

While these could be interpreted as dishonest methods to ensnare the reader, Stake (1998, p. 145) also notes that the writer needs to consider ways to use two pedagogical methods, the didactic and discovery learning. In this process, he or she needs to accommodate the reader's pre-existing knowledge and to try to build on their experiences.

Criticality

Criticality is the third dimension proposed by Golden-Biddle and Locke, and this is "the ability of the text to actively probe readers to reconsider their taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs" (1999, p. 374). This is achieved through the form of the text and its rhetorical style. Criticality, having already been used by the researcher in the production of the text, is aimed at readers, giving them room to reflect, stimulating their recognition of differences and provoking them to examine these and encouraging them to imagine new possibilities (1999, p. 387).

Establishing authority

Both plausibility and criticality are concerned with the production of ethnography, that is, with the process of writing. Gergen and Gergen note that, in naturalistic studies, one cannot separate the research process and the research product, as research and representation are "intrinsically intertwined" (Gergen & Gergen 2000, p. 1027). They identify four methodological innovations that lead to good inquiry. These are:

- reflexivity, a conscientious effort to tell the truth;

- multiple voicing, a promising way to provide a potentially rich array of interpretations;
- literary representation or literary styling, which signals that the representation is not a 'map of the world' being studied; and
- performance, the re-enactment in dramatic terms of key aspects of the findings of the study (Gergen & Gergen 2000, pp. 1027 - 1030).

For Gergen and Gergen, it is important to move the evaluation from a focus on the product of research alone to include its process (Gergen & Gergen 2000, p. 1039).

Clifford however appears more concerned with the creation of ethnography as the product. Having dismissed authority based on experience and interpretation as only part of the requirement, Clifford instead posits "paradigms of discourse, dialogue and polyphony" (1999, p. 296) as the other necessary features of good inquiry. However, he considers the "textual embodiment of authority" to be a recurring problem as the processes of good inquiry – experience, interpretation, dialogue and polyphony – lead to discord. Yet the expectation is for a coherent presentation that presupposes some form of control. The way this coherence is achieved in the report is, he notes, "a matter of strategic choice" (1999, p. 305).

Richardson explores some of those 'strategic choices' and indicates how they might be achieved. Even though she is concerned with the writing of the reports of research, she does not discuss authorial presence directly, but rather focuses on conventions and processes of writing. She encourages researchers to explore their research through writing and suggests a number of writing practices (Richardson 2000).

As a practical starting point, Richardson proposes the writing up of field notes as an opportunity to practise writing and encourages the use of Glaser and Strauss's method of writing different types of notes – observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes and personal notes (2000, p. 941). More challengingly, she proposes the writing of a 'layered text', giving oneself the possibility of including multiple perspectives and at the same time identifying those aspects of the study that might otherwise have been overlooked through the use of a more dominant authorial voice. The consistent message

in her discussion of writing practices is that writing is a skill that needs to be developed as much as other skills of research, and that, without good writing skills, researchers limit their own research possibilities and undermine their authority.

These writing practices can lead to several types of exemplary text. These include the seamless text, the sandwich text and the layered text. Richardson (2000) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that researchers practise writing each type. The seamless text is written with a single authorial voice, giving a sense of harmony and completeness to the work. The sandwich text is described by Ellis (2004, p. 198) as a story with academic and literary theory on both sides. The layered text mixes various styles and writing forms to give a sense of the complexity of a polyphonic work of the kind suggested by Clifford. Rosen's 'Breakfast at Spiro's' (1985), a much-cited ethnography, uses the 'epilogue' form of the layered text, where a theoretically based commentary follows the story.

Maximising transparency

In ethnographic research, the subjective nature of the process means that there will inevitably be attention to some aspects of a study rather than others. A key strategy for minimising the effect of the researcher's influence in interpretation is the use of induction, where meaning and theory emerge from the data, and this will be essential to the data analysis in this study. A second way to manage subjectivity is often referred to as neutrality. In positivist research, it is deemed necessary to establish distance between the researcher and the participants or research subjects. However, in ethnographic research, it is not appropriate to attempt to maintain either physical or social distance, and the researcher's subjectivity will inevitably influence his or her interpretation of the findings. Thus, the ethnographic researcher is sometimes encouraged to keep an open mind, to be led by the data, to minimise the chance that he or she will actively influence the data collection or the data analysis. For some ethnographic researchers, this means collecting data before having done much reading or other conceptual preparation. For a research student this is not really feasible, and therefore, although it is important to be aware of the principle of neutrality, it is important to be aware of other strategies for managing bias. A third strategy for managing bias is transparency, a strategy in which the researcher acknowledges his or her subjectivity by explicitly stating his or her

position (O'Leary 2004). The strategy of transparency is relevant to this research study as I, the researcher, am known to many of the participants and have played an active role in ongoing work processes.

Thus, I begin the process of acknowledging my subjectivity by noting that I am female (gender), that I am more than old enough to be mother to any of the participants (age) and that I have been involved in the work of universities as a teacher and a manager for many years (social status). Through a professional association as well as through my work, I have worked on issues related to young people's achievement of their potential, and my involvement in organisations in civil society has also been on projects related to youth development (experience). Googling my name will give an overview of my current and recent interests and activities.

I have advocated the importance of information for people to make the decisions relevant to the kind of life they wish to lead, and I believe that, as individuals, we can have some impact on the world around us – we can choose whether to act or not and we live with the consequences of those choices. As part of a group, we can have a greater impact or make further-reaching changes than we can as an individual. This information we use to make decisions is not an absolute, a fact with the same meaning for all. Information is socially constructed and different people will create different sorts of understanding from the same information. However, there is often a sense of collective agreement that a fact or topic is worthy of consideration.

I believe that the exchange of knowledge, information and experience is fundamental to good social relations, and conversely, that good social relations are fundamental to the exchange of knowledge, information and experience. I have experience of working with young people in exchanging information through online learning and discussions using forum-style technologies, both through my work and through involvement with a program of youth engagement in action for social change.

This emphasis on information also affects my view of the ways we can know about our world. We know our world in two ways: through our conceptualisations of what we

have read about it and through our interactions with it. This means that, as researchers, we are part of what we study and our interpretation is partial and provisional.

As an ethnographer, I am both part and not part of the group. I have worked on the same project as several of the participants and can claim peer status in that regard, although immediately we move from that narrow shared experience the difference in our ages becomes apparent. Being a researcher also separates me from the participants, as few of them have had the opportunity to carry out scholarly research yet, although many of us share an interest in the scholarly writings on social change, and the discussion and debate of what we have been reading has informed our social interactions over time. For those of us who knew each other before the study, it was not unusual to have email discussions and from time to time we would meet for coffee or lunch or a bite to eat after work.

As noted earlier, one of the advantages of being part of the group is that I bring an insider's understanding. There are issues that do not need to be stated in full because we have explored them in the past, and understandings that we have long since clarified and used as a basis for action. I also know things that do not pertain to this research project and that should therefore remain un-stated. There are a number of disadvantages to being part of the group. The closeness of our relationships may mean that I interpret the views of some participants more easily than those of others. It may also be that those who see me as more of an outsider express themselves differently in our discussions. It is important for me to be clear about my assumptions and preconceptions as they will affect not only the data collection but also the analysis and the writing.

I have a commitment to ethical practice. In the context of this research study, I find myself less bound by the policies, procedures and rigorous approval process of the university or by the requirements of an approach to research than by the sense that it is important to reflect the thoughts, utterances and behaviours of people as they would wish them to be represented. Thus I have sent the transcripts of the interviews to the participants for checking, removed those parts they felt were inappropriate for the study or did not properly represent them, and amended some expressions which individuals felt were inarticulate or reflected poorly on their ability to express themselves.

The process of maximising transparency, and of enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of the study, is a complex one, with the researcher central to creating quality in an ethnographic case study.

Collecting data

As this is an interpretivist study, it begins from the assumption that the purpose of data collection is to represent the human activity of interest. This is done in a variety of ways. In this study, the data include the websites of organisations in civil society, the text of blogs and discussion forums and descriptions of individuals' perceptions and interpretations of community, mostly gathered through interviews. It is commonly said that gathering data in a case study is not a problem as the data is just lying around waiting to be collected. This is not to imply that case study data collection is the equivalent of rubbish removal after an open-air concert. Rather, it more closely resembles a process of urban gleaning or re-use of materials.

Inscriptions and note-making

According to Geertz, the role of the ethnographer is to "trace the curve of a social discourse; fixing it into an inspectable form" (Geertz 1993). As noted earlier, Geertz uses the technical word 'inscription' to convey Ricoeur's idea that what ethnographers write as they fix social discourse in an inspectable form is not a description of the passing event as event but rather the meaning, the gist or thought behind what was said or enacted. This description has four characteristics. In Geertz's words, it is interpretive, it focuses on the social discourse, it attempts to fix passing events so that they can be re-considered, and it is microscopic. These characteristics are relevant to the approach of this study.

Making inscriptions

In a traditional sense, inscriptions were made from notes taken during meetings and interviews held with key informants. These interviews were conducted face to face and by email. The interviews and discussions sought, in an unstructured way to gather data to answer the question: How do members of Generation X and Generation Y, who are active in civil society, create and understand a sense of community? The questions

guiding the interview were: what does community mean to you? what do you think, or in your experience is needed to create that sense of community? can community exist online and if so, how? What do you understand by civil society? how are you involved in it? Do you consider yourself part of civil society and why? and what have you achieved or what have you hoped would be the outcome of your involvement? All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Notes were also made following unexpected events or interactions and they were made of reflections and insights from me, the researcher.

Identifying documents

Inscriptions were also made from the text in the websites of organisations in civil society, from blogs and discussion forums. The websites of civil society organisations contain a wealth of information. These websites include information about the aim and purpose of the organisation, contact details, instructions and mechanisms for becoming a member, statements of principle, working papers and other publications, manuals or other opportunities for skills development or capacity building, information about campaigns, opportunities for engaging in social interaction, newsletters, discussion forums, methods for making donations and so on. Blogs may contain records of personal perceptions or interactions with others around a topic or commentary on an event or a media report. Discussion forums may contain individuals' reactions to a topic posed for discussion by an organisation in civil society and may also include dialogue with others in that discussion forum.

Collecting inscriptions

The participants in the study were identified through a snowball technique. They cannot be taken as representative of young Australians, In the first instance, four people known to be involved in action for positive social change in civil society were invited to take part in the study and asked to invite others to become involved or to forward the contact details of possible participants to the researcher so that she could contact them. These four people are in their late twenties or early thirties and are university graduates. The snowball of Sunil was not effective in introducing people to the study, although his contacts were enthusiastic about the research question and emailed the researcher. The snowball of Therese introduced one person to the study (with several others declining the invitation to take part), although Therese herself has maintained contact with the

researcher throughout. The snowball of Alastair crossed over with the snowball begun by James. These four starting points brought fifteen participants to the study. The cross-over between the starting snowballs and the references made by participants to each other demonstrated that this was becoming a homogenous, closed group. Further, several participants had noted that those who were younger than them would have a different perspective on the question of community and online interactions. Thus a fifth snowball was begun, with Katherine, aged 21, a university student. Katherine's snowball introduced seven participants to the study. At the third move of Katherine's snowball, there was again overlap with the snowball of Alastair. Robert was recruited into the study as a user of a website forum which Isaac had described. A person in the university context who might have been familiar with this website was contacted and he suggested that many of its users might have an interest in anime. The president of the UTS anime club was contacted and he forwarded a request to club members, asking anyone who used the particular website and who was interested in taking part in the study to contact the researcher. Three individuals contacted the researcher by email and Robert agreed to take part. Anna N. volunteered to become a participant in the study after a conversation with the researcher and others on action for positive social change. Three people declined to take part in the study, but recruited others.

Thus there were twenty-four participants in the study. Twenty-three of these were interviewed face to face in Sydney or Canberra between September 2006 and April 2007 and the twenty-fourth, who was overseas, responded by email. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded using an MP3 player. Participants were given the option of being identified through a pseudonym. Each interview was transcribed and emailed to the participant for him or her to correct any misunderstandings and to identify any sections that should not be considered part of the public record. Some of the participants indicated that they had their own website or were active in listservs and discussion forums, and where these were publicly accessible they were explored.

Using the approach developed in the analysis of the websites of organisations in civil society identified through the ActiveSydney website www.active.org.au/sydney/ (Yerbury 2007a, 2007b), a number of websites of organisations in civil society were

investigated, to give a picture of the context within which participants might be involved in action for social change. These were the websites of organisations which study participants indicated they used or were involved with. The websites of three organisations were explored in greater depth. These organisations are GetUp, ActNow and Vibewire, and the director or coordinator of each organisation, all of which are web-based organisations, participated in the study. Further, social networking sites, blogs and discussion forums named by participants were also explored.

Analysing data – finding meanings

The purpose of data analysis in an ethnographic case study is to "reduce the puzzlement" (Geertz 1993, p. 16). This is done by reviewing multiple sources of data to look for "behavioural regularities" (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 8). There are three stages to the analysis of data: data reduction, data analysis and verification of meanings.

Approaches to analysing the data

One of the challenges of working with case study data is to overcome the volume of the data in order to make sense of it and to link one aspect to another.

Interview data

The challenge of vast amounts of data can be overcome by using codes to tag or label the data. A provisional set of codes can be developed from the literature and could be helpful in establishing a basic description and interpretation of the data. However, as the focus on the study is on understanding how people interact and establish rules and norms for their interaction, pattern coding was considered an appropriate starting point. The purpose of pattern coding is to be able to bring together similar behaviours or perceptions and make sense of them, or to take a step towards "draw[ing] large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts" (Geertz 1993, p. 28). It is important not to decide too early that a "pattern" has emerged, as this will cause a break in the interpretation and simultaneously cause a break in the conceptual and theoretical development that the interpretation will lead to.

NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd 2006), potentially a useful tool for the coding of large volumes of data, was used to code the interview data. The analysis of the data did

not commence until the interviews were completed and the transcripts had been checked by participants.

Using the free node function, transcripts were analysed and coded using open coding. The first stage of analysis identified eighty-two free nodes. Many passages of text in the transcripts were coded at several nodes.

A more detailed examination of the text in the free nodes identified five major clusters of nodes. These were created as tree nodes in NVIVO. There were some ideas expressed in the free nodes which were not related to others and which therefore were not translated into tree nodes. Most of these were meta-comments, and were used to help portray an 'etic' view of the group of participants.

Social networking data

The relationships among and between the participants were complex, as was evidenced by the overlap among and between the separate snowball trajectories. Three types of relationship appeared to exist among the group: social relationships, relationships in civil society and relationships in websites. To identify these relationships, the text of interviews was analysed alongside my notes of anecdotal information and observations. Using the UCINet software (Borgatti, Everett & Freeman 2002), spreadsheets representing each of these relationships were devised. For the social relationships, a symmetrical spreadsheet was devised using a code for strength of relationships drawn from the views of two of the participants during the interviews. Anna J. had noted that there were 'going for coffee' friends and there were people one made a special effort to see and do things with. Tristan similarly expressed the sense that there were people one sees around and then others that one has different levels of contact with. Therefore, three categories of social relationships were used for the purpose of analysis: (1) people one comes across or sees around, for example at parties; (2) people one makes arrangements to spend brief amounts of time with, such as having coffee; (3) people one makes a special effort to see, for example to eat together or to do something special with. For ease of representation, it was assumed that relationships were reciprocal. For the relationships in civil society, a symmetrical spreadsheet was used to identify (1) relationships where people had worked together on the same project in civil society and

at the same time and (2) relationships where people had worked at the same organisation or on the same project but at different times. For the web-based relationships, three types of relationship were coded: relationships through the websites of civil society organisations, relationships through social networking software, and relationships through both social networking software and the websites of civil society organisations. The multiplex function of UCINet was used to calculate these relationships and NetDraw (Borgatti, Everett & Freeman 2002) was used to produce a visual representation of these relationships.

Data in the websites

Content analysis was used to explore the ways in which the websites of civil society organisations construct a notion of community for the people interacting through their websites (Yerbury 2007a). The literature identified three key elements of community and civil society: facilitating a sense of belonging, providing opportunities for action or contribution, and the sharing of values. Indicators for these three elements of community were developed from the literature and used to analyse the home page and second level pages of each website. For the majority of these indicators, only their presence was recorded. However, some of the indicators, such as the direct appeal to values, were identified through text or images in the websites, and phrases and descriptions of images were recorded on the data collection sheets.

Content analysis was also used to identify the range of activities carried through their websites by the organisations in the sample (Yerbury 2007b). Indicators for the three aspects of providing opportunities for involvement in civil society – for the range of activities, for supporting the development of active citizens, and for opportunities for civic engagement – were developed from four studies. The indicators for activities available through websites were adopted from the study by Surman and Reilly (2003); the indicators of opportunities for developing active citizenship were derived from the work of Flanagan and Faison (2001) and Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles and Larson (2004); and the indicators of opportunities for civic engagement were derived from the study by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003), using a similar approach to that of Barraket (2005). A coding sheet was developed listing all of these indicators and the home page and second level pages of each website were analysed. For the majority of these

indicators, only their presence was recorded. However, the indicators of civic attachment and sharing values were identified through text or images in the websites, and phrases and descriptions of images were recorded on the data collection sheets.

Chapter 4 THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR SOCIAL WORLDS

This chapter introduces the twenty-four individuals who took part in this study. A complex web of relationship links them together, more strongly than might be indicated by the snowball technique, described in Chapter 3, through which they were recruited. This sense of the interconnectedness of the participants was tested through social network analysis, using the UCINet software (Borgatti, Everett & Freeman 2002). This chapter describes the participants, explores their social worlds and sets out some of the complexity in their social relations with each other, with me and within the world of civil society and associations.

The participants had at least three worlds where they could interact. Relevant to this study are the social world of friendships and acquaintances, the embodied world of civil society and the online world of civil society, blogs and social networking sites. Their interactions showed considerable multiplexity, with evidence that each individual plays more than one role and has interactions based on different interests and in the same interaction can switch between roles and interests (Beggs, Haines & Hurlbert 1996).

Introducing the participants

The participants had all lived in Sydney and each had a university education. Some considered themselves members of the full-time workforce while others were still completing their undergraduate degree or were enrolled in their honours year.
Their demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

Gender	Male = 15	Female = 9
Age	Over 25 = 15	Under 25 = 9
Occupation	Workforce = 16	Student = 8

In terms of age, the older group can be labelled members of Generation X and the younger group members of Generation Y (Wyn & Woodman 2006), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Members of Generation X and Generation Y

Generation X	Generation Y
Aimé	Alan
Alastair	Angela
Annette	Anna J.
Ben	Anna N.
Brett	Isaac
David G.	Katherine
David T.	Nick
James	Robert
Jonathan	Tristan
Kelly	
Marianne	
Rachel	
Sunil	
Therese	
Tom	

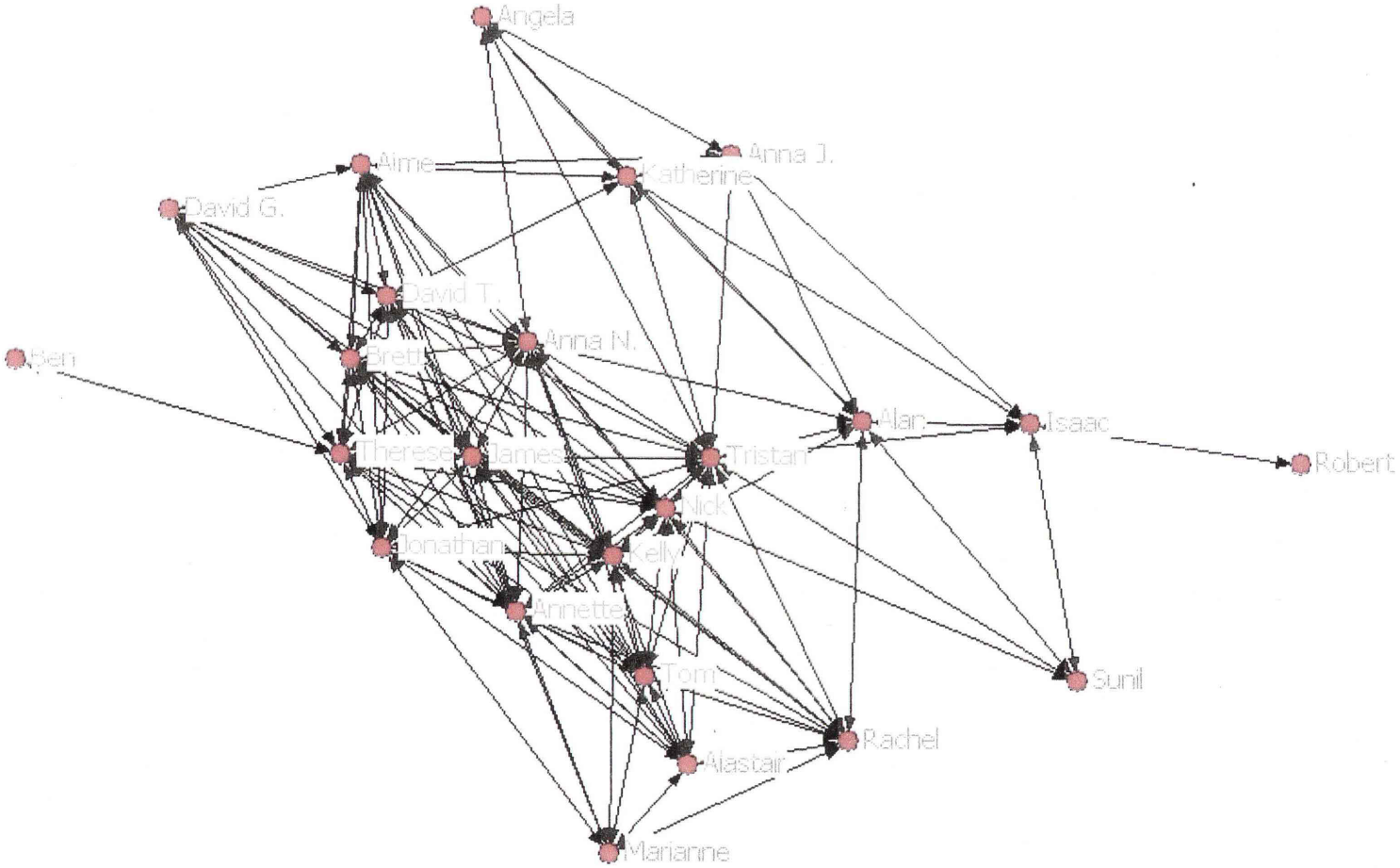
With one exception, the participants identify themselves as Australian, although this does not mean that they are of Anglo-Celtic origin. Although data on ethnic origin was not collected, it was apparent from physical and social characteristics that almost half (11/24) are not of Anglo-Celtic origin.

Just over half of the young people in the study have easily accessible images online. A simple Google search on their names may bring a range of images. There are formal passport-style photos and posed, media-style photos. There are photos from public professional occasions. There are two avatars. The images change from time to time as

the profile and interests of the individual change. There are gaps and spaces where one must imagine the images of the participants for whom there are no publicly accessible images.

The analysis of their relationships within the embodied worlds of social relations and civil society shows that they are complex, and that their relationships in the online world are no less complex. Diagram 2 shows the multiplicity of links and relationships between the twenty-four participants in all three worlds. The busyness of this diagram hides the differences among and between the relationships in the three separate worlds, and these will be explored in more detail.

Diagram 2 Combined social and civil society relationships



Knowing each other

The social world of participants was divided into three layers of friendships, according to Anna J. and Tristan. These three layers are: those people one saw around, for example at tutorials or parties; those who were 'going for coffee' friends; and those who were close friends that one would make arrangements to do special things with, such as eating together. Diagram 3 shows the social links between the participants and the strength of those links, based on the typology of Anna J. and Tristan.

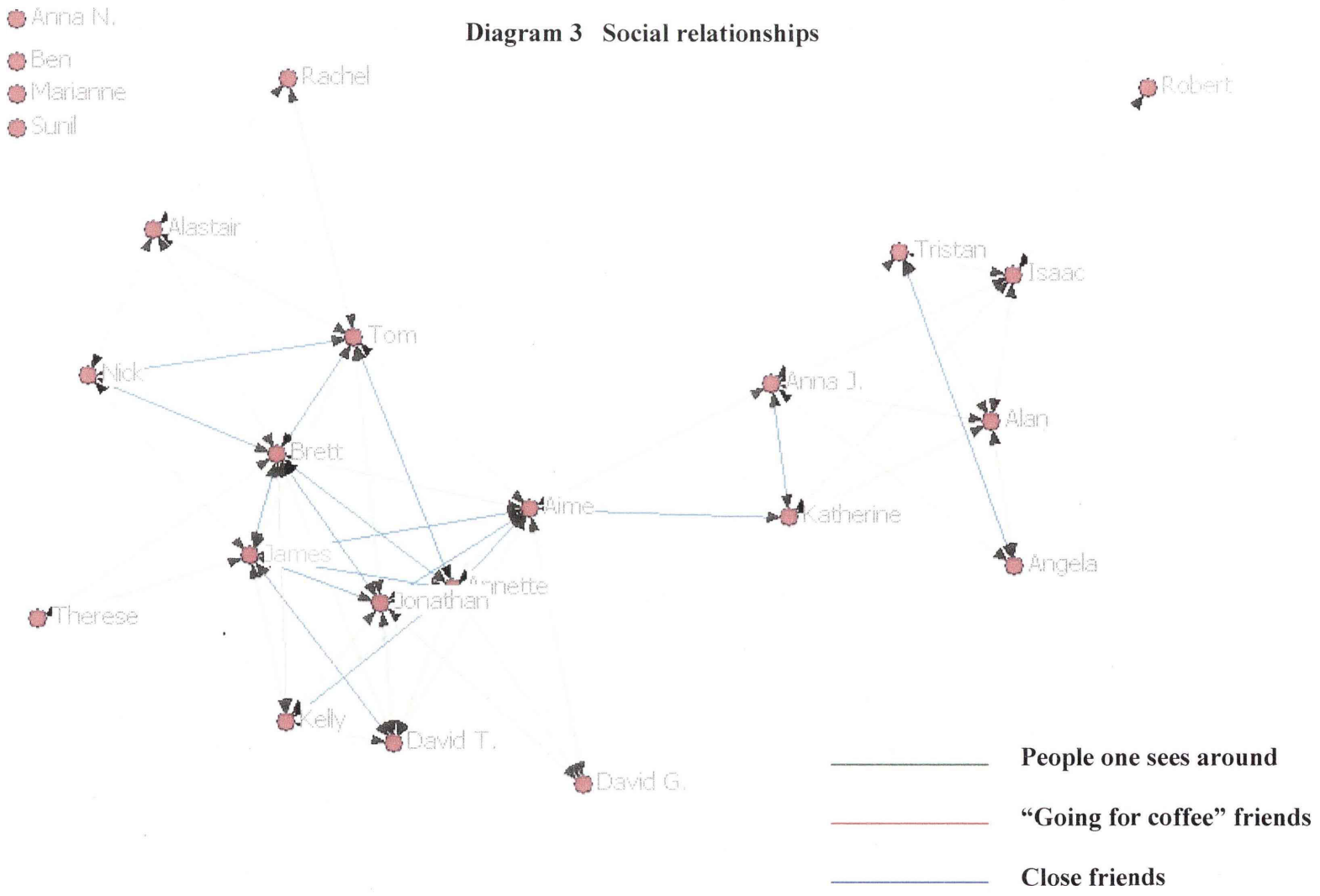
The age of the participants appears to influence the level of relationships that they form. The participants over the age of 25, also referred to as members of Generation X, were more likely to have stronger social relationships, based on eating together or doing special activities together. Those who are currently university students, referred to as members of Generation Y, are more likely to know each other through meeting up at parties. The two groups are linked by Aimé, who has a strong friendship with Katherine and who also makes arrangements to see Anna J. from time to time. There are four social isolates in these twenty-four, Anna N., Sunil, Ben and Marianne. The people with the largest number of strong links to others are Brett, Aimé, Annette and James.

There may be a qualitative difference, based on age, in whom one 'sees around'. The younger participants seemed to operate within a structure that brought them together – most of them were in a cohort that had recently turned twenty-one, so they met up in each other's homes or in bars or restaurants to celebrate. The older participants seemed to be more purposeful in some of their social interactions, which seemed to be extensions of their relationships in civil society. Most of the younger participants still live at home and this may limit the possibilities they have for eating together or doing special activities together.

Even some of those who chose not to take part in the study played a role in tightening the social links between people. For example, Jacinta who decided against being interviewed, forwarded messages to Tom, who had already been contacted by Alastair, and to Toby, who was linked to Alastair, Brett and Tristan. Toby was overseas and in the end did not take part in the study.

Some participants brought their social worlds into the interviews. "*Have to dash now, I'm meeting XX for dinner – do you know XX? You should speak to him, he'd be really interested in this,*" said Tom, for example, as we concluded the interview. Even though they may not see each other often, they are aware of each other's activities and achievements. One of the participants had been featured in a magazine and one of the other participants jokingly remarked: "*Did you see that photo of X? He's such a media tart*", referring to the public profile this person had enjoyed in the weeks leading up to the start of the interviews.

Diagram 3 Social relationships



Knowing me

More than half of the participants knew me face to face, had interacted with me online or knew of me. Following the levels of relationship identified by Tristan and Anna J., most considered me a 'going for coffee' friend or 'organising a special activity' friend. "*How about we meet for coffee, say mid afternoon ... how about the café at Sappho Books? Just go straight through the shop to the outside courtyard.*" In this way, the arrangements for the second of the interviews (with David T.) was made, setting a pattern for the rest of the interviews, since almost all of the participants chose to meet over coffee (and cake), lunch, dinner and even breakfast. At the Art Gallery, we lingered over green tea until the staff packed the furniture away around us; at Café Essen, we sheltered behind the clear plastic drapes as the rain poured down; in the Union café at one of the universities, we sipped chai latte and chatted until the lunchtime crowd made it impossible to hear ourselves think; at the Stir Café, we shouted above the noise of the buses and trucks idling at the traffic lights as we ate our burgers and salad; at Badde Manors, one of us managed to persuade the kitchen staff to cook 'the Big Breakfast' even though it was way past the time they had stopped serving it; and upstairs at Gloria Jean's we surveyed the scene and chatted over one extravagantly creamy glass of hot chocolate and a peppermint tea.

Eating together is often seen as an expression of togetherness, of lasting social relationships based on trust and underpinned by reciprocity. It is acknowledged as a fundamental rite in establishing social connection and would seem to be accepted universally as a symbol of community, giving a sense of belonging and the opportunity to share values. Sharing food seemed a natural part of the process of interaction in the data collection for this study, and some of the participants arranged other opportunities for us to have coffee or lunch together after the interviews were finished. Some of us had shared food together earlier in an online workshop without actually having met. Online workshops, involving young people from many countries who are not familiar with each other, usually begin with an ice-breaker, and an effective one is the "virtual feast … a pot-luck meal where each of us will bring a dish". In one week-long meal, we had shared Easter biscuits, butter chicken, Peruvian ceviche, pumpkin soup, roast beef and roast vegetables with gravy, lebkuchen, cheese-cake with raspberries and

blueberries, yak butter tea, a garden salad, a jug of water with ice and maybe a few slices of lime, a Cambodian soup of lemongrass and tamarind topped with green vegetables and herbs, coffee, potato omelette (which we could eat cold the next day) and humble pie brought by a latecomer. "One of the great things about the virtual feast is that the food never runs out, is always the right temperature, never looks tired and still smells as good as the moment it was first thought of" (HY notes 2005).

Our shared backgrounds meant that there are references throughout the interviews and discussions to activities we had been involved in and to other people we both knew. David T. and Brett refer to shared experiences and mutual experiences. Annette and Kelly draw parallels and make comparisons with a project we were all involved in over time. Therese refers to James as "*you know, the guy with the long hair*", although she cannot remember his full name. Throughout the interviews most of the time the tenor of the interactions was largely social and conversational, with topics introduced and thoughts expressed. Brett broke off to tell me about the wedding of a mutual acquaintance. Kelly recounted the story of the travels of a mutual friend as we walked from her office to lunch. Annette left the café to meet Aimé as they had discovered a common interest in soccer and had joined the same social football team.

There were three exceptions to the conversational tone, even within the context of a shared meal. The first was where participants might be voicing an idea they had not articulated before and were conscious of the context of the interview. Robert, for example, said "*I don't know how to explain this*", James asked several times "*Does that make sense*?" and David T. said "*You know what I mean? I can't quite ...*". The second exception was where the participant (always one of the young men) might cast himself as an expert and assume that the topic he was talking about might not be familiar to me as a woman of an older generation. Robert, for example, was describing a games forum and asked "*Have you been there before?*" before describing it, and Nick was explaining something and used Flickr as an example, then asked "*I don't know whether you've come across Flickr*".

Another example of acting as an expert arose from my status as mother to someone in the same age group as the younger participants. In the snowballing technique,

participants contacted others in ways that seemed appropriate to them. Jenna, who did not take part herself, did recruit three others, identifying me not as a researcher but as 'Katherine's Mum'. At least one of those she recruited used her message in a forwarded email to recruit others, where the mention of Katherine and her mum had no meaning. Tristan was the only one of these to express any curiosity about whether Katherine fitted into his network of friends and acquaintances. Isaac, who knew me through the snowballing technique as 'Katherine's Mum', seemed conscious of my status as mother throughout. He was very aware of the age difference and the kinds of things I might not know about, so that when he was talking about lurkers, for example, he asked "*are you familiar with the term*?" and went on to explain their behaviour. Sharing his experiences and knowledge about online communities, he saw problems for my research: "*I think the scope of your thesis is very wide. ... I am very well aware that in my own circle, my own community is a tiny bubble in a vast sea of communities out there.*" He was also concerned to warn me about one of the website communities he talked about, the 4chan site (www.4chan.org). He began "*You **might** be able to find it. It's full of illegal and unsavoury materials, so you might not ...*" with his voice tailing off, leaving his full warning unstated, and then later in the interview he remarked "*I think you might find 4chan to be quite interesting, although maybe a vile place to research ... But again ... it's full of unsavoury material.*"

The third exception to the conversational tone occurred when participants drew on scholarly knowledge and introduced that into the discussions. For some, this was part of the repertoire of our previous interactions. It had been important to ensure that a project we worked on was theoretically informed, and sharing the literature we had researched was a regular practice. Annette noted that civil society is "*such a contested concept*". James theorised his understanding of community based on the writings of Marcel Mauss and Antonio Negri. He also used a lecture he had recently attended, given by Ghassan Hage, to expand on subjectivity, although he acknowledged this might be "*a theoretical tangent*", and he referred to a speech by Justice Michael Kirby about activism. Kelly mentioned that she has made contact with Ian Fyfe, a Melbourne academic, to discuss some issues, and that her work colleague is completing her PhD and that work has been informed by the writings of Henrik Bang. She also has read Rebecca Huntley's book, *The World According to Y*, to gain a better understanding of young people and their

activism and engagement. David T. indicated that he would "*dig out this article*" and send it to me.

For others, referring to their scholarly knowledge was part of their own way of understanding the ideas. Several referred to subjects they had taken in their university courses, to concepts they had studied or to issues they had read about. Angela "*did a course on online communities last year*", which was "*very interesting*". Katherine had "*learned ... about civil society in terms of it being a concept*". Tristan had read an article about the concept of friends in Facebook "*that said that the use of 'friend' on Facebook is really contentious ... that was interesting because I'd never really thought about that before I read it*". Katherine refers to "*what Richard Dawkins says. I was reading his book the other day*" when she tries to explain the moral dimensions of human actions and interactions. Alastair mused on the possibility of developing a spin-off study using 'actor-network theory', a concept relevant to his current work. Marianne explained that her work is informed by the ideas of Martin Seligman.

Embodied relationships in civil society

The embodied relationships in civil society exist for the participants in their relationships to a project, either one where they have worked together on a project or where two participants have worked on the same project but at a different time. These relationships potentially allow participants to feel a sense of belonging and of common values. All of the participants have been involved in civil society as volunteers. Most of the older participants are currently employed in organisations in civil society or in other organisations that support social change and development, and as university students they had worked on projects in large international non-government organisations (INGOs), such as Oxfam and Amnesty International. The organisations where people acknowledged that they have been in paid or unpaid work are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Organisations where participants have worked

Organisation	**Participants**
GetUp	Alastair, Brett, Nick
Information and Cultural	Therese, Ben

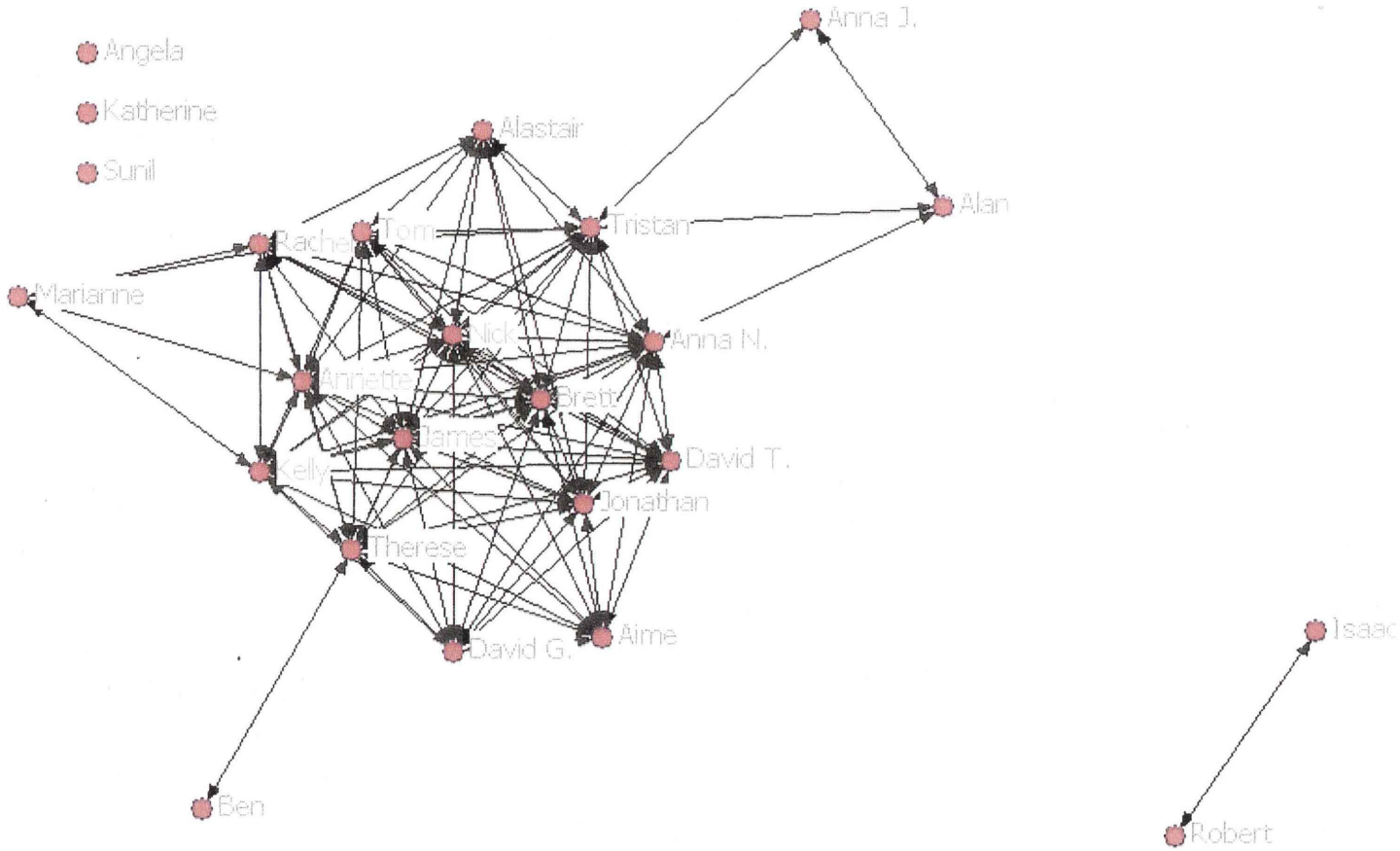
Exchange	
Inspire Foundation	Kelly, Marianne
Oxfam	Aimé, Anna N., Annette, Brett, David G., David T., James, Jonathan, Kelly, Therese
Amnesty International	Brett, Kelly
Vibewire	Alastair, Marianne, Rachel, Tom

Four are employed by a large development agency, which they have asked not be identified. In addition, Brett has managed a major project and now manages a civil society organisation, and similarly Kelly has been a paid employee in two civil society organisations. Tom coordinates a civil society organisation where Rachel has worked. Each knows some of the others who have worked as volunteers on projects in those organisations.

The younger participants are not as heavily involved with others in this group in embodied civil society. Although all of the younger participants had been involved with the students' association or student services in their university, they had not been members of the large INGOs, with one exception. Anna N. is the only one of the younger participants who is still a student yet acts as the members of the older group; she is taking her honours degree a year after finishing her bachelor degree and has been involved with ANTaR and an Oxfam project as well as being an active member of GetUp. She was not recruited to this study through the snowball technique, but volunteered to take part.

Katherine, who is an isolate in civil society in this group, was involved in a local bush regeneration group and also in the peer support group for new students at the university she attends. Angela, who was involved in the peer support group for new students at another university, and Sunil are also isolates in civil society relationships within this group, while Brett, Kelly, James and Annette have the strongest links. Diagram 4 shows the embodied relationships in civil society.

Diagram 4 Relationships in civil society



Being an engaged individual

Although all of the participants have been involved in some form of voluntary work, their reasons vary. Katherine is involved as she is fulfilling a sense of responsibility, while Robert is "*there for the fun*". David G. gets a "*sense of satisfaction from being involved in things that [he] believe[s] in*". Jonathan wants the opportunity to work on global issues, Aimé is concerned with strengthening youth networks and Kelly wants to "*help ... young people to think and question*". Tom is involved in "*engendering citizenship experiences*" and James takes a very broad view, noting that his concern is with "*how to make activism work in the broadest sense of the word*". Brett wants to "*achieve social change*".

David T. talks in terms of being excited in his work in civil society, because in the rest of his life there is not such a challenge. Kelly is passionate about the opportunities in her career and Marianne acknowledges that she has "*a particular passion and interest in making it work*" in her job. However, Tristan acknowledges that that passion may not lead to embodied action – "*I am really passionate about Tibet, but I will not go to a Tibet protest ...*"

Alan has a concern for environmental issues, which leads him to a political, individual, action that falls outside of embodied, associational civil society. He:

> *very rarely attend[s] environmental rallies or environmental collectives or meetings ... [but]... For my 21st, I've asked for no presents, but please do bring some money that I'm going to put in a box at my 21st and all that money is going to carbon tax later.*

Taking part in the democratic process is important for some participants. In the context of a forthcoming election, Katherine had been reading the newspaper to feel that she would have *participate[d] responsibly*" when she casts her vote, and Alan felt part of a democratic society because he was "*involved in the creating, controlling and finding out about politics*". Tom agreed that voting "*is a responsibility, you have to vote and you should make an informed decision*". Voting is one of the few actions that Kelly takes

outside of her work. Therese, a migrant without citizenship, has not "*had the right to vote ... and that's very dis-empowering*".

Although these young people are motivated to take part in the actions of civil society, they acknowledge that others may find it difficult to get engaged in social action, especially in the context of an organisation. Kelly, from her experience in working at ActNow, has done "*a lot of work with young people on what stops you getting involved*". She identifies "*different ways of expression*", for example wanting to be involved but without joining an organisation, or wanting to express an opinion but through blogging instead of through formal channels. She also identifies risk as a barrier to engagement for young people, speaking on behalf of those younger than her she explains:

> *You know ... I'm 18 and I'm forming my identity. I care about global warming, but ... I'm not going to go to a party and start talking about it, because if people ask me a question, I'm going to sound like a nob because I don't know, so I'm going to talk about Big Brother instead.*

She explains how young people find it difficult:

> *working in adult structures. They are not really feeling welcome ... [they are not] able to go and do things and immediately see the impact that you are having by ... making your choice... as an individual ...rather than being part of a group.*

The world of online social action

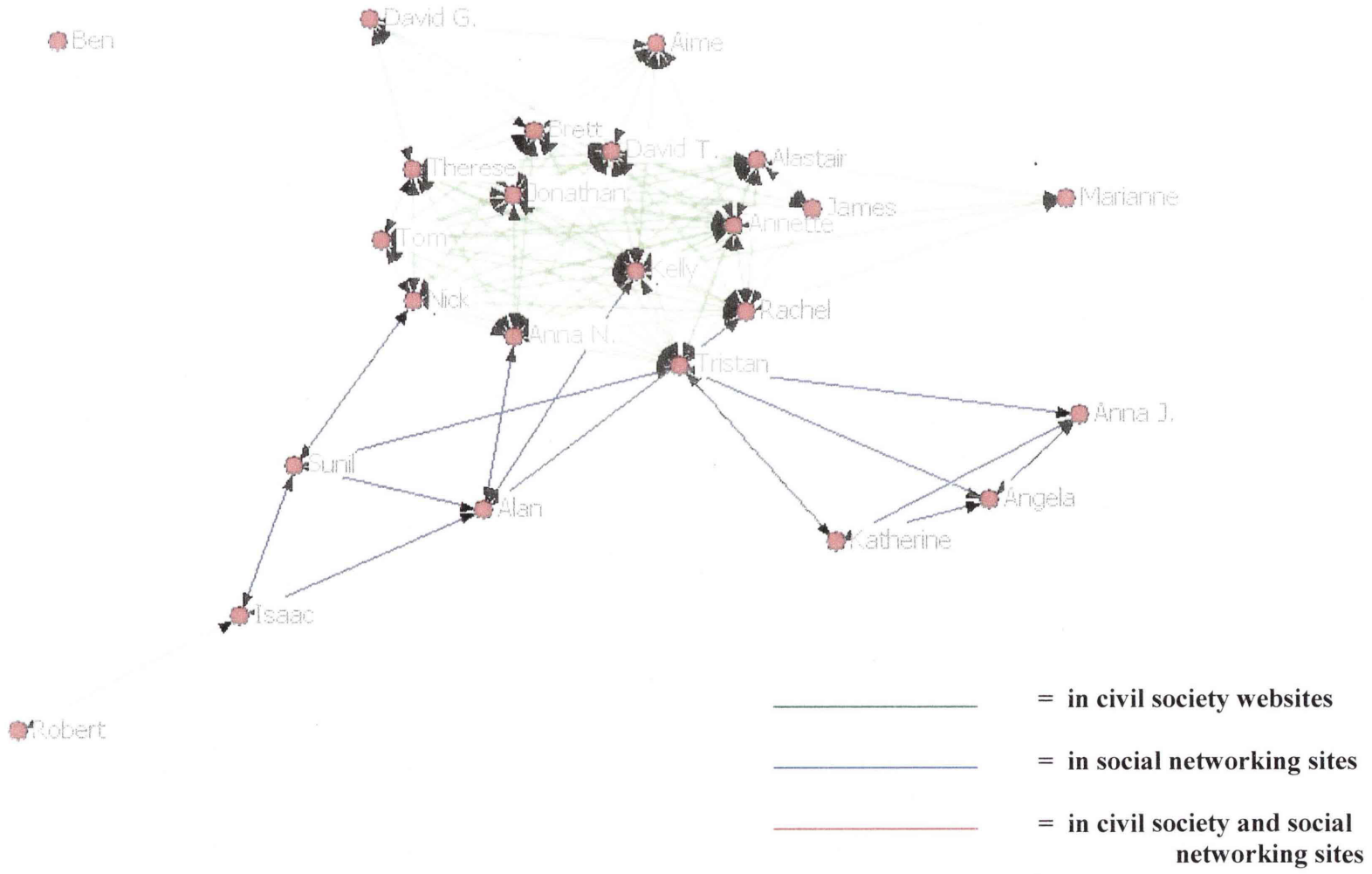
In addition to their embodied social action and their social action offline, all participants take part in social action online and most consider that there are advantages to taking social action online. Some participants welcomed the lack of constraints in online interactions. Rather than accepting all of the issues and actions of an organisation, one

can be involved on an issue-by-issue basis, "*like on this David Hicks[1] stuff*" as David G. put it. Isaac finds that it is "*easier online to move between communities than it is in real life*" and Sunil acknowledges that one "*can meet and engage with people with similar interests and viewpoints ... rather than being forced by the limits of current media ownership to particular opinion or paradigms*". Others noted the ease with which one could indicate support for an issue. Katherine, for example, said that "*you just click a button*". James believes that online engagement should involve more than a click, and thinks that organisations like "*New Matilda ha[ve] been more successful ... because new Matilda always requires its subscribers to be more active and to take part in their online discussions*". Jonathan, whose preference in engagement "*is for something I can commit to over a long period of time*", sees that a website can stand as a public record of involvement and achievement where people "*have written about their experiences [in a particular project], taken photos, written poems, things like that*".

For the young people in this study, involvement in civil society online can take one of three forms: use of the websites of organisations such as Oxfam or GetUp, use of blogs or discussion sites such as Vibewire or TakingITGlobal, and use of social networking sites such as Facebook or Flickr. The younger participants are linked through social networking software, the older participants through involvement with the websites of organisations in civil society. Five participants, – Kelly, Rachel, Anna N., Nick and Tristan – are linked through both social networking sites and the websites of organisations in civil society. Tristan has the strongest links in online civil society, having a mix of civil society and social networking links. Ben has no online links to others in this group. Diagram 5 shows these relationships.

[1] David Hicks is an Australian who was held in Guantanamo Bay following involvement in Al'Qaeda-related training and in 2007 he became the first to be tried and convicted under the Military Commissions Act of 2006. His trial was widely criticised in Australia and overseas and his case was a focus of social action in Australia throughout 2006 and early 2007. In 2007, he was returned to Australia to serve the remainder of his sentence for 'providing material support for terrorism'.

Diagram 5 Relationships in civil society online



The websites mentioned by participants are listed in Table 4. There is no assumption that this listing gives a complete picture of the websites visited or used by participants in the study, but it is interesting to note that some websites seem familiar and worth mentioning for a number of the participants while others appeal to only one participant.

Table 4 Websites and blogs mentioned by participants

Websites and blogs	Participants
GetUp!	Alastair, Anna N., Annette, Brett, David T., James, Kelly, Nick, Rachel, Therese, Tom, Tristan
Oxfam International Youth Parliament	Aimé, Anna N., Brett, David G., David T., Jonathan, Therese
Vibewire	Alastair, Annette, Marianne, Rachel, Tom
Facebook	Angela, Anna J., Katherine, Tristan
YouTube	Alan, Isaac, Sunil
Flickr	Nick, Sunil, Tristan
http://newmatilda.com	Annette, James, Rachel
Amnesty International	Aimé, David G.
Pandora	Alan, Sunil
4chan	Robert, Isaac
ActNow	Kelly, Marianne
Transparency International	Aimé
Halfbakery	Alastair
eBay	Angela
ANTaR	Anna N.
CIVICUS	Annette
Health GAP	David T.
The Commons Institute	James

AID/WATCH	James
ReachOut	Marianne
TakingITGlobal	Nick
Nation1	Nick
LiveJournal	Rachel
Vogue Forum	Rachel
World of Warcraft	Robert
Drupal	Therese
Daily Kos	Tom
Idealist.org	Tristan

The objectives of these websites vary tremendously, yet they have several features in common. Each presents 'news', each encourages contact with the organisation through email, each offers opportunities for people to become involved in something, and almost all exist only online for participants (the exceptions are AID/WATCH, Amnesty International, ANTaR and, for some participants, Oxfam IYP). Most of the websites encourage participants to have a voice and express their thoughts and ideas, either through a blog, through a discussion forum or through the writing of journalistic pieces, with the exceptions again being AID/WATCH, Amnesty International and ANTaR.

Creating opportunities for action online

Some participants have provided opportunities for others to become involved in civil society online and to take social action by using their positions in organisations in civil society to champion the use of information and communications technology. Brett, speaking from his perspective as Director of GetUp, champions the view that internet technologies support the development of civil society. He says:

> *In campaigning terms, new technology has empowered civil society. ... [It] has really given us an incredible opportunity for the progressive side of politics much more than the conservative side of politics to interlink and to understand each other and to put aside differences.*

The GetUp experiences bear out this optimism. Over 180,000 people had registered with the site by July 2007, they raised $180,000 from a single email (*http://www.abc.net.au/sundayprofile/stories/s1972998.htm*) and have been very successful in the outcome of the campaigns they have run. Kelly, from her position as Coordinator of ActNow, was also enthusiastic about the possibilities of using "*a website that's going to help young people get through tough times*", acknowledging the importance of keeping up with the technologies that young people use: "*the next big thing is with mobile phones – how do we incorporate mobile phones into [our services]?*"

Nick, from his experience in several civil society organisations involved in using the internet, is also a champion of information and communication technologies and says that in terms of developing civil society:

> *I think technology is something we haven't tried yet. I mean, we've tried to get people to do many things, good things, but we haven't tried technology ... so we might as well try to use it ... The internet now is seen by many [civil society groups] as completely central to their work .... I think the more you are involved in something, the more you see the power of technology to unite people, to organise people, to connect people behind a shared vision and in more meaningful dialogue around issues.*

He believes that

> *technology and the internet play a big role in enhancing the effectiveness of [a new approach to customer relationship management] by connecting people to the issues in a much more positive way so they can be touched firsthand by people affected by the issues to see the issues in a more interactive way, so they can feel some personal imperative or reason to take action.*

David T., on the other hand, was excited by the possibility of the International Youth Parliament's global reach through the use of information and communication technologies, but noted that there were inevitably people who were unable to take part in discussions and activities:

> *The problem, well the downside, if you look at IYP, being technologically driven, [is] it's dependent on your capacity to access particular types of technology, [so it's not] representative, as diverse as the world is ... because it's predicated on your capacity to act ... We need to remind ourselves in those forums of who's not there 'He's not there because [he doesn't have access to the technology]'.*

Tom makes a similar point when, speaking as the initiator of Vibewire, he says:

> *not everyone is equally able to take advantage of [Vibewire as a set of opportunities]. At the moment, it's meant to be a place for young Australians to express themselves on the issues that matter to them, [and] not everyone expresses themselves through writing.*

Highlighted here are the organisations which Brett, Kelly and Tom are involved with. The websites of the organisations they are involved with, GetUp, ActNow and Vibewire, provide opportunities for developing active citizens and for civic engagement. To a large extent, the website functions which facilitate these opportunities are a result of the time when a particular website was developed and the technologies available at that time, a point made by Nick when he said:

> *the new wave of websites and the new wave of NGOs that have got on the internet have taken forward [sic] ... the other civil society [those organisations that developed their websites when internet was introduced] ... dropped the ball a bit in terms of their technical ability ... in terms of their innovativeness, in terms of their websites.*

Thus it is not surprising that, being newer organisations, GetUp, Vibewire and ActNow have websites which provide greater opportunities for interaction with their members than longer-established websites (Yerbury 2007b).

"ActNow is an awesome website for young people. It gives us information on important issues and makes them easier to understand. It's also a great place for people to get inspired on taking action", says Melissa, an ActNow volunteer, quoted on the ActNow website (www.actnow.com.au). ActNow is run by The Inspire Foundation, an Australian not-for-profit organisation that creates opportunities for young people to change their world. According to the website, ActNow seeks to be a leader in its field in the use of technology to increase youth participation.

Vibewire describes itself as a "non-profit youth media and arts organisation ... designed to provide young Australians with a forum where they can comment on matters pertinent to their lives". Its goal is "to engage young people in active citizenship through their involvement with local arts, culture, politics, current affairs, poetry, fiction, ideas and beliefs". Its website (www.vibewire.net.au) is run by young people for young people and relies on the active involvement of young people to work.

GetUp describes itself on its website (www.getup.org.au) as "an independent, grass-roots community advocacy organisation giving everyday Australians opportunities to get involved and hold politicians accountable on important issues ... GetUp members [are encouraged to] take targeted, coordinated and strategic action."

Developing active citizens

As indicated in the description each organisation provides of itself, each is concerned with active citizenship. ActNow (www.actnow.com.au) fosters the development of active citizens in a number of ways. The website gives the opportunity to develop civic literacy, civic skills and civic attachment, which are elements of active citizenship, according to Flanagan and Faison (2001) and Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles and Larson (2004). In its development of civic literacy, the site explores aspects of a range of problems of interest to young people, such as obesity or recycling. These areas of interest have been suggested by young people themselves, and ActNow has

commissioned young people to write information pieces specifically directed at the targeted age group. These pieces follow a structure, outlining the issue or problem and providing online sources for further information. They give people the opportunity to post comments, identify organisations involved with the issue and propose actions for people to take, with simple, straightforward steps appropriate to the action. Through the website, young people can develop civic skills. ActNow makes a training manual available online. It is known as the ActNow Toolkit, and it helps young people to develop a range of skills from managing money to writing a petition or contacting the media. Through the opportunity to link with others and to sign up to support plans of action, young people also develop a range of civic skills appropriate to the particular type of action. ActNow encourages the development of a sense of civic attachment through directly addressing young people as though they were already part of a collective or by asking them to imagine themselves in a given situation. For example, the introduction to the 'young carers' issue begins "Imagine being responsible for taking care of a dependent family member from the age of 12 yrs. Sounds tough ha? Well there are a lot of young people out there doing it!" (http://www.actnow.com.au/Issues/Young_carers.aspx). It does not set an agenda for others to follow but rather gives young people the opportunity to set their own agenda. It uses the language of young people, expressing issues in a way that is familiar to them. The website creates the image of the staff being approachable by introducing them, alongside their photo and the actions that they have pledged to take part in.

GetUp (www.getup.org.au) facilitates the development of active citizens in different ways. Through its website, it begins by evoking a sense of civic attachment by appealing to shared values or invoking a group identity. The website announces that "GetUp brings together like-minded people who want to bring participation back into our democracy" and claims that its members are "building a ground-up movement of Australians who want to act, not just complain". GetUp provides opportunities for people to fulfil their desire for participation and for action through posting information about events and activities. Information about the events is posted on the website, but also sent to subscribers by email. The GetUp website helps individuals to develop civic literacy by exposing them to a range of issues that they may not have heard about. Anna N. described how a middle-aged woman she had spoken to at a public meeting "*had a*

great sense of joy for how good the internet is for this kind of activism. ... It was almost endearing to see people who may have only recently learned how to use email do a huge jump from emailing to online activism." Each campaign has a brief introduction, access to other electronic resources and an associated blog. Here people can find out about the issue in general terms, read the opinions of individuals, and even express their own opinions for others to read. Each campaign has actions associated with it, and popular among these is the online petition. GetUp does not aim to develop general skills of active citizenship, in the way that ActNow does; rather it embeds specific skills in the action individuals can choose to undertake.

Vibewire also facilitates the development of active citizens, using a broader definition of active citizenship than ActNow or GetUp. Its focus is on creating a forum where people can express an opinion or present their writing. Like ActNow, it provides information on those issues which are of interest to young people, but whereas ActNow seeks writers for particular topics, Vibewire is concerned with the ideas that individuals wish to express. The development opportunities are in the area of writing and use of digital media. It offers participants the opportunity to "improve your writing, beef up your resume and get help from professional editors". It does not promote campaigns and civic literacy, focusing instead on the civic skill of self-expression, and does not specifically encourage civic attachment except in the broadest sense, as can be seen in the statement: "The website is run for youth by youth and relies on your participation and active involvement to work."

Opportunities for civic engagement

The websites of these three organisations provide participants with opportunities for civic engagement. Civic engagement, according to Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003), comprises three levels of activism: individualistic activism, contact activism and collective activism. The opportunity for individualistic activism through access to information about the issue or problem or about events is commonly provided in websites of organisations in civil society and through email updates. However, reading about an issue is a very low level form of activism, and at one level it seems difficult to include this as an indicator of civic engagement. The opportunity for online donation is the most common form of individualistic activism after provision of information

(Yerbury 2007b, p. 116), and this matches actions in the real world, where donating money to an organisation is the most widely reported action (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003, p. 446).

ActNow provides some opportunities for civic engagement at all three levels. It gives access to individualistic action and to collective action by providing information about issues and actions that people can take part in. It also facilitates contact with the organisation itself through its email newsletter and contact mechanisms and through the information it provides about members of the 'ActNow Crew'.

GetUp also uses its website to provide opportunities for all levels of civic engagement. Most of them are examples of individualistic action. These include soliciting online donations, providing news about current issues and adopting strategies for action such as letter-writing and signing e-petitions. It encourages the contact activism activities of online signup to the organisation's campaigning emails and updates. As noted above, this is perceived as a powerful linking device by those who receive the 'personalised' replies. As an online organisation, GetUp would not be expected to provide significant opportunities for collective activism, but because of the organisation's partnerships with other organisations, GetUp adherents can take place in the embodied events sponsored by others.

Vibewire is not an activist organisation like ActNow or GetUp. It uses a different approach to politics and to engagement and thus its members are engaged in what they interpret as political actions, although there is no real link between these actions and those behind the levels of civic engagement identified by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003). The concern with identifying and analysing issues and expressing the resultant opinions constitutes engagement for people involved with this organisation.

Taking social action online

Participants in this study mostly undertake one or more of four actions online. These are receiving emails, making donations, signing petitions and taking part in e-list discussions or blogs. Emails fulfil at least three functions – they deliver newsletters, they notify people of particular campaigns or events and they are used as a medium of

contact among and between people. Several participants indicated that they receive emails from organisations such as GetUp, CIVICUS or ActNow. According to Annette, these may be "*interesting in terms of disseminating information and opportunities*". Anna N. summed up the feelings of most participants who receive these emails: "*It was exciting getting the email, because I always support what GetUp does, but I do feel that my participation, and anyone's participation, can be quite minimal*". Email is also used to collaborate on projects. Aimé says that as members of an advocacy "*coalition to end HIV/AIDS ... we draft letters to send to people including the US president for example*".

Participants recognise online donation as an accepted activity, although it would appear that few actually use the online facility. Annette describes how GetUp "*sent out an email saying 'we're trying to raise money to put up a billboard to support David Hicks' and within 48 hours they had raised $150,000, so obviously you can generate action in the real world*". Jonathan "*would have ... donated ... online, but it's mainly through a regular donation program now*", that is, a program which debits regular amounts through the bank. Clicking on a button on a website can prompt a sponsor to donate funds, – another easy approach to online action but not necessarily an effective one, as Anna J. shows: "*My grandmother does send me links, saying click on this and you'll buy a cup of rice. I don't know enough about the way it works to bother doing it.*"

Signing online petitions is a common form of social action for participants: "*I do sign the odd online petition*" (Tom); "*when I find the time*" (Rachel); "*It's quite easy to do and quite painless*" (Alan); "*a good way ... to get a lot of advocates, because obviously on the internet it's very difficult to be lazy*" (Katherine). It gives some people a sense that they are still "*in the activist mode*" (Alastair).

Anna N. explains from an organisation's perspective how online petitions can quickly show a level of support in the community:

> *When the Native Title in the Northern Territory was due to be changed and put through the Senate ... ANTaR, the indigenous rights group, decided to put a submission to GetUp to run a campaign ... which got*

> *about 10,000–15,000 signatures over a weekend ... quite a significant response.*

Yet for David T., this type of involvement can easily appear as "*a tokenistic approach to agitating for change, without substantially asking people to reflect on their own lives*" and can lead to cynicism. Jonathan comments:

> *I've been a bit sceptical of those forwarded email petitions, that you just add your name to at the bottom, but ... the Make Trade Fair [campaign] where you can add your name in a transparent way [seems more appropriate].*

A number of participants are involved in blogging and commenting on the blogs of others. Blogging, potentially one of the significant ways of creating a sense of community through sharing information and experience, has three activities associated with it: writing a blog, reading someone else's blog and commenting on that blog. Blogging seems to be an activity linked to personal interests and one which shows how the line between the public and the private can blur. Most participants read blogs from time to time, and most of these make comments, albeit rarely. However, few participants have their own blog, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5 Activity of participants in blogs

Activity in blogs	No.
Reading	18
Commenting	16
Writing	8
No mention of involvement in blogging	6

Isaac has his own blog, and considers that a community has formed around it, supported by interaction on Internet Relay Chat. Alastair contributes to a blog site, Halfbakery.com, and comments in quite a few other places. Rachel has a presence on livejournal.com and actively engages in the blogs of other people she knows, and Sunil uses Blogger, although he also keeps "*a personal, private journal*". Tristan does have a

blog, and he reads "*a lot of blogs, from friends of friends of mine, strangers' blogs*", although he only "*comment[s] on them mentally*". Alan does not have a blog of his own, but does comment on Youtube postings of music and theatre. Tom is "*trying to keep a blog at the moment, but I'm just hopeless at it, absolutely useless, it's never as important as everything else.*"

Marianne reads blogs "*that can feed into my work*", but she doesn't respond because "*well, I see myself as having to be an expert before I respond*". Jonathan also reads the blogs of friends who travel, and he reads a number of blogs for his work. He tried once to make a comment, but received an error message that said "*this article is too old, so we won't let you post*". The theme of priority in the use of time is clear in Annette's statement that she doesn't blog and that she only reads entries that someone has forwarded to her, and in her later acknowledgement that she does read blogs and look at photos of friends who are travelling or who have had babies.

James actively supports the approach that newmatilda.com takes in encouraging people to take part in discussions around social issues. Although several participants are involved in listserv discussions or blogs, only Rachel sees her involvement as a way of taking social action online. She comments: "*Even today I made a post in my MySpace blog, talking about the NSW elections*". Few participants have engaged in social action online through formal programs of discussion or learning, although this probably reflects the small number of opportunities available through the websites of organisations in civil society (Yerbury 2007b, pp. 114-115). Anna N. has taken part in workshops run by Oxfam as part of its Change Initiative for volunteers and staff. David T. refers to his involvement in the Oxfam IYP program of online learning and the relationships he built with others through his role as moderator. Isaac notes the important role that moderators play in developing and enforcing standards of behaviour in online discussion spaces.

Conceptualising the social worlds of participants

The participants in this study, members of Generation X and Generation Y, exhibit strong social networks, both in their social worlds and in civil society. They recognise that some relationships are stronger than others. The links between and among them

seem to be strong and diverse and the relationships seem to be multiplex. The meetings and conversations in and around the data collection interviews showed them playing various roles, introducing a number of topics, and switching language codes and often introducing into the conversation their relationships with others. Their interactions online, in the websites of organisations in civil society, in discussion forums and in social networking sites or in blogs, show how they create identities and play out their roles, whether as friend or as activist. They engage not only with everyday lived reality but also with the ideas expressed in the books and articles they have read in their studies or been referred to by friends. They create community not only through their social interactions online and offline and their involvement in civil society but also through this sharing of scholarly knowledge.

The analysis of the three worlds of relationships – the world of social relations and friendships, the embodied world of civil society and the world of online involvement – has shown that the same group of people has different relationships in different dimensions of life. This supports Jonathan's claim that we can be members of several communities at the same time. One striking feature is that Anna N. is a social isolate, knowing no other participant in her embodied social being, yet in online civil society she is potentially one of the most strongly connected individuals. Tristan notes that online he can feel himself and follow his passions, while offline he feels inhibited, not wanting to be linked physically with the type of people who may share his views.

It is not surprising that the young people in this study present such a strong picture of their engagement in embodied civil society and in social actions online, because involvement in civil society was one of the criteria that they were asked to use as they suggested others for inclusion in the study through the snowball technique. The way that they talk about their engagement in social action certainly negates any sense that they are apathetic (Vromen 2003). The different motivations for that engagement and the differing forms of their engagement suggest that they conceptualise social action in different ways. They seem to separate it from volunteering. David G. indicated that volunteers take on the objectives of others and they work in a timeframe where they may not have the satisfaction of seeing these objectives realised, so that they must "*have*

the passion to sustain them, because there isn't the routine that carries through". Social action, as Tristan indicated, is something that an individual chooses to undertake.

Participants' views of social action do seem to imply some form of collectivity. Social action may be considered in some way to be linked to opposition to structures of power, such as government policy, and Brett makes the point that it is possible to form community through opposition, to work together to change policy. However, much volunteering for these members of Generation X and Generation Y is not focused on opposition but rather is concerned with working in partnership toward an agreed goal, on something they have chosen to focus on.

Social actions based on advocacy and social action that works towards an agreed goal are collective actions which are also instrumental actions. Those who are members of Generation X seem to envisage instrumental forms of social action. They work in organisations related to civil society in some way (all except Sunil), and some maintain their involvement in projects outside of the workplace as well, with the focus on instrumental action, as Jonathan's comments about working on global issues and Aimé's concern with strengthening youth networks suggest. Their interests can be seen as the kind of concern with the "elimination of exploitation, inequality and oppression" that, in Giddens's view, is linked to "emancipatory politics" (Giddens 1991, p. 215). The kinds of social action implied through these interests and concerns are those that require the involvement of large numbers of people, with a coordinated and agreed plan of activities. Anna N. reflects on the viability of collective instrumental action for people of her generation (Generation Y) when she describes how, at the GetUp meeting she attended, the older people there just accepted the plan of action set before them, whereas she would have expected plenty of discussion and disagreement from people her age:

> *Anyway, we were told what we were going to do and people accepted it. There wasn't any kind of debate about whether it was going to be successful or whether people were going to be able to encourage other people ... [These were people who] are not*

interested in debating which way of activism works but happy to take direction from an organisation and participate.

Her tone of voice indicates that this is something unexpected for her.

The notion of collectivity is found also among the members of Generation Y, in the belief that actions should involve others. There seems to be an acknowledgement that social action is action undertaken with others at least in thought, a shared understanding that something is worth thinking about and talking about. In this way, participants turn the individualised act of signing a petition online into a collective act, bringing it into a social world.

As Giddens notes, actions in civil society are not necessarily instrumental. Tristan's "*passion*", Robert's "*fun*" and even Katherine's "*sense of responsibility*" indicate an emotional, individualised approach to social action. However, they are referring to something they do which is part of their lives, compartmentalised and separated from other parts of their lives to some extent, but nonetheless essential to their sense of self. These are actions which they choose to take, making them their own, carried out in their own way, but which they take in the knowledge that other people are taking them too. This is reminiscent of Beck's "*cooperative or altruistic individualism*" (Beck 2001, pp. 162, emphasis in the original), where the starting point is an emotional, individualised approach but the purpose or intention is to work together with others for mutual benefit and for individual satisfaction.

Here then is a paradox. Members of Generation Y are involved in activities that involve others in some way and thus can be called 'social', yet many of these activities are undertaken online without offline counterpart actions. Individuals choose to participate, without necessarily adopting any wider agenda from the organisation or experiencing any commitment to other actions managed by the organisation and without ongoing links to others. Thus, in this way, the actions are not social. Further, without the organisations and their websites, these young people would have no activities to choose from. The websites they use can be seen as sites of anomalous social action. On the one hand, the websites appear to promote instrumental action, in line with the assumption

that the internet is a tool that supports instrumental action. On the other hand, the website of each organisation represents choice for the individual – opportunities to choose engagement in particular social actions and to choose from different forms of political action.

The three organisations described above which participants in this study are involved in exist only through their websites. Thus, the organisational views of social action have not been hampered by existing ways of doing organisational business (Smith, Kearns & Fine 2005, p. 10). None of the organisations would be recognised as a traditional organisation in civil society, in that none of them has a specific focus or orientation in civil society. ActNow, GetUp and Vibewire each promote elements of active citizenship, although there the similarity ends. It seems possible to think of these opportunities for developing as active citizens not only as ways of doing things, but also as ways of signalling a sense of who one is and of working towards the kind of life one chooses, akin to Beck's "niches of activity and identity" (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994, p. 20) that he considers permit "a new mode of conducting and arranging life" (Beck 1998, p. 35).

The website of each organisation presents a different view of political engagement through which participants can express themselves and take action. GetUp, whose campaigns critique government policy and call policy makers to account (Keck & Sikkink 1998), is the closest to a traditional organisation in civil society. Its political actions of advocacy are evident and the agenda for individual issues is clearly set out, but there is no expectation that a single ideology underpins these issues nor that becoming involved in one issue predicts involvement in any other issue. The website provides many opportunities for civic engagement. ActNow does not aim to provide opportunities for civic engagement, although it encourages people to set out the actions they wish to take and gives others the opportunity to join in these actions. Through its website, it does encourage the development of active citizens, with an assumption that they may then choose to undertake social actions which will bring about some positive change. Vibewire is largely a site for exploration of understandings of issues of interest to the young people who post their writing. Civic engagement here is about gaining

experiences and expressing them to others. Both ActNow and Vibewire seem to present social action as part of the everyday lived experience of young people.

All three websites reflect opportunities to engage with the "life-style politics" which Giddens describes, where the focus is on "the creation of morally justifiable forms of life" and the ethics of "how we should live" (Giddens 1991, p. 215). ActNow in particular seems to promote "political issues which flow from processes of self-actualisation" and supports opportunities for self-actualisation.

Social action forms an element of the social worlds of the participants in this study. As conceptualised here from the thoughts and experiences of participants in the study, it has elements of instrumental action, based around planned collective action, and elements of "cooperative or altruistic individualism". For those who are members of Generation X, there is a concern with matters of justice and equity, whereas for those who are members of Generation Y, there is a concern with creating the kind of world they want to live in. It is impossible to say whether members of Generation Y will adopt a more instrumental approach as they move into full-time employment, although it does seem that most members of Generation X in this study took an instrumental approach to social action even when they were of a similar age.

The social worlds of the participants in this study are complex and their relations are multiplex, encompassing knowing each other in various ways and knowing me, eating together, volunteering on the same or similar projects, reading and sharing similar books and articles, working together in embodied civil society, and taking action online together or individually but with a common end. In this chapter, I have introduced the participants in the study and given an overview of their interactions, describing their relations in embodied civil society and indicating that actions they take in civil society online can also be considered as social actions – activities undertaken individually, but in the knowledge that others are taking the same action. In the next chapter, I will explore how the participants create and understand their identity and their sense of self.

Chapter 5 ESTABLISHING IDENTITY

Knowing who I am

In this chapter, I explore the participants' approaches to questions of identity. The questions of who I am and how my identity is created and presented and how others react to this identity are important to young people as they get ready to take their place in the world of adults. Questions of self and identity are also central issues in the social sciences (Giddens 1991). Using data from the interviews with participants, from websites, blogs, discussion forums and other materials they referred to directly as well as from other materials discovered through a Google search on their name or pseudonym, the chapter explores identity from several perspectives. These include a developmental perspective, a perspective that one can construct identity and may have multiple identities, constructed for different purposes, and a perspective drawing on the notion that identity is constructed through social interaction.

The process of becoming

Some participants indicated that they had a clear perspective on who they were and were able to express a sense of self. Some identified themselves through a personal trait and others through a skill, expertise or through their actions. Anna J. labelled herself "*a stickybeak*", curious about the world around her, willing to set up a situation and then wait to see what happens. Alan is "*a musician by background*". He offered this information to explain the context of some of his anecdotes in the interview, and a Google search on his name reinforces that he has been widely recognised by others as a musician. Some, like Brett, Kelly and Nick, recognised that they were public figures and even opinion leaders, because they were associated with organisations in civil society or campaigns for social action. Alastair allowed us to grasp not only who he understands himself to be, but also to understand how he establishes and maintains this sense of self.

Alastair identifies himself as a political activist from a "*media and communications background*", "*a writer*" who "*values humour and satire*". He has his own website,

where he has used his skills to create satirical animations on political events. He reads current affairs blogs and occasionally posts comments and replies to them. When he takes part in debates, he likes to bring contributions "*back to the argument*" and to "*play the ball rather than the man*". He dubs himself "*a notorious pedant*" in the way he expresses his ideas, and is critical of a contributor to www.news.com because her "*writing was just so badly put together and so badly punctuated [that] it was just unreadable*". Alastair also "*likes playing brain games*" and is a contributor, under a pseudonym, to www.halfbakery.com. The Halfbakery is described on its website as "a communal database of original, fictitious inventions, edited by its users. It was created by people who like to speculate, both as a form of satire and as a form of creative expression." Here, Alastair wrote a well-received piece on the pedant email bouncing tool, which begins: "*You receive an email that offends your pedantic sensibilities. The sender has apostrophes all over the place, they're mixing their metaphors, and ...*".

A small number of participants acknowledged that they were still coming to terms with their identity. Aimé reflects on a process of self-actualisation. He believes that in order to contribute to effective positive social change, he must constantly be aware of "*my stages, my stages of growth, what I need to stay informed and stay active*" and he is "*also very interested in [his] personal growth*".

Robert is concerned with the process of turning from a boy into a man. He "*loves to read ... because the books have what my life doesn't*". He wants people to look up to him, and although saying "*I never thought I would be a leader of any kind*", he has achieved an elevated status in an anime society. Under a pseudonym, he uses discussion forums to explore thoughts about social relations. He says that in the forums "*they have an idea of what my online persona is but as a person they don't [know me*". In one of the discussion forums, www.madboards.madman.com.au, over a period of several days, he takes an unpopular position on a discussion of an anime character's action. He poses the question of whether having feelings makes a man a 'wuss', ie weak, ineffectual or unmanly, as he explores aspects of masculinity. He provokes a flood of responses with an entry that reads "*How does having feelings NOT make you a wuss? Man, I'm really hoping ur a girl since a guy won't say stuff like that. Unless you are one of those metro guys where it's cool to be like that. A man must hold everything in, and weather all*

storms. Displaying emotions is also like displaying your weaknesses. It is not to be done." On the third day of the discussion, having received some very pointed criticism about being insecure and not being in touch with his emotions, he writes: "*[I'm] perfectly secure, knowing that my world will not crumble around me. I would say that I am not insecure about my masculinity, It's just that I don't see myself as man-enough, due to my strong beliefs. ... I don't get females ... I should try more to get a gf [girlfriend], but I just don't get it ... Bachelorhood here I come for like 50 yrs!*" In another forum, later, he reports that, although life in general is much the same, he has a girlfriend.

Alan and Tristan recognised that they were still testing out opinions and perspectives. They are both students, each still experimenting with their interests and activities. They both believe that online interactions give them an environment where they can express their views in a way that they might not offline, but at the same time, they are both aware that the internet allows thoughts and actions from the past to be retrieved and taken out of context, and neither wanted what might turn out to be transient concerns to have an impact on their careers in the future.

Alan says that he would "*very rarely use [his] own name*" in political discussions online, because he doesn't want to be "*tied to a particular political party*". Tristan, on the other hand, recognises the security of the online environment for some actions, and he will not take part in any activities offline that could link him to certain human rights organisations. He says:

> *I know I can do things online, because I'm a number, so I will sign petitions online, forward emails, stuff like that, but as soon as I can be photographed, identified, that's where I draw the line ... if [activities where I can be photographed] jeopardise my future, I don't know how valuable they are right now.*

They value the separation of the communications from the identity of the flesh-and-blood person. Alan says that by not using his name he can support the specific issues he is interested in without having to accept institutional policies that he might not agree

with. Tristan takes a different approach, not necessarily wanting to be associated with the type of person who engages in collective action, as that would erode his capacity to be himself.

Katherine is concerned with a different kind of becoming or transformation. In her view, computer-based communication is impersonal and you may never get to know "*the true person*" because written communication allows one to "*create what you want others to see or think, it's not so immediate and spontaneous as speaking to someone directly.*" She likens the interaction on a discussion board to an interaction on a noticeboard at university and expresses her concern that the impersonality of these transactions has the potential to commodify an individual. She says:

> *I'll post my room for let flyer and someone might deface it or they might respond to it or someone will stick their bed for sale flyer over mine ... but [you have to] actually see the person that tacked their flyer over someone else's flyer ... I think that would lead to an element of intrigue or perhaps community. And then you could say 'Oh, it's that girl with the red hair I wonder what she does' rather than 'Oh, it's a piece of paper saying bed for sale'.*

Expressing a sense of identity

Some participants acknowledge that they can create a sense of identity. Rachel and Nick both describe how they have used writing, the media and their public activities to create this identity. Isaac, on the other hand, cautions against creating an identity which could have the potential to undermine the personal sense of self. Kelly describes how an organisation can create an identity to function as a point of contact.

Rachel develops her identity as an opinion leader and a writer on political and social issues through her two websites. Through the website www.rachelhills.typepad.com she presents herself professionally, as "*journalist, writer and editor*", giving examples of her work and listing her employers as well as the forums in which she has expressed her opinions. Her second website is a blog, http://miss-r.tumblr.com, entitled 'Musings of

an inappropriate woman', which she describes as "*an experimental web log by Rachel Hills: political editor, feminist, pop sociologist... prone to far more fits of shallowness than the aforementioned would suggest.*" From it, she invites her readers to link to her "*professional portfolio*", indicating that she presents at least two identities. Rachel has also taken on a higher profile as a public figure through 2007, accepting invitations to speak at conferences and festivals such as the Melbourne Writers Festival. The range of topics she writes and speaks on, as well as the style in which she writes opinion pieces, demonstrates a constant reinforcement and reworking of her identity.

When she started writing, she thought she:

> *could use [MySpace] to promote my work. I don't think that works so well [as it does for musicians], because ... writers don't have fan bases ... But what has been interesting about [having a MySpace profile] is that first of all you start adding all of these people that you know and then a critical mass comes to be.*

She has also maintained a profile on LiveJournal, where she has used a pseudonym, although:

> *because I've been using it for three and a half years now, I think that pretty much everyone who reads my journal either knows or could very easily find out ... the connection between Rachel Hills and me as the chick on LiveJournal.*

At the end of 2007, Rachel had moved her profile from MySpace to Facebook, which gives more control to its users over the privacy settings they use and thus enables her to better protect some aspects of her personal life.

Nick has been in the public eye since he was a very young teenager setting up a computer-based business, and at the time of our discussion he was twenty-four. He begins the discussion with "*I'd like to give you a little bit of background about myself*" and adds "*if you want to find out more ... you can google my name*". There are at least

two other people with the same name as Nick, which makes it difficult to know exactly how many entries there are in Google for the Nick in this study, but the estimate would be closer to 1,000 than to 250. He consistently presents himself as someone with a vision for using internet technologies in ways which appeal to young people. He reinforces this vision through speaking on the radio, being reported in the media and appearing at conferences and festivals, such as the Melbourne Writers Festival. He says:

> *I guess my vision is to be able to help different organisations and movements and issues gain traction and see more support and help the people themselves to be empowered to make a difference.*

He describes himself as "*a reluctant wearer of the civil society badge*", and suggests that, while other people might seem him as an innovator with his emphasis on internet technologies, to him "*it's just a natural thing to do*". Nick establishes his credibility through the organisations he has worked with; the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which supported him and a group of others to form Nation1; TakingITGlobal, a global network of young people active around important social issues based in Canada, where he was responsible among other things for the input of young people to the World Summit on the Information Society; Amnesty International in London, where he worked on the development of a youth communication strategy and produced a handbook on strategies for impact in youth activism; GetUp, a politically motivated movement attempting to enlist like-minded people who want to bring participation back into democracy, where he was Online Director and, since our discussion, Greenpeace, where he is currently the 'mass mobilisation manager'.

Isaac uses the internet to "*develop my intellectual side a bit ... challenging the status quo*". He explains how in his university studies:

> *you research, you look at what other philosophers have written and you write your rebuttal or support. But, online you have other people who are challenging you and it's a much more vicious and instantaneous kind of communication. You don't have three weeks to write an essay ....*

Involvement in online discussions, "*a medium which is not entirely excluded from the real world*", has enabled him to go beyond what he might choose to do face to face because he is "*kind of shy in the real world*".

A different way of creating identity is to commodify the self, to create something which is marketable. Kelly describes some of the strategies through which the ActNow organisation is promoted to the young people who comprise its target audience. One of the strategies uses MySpace, which at the time accounted for 18% of the hits on the ActNow website. However, on MySpace, ActNow is not set up as a group, but as a person. That person (in January 2008) had the profile characteristics of being twenty-two, single and female, born under the star sign Capricorn. The fictional identity places ActNow in the demographic of its target market. In the convention of behaviour in MySpace, the identity has quite a large number of 'friends', well over 2,085 in February 2007. An analysis of profiles of the forty-eight of the 'friends' who commented on ActNow's profile between November 2006 and February 2007 showed that twenty were individuals and twelve were organisations marketing a cause, event or product. The remaining 'friends' were either duplicates (10) or their profiles had no content and/or no other identifying information attached (6). Whereas the commercial organisations (8) were using the comments as a marketing tool, with no pretence at creating an identity, the civil society organisations (4) seemed more likely to have constructed an identity with which to engage with others.

Several participants acknowledged that it was possible to have or to construct more than one identity, although there was variety in what they meant by this. It can mean signing on to an online discussion group under more than one login name. Alan describes how he sets up a range of accounts in a discussion forum in order to present different points of view, and Isaac notes that, when he was a moderator on a forum, one of the members "*had opened multiple accounts on the forums, so she had fifty other members, who were actually herself*". It can also mean recognising different aspects of oneself through involvement in groups or activities. Jonathan acknowledges that "*multiple memberships*" of community organisations appeal to different aspects of an individual's interests.

Kelly acknowledges that she plays two roles. She separates herself as an individual taking social action from the person who is responsible for the ActNow website when she says:

> *I always think I could be doing more at a personal level ... but then I think, no, actually I think about this stuff every day at work, so no, I do like to go home and watch reality TV and switch off, surround myself with a friendship circle that doesn't do what I do ....*

Brett, on the other hand, suggests that though he may make a distinction in his roles, as he refers to membership of a tribe, which may suggest an individual perspective, and to managing GetUp as a brand, which may suggest a managerial perspective, he is active as an individual. Kelly and Brett both take instrumental action themselves and present others with the opportunities to choose to take part in actions. Tom is aware that his view of social action as an individual is separate from the social action supported by Vibewire. He favours civic engagement, with a narrower definition of politics and potentially a more instrumental approach to social action than Vibewire espouses.

Identity can also be a recognition that interests and personal characteristics can be defining factors around which a group can form, signalling identity politics where the concern for a particular characteristic becomes divisive (Bernstein 2005). David T. acknowledges this approach to identity and expresses concern that acknowledging the existence of more than one 'identity' in a community or society can undermine universalism and shared respect. He says:

> *Let's take [this organisation] ... within that there's people who have different passions about particular things, whether their passion is gender, they'd have a strong gendered identity, ... then you've got gay rights or [if their passion is] trade or – so people construct multiple [identities and organisations] the same but different.*

Creating identity through social interaction

Identity is also created through social relations with others. Recognition is an important part of identity, as in part it forms the basis for credibility and trust. Angela, who hopes to be a journalist, understands the importance of recognition. She notes that blogs give one the opportunity "*just to practise writing ... but also ... allow people to visit your site and see who you are and give yourself some credibility*". Alastair, too, thinks that having one's own website "*does tend to give you a bit of credibility ... [and] people will tend to take what you have to say a little bit more seriously.*" David T. shows how he identifies individuals as he emphasises the reputation of most contributors to the Health GAP discussion list:

> *I know their names, I know I've read papers by some of them ... I know who they are and to a certain extent I know where they come from as well and what their history is ... they are all quite important and smart.*

Jonathan uses the metaphor of visibility to express the importance of recognition. He talks of the importance of trust in relationships, and notes that building trust is more difficult online.

> *It's different to the street, where you can see someone walking down the street ... there's a kind of visibility that you have in an offline community. It's harder in the city, but up to a point, there is an element of visibility that isn't there in an online community.*

Ben struggles to explore the idea that people can express an identity, a presence, without the expectation that this "*require[s] the action of textual exchange or verbal exchange. It's hard to put your finger on.*" He uses the word "*projection*", perhaps because of his interest in visual media, but this projection may not relate to individualised experiences or thoughts or feelings as one might find in a blog. He describes a project he has been involved in with young refugees and notes that

there really is an interest in transmitting facts which I wouldn't have really thought before was going to be that intense a thing ... but ... telling those kinds of stories [about what is happening in their country] is a major kind of way that people are part of a larger social fabric.

This is a way of registering one's presence, making oneself visible to others.

Tom explores how others can be involved in the creation of the identity of young people. He is particularly concerned that young people may be maligned as being apathetic in political issues and explains how this occurs, from his perspective:

young people are very engaged in a whole range of issues, to do with identity for instance, but they are switched off from formal politics, and that's because formal politics switched off from them first. I think there's a strong discourse of apathy which lets the system completely off the hook and acts as if 'it's weird, what's wrong with young people today, they are so apathetic'. I mean (a) young people have never done what their elder generation have wanted them to do, you hear that every generation and people shouldn't act surprised and (b) I think this whole discourse around youth apathy entirely ignores the fact that we have a political system which has removed itself enormously from citizens and it's not just a youth issue.

A number of the participants have been the focus of the media. In newspaper pieces or transcripts of radio broadcasts, they are usually identified by age and by title, following the journalistic convention: "Aimé …, 31, Peace Fellow, currently studying …", Tom …, National Coordinator, Vibewire … . James is now most frequently referred to as "lecturer and academic", although previously he was "counter-globalisation movement researcher" or "activist". Kelly is most often represented in her role as coordinator of ActNow in her radio appearances and other media mentions, but she is also profiled in the blog of Clare Mulvany, which is entitled 'exceptional lives; a journey to discover

the people who change our world' (http://exceptional-lives.blogspot.com/2007/01/inspire-inspiring.html). Brett has frequently been reported on by the media or interviewed, but mostly the reporting has identified him by his job title and used his own words. A piece in the *Sydney Magazine* of 13 December 2007, on 100 influential Australians, goes beyond the labelling with his age and job title, categorising him with the political activists and dubbing him "the stirrer".

Several of the participants expressed concern about issues of identity in social relations. Much of this concern was directed at the protection of an individual's legal identity online and the mechanisms for doing this, including what details one might reveal about oneself, what one's view of privacy is and how one reacts to anonymity. Other aspects of concern were the interrelated concepts of authenticity, trust and reputation. Most participants were concerned with notions of authenticity, their own or other people's. Although a few participants seemed more than happy to provide answers to the question of who they are, some participants were more concerned with the ways to conceal identity and to prevent unwanted recognition or contact, and accepted that they may never know who they are communicating with in some online situations.

Anonymity can protect one's identity. On the positive side, it can provide a sheltered environment for expressing an opinion. For Marianne, in an anonymous discussion forum, "*young kids have become more themselves and it's one of the few places where they can be themselves*". Adopting a pseudonym might prevent you from "*sounding like a complete wanker*" as you search for ways to express an idea, as Alastair put it, and it might allow you to participate in online discussions where it could be difficult to use your own identity. Jonathan "*know[s] that friends who are in the public service have blogs for their alter egos*", and Tom sometimes uses a "*pseudonym that's supposed to be difficult to spot*" to take part in discussions on Vibewire. Robert and Isaac are known through their avatars in the discussion forums of websites concerned with anime, following expected practice for these sites.

On a darker note, Jonathan sees "*there's the potential for deception*". Robert suggests that anonymity can be used as a cover against responsibility. He says that with

anonymous postings "*you can post anything and get away with it*". However, for Sunil, in spite of the illusion of anonymity:

> *there is no such thing ... everything you do, everywhere you visit, all your details, are being stored for no immediately apparent or obvious reason. ... [I]t does create anxieties about privacy, security and civil liberties.*

He refers to the actions of Google, Yahoo and AOL in releasing details of internet users and usage to the Chinese government and the "*disastrous*" consequences for the individuals involved.

Some participants are concerned that details they reveal about themselves may make them the target of unwanted attention, allowing people to identify them and contact them offline. Social networking sites expect participants to adopt certain conventions of self-identification, including giving one's name, age or date of birth and photograph. Angela is typical when she says that she is "*very careful about what information I put out there on the internet about myself*". She doesn't put her mobile phone details on her Facebook page, and the email address she uses is one which "*will be cancelled fairly soon as it's my university one*". Anna J. was cautious about what information she wanted to reveal in Facebook and kept her privacy settings at the maximum. When she first started using the site, she tried to provide very little information about herself, but has since made some concessions.

> *[B]ecause I got badgered about it so much I finally put up a photo. If you don't put up a photo, you just have a question mark next to your name as your profile picture and two friends whom I like very much said: "What is this Anna? It's not Questionmarkbook, you know, Put up a profile picture." Another one hassled me about initially not putting my surname. It was like "Anna, concealing your surname didn't fool me, I found you anyway, hahaha", so I gave in and put*

surname and photo ... and slowly conformed to the Facebook norm, but the privacy settings are still there.

Tristan, on the other hand, is happy to use the privacy settings in Facebook to control "*how much of my profile I want [people] to see and under what circumstances*". At the same time, he acknowledges that you can find out:

a lot about people from their profile ... You can see who they are, you can see what degree they're enrolled in, what courses they are enrolled in if they want to give you that information, who their friends are, what they are doing, what clubs they are part of, all that kind of stuff ... .

Sunil withdrew from Friendster, one of the early social networking sites, because it "*demanded too much personal information*".

Having one's words taken out of context can threaten one's identity, as thoughts and ideas are core to the self. Katherine reported that one of her university lecturers:

was complaining about the fact that something he put up [for] our lecture had been taken and put into someone's blog in the US or somewhere on the other side of the world and he now had no control over what got said in a discussion or how his words were used.

She could sympathise with him:

because it's intellectual property, it's part of your own self in a sense and I think you like to maintain – what's the word? – jurisdiction or something like that over your own property. You don't want other people abusing it. That might sound old and conservative but I think your

mind and ideas are the only thing that can't be taken away from [you] by anyone.

Stated differently, one's words are the surrogate for one's authentic self, and the use of one's words to convey a message that is contrary to one's beliefs undermines one's integrity and even damages one's sense of self.

Making sense of identity

Having a sense of self was important to all participants in this study. Some, mostly from Generation Y, acknowledged that they were still in the process of developing their own understanding of who they were or how they wanted to be recognised. Yet, participants from both Generation X and Generation Y had similar perspectives on the notion that one can construct identities for different purposes and that identity is constructed through social interaction.

Participants are concerned with issues of transformation, which can be grouped into three types. The first type is that which relates to Erickson's notion of development, where participants seem to indicate that those aspects which they feel are still developing will be clarified in due course. In this category one can place the transformations from boy to man which concern Robert, the transformations to adulthood which are discussed by Alan and Tristan, and the transformation to the professional persona of a writer, mentioned by Angela, all members of Generation Y. The second type is the transformation of self-actualisation, and this can be seen in two ways. There is the self-determination theory, which takes a psychological approach and emphasises the need for competence, relatedness and autonomy (Deci & Ryan 2000, p. 229), and the sociological approach which Giddens describes (1991, p. 78). Aimé, from Generation X, emphasises that he is constantly engaged in this second type of transformation. The third type of transformation is the potential commodification of the human into a non-human actor through the use of information and communication technologies (Knorr Cetina 1997). Katherine (Generation Y) is particularly concerned with this aspect of transformation. Firstly, she explains that she withdrew from a social networking site because she did not want to become a commodity to be "*collected*".

Secondly, she expressed her concern "*the girl with the red hair*" who might have made a post in a discussion forum is transformed into "*a piece of paper saying bed for sale*".

At the same time, participants give the impression that they know who they are and what is important to them. They see identity as a constant, as authentic, as encapsulating something of themselves that is unique. They expect to find authenticity in others and are tolerant of ambiguity in the identity of others in the same way that they acknowledge that they try to be true to themselves and would disagree with Hall that there is no true self (Hall 1996).

And yet, some participants acknowledge that it is possible to construct a character, to play a role, which may bear no relationship to their own sense of self. This seems to go beyond Mead's notion of the 'I', the public expression of 'me' (Mead 1934). They do not seem to be taking contradictory positions on this matter. Rather, they seem to acknowledge that there are at least three ways of considering identity from a perspective outside of the individual, which are separate and can coexist. First, there is the legal form of identity, the details of personal identification necessary for financial or other contractual transactions. Most of the participants consider enacting this identity to be a part of normal life. Second, in blogs and discussion forums which are not confessional, there is the expression of self, of thoughts and ideas, which is likely to come from a position of principle and thus to be consistent and coherent, close to the constant, authentic 'me'. People often attach their own names and contact details to these statements, as though they were taking ownership of them. They may also distinguish between a personal self and a public self or professional self, the 'me' and the 'I'. Interestingly, in self-help discussion forums where participants are required to maintain their anonymity, they seem to accept that people strive to express themselves with integrity. Third, in discussion forums where it is usual for participants to adopt pseudonyms, for example in forums related to gaming, they acknowledge that people may adopt multiple identities or roles, and that although these identities may be coherent and consistent, they lack any link to the personality or social being of the individual.

The participants do not seem to be overly concerned by the potential for multiple identities or by communicating with someone whose identity they may not be able to know, as a reading of Jones (1997) or Rheingold (2000) indicates that they might have been. With Isaac's avatar being a female anime character, the evidence did not clearly support Merchant's claim (2006, p. 239) that in constructing identity we use what he calls 'anchored' aspects, such as gender, religion and age, which we are less likely to change, and 'transient' aspects, which are related to context and therefore likely to change over time. However, like Larsen's participants, they do expect sincerity from those they interact with (2007, p. 10).

Goffman's 'social identity' is useful in grasping the complexity the participants express about who they see themselves to be and how they understand the identities of others. For him, there are two types of social identity: the first is the 'virtual social identity', the expectations we have and the impression we form of someone we do not know well; the second is the 'actual social identity', which encompasses the characteristics and attributes the individual has (Goffman 1963, pp. 12-13).

Participants acknowledge that their identity needs to be recognised and validated. Some acknowledge that this recognition comes through their own efforts. One participant (Ben) argues for the construction of identity, probably through the use of images, in a context that does not assume that the intention is communication with others. Here, all that is required is that the presence of the other be registered, that they stand within sight of the other. Those who are constructing an identity as a communicator or writer strive for recognition or validation through their writing. Their writing stands for them in a social interaction. In the same way that they can construct their own identity, making and remaking it with new writings, new posts, new photos and images, new favourite songs, so others can take words of participants, their ideas and their images and construct another version of their identity (Ferraris 2006).

Some, such as Nick, claim this recognition through an appeal to an external authority (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Their identity is inextricably linked with an organisation. They may be a member of the organisation or an employee. They present themselves as embedded within an organisation, and thus any reputation or kudos of the organisation

accrues to them, particularly if they can claim that some action of theirs has led to the organisation meeting its goal. Where identity is constructed through the tasks carried out within the organisation, it could be argued that these claims to recognition are based on what people do, although where identity is constructed through organisational role it is more likely to be conceptualised as an entity, like a role.

Building on Mead's notion of reflexivity in the construction of identity, we have grown used to the idea that we construct ourselves, yet, as Goffman has noted (1963), others can also take part in the construction of our identity or change our own and other people's perception of our identity. In social networking software, when other people post images of the participants or when they post messages about what participants have done or said, they add to the notion of self that they have been constructing, they interpret and reinterpret participants' identity, publicly, in a way that is largely outside of the control of the individual. In the case of their words and ideas being appropriated into the blog of another, they lose control over the presentation of their identity as the new context in which their words are presented may suggest another interpretation of their words and therefore a different aspect to their identity. Boyd comments that online postings as constructions of identity have four characteristics which make them different from constructions of identity in other forms: they are persistent, lasting long after the expression or action; they are searchable, allowing those who never knew of the expression or action to find out about it; online postings can easily be copied and pasted, taken out of context; and those who may read or view an expression of identity are invisible, unknown and potentially unknowable (Boyd 2008, p. 242). It is these characteristics that concern Tristan and Alan in their transformation to adulthood.

The presentation of self is significant in the construction of identity, and equally display is important, according to Goffman (1959, pp. 252-253). Display is a way of making oneself more widely known, making oneself seem a more interesting individual. It also allows one to be present when physically one is absent, important in a social context where an individual's physical location may be independent of their location in a communication (Wellman et al. 2005, p. 1). It is as though display allows one's identity to be cloned, giving the impression that one does more, has more sides to one's personality. Display is a significant part of involvement in social networking sites. Yet

display can be equally important in the discussion forums of some organisations in civil society. The labelling of the public or professional self in a discussion forum, for example about climate change, may be an example of self-promotion or display. Adding one's name, and perhaps one's role and place of work, to an expression of opinion in a forum is such a form of display which similarly has the effect of extending the scope of one's identity and allowing one to claim principles and values that the administrators of the discussion forum may hold.

Sense of self may become separated from identity. Sense of self may remain firmly part of the individual and identity may become an entity, with a life of its own. Both sense of self and identity are developed and maintained. As some of the participants in the study acknowledge, they are immature, still developing their sense of self, still working out how to construct identity and how to display or present it. For those whose social circle is fragmented and spread around the world, an advantage of having elements of identity on the internet is that they can exist outside the constraints of time and place, as Wellman et al. have noted (2005). Yet, these same characteristics can also undermine identity which is 'under construction' because these words and images, these representations of self, persist long after the flesh-and-blood person has disowned them (Boyd 2008). Young people growing towards maturity do not want to be held to the actions and beliefs of a time of transition, as Tristan noted. When place and time have changed, when the years have passed, and experiences have modified the sense of self and one's identity, those reminders of a self existing in another time and space remain, being neither forgotten nor reinterpreted with the passage of time, but remaining as an undeniable 'fact'.

Dilemmas and threats to the self exist. According to Merchant (2006, p. 236), for Bauman, our anxieties seem to relate to the link between the conceptualisation of self, which is presented in identity online and its embodiment, fuelled by 'scare stories' about the threats posed to property and the self through interactions online. The threats to identity perceived by some of the young women in this study are threats to the embodied self. There is the threat that the representation online will lead to an unwanted intrusion into the physical space, whether through unsolicited email or a phone call or

even a visit. What is threatened here is the physical self and potentially the activities of this embodied, physical, flesh-and-blood self.

As they 'live in the world', those participants who acknowledge that they are involved in the process of transformation express concerns about identity. These concerns can be related to the difficulties which for Giddens are a significant part of everyday life in late modernity. Robert, in his transformation from boy to man, struggles to come to terms with his own masculinity and the role of men in society, and in the discussion forums adopts what others perceive as a rigid traditionalism as he avoids the breakdown of the role which could come about through an acceptance of the values and behaviours of the metrosexual. His struggle encapsulates one of Giddens' dilemmas, the opposition between the single, unified view of the past and a fragmented view which gives the capacity to mix elements from a traditional view with newer interpretations of the role (Giddens 1991, p. 190).

More participants express concerns about the conflicts between personalised and commodified experience (Giddens 1991, p. 196). These come from the younger participants, from Generation Y, as one might expect from young people learning to live in a world and about to take on new roles as they move from being students to a time where they will take on professional roles. They aim for individuality and strive to keep some element of their uniqueness. Online, the conventions of the software constrain the expression of their individuality, and there is some sense that this process of creating an identity online is the creation of a commodity, where one becomes a package which can be traded. In her organisational role, Kelly shows how an identity can be created and used as a commodity, in her case as a resource which allows the organisation to establish interactions with a group of potential strangers. Katherine's concern with becoming a piece of paper contrasts with Tristan's lack of concern that he will be 'commodified'. He believes that website profiles make narcissistic display easier. The profile is merely the podium or display window or packaging where the personalised experience can be found.

There is little evidence that these members of Generation X and Generation Y feel powerless to act in the world around them. Similarly, there is little evidence that they

feel subordinated by the authority of others or paralysed by the multiplicity of choices available to them. Indeed there is evidence that they have taken the initiative to create opportunities for themselves and others to take social action and that they have a clear sense of themselves and how to make decisions affecting their lives. Thus, it seems that, for the most part, the participants in this study are not beset by the dilemmas which Giddens identified (1991, pp. 187-200).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have suggested that the construction of identity is a complex process. It involves both psychological and social processes. The psychological processes of transformation interact with the social processes in ever-changing ways. The social processes themselves can be seen as a three-way tussle between differing conceptualisations of self and action. Firstly, there is the notion of the authentic self which interacts with others and is concerned with issues of justice, equality and participation in those interactions. This self lives by principles that respect others, striving for a balance between competing demands and acknowledging the importance of the principles of universalism. Secondly, there is the notion of an identity which emerges from a communal recognition of a particular characteristic, such as gender, where the interest is in the relative power of people who 'identify with' this characteristic, and the objective is probably to increase the power of this group or at least to ensure equity in relations with other identities. Thirdly, there is the notion of identity based on the individual, where the individual has freedom to choose his or her own identity. This self is concerned with self-actualisation, a never-ending process, and with constantly creating a context in which questions of ethics are confronted, as our separate selves interact and seek to coexist. The interactions between psychological and social processes are further complicated by the influences of particular aspects of life in the twenty-first century that impinge on the development of the sense of self which participants consider their identity.

Chapter 6 CREATING SOCIAL RELATIONS

The process of creating community involves moving from 'I' to 'We', from the individual to some kind of collective. Community does not exist in a vacuum, separated from the individuals who are part of it. It is formed and re-formed in social interactions. Our practices in establishing and maintaining social relations with others are part and parcel of our sense of community, and thus one can understand this sense of community by exploring these practices of forming social relations. The previous chapter has explored how these members of Generation X and Generation Y understand and create identity and a sense of self.

This chapter explores the practices and observations of the participants concerning the processes of creating community and social relations, and considers the ways these practices and observations may be reflected theoretically. It underscores the emphasis which the participants place on the skills and techniques they use for creating social relations with others, presenting these techniques before analysing and interpreting social relations themselves. It analyses the descriptions of their thoughts, actions and techniques in the context of literature on the concepts and theories they have alluded to, identifying a range of different groupings that the participants in the study say they are engaged in, concluding that participants seem keen to establish and maintain a sense that they have moved from 'I' to 'We', and that they have exercised a degree of choice in doing this. One of the striking features of their thoughts, actions and techniques concerning social relations is the variety of types of social relations they identify and the ease with which these can be matched against the literature and labelled. The consequence of this variety of social relations is that its exposition may at first appear to constitute a catalogue of types of group, but it moves from the social relations of friendship to those which are based around instrumental action in the context of organisations, where no personal knowledge of others is necessary.

Creating a collective

Participants in this study describe a number of different ways of creating the social relations that can create a collective. Knowingly or unconsciously, they describe the ways they go about the process of creating community, of building relationships with other people. Some participants focus more on the techniques they use than on the kind of collective they are engaging in. In the context of this study, participants acknowledge that the range of techniques they use is largely derived from those used in face-to-face situations. Participants talk in terms of making friends, building social capital, forming weak ties, sustaining communities of interest, becoming a community of practice, forming an association, creating small worlds, joining a tribe or creating a brand. They acknowledge different forms of social relations. These range from those like friendship, where the social relations are linked inextricably to particular individuals, through those like communities of practice and associations, where social relations are based on skills, knowledge or interest and one individual can be replaced by another, to relationships like those based on the notion of the brand, where individuals have become commodified and can be used as tokens in exchange relationships.

James states explicitly what others assume when he says "*In our actions and our desires, we form the 'we', we move from the 'I' to the 'we'.*" Only Jonathan and Alastair (from Generation X) and Robert (from Generation Y) are concerned about the negative effects of being part of a collective. For Robert, "*the majority or whoever is in power sets the trends [and] the rules do enforce a certain point of view*". Jonathan notes that there are "*downsides*" to being involved with others, as "*they can be coercive or exclusive*".

Skills and techniques for establishing social relations online

Although often potentially strangers, particularly online, participants acknowledge others in ways that express at least a sense of courtesy and respect, or even a sense of familiarity. Learning the technical and communication skills essential for online communication is an essential part of being a participant in any group. The emphasis which participants placed on the techniques they use online to create a sense of belonging shows the importance of knowing the norms and standards of interactions in

these groups. The skills they demonstrate are part of the conventions for interacting online and as such could be used as tools of pragmatism. They have learned these skills through their experiences online. Sometimes, developing the skills and demonstrating their use was a requirement for participation in an online learning subject at university. Sometimes, the use of these skills was seen as part of the convention of social behaviour online. Sometimes experiences online, when skills were not well developed, were painful experiences, leading to a sense that one was being ignored or even not welcome in the discussion forum.

Sharing information and experience is a significant approach to creating a sense of the collective. Participants make deliberate attempts to enter into dialogue and sustain that dialogue, many of them believing that without dialogue there can be no relationship online with others. They are concerned with establishing their own credibility and with indicators that warrant their placing trust in others. Establishing social norms and setting up rules and processes for enforcing those rules is part of developing the kind of conduct and behaviour which underpins social relations. The coordinators, managers and moderators of online websites and discussion forums demonstrate their interpretation of the rules by the way they enforce them.

Some of the younger participants learned techniques for interacting online through their experiences in web-based learning and online discussion forums during their university courses. Alan found online discussions of readings useful, because "*it's an unlimited matrix, three-four-dimensional ... a limitless range of options involved to talk about*" and this reminded him that political discussions were almost always polarised, ie two-dimensional. David T. considered that the discussion forums in his university course gave people the opportunity to "*begin to negotiate and discuss positions*". For Katherine and Anna J., on the other hand, the experience was not particularly satisfying. Anna J. noted there was a need to write a certain number of words, which she learned from the requirement that "*you had to send two postings of a certain number of words each and that was your contribution for the week that you were assigned. And if you did extra discussion, then you got bonus points.*" Katherine found that "*some people were there because they had to be there to meet the requirements*"

and their approach seemed to inhibit others, because their posts offered nothing of substance to respond to.

Marianne explored her own experience as a facilitator of an online discussion in using techniques to make people feel part of a group. She emphasised the importance of acknowledging other participants. She explained that she was facilitating a group of people online who were potentially strangers, and described how she would use the technology of the discussion board to help break down barriers. She noted that she had one thread where she would "*get everyone to introduce themselves, and then after that they are comfortable talking*" and then one of the participants "*started another thread called 10 things you didn't know about other community members*" where people could write about pet hates or favourites, such as "*I like this band or I hate that food* ". She emphasised the importance of responding as soon as she can to posts on the discussion board, and of "*making people feel welcome*" with greetings and questions like "what did you do on the weekend?"

Rachel also emphasises the importance of acknowledging the contribution that others make. She sees that in:

> *my role in Vibewire, the main strategy is trying to build up a buzz around whatever project I am working on and getting young writers to be involved in that. ... it's just the same techniques that you would use anywhere, remembering to respond to people quickly, give them the information they need, encourage them, remember who they are ... I guess making them feel that they are connected to you as an editor ... I'm not saying I'm dying to be best friends with every single one of my writers, because obviously that's not possible and you'd be able to challenge me if I did say that, but I do try to know a little bit about them.*

She speaks of "*going out of her way to make contact with [people], [saying] 'Hi' or 'Nice job'*", but acknowledges that "*to become a true community they need to voluntarily create links to one another*".

Sharing information is a technique that can be significant in creating or expanding links with others. For David G., the sharing of information has added another dimension to his links with his work colleagues. He explains that in his workplace:

> *I have met a bunch of people who have similar real interests in [civil society], so there's a lot more of that: 'I've come across this article and you might be interested' or you might want to include a critique of what you've just read. ... That's not something I ever did at university, but I do now and I really try.*

Annette sees herself as someone who shares a lot of information, asking "*Have you read this article? Have you heard of this person? Have you heard about this seminar?*" She does this "*in a real person-to-person sense*", but she also uses information technology. She explains how she shares a common interest with people by exchanging information and:

> *use[s] email to facilitate contact [with] people who are engaged in different ways in civil society or in politics and I use their engagement to draw on for my own engagement or understanding. It's almost as though I don't need to do all of that myself, I can pick what interests me, but I have access to some of it through them passing on articles or saying I saw this opportunity or this employment list or I met this person ... you've got a group of people who share things ... I see myself as a connector between people, so I'll say I saw this job or I saw this article and I do that quite a lot.*

Establishing dialogue and discussion is another technique which can lead to social relations, according to some participants. They place an emphasis on engagement with the ideas, thoughts and experiences of others, and value the skills of argumentation and debate. For this sense of collective to emerge, participants think that skills such as the

ability to express oneself clearly in writing and to engage in rational discussion are essential. Alan emphasises the importance of entering into dialogue when he says:

> *One of the things that I think makes a community is dialogue [...The topic] might not be anything of note [but] a lot of the debates end up taking lots and lots of different instances onboard. I think that's pretty much community, because community should always, through dialogue, evolve.*

He sees the importance of presenting different facets to an argument, as well as having a critical mass of participants, and acknowledges that he has a technique – "*I'm sure other people use it too*". This technique involved starting a discussion:

> *then I signed in with a different name and I replied to myself and then again and again and [the discussion] got started up really quickly because it looked like it was a heated topic ... with slightly different takes, [so] people are more likely to respond or at least read.*

For Isaac, too, dialogue is important, although he believes that people may find it difficult to be included in the discussion.

> *The more you talk, the more you build connections with other people ... I guess new people will find it a bit hard to get into, but if they keep posting and keep persevering, they will become part of the community.*

Alastair, on the other hand, is more concerned with the written word. He takes the written word for granted, and values rational communication, to the point where he attempts to use it as a weapon in interactions with those whose positions are not expressed logically.

> *If someone is putting forward a rational, coherent argument, then by all means engage with that, and you can have a wonderful time working out where your common ground is and your differences are, but if someone is being inflammatory or obviously hasn't thought the issue through, then I find agreeing with them past the point where they can agree with you is a really good way of actually getting them to look at their argument.*

Some participants are aware that there are factors which inhibit their engagement in discussions online. Jonathan is aware that there may be some conflict between his various roles and, speaking in the context of his job, is "*well, a bit reluctant*" about "*putting stuff on the web, that can be associated with change*" because of the place he works and his concern that he "*might compromise [his position]*". He:

> *thinks there are perhaps the closed online communities where you are able to chat about real type things, but there is a lot of online community where I would be reluctant to be out there on the web.*

Alan is more concerned with the antisocial behaviour of others when he observes that:

> *postering or flyering or spamming [posting a message which is not on the topic] ... can kill what you are doing because people become disinterested. ... I know it's probably just a few seconds of your time, but you get irritated by it for much longer than that.*

Similarly, he is frustrated and "*feel[s] that the community has been limited a little bit*" when there is no feedback on a particular post, especially if those managing the technology have made the decision that leads to this consequence:

> *the comments will have been disabled ... because there's a level of bureaucracy, some level of regulation happening that is there to police the way that the community works, that it's not entirely free.*

A small number of participants explain that they do not take part in online discussions because they have no interest in that form of engagement. David T. does not take any part in the discussions and blogs of a popular social change organisation because "*there's no point at which it inspires me*". Katherine "*ha[s] very little interest in participating in online chats and that kind of thing*". Ben does not believe it is useful to be concerned only with "*people rationally debating things*". In his view, there are "*limits [to the way] you define rationality*". His concern is with "*how a political community might arise from extra-personal feeling and its circulation, not from people rationally debating things*".

Ben also notes that sometimes the techniques people use to establish social relations cannot be identified by people outside of that group, leading to exclusion of those not already accepted. He says: "*people somehow coalesce together based on a song that someone puts on their MySpace page ... based on little winks and nudges ... impossible for me to read clues*". In his view, this is different from interactions in:

> *a textual culture that is all based on strength of what you write .... The only way I can describe ... how I thought this was working was [to think about it] like on the same level as, and these are completely socially marginal examples ... of public sex and drug deals, where the kind of communication that people have when they establish illicit interactions with each other would probably be invisible to me, because I don't do those things. So, I would think that there is probably something similar going on there, where you have a certain level of ritual that has not been verbalised in the same way that online culture up to this point has probably been thought of.*

Some participants would like the benefits of social interaction, for example gaining new information, without having to establish social relations. For Angela, finding information through websites has advantages over seeking it via face-to-face contact:

> *I think a lot of people who are intimidated by the idea of going to talk to someone about their problems ... are more amenable to the idea of communicating with someone in a virtual space and it's easier to make that step to your keyboard and computer and log in to somewhere. You can see what the space is like before you choose to contribute to it as well, so they can get a lot of information off the internet without having to contribute themselves, so in that way, it's a very positive source of support.*

Participants are aware that there are particular behaviours and techniques which are likely to lead to a social interaction, and by and large they are able and willing to use these techniques to begin the process of building social relations. Those who favour information exchange, dialogue and discussion seem to be particularly aware that they are taking up a social position, assuming at least the possibility for a response from someone else, but even those who do not focus on these behaviours recognise the importance of the inherently social nature of the norms and standards they use.

Making friends

Making friends is at the centre of social relations. Friendships are seen by some to be at the heart of community; for others, friendships belong to a private realm, relationships which are apart from community. Several participants described their experiences of making friends online. The concept of friendship has been affected by the technology and labelling in social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. It has also been affected by the notion that social relations can be commodified, for example as sets of contact details, and used in exchange relationships.

Friendships are mostly seen as personal and private. Jonathan notes that family is different from community and explores the idea of how "*circles of friends can begin to shade into community*", where the notion of "*mutual benefit ... and shared values*" might become something "*that they want to promote more broadly within society*". For Annette, "*my community is my friends*", and for Aimé, friendships are "*a private contact between people*", although they may exist within a community. For Alastair, however, friendship is an integral part of community. In talking about halfbakery.com, "*a website*

for I think probably your more creative type of engineer", he says that it is a community because it is:

> *a bunch of people who've got a similar kind of mindset and something to talk about and it's got the friendships and the enmities and the nemeses that I think all communities have got.*

On the other hand, after a day working at the computer, he:

> *just want[s] to go to the pub or get offline and participate in offline society, in offline communities [because] there's still a lot more warmth and a lot more humanity and really something a lot more rewarding about being involved in an offline community than an online one.*

David T. also "*think[s] you do actually need to physically interact with people*" to establish friendships, although he also says:

> *I just got this email out of the blue from [Laurence] and it was kinda like hard to describe, it was just like it came from a really good friend, [although] I only met him once.*

Making friends online is a real possibility for several participants. Tom has "*several close friends that I have met through connections with inthemix*". Isaac also has made "*friends, real friends*" online. He says:

> *With such close conversation over such a long period of time, you get to know their real personalities. ... I don't think it's necessary [to have a physical meeting in order to be friends because] from intellectual and emotional bonding, you might be able to make friends.*

Friendships which develop online may have different characteristics of intimacy and co-presence from those which develop face to face. Katherine describes relationships with friends offline as "*an insurance policy*", believing that you could never expect support from someone you only know intellectually. Rachel believes that "*you can have a good genuine friendship without the need to see [the person] every day*". She "*met one of [her] best friends ... online*", when she was in her mid-teens and has maintained that friendship for a number of years, but it is "*really important for me to take any online connection offline*". They have "*met in person many times, stayed at each other's houses*" even though the other young woman does not live in Australia. Rachel "*would not want to have only online friendships*". Anna J.'s experience was rather different from that of Rachel, when she met someone she had known online and found that this did not translate into knowing them offline. She describes how a sense of connectedness was built between teenagers interacting on a listserv for "*kids with siblings with disabilities*", through emails which were

> *deep and reveal[ed] a lot about ourselves [but] [w]hen it came to sitting down together, we didn't start from that point again. We regressed back more to being strangers.*

Rachel and Angela both know people who have met their life-partners through online discussion forums. Angela describes how someone she knows "*met his girlfriend online ... through one of the official [Myers Briggs] intp sites*". It took them "*nine months or a year*" to meet "*and maybe a couple of years before they were going out*". Rachel has noticed that:

> *there's a huge trend from people around my age, in their mid-twenties, that they start dating people that they first met as they were blogging ... [p]art of the appeal ... is that they do get to know people's minds first. ... When you meet offline, it's like you already know each other ... and you have that depth to the relationship to begin with.*

Friendship seems to relate to knowing people, experiencing a sense of connection to them, sharing experiences or achievements with them and doing things together. The communications and activities online may be sufficient to sustain a sense of connectedness, but, for some participants, friendship may require more than a meeting of minds or an exchange of words and images; it may require bodily presence and it may also require a sense of interdependence.

People can be sceptical about whether relationships formed online are really friendships. Isaac explains that when he talks to people about his friends online, they often question him: "*You know, 'are those your **friends**?'*". He believes that it is possible to form friendships online but that the term should not be used indiscriminately.

Several of the participants are sceptical about the way that MySpace and Facebook terminology has given a new dimension to the word 'friend'. Isaac thinks that "*the MySpace friends dilute the meaning of friends*". Rachel refers to "*all these random guys on MySpace going 'Hello, would you like to be my friend?'*" and gives as her "*internal response 'No, not really, not unless we had something in common or some basis for that friendship'*". Tristan is, "*in Facebook terminology, a true Facebook whore*" and has lots of friends, both in real life and on Facebook. He explains how his understanding of 'friend' has changed through reading an article about social networking sites and their use of terminology.

> *It's your friends, but it's Facebook friends. This is an interesting concept, because a Facebook friend is a lot broader than what you would really call a friend in real life. There's an article I read about it that said that the use of friend technically is really contentious because a lot of people don't consider who they have on Facebook as friends. A lot of people just try to get more and more numerical friends to feel popular or important. And in AOL Instant Messenger or AIM, it's called a buddy and people feel a lot better knowing they are buddies not friends, because friends carries this whole social and emotional connotation behind it. So,*

that was interesting because I'd never really thought about that before I read it.

Others adopt the technology and the terminology as a way of acknowledging a collective and meeting their objectives. Kelly sees the concept of MySpace friends from an organisational perspective as a mechanism for communication, a way of disseminating information. Speaking as coordinator of ActNow, she notes that:

we've got more MySpace friends than we have ActNow members ... we're sending bulletins out on our MySpace page, so all of our friends get an update about what we're doing. I mean community is all about relationships ... be in touch regularly, show that you care.

However, significantly, she goes on to move this notion of friendship outside of the bounds of social and emotional relationships into a relationship of exchange when she says they "*give them stuff, you know, free stuff so there's a reciprocal ... everything is a transaction today*".

Rachel, who has been involved with Vibewire, also uses a metaphor of exchange as she explains from an organisational perspective how creating community is about "*trying to bring people together around common areas of interest*". It can be "*quite a difficult thing because it requires everyone to voluntarily be part of it*". She explains how she "*go[es] out of [her] way*" to make contact online with people she finds interesting or who might want to be involved in a project she is supporting and congratulates them on what they have said or done and sometimes asks them if they would like to meet face to face. She sees this as "*trading opportunities*", although the opportunities are usually inseparable from the information that is shared.

Creating small worlds

Most participants in the study seem to assume that you can only be fully aware of those you are interacting with in relationships of friendship; they seem to have some understanding of the boundaries which separate 'insiders' from 'outsiders', friends from

strangers. Yet it is also possible to establish other forms of social relations which are exclusionary and operate within defined boundaries, such as the form known as the 'small world' (Chatman 2000). David T. was able to set up a group whose members were separated from others by the technical process of online registration, but more significantly through envisaging the people as members of a group separated in some way from the world at large.

David T. created a metaphorical small world for participants in an online learning project, designed to enhance project management skills. The young people involved in this activity were taking part in projects aimed at achieving positive social change in their community. They lived in places around the world and most had not met each other face to face. David took on the role of facilitator. Each week, participants were to explore a topic through reading and responding through email to the facilitator, but also they were expected to participate in a guided discussion which took place through a forum technology. In the days before the formal learning project began, as participants logged into the discussion forum, they found David's message of greeting. This encouraged them to imagine that over the following four weeks they would be joining the other participants on a boat trip down a river and that they could take one special item with them and then to sign in to the forum, introducing themselves and indicating the item they would take. Some participants identified keepsakes, such as photos, which were personal to them and which gave them inspiration, while others said they would take items they could share, such as a musical instrument or a book. One participant wrote that she wanted to take her cat, but another participant thought that it was not appropriate to take an animal which others might not like into an enclosed space. The participant with the cat agreed to bring along the cat basket and to ensure that the cat would not roam freely through the boat when it was allowed out of the basket. Other participants offered to play with the cat and supervise it when it was out of the basket. In this imaginary world, participants began to establish norms and standards of behaviour following their first online encounters, and they adopted roles or social types – the joker, the musician, the cook – all in the context of this imaginary world.

Close-knit online groups can seem to exclude those who want to join them. Anna J. refers to new members of an established online discussion group as "*intruders [who] had to prove themselves before they were allowed in*". David was faced with finding a way to integrate those who enrolled in the workshop a few days late. They had 'missed the boat' and, in his role as facilitator, David had to make arrangements for them to catch up with the boat and introduce them to those already on board, making space for them in the boat that was beginning to seem crowded. They were potentially already outsiders (HY Notes 2005–2006).

Isaac and Robert are involved in an online community which functions as a small world operating within a set of boundaries created through metaphor and beliefs. They do not know each other in the offline world, but are both involved in the 4chan website (www.4chan.org) and take part in the /b/ forum. 4chan.org is an imageboard site, largely concerned with anime and manga. It contains many discussion boards, on topics from cooking and weapons to animated pornography, in addition to the anime and manga boards. The /b/ discussion board is 'random' and is based on the Nijiura board of the Japanese imageboard Futuba Channel. It is extremely popular, having received more than 35 million hits (by August 2007) since it was launched in October 2003. It has a culture of its own. Its users are known as /b/tards and, as Robert notes, they are "*the legion, you shall not talk about /b/*". In spite of this injunction, 4chan and /b/ have wikipedia entries which are frequently revised and updated. These entries include sections on three elements that typify /b/, that is, /b/ and its characteristics, anonymity and controversy. There is a certain mutual recognition among /b/tards.

Small worlds are not always pleasant places to be, and their inhabitants do not always want to make friends with others, although they may be inextricably linked to them (Chatman 2000). Isaac referred to 4chan/b/ as "*unsavoury*" and Robert mentioned that it was "*not the best site*". According to Robert, the sign of a /b/tard is that he can view a picture that other people would be disgusted by, and not express revulsion. (There is an assumption that /b/tards are male.) Both described how the site had been taken down because from time to time postings contravened societal norms and standards. The disclaimer on the home page states that the content of the site is for "mature viewers only" so that to enter the site a member or visitor must agree that the organisation bears

no responsibility for any content or consequences of accessing the site.

4chan is an anonymous bulletin board that does not require users to supply any personal information. Robert and Isaac both describe how this anonymity at the same time creates and dispels the possibilities for social relations. Isaac explains that "*You don't know how many members there are*" because all postings are anonymous. The regulars "*despise people who have accounts or nicknames that they post under*" and refer to them as "*tripfags, because trip is a tripcode which is a password and is needed to create a nickname, and fag – well, you know fag – homosexuality. So, they are called tripfags and generally they are looked down upon.*"

For Isaac, even though no one can be identified and "*one would think that ... anonymous postings don't lead to community, they actually do*" because they lead to memes, an example of shared intellectual effort which many people have been involved in. One of the best-documented is the 'looooooong cat', which has "*a guy holding up a cat. And the cat is stretched out.*" The memes begin with an idea or image that catches the imagination and:

> *all of these other people ... try to reply to that, they would change it and make it into something else and it would become a kind of in-joke, and a recurring theme, which appears over and over and this becomes a meme.*

Isaac follows up this idea that anonymous postings can lead to a sense of community through intellectual effort by noting that adopting anonymity is "*kind of like saying 'I am selfless', so I contribute to this community without having to take any credit from it*". Robert, on the other hand, thinks that "*anonymous is an entity*" rather than a community with social relations:

> *since anonymous don't really interact with anonymous. It's a bit like playing 'bump in the dark'. ... If it's a community, you would know this person's handle, how they post and how they type and how they express themselves online, but with anonymous, anybody*

> *is anonymous, so instead of you expecting anonymous, different people in anonymous, you just treat anonymous as a whole, as one person.*

Robert continues that because "*no one knows who you are, it's kind of like being in a crowd, you know, the crowd mentality where you can get away with anything. You can do anything and get away with it and that gives people a sense of* power." Isaac also sees that anonymity "*is simply a protection for you being able to flame without any repercussions ... people can post everything they want without any consideration*".

Both agree that another factor that makes it difficult to establish social relations in /b/ is that nothing lasts long. Isaac describes it as "*like a real community that runs at double speed*". Robert explains that "*for the servers not to overload ... they constantly delete old stuff*". A thread that's not alive with people posting "*will die in about one and a half hours ... no matter what people type, it will disappear, even thousands of pages long*". /b/tards vie to gain prized post numbers, such as 12345678, and may post many entries in an attempt to gain that number.

One of the norms of 4chan/b/ is the challenging of authority structures; 4chan itself has "*a 22-item list of rules*" (Robert) but "*people protest against the rules*" (Isaac) and "*tend to look for the limits, the boundaries to the rules*" (Robert). There are no rules for /b/, "ZOMG NONE!!!1", beyond the general rule that nothing that is illegal, such as child pornography, should be uploaded. Its regular posters like to push the boundaries, "*to bend or break the rules [although] there is always someone more extreme than you*" (Robert). "*Rules are always breakable*" and freedom of information is one of those areas where people may protest against the rules. Isaac sees this attitude as being linked to "*anti-authoritarianism, where the people who hold the copyright are seen as the authority and we instinctively fight against them as young people*". Yet, for Robert, it is clear that "*there are things that are accepted by anonymous and things that aren't*"; in other words, in this environment with no rules, there are norms and standards for the basis of social relations. In his view, it can be harder online to catch people who "*do the wrong thing*" and then when "*everyone does it ... it becomes morally accepted.*"

One of the conventions or norms of 4chan/b/ is that "*there are no girls on the internet ... It's a misogynist environment.*" Isaac explains that:

> *I'm pretty sure that there are girls in the community. I think it's a kind of self-demeaning thing for the community. We go 'Oh, we are all immature guys here. No girls here. No girl would deem herself unworthy enough to visit us'.*

Robert explains it differently. He refers to a running joke: "*Why are women's feet smaller than men's? So they can get close to the sink back in the kitchen where they belong.*" He sees it as a "*very male chauvinist site where women are subservient to men*", a place which is "*more primal, where the men go out and hunt and the women stay home and cook*".

4chan/b/ has ways of binding people together, as one would expect in a 'small world' (Chatman 2000). There are many stories which link individuals, and the norms and standards serve as much to keep others out as to bond those who are /b/tards. Both Isaac and Robert did their best to indicate that the normal behaviours of /b/tards might be distasteful to me and that outsiders might find it difficult to become familiar and comfortable with each other.

Sustaining communities of interest and developing communities of practice

Social relations can develop based on the exchange of information, without a need for emotional engagement. Participants acknowledge that communities of interest can easily exist online when the sharing of that interest does not require physical presence but only the exchange of information. Jonathan says:

> *for example Star Wars, you can do that online or you can do that in person; there's still that same ability to share interest. It depends, equally a community founded on beliefs, communication, discussion, can also transfer pretty well online, but certain types of community can't transfer online so well, not without losing something. ... Say, for example, sports fans, where part of their*

> *engagement is online but basically if the matches aren't there to go and see, then there's something missing.*

According to Tom:

> *the minute you go to inthemix, you know that you have this one thing in common, dance music. You'll argue endlessly about what style of dance music is better or worse, but you all have that [same] thing.*

When participants all share the same interests, in Isaac's view, they can "*discuss things and we might build a rapport*". In an active community of interest, the less knowledgeable or less confident can share the information posted by others, contributing rarely. In spite of his own reluctance to post information, David T. explains that he uses a particular discussion board frequently,

> *as a reference, as a source of information. ... [W]hen I do post, I tend to post details of a report that I've come across ... rather than posting my own opinion. That might have something to do with my confidence in relation like to who's involved in this. Because they are all quite important and really smart, do you know what I mean? ... There's thousands of us that sit on the periphery but actually are part of this group.*

The sharing of information alone may not be enough to give any sense of collective; there may need to be some context or purpose to bring people together. A sense of collective can also form around a broader shared interest in the expectation of learning something and it can lead to active engagement, which could be labelled a community of practice. For a number of participants, the collective forms around an aim or an activity, "*get[ting] together ... to achieve something*" (Rachel) or working in an organisational context. Alan describes his involvement with what he refers to as "*a community of theatre*". He explains the interplay between social relations online and offline, describing how once the rehearsals have begun he is:

> *so heavily involved in the physical community ... when you have a physical community where the extension is the online community, the physical community almost without fail will take precedence. [However] for a show I've only just started on, almost everything I know about the background is online, everything I've heard about the show is online ... One of the things that I find good about online chat groups is that you are seeing everything firsthand. ... I find it really fortunate that I've been able to put things into my shows that I have learned online.*

Alan gives a practical example of how the knowledge he gained online enabled him to play an active and immediate role in a community of practice. He explains that he is "*a musician by background, so I often play as accompanist*" and was able to:

> *play for one night as a stand-in for the pianist for a show in Rockdale [a suburb of Sydney] [because] I had read about the show online ... [The pianist] was very freaked out that he couldn't perform that night, so he called me up in the morning ... and I said, no, this is really good, I've heard of this, all of this online …*

and with only 20 minutes' rehearsal, he was able to fill in the "*30–40% of the music ... introducing some of the musical themes and leading the themes through when the singers came in*".

Therese actively seeks to learn new things and become part of an online community, which could be labelled a community of practice "*to fill some lack [of a sense of community*]" that she experienced when she moved to Australia. She also plays a part in supporting the development of that community of practice through decisions in her work role. She explains that she:

> *felt very disconnected and [asked herself] 'what am I doing?' ... and for the first time ever felt this very strong pull to do something that had a civil component or that was about community, so, I think I've gone to look for it in a professional community ... it's interesting to see how excited they all are about [the DRUPAL opensource software]. ... But I get the sense that they are also excited by meeting a lot of like-minded people. That's ... a community ... I've been part of and interested in building by supporting the technology, by using it, paying a developer to develop it further and so he can put what he's developed back out into the DRUPALosphere for other people to use ... you know, the whole kind of creative commons licensing type of approach.*

Sharing information, wanting to learn from others and working to a common goal are all ways of creating social relations.

Forming an association

For some participants, the sense of collective and of developing social relations can really only exist through the formalised workings of an organisation. This might involve using structures, policies and practices more usually found in organisation or actually working through the structures of an association.

Aimé gives examples of creating community through setting up bureaucratic structures in order to achieve a set of objectives or outcomes: "*[We] set up an online secretariat to organise a big event [the African Youth Parliament].*" He has strong views on the need for a moderator in online discussion forums with "*the same leadership qualities and values that you would need in a good well-organised community*". He notes that:

> *sometimes you'll get people being moderators just because they are the ones who came up with the idea or because they have easy and regular access to internet. That's not enough. ... It can impact ... negatively on the survival of the community.*

The techniques which Jonathan identifies as useful or important in building community are those which he has seen in his involvement with the board at Oxfam Australia, "*like ways to get agreement about something*". These techniques are "*good practice*" in a work practices sense, and from this experience he has recognised the need for structure in discussion and decision-making. He notes that:

> *they have even brought in an online facilitator, you know, week by week discussing objectives and so on. I thought that was a really useful way of doing things that I hadn't thought about, well, didn't know about.*

Isaac explains his role of moderator in one of the online websites he belongs to. Isaac's role as moderator is rather different from Aimé's conception of the moderator. For Aimé, the moderator is responsible for developing an agenda, ensuring that all voices are heard during a discussion and also moving the debate forward. Hence it is a leadership role. For Isaac, the role of the moderator is to monitor behaviour. He explains how moderators are responsible for ensuring that members' posts conform to the rules and can take action against those who do not abide by the rules: "*What I do is close threads which are inappropriate ... you ban members who repeatedly violate the rules set down by the founder of the site, so it's not really a democratic place.*" Each in different ways sets the conditions under which social relations can form.

Kelly and Marianne both speak from an organisational perspective, emphasising the importance of rules and guidelines which can be used to structure discussion and which can also limit the way people can post in a forum. Kelly describes ActNow's policies and says that they have 'house rules' which are used to guide the development of discussion. Marianne, referring to ReachOut, says "*[the] guidelines are a lot stricter around what's permissible in terms of posts [than you find in other communities because they want to] put ... healthy boundaries around the community*". The purpose of forming an association or organisation is to create the infrastructure for young people to interact with each other, and possibly to set the agenda for these interactions.

Creating metaphors for collectivity

Brett's ideas about how to create community show the tension between the personal and the associational perspectives of social relations and the overlaps between notions of social relations, social capital and civil society. He speaks about GetUp both as a tribe and a brand, two different metaphors for a collective which is portrayed as an organisation through the media. He also describes its workings as the workings of an imagined community. Brett was Executive Director of GetUp at the time of the interviews and elaborates on this idea of creating something:

> *So, what I want to create is [a place] where people [will find] a sense of family and a sense of collectivity and understanding and ... debate, but an overarching shared thing ... it's linked by a recognisable brand [and] it's got a tribal element to it as well in a modern sense.*

He answers his own question "*What are the signifiers of being part of the GetUp tribe?*" by responding:

> *Well, you're concerned about social justice issues, you're highly sceptical of the government, you love and respect certain elements of our society ... procedural fairness, rule of law, equality ... you have a love and respect for human rights ... you actually engage with the world in a way that maybe other people don't and you're also an influencer. You share the information from GetUp with others, acting as a multiplier.*

Annette would probably say that she does not feel part of the GetUp tribe. She notes that she does not "*feel part of something really concrete online, but it reminds me that there are other people around who are interested in similar things, sharing information ...*".

Anna N., who attended one of the GetUp public meetings before the NSW State election, recognised that sense of being part of something. She was:

> *surpris[ed] that I was one of the very few young people ... the main kind of demographic would be middle-aged to older middle-aged, people who looked fairly affluent ... I grew up in Balmain – I identified a lot of those people as the retired or semi-retired champagne socialists, people with money and people with time, but also people who have a certain social conscience. ... We were told what we were going to do and people accepted it.*

Brett also perceived GetUp as a brand, along with New Matilda a "*part of the infrastructure of civil society*". GetUp is "*a legitimate channel for community to be able to have their voices heard*", but, unlike some other organisations which may be structured around an "*issue silo*", it "*is multi-issue*". Here it is less the social relations that bring people together and more the creation of a mode of taking action. Brett believes that he is:

> *able to mobilise and aggregate and channel large numbers of people in a way that doesn't have to go through political manifestos and paths associated with a political party or governmental bureaucracy .... For example, 18,000 people responded to the GetUp survey on 'what does your Australia look like?'*

David T. sees GetUp more in terms of a brand as "*a marketing tool*", and argues that:

> *unless they do some serious evaluation of the particular campaigns and programs that they run, I'm not sure that you could claim that it is an effective process really through which you can advocate for change.*

However, he acknowledges that many GetUp members are involved because "*it actually provides a sense of appeasement, people feel that they are participating and influencing, whereas in fact, they are not necessarily*".

GetUp also uses information and communication technologies to create another form of collective. Brett drew my attention to the "*climate change action map [from the GetUp*

campaign] ... you should have it front and centre in your research". At the time of the interview, this interactive map in the GetUp website and the technology which underpinned it symbolised community and the possibilities for establishing social relations. It allowed people who signed to support the climate change campaign to identify the suburb where they lived with a dot on the map and to find out how many other people supporting the campaign lived close by. In this sense, an imagined community was created among people who not only did not know each other, but who at that stage had no way of knowing the identity of others. Brett said that he received "*individually crafted emails, hundreds every week*" from:

> *people who have felt very much connected, part of a movement, part of civil society – well they probably wouldn't name it civil society – part of a movement, part of a community or shared ... you know 'Oh yeah, I'm a GetUp member, thanks for giving me the opportunity to have a say, for giving me the opportunity to realise that I'm not alone, not the only one in my community who feels this way.'*

The next step, "*the trick*", is to empower people so that they "*just aren't experiencing their political identity virtually but are actually coming ... to the walk against warming*". The following step, which took place on 5 July 2007, was to encourage the people who represented the dots on the climate change maps to meet in person. GetUp members agreed to host 'GetTogethers', usually in their homes, to bring together people in their neighbourhood to explore issues and strategies for climate change. In most instances, these people were strangers to one another, so that the idea of the GetTogether, hosted by an individual, involved an element of trust, based on perceptions of belief in similar values.

These three examples of collective expressed through metaphor – the tribe, the brand and the imagined community – indicate that social relations are formed in the context of the imagination, where allusion to other forms of identification can conjure otherwise unattainable collectives, beyond those based on friendship, personal interest or the pragmatic purpose of achieving a common goal.

Conceptualising the 'we' in social relations

Implicit in the descriptions given by the participants are conceptualisations of community and social relations. These can be interpreted in various ways. One way is to label the types of social relations that emerge from the descriptions of participants. In some cases, collectives have been given a label from the literature by the participants, while in others I as researcher have given the label. Another way is to analyse who sets the agenda for establishing the relationships or taking collective action. A third way is to consider the relationships between individuals and whether or not a relationship would continue to exist if one individual or some other aspect of the relationship were to be substituted for another.

Labelling social relations

A striking feature of these descriptions is that some participants identify and label the kind of collective they believe they are engaged in creating and others give enough details for the collective to be recognised and labelled by the researcher. Communities of interest and communities of practice are acknowledged by participants. Jonathan, as noted earlier, believes that you can have communities of interest online, as long as all parts of the activities associated with that interest can be transferred online. He holds that sports fans could not form a community of interest online because they would be unable to go to the matches or games. On the other hand, Star Wars fans could form a community of interest online. When Alan states that he belongs to "*a community of theatre*", he appears to have in mind a collective which meets Wenger's three requirements for a community of practice (Wenger 1999). He describes a situation where there are others with the same interest and where levels of knowledge and expertise are acknowledged; where there are joint activities and people help each other to learn and to solve problems; and where there are experiences, stories and ways of working which build up over time because of ongoing interactions.

An analysis of the literature provides the label of the 'small world' for the collective which David T. has been involved with through his imaginary boat trip and for the 4chan/b/ discussion board. In each case, it can be argued that a small world exists as Chatman's four factors of normative behaviour can be identified (Chatman 2000). In

each context, social norms exist and those who do not abide by them are excluded from the group. The worldview of participants in each group is similar. In the group David facilitated, participants had been selected to take part in the online learning workshop through a selection process which assumed a similar philosophical orientation and then further fostered its development. In the 4chan/b/ discussion board, those who are considered not to share the world view of the majority are treated roughly, probably in an attempt to force them to stay away from the group. As participants are anonymous, it is difficult to know who may not share the worldview of the majority and to know what happens to them. Each group has social types, whether those which emerge in many social settings, as in the case of the imaginary boat trip, or those which are recognised and formalised, as in the case of 4chan/b/. Finally, there are recognised patterns of information behaviour. For participants in the imaginary boat trip, which is also a formal online learning workshop spread over several weeks, there are conventional ways of approaching formal learning materials, of posing questions and responding to them, and of introducing potentially relevant information and experiences to others. On 4chan/b/, in spite of the claim that postings are random, so that one never knows what will come next, there are some acknowledged information behaviours, such as 'spamming' to flood someone else's site and bring it to a halt, posting many messages to help reach a target number, and adapting messages to create memes.

The metaphorically constituted 'tribe' and 'brand' are acknowledged in GetUp by several participants. David T. echoes Maffesoli's view (1996) that members of tribes can act from emotion and passion as well as rationally when he says that people feel "*a sense of appeasement ... feel that they are participating and influencing, whereas in fact they are not necessarily*". The development of GetUp's Climate Change campaign shows how GetUp moves people from being individuals to people playing a role in a social group, whether through their involvement in the Walk Against Warming or through hosting or attending one of the GetTogethers. It seems too that GetUp adherents are held together by something which they acknowledge as being greater than themselves – the significance of the environment, or the belief in social justice, for example. When Brett and Anna N. offer examples of GetUp as a brand, one can recognise the similarity with the way that Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) describe the construction of the sense of togetherness, by the acknowledgement of belonging and the

use of communication protocols by the organisation itself. David T. notes that the notion of brand is bound up in the way that GetUp is used as a 'marketing tool', something which is becoming recognised and on the basis of which claims can be made. He moves from the metaphorical construction of 'brand' to the strategic perception of 'marketing tool'. His concern is that the campaigns and programs may not live up to the promise found in the marketing tool, and, without evaluation, may not prove to be "*an effective process ... through which you can advocate for change*".

An analysis of the literature on conceptualisations of various forms of collective shows that most are loosely specified models derived from practice. Thus, it is not surprising that it is possible to match the forms of collective described by participants to those found in the literature. However, one group, GetUp, is conceptualised as both a tribe and a brand community by the same person, Brett, in the same stream of thought. These are different conceptualisations, held at the same time. On the one hand, it could be argued that in an interview setting, people sometimes do not choose the word they intended and take the opportunity to rephrase and to correct themselves. However, from the way that Brett elaborates on each, it does not seem rational to argue that it was a slip of the tongue to refer to two forms of collective. Thus, another explanation would seem to be that Brett is speaking from two different positions. It could be argued that, as a private person, he sees GetUp as a tribe of which he is a member. As an activist, intent on achieving social change through an organisation, he sees GetUp as a brand, with features, campaigns, which must be communicated and marketed and where it is possible to talk in terms of the number of responses to a survey or the time taken to raise money to support a campaign. This example is a reminder that all participants are constantly shifting their own identity, the 'I', and thus changing the 'we', the collective to which they seek to belong.

Exercising power over social relations

At another level, participants exercise power over the very existence of social relations in a way which is reminiscent of Giddens' descriptions of the processes of re-embedding (1990, pp. 87-88). Some participants, like Jonathan and Isaac, find ways to become part of existing collectives, to join themselves to a 'we' that is already established, such as an organisation or association. Others, like Aimé, bring the

structures of organisations into relationships to achieve shared objectives, so that there are recognised roles for individuals to play. Other participants find that there is no collective that meets their needs and expectations. Brett shows his determination to exercise power over the social relations others might form when he explains that part of his goal in life is to create an organisation where people can come together to work together for social change. Tom and Nick have also taken the initiative in setting up organisations. A few participants note that they lack the information, skills or inclination to be part of a collective. David T. does not take part in an online discussion because it does not inspire him, and stops there, ignoring the possibility of perhaps finding another group which might interest him, even though he does use online discussion forums for his work. Yet even in this stance, he is exercising a choice.

Substituting people and interests

The concept of substitutability underpins the choice participants have expressed in establishing some types of relationship and the extent to which other individuals could become part of the relationship without destabilising or destroying it. Some participants make a clear distinction between the social relations of friendship and the social relations of acquaintance or action. Friendship is significant for these members of Generation X and Generation Y. According to Huntley (2006, pp. 24-25), friends are "an essential part of my world ... like family only better". Friendship may be private, it is based on notions of mutual support and significantly, it is firmly based on knowing the other person. This knowing of the other person does not have to be a bodily, face-to-face kind of knowing, but it does require a recognition and relationship with something that might be termed the 'essence' of the person. In the 'we' of friendship, we have "*intellectual and emotional bonding*", as Isaac puts it, and each friendship is different from every other friendship. Barna argues that members of Generation Y "aggressively pursue diversity among people" (Barna in Huntley 2006, p. 35). In the 'we' of friendship, we cannot substitute one friend for another, nor can we substitute some other end or purpose for that friendship (Todorov 1996, pp. 105-106). It is this inability to substitute one individual for another that separates friendship from all other forms of social relations for these participants.

Yet the participants do acknowledge that substitution of people and of interests is not only acceptable but very much part of their interactions. In some of the social relations that participants form online, what they know or the skills they have are more important than who they are. In this context, individuals can be substituted if they have the same information or skills. When Rachel talks about "*trading opportunities*" for linking people into a wider network, she indicates that one person could be substituted for another if the information she has about each of them is similar. Alan shows how in a community of practice it was information and expertise that allowed him to substitute for someone else in a theatrical production. Aimé and Isaac emphasise the importance of placing the recognition of a role above the wishes of an individual; in this context, what matters is having a person who can effectively carry out the responsibilities of the role.

In two other groupings, the issue of substitutability is positioned differently. When Brett and Annette speak of 'the tribe', they are referring to a collective which people can choose to be part of. If there is substitutability, it is that people would choose to align themselves with another tribe. In David T.'s small world, or the online group that Isaac and Robert belong to, it is difficult to think in terms of substitution. When new members come to the group, they have to be able to act as though they were already members; they have to be able to fit in. This implies interchangeability of members, with all members having a set of knowledge and skills and an understanding of the conventions and culture of the group. However, new members also have to gain acceptance from the existing members. This would seem to suggest a relationship rather more like friendship, at least in David's small world. Brett refers to the 'tribe' as a 'brand', and in the context of a collective which forms around a brand, the existence of a consumer culture is hard to ignore. Here, the substitution could exist in both directions. The 'consumer' could choose a different brand, a different cause to support, and the marketers of the brand could seek out other potential consumers of the brand product.

Some social relations are formed on the basis of choice, such as the choice of an area of interest or concern, and it is widely recognised in the literature (eg Bauman 2001; Giddens 1991, p. 83; Hall 1996) that people can feel a sense of belonging to a number of distinct groups and it is acknowledged that some of these groups have no tradition

and are unlikely to last long. This substitutability of interests can be seen as very like the "cloakroom communities" which Bauman criticises because they are not intended to last (2000, pp. 199-201). His concern is that the collectives we form "tend to be volatile, transient and 'single-aspect' or 'single-purpose'. Their life-span is short while full of sound and fury" (Bauman 2000, p. 199). As noted earlier, he refers to these transient collectives as peg or cloakroom communities because we are really only spectators in the events of these groups, and when the entertainment has finished we "*collect [our] belongings from the cloakroom*" and turn to our other roles. He argues that we involve ourselves in causes and activities as a matter of taste, or fashion, so that our relationship is as consumers and therefore with the cause and not with other consumers. Brett's reference to GetUp as a brand casts people simultaneously as a commodity and as consumers of this commodity. The participants in this study do not seem to exhibit the loneliness Bauman suggests leads to a craving for togetherness, exhibited in collective activities like protest marches or the actions of imagined communities (1995, pp. 44-48). Indeed they seem to welcome the exercise of power in accepting the possibilities of interacting with another person, or finding another source of information or following a different set of interests. A more optimistic view of this behaviour suggests that people are making active choices in line with their interests, acknowledging to themselves that they will sustain membership of this or that group for as long as they maintain that interest, and then moving on to take up another interest (Giddens 1991, pp. 83-85).

Conclusion

Participants seem very keen to establish and maintain a sense of collective, with only three participants cautioning against the dangers of the collective because it becomes a force either for coercion or a tool for divisiveness. The 'we' that participants seek to create is rarely a single collective, as different aspects of their 'I' come into play. They recognise that there are different forms of collective, different relationships possible in the 'we', and sometimes actively establish a form of collective which meets the expectations of their 'I' and a broader desire for social change. They seem excited by the possibilities of involvement in something they have chosen to be part of and optimistic that they can create relationships, gain credibility and have some impact on the world around them.

Creating and maintaining the private relationship of friendship is very important to most of the participants and will take precedence over engagement in other social relations. Without friendships, which provide them with a level of "support, acceptance and advice" (Huntley 2006, p. 34), they may find it difficult to take part in other forms of social relations.

The significance of friendship for participants is rivalled by the concern for sharing information and experience and for establishing and maintaining dialogue. Even where developing friendship is not an aim, participants mostly use a range of communication techniques which demonstrate courtesy and mutual respect. In different measure, these three activities – sharing information, maintaining dialogue and demonstrating mutual respect – are fundamental to developing a sense of collective, creating a 'we'.

Chapter 7 CREATING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Introduction

A number of research studies and reports in the 1990s and early 2000s concluded that young people were apathetic and disconnected from the lives of their communities (Huntley 2006; Vromen 2003). Membership of organisations had declined and the consequent loss of social capital, especially among young people, was lamented (Putnam 2000). It seemed that for a long time researchers and scholars had overlooked young people and the way they created social capital and then in this decade wanted them to create social capital in the way they – the researchers, scholars and policymakers – had done, through their families and neighbourhoods, through their schools and through local community organisations.

Youth was taken as a time of transition during which young people would learn how to take their place in their community as their parents had. Thus, any discrepancy between the way young people and those of their parents' generation created social capital would disappear as young people took on the responsibilities of the adult world. However, research from the early years of the twenty-first century has identified a number of factors that call these conclusions into question. There is evidence that the period of transition is much lengthier than in previous times and that the notion of adulthood being a time of stability is no longer valid (eg Turkle 1996). A number of studies have shown that young people are not apathetic and disengaged, but rather follow their own interests (Beck 2001; Lombardo, Zakus & Skinner 2002; Norris 2003; Vromen 2003). This following of individual interests may be a consequence of the higher levels of education young people can reach as a result of government policies and societal expectations. And these interests are probably not related to the policies of political parties or even to established third sector organisations, but have some relevance to the kind of world that young people wish to live in.

The young people at the centre of this study are constantly engaged in creating social capital. There are parallels between the techniques and activities used to create social

capital and those used to establish social relations. They pass information such as articles, reports and news about events among each other, swap details about people they know, and contribute to discussion boards and other forums where knowledge and expertise can be shared, making little distinction between what happens on the internet and what happens offline. Sometimes they just chat to each other, face to face or using one of the communication technologies. This seemingly trivial activity is actually significant in the creation of trust and a sense of authenticity and in creating their own identities.

They seem keen to have an impact on the world around them, to be actively engaged in issues and projects, with some taking significant steps to engage others and others focusing on having an impact in their own world.

Exchanging information

"*I like to be a connector*", says Annette, "*but I don't seek out places to belong to in order to bring new information in; it's just things come along.*" Annette believes that sharing information is an essential step in building a group to get together physically to do something. Rachel is a connector, too, but she describes herself linking people, "*going out of her way to make contact*" with people she thinks may know something or someone she would be interested in. She sees this as the "*opportunity to be part of that bigger thing*". Therese has experienced the importance of establishing systems for people to make contact and information to be exchanged online and offline as a substitute for interactions in the close-knit rural community she grew up in. She recognises that this approach might seem artificial, "*but I think that's probably something people do in the big metropolitan centers*".

While Katherine might also be a connector, she would disagree that just circulating ideas and information leads to the creation of social capital. She thinks that, although one can "*have a community based simply on getting ideas out there*", you need to "*give them an origin or a context*", because in her view, ideas are fundamentally part of the person, "*the only thing someone has that can't be taken away from them by anyone*". Anna N. would probably agree with her. She describes her excitement at receiving

emails encouraging her to be part of a group of people supporting a particular action for social change, but explains how attending a public meeting was more powerful:

> *being able to feel the sense of talking to other people and seeing that other people do feel the same ways as you and also trying to negotiate or convince other people who may not even have an opinion about the issue. That's a kind of interaction you don't get on the internet so much because there isn't that face to face conversation.*

Nick believes that information technologies are important in "*connecting people to the issues ... so they can by touched firsthand by people affected by the issues or see the issues in a more interactive way, so they can feel some imperative or reason to take action*". Like David T., he sees a particular place for the exchange of information, especially when an individual is beginning to explore an interest. He explains that:

> *Internet communities are more valuable for people of all different types, really valuable for people who are just learning about or who want to get into an issue, into a space or into a community of people. They are not so good for people who are really involved in that issue already, because those people have plenty of ways to have strong ties to other people in the community. It's when we really just get involved initially and just get up to speed. You feel like you are part of the group, you get involved in some initial activities, you get an initial understanding of what's going on ... The best websites are ones where there's very tight discussion about very practical things and ... people can read and learn a lot about things ... that's the ones I really like. Learn about things you didn't know about* ... .

Aimé shows the power of connection through information when he describes his interaction with Amnesty International France and other users of its website.

I've never met them. I know people through online. You can share information, you can write to each other, you can email, you can ask for more information when people send something and they will gladly respond to you. ... There was one person who was writing on the Congo and she was a journalist and she had written a book and she talked about her book and gave a good summary of it and shared that with the network and I wrote to her saying that I really like what you wrote ... and she [sent] an email saying if you want to purchase this book or if you want more information I am happy to respond. So I wrote to her privately and we stayed in touch maybe one or two years ... I know if I wanted to I could still go back, google her or something and get back her email, then I could ask her, if I needed something, she would provide it.

Sunil is concerned with the need for rational, intellectual engagement with others. He contributes to Wikipedia because "*it's a wonderful resource that provides an adequate amount of reasonably reliable information for most general narratives*" and because of the open editing process, "*the tensions, the tos and fros, the constant debate and improvement that may make Wikipedia a much more diverse and possibly powerful information source*".

Making conversation

The ability to talk to one another is often taken for granted in discussions about social capital and its creation. Jonathan dismisses discussion that is not action oriented as "*conversation*". Yet, for some of the young people in this study, the ability to establish conversations, to discuss things, was a crucial first step in developing relationships and exchanging information. Marianne, a member of Generation X, describing the effectiveness of a discussion forum for young people suffering depression, says that "*as an adult, you forget how isolating it can be when you are going through difficult times*", and she refers to any opportunity to communicate with others as "*a positive occurrence*".

Isaac describes how some communication technologies, such as 'chat' technologies, allow people to discuss things and build rapport at a personal level. This can lead to friendships and to exchanges of information on a variety of topics, but perhaps not social capital leading to changes in society as he cautions that"*you might be a bit optimistic to think that the musings of a few immature college students is the basis of democratic groundwork*". Tom is also concerned with the importance of conversation. He values solid, well-thought-out and well-presented discussion and distinguishes between his interest in dance music, which is "*recreational stuff*" and the "*slightly more cerebral stuff [of] politics, issues and culture*". He is critical of MySpace posts because in his view they are "*just announcements*" and do not lead to conversation or to deeper engagement.

Nick has considerable experience in strategies for bringing young people together to engage in actions for positive social change, especially through the use of information technology. He notes that what "*Generation Y wants to do ... [is] talk about issues, speak out, be involved in a dialogue rather than just receiving messages*". He discusses how Web 2.0 technology facilitates this but asserts that just providing the opportunity for dialogue is not enough. He says "*creating a vibrant discussion is difficult when everyone has the same opinion*" and asks "*Where do we further the conversation?*"

James also believes that in conversations "*it's not just the two of us, we aren't isolated from everything else we're doing*" and that conversations "*have reverberations*" through our other relationships and through the wider community. Nick elaborates on this idea when he says:

> *blogging and chat and discussion and social networking and linking profiles and being able to see what other people have done ... and emailing and getting involved in discussion forums ... seemed very natural. I communicate with my friends and they communicate with their friends.*

Through recognising the importance of conversations and these multiple approaches to communicating and sharing information and opinion, Nick was part of a small group

which was able to form an organisation "*beyond any existing frame of reference, a new youth-based organisation, global and internet-based which we hadn't seen anyone else do*".

Creating an environment of authenticity

To some extent, establishing rapport with others online is a risky business. Angela, who like Katherine has been involved in mentoring students new to a university, makes a distinction between exchanging information in this context and sharing more personal information in a social networking site. She recognises the importance of helping a complete stranger, who may still be overseas, to understand the conventions, rules and expectations of interaction in the university, and she communicates within the context established by the university. She distinguishes this from social relations when she explains that she will only add someone as a Facebook friend if she has met them or is likely to meet them in the foreseeable future.

Participants believe that it is important to establish one's own credentials and to be able to trust in the authenticity of others. Alastair says that he believes the fact he has his own website "*does tend to give you a bit of credibility, because if people see that you have put a lot of work into producing some kind of media ... then people will tend to take what you have to say a little bit more seriously*". Angela also believes that having your own website "*allows people to ... see who you are and gives yourself some credibility*", a view echoed by Rachel. Robert describes how he creates his online persona in a forum and is known for being somewhat controversial, doing his best to bend the rules. Yet speaking at the same time from his perspective as a moderator in a different discussion forum, he explores how the rules "*enforce a certain point of view*" and help people to establish common ground in a "*friendly atmosphere*".

Anna J., talking about her involvement in a discussion forum for the siblings of disabled children, said "*the thing that primarily helped to forge the connection wasn't that different from what goes on in face-to-face contact. And that was a frankness and an openness about one's own situation, which encouraged the same in other people, but perhaps it was easier online.*"

Involving reciprocity

David T. has experience of creating social capital through learning together, "*through emailing each other and experiencing each other online, which is reinforced by personal meeting*". In this context, he thinks that there is room for "*collaboration but also resistance as well*" and that even with disagreement "*you are influencing people to actually participate or think more about diversity*". He also has experience in being part of an online discussion forum, where most of the participants are well established in the field but he is a relative newcomer. Here, he feels that he takes part in the exchange of information because he reads what others write and very occasionally posts links to reports he has come across; he doubts whether the regular posters consider him someone who helps the group's knowledge and understanding to develop, but he also acknowledges that this "*might be something to do with my confidence in relation to who's involved*".

David G. is "*constantly amazed at how much contribution there is online*" and he "*wonders what the incentive is*" for people to participate in providing information to share. He only searches out information online for his own interest, but he does make an effort to pass articles and reports he has come across to his friends.

The idea that one does not have to exchange information to create social capital, that the act of putting information into an arena where it may be acknowledged is sufficient, is echoed by Ben. He has been working with recently arrived young refugees on a blogging project and was surprised at the intensity young people expressed about the opportunity to post a blog, as if to say:

> *one good thing about blogging is that I can tell the world about what's happening in my country, but in a way that's different than the news is usually transmitted. ... Telling those kinds of stories is a major kind of way that people are part of a larger social fabric, even though there is not necessarily dialogue.*

Making the world a better place

All of the participants have been involved as volunteers, as noted earlier. Most of the activities they have been involved in have taken place offline. Examples included short-term project involvement such as student union activities, university orientation programs or holiday-style overseas projects, and longer-term involvement such as with the Oxfam International Youth Parliament and bush regeneration. Online volunteering included various kinds of writing, including journalism, online facilitation of discussions or e-learning, moderation of discussion forums and website development. Rachel explains how Vibewire provides an environment which mimics the professional context for its volunteer writers, and Kelly describes how ActNow recruits and pays young writers as "*part of the capacity building, to give people experience of what it's like to pitch and engage in an editorial process, and pay them market rates*".

Young people want to make a difference in the world, but Kelly explains they would rather write a blog than join a political party. In a social setting, they are unlikely to express their views, because they are forming their identity and do not want to face the risk of looking foolish or not fitting in. Speaking in the persona of an 18 year old, Kelly says:

> *I care about global warming, but like I'm not going to go to a party and start talking about it, because if people ask me a question, I'm going to sound like a nob because I don't know, so I'm going to talk about Big Brother instead.*

Tom's view is that "*anything you do to place an opinion out there in the public domain which has the potential to affect someone is politics*" and can lead to social change. However, he no longer thinks rallies are a particularly effective way of creating change, although he often goes to them because he believes it is important to show solidarity with others. Speaking from the perspective of someone who is the founder of an organisation that allows young people from Generation Y to present their views on life and issues through a website, Tom asserts that for young people "*what is lacking is often information on this thing you care about*". In his opinion, people will go to the site "*not because they want to read work written by [other] young people but because they*

want to speak about an issue" and at the same time the site also "*creates opportunities for people to listen*". This need to know that one's point of view is valid and to read ideas of someone who is "*not a hairy-armed radical, not a Young Australian of the Year do-gooder*" but "*just like me and they care*" is emphasised also by Kelly, speaking similarly from an institutional perspective. She notes that the young people she works with feel that the information available to them through formal channels is not directed at them and not relevant to their interests, so in her work role she must create opportunities for relevant information to be brought within their reach.

Brett described how he has taken on a particular kind of work because he believes it is important to strive for social change to make the world a better place. For him, the advocacy organisation he manages has as part of its goal "*to build social capital ... to work with what unites people as opposed to what divides them*". Thus, they have a responsibility to disseminate information about key issues, whether climate change or indigenous rights:

> *giving people information about a piece of legislation they wouldn't otherwise have known about* [and] *getting those people [who would otherwise never meet] into a group, into a shape and linking them in such a way that they can actually communicate with each other [and form opinions].*

Brett also states that the information and communication technologies they are using in the GetUp organisation allow "*people who have felt very isolated and disengaged [to] feel very much connected*" and to have a say.

Changing my world

Some participants were also concerned with making changes to the world they live in. Jonathan took a hands-on approach to changing something in his immediate environment – he ran a gardening club at his London college. "*It wasn't a huge thing and not earth shattering*" but it turned a large walled garden that was too big for the one employed gardener to manage to something that was cared for systematically by a group and was productive, as gardens should be. The process brought together students from

the college over the internet and also face to face as they worked collaboratively, "*getting their hands dirty and doing something you wouldn't normally do*". The outcome by the time he left was that "*there were some great veggies coming up*" and the gardening was becoming a tradition that "*people are very keen to carry on*".

Aimé also focused some of his attention on himself and his immediate environment, thus distinguishing two levels of social capital. Although working for social development and conflict resolution, both in his paid work and as a volunteer, at one level he was more concerned with building social capital to support his own wellbeing. He explained how he had been extremely active in "*different sorts of groups that share information on the issues of development, where you get information and you respond to what people say*", and how it is important to show an interest in what is happening for other people in the group, to encourage them in their activism, to seek more information and to share information from your own experiences. Even though this sharing of information was important to him and fundamental to his "*stages of growth*", he acknowledged that spending time online exchanging information may be a luxury when you have recently moved to a new city and need to establish yourself. He notes that in circumstances where you do not know the people around you:

> *you go to a pub to 'build social capital' with your colleagues ... we felt like we needed to rely on each other and help each other to get through difficult times, to adjust to the way of life ... you go on Friday to the pub, Thursdays you go to soccer and after that you are so tired that you can't spend time doing internet.*

This approach is similar to Alastair's need to "*go to the pub*" where "*there's still a lot more warmth and a lot more humanity*" than there is online (page 148).

Discussing social capital

The findings of this study confirm and extend the findings in other recent studies of young people and their creation of social capital. The young people involved in the study express ideas that are rational and idiosyncratic at the same time. They seem to

accept the paradoxes of living in discontinuous time and dislocated space while maintaining continuity in relationships and actions, especially valuing friendships. They acknowledge their own differing and sometimes conflicting views of self-identity, where the social, the professional, the activist and the student/scholar selves may be in conflict with each other. The young people who took part in this study expressed views of social capital that more closely match the broader definition used by Bryant and Norris (2002), including social participation, civic engagement and perception of community, rather than limiting themselves to the narrower definition of involvement in organisations deriving from Putnam's work (1993; 2000). There is evidence to support Quan-Haase et al.'s conclusion that "as the Internet is incorporated into the routine practices of everyday life, social capital is becoming augmented and more geographically dispersed" (2002). The participants in this study may be travelling or living in another city or another country, or they may be busy when others are available, but, in spite of them being separated from others in time and space (cf Giddens 1990, pp. 87-88), the flow of ideas and the conversations about action-oriented projects or about the everyday does not stop, because email and other communication technologies such as text messaging and Skype allow people to keep in touch with family, friends and acquaintances (Huntley 2006, pp. 35, 115).

Notions of social capital, of bonding and bridging, of forming strong and weak ties, are readily apparent in the descriptions of the way participants establish social relations. Aimé uses the phrase "*build social capital*" to describe his attempts to create a social circle in the city he has moved to. He also describes the way he has exchanged information with an author through the website of Amnesty International. In the context of social capital, these could be labelled 'bonding' and 'bridging', two ways in which social capital can be generated, where bonding refers to what happens in social networks with those close to oneself both physically and emotionally, and bridging refers to what happens in social networks where one may have only an intellectual or rational relationship. The sharing of information is a significant activity for a number of the participants. Although for most it may be little more than an activity appropriate in the context, Nick would seem to have something like Granovetter's notion of strong and weak ties in mind. According to Granovetter (1973), strong ties exist when people know each other well and support each other, participate in common activities or tasks, and

bring together resources, including information, to be used by the wider group. Weak ties are based on knowing each other well enough to exchange information but without strong emotional intensity or intimacy, and are instrumental in bringing new information into a group or to an individual. Nick sets out how internet communities and websites are useful sources for people who want to get started on something, becoming involved in an issue or getting to know people who belong to a group, and contrasts this behaviour with "*people who are really involved in that issue already, because those people have plenty of ways to have ties to other people in the community*".

Bessant's view of the internet as a democratic space (2000) is upheld by the views of those involved in some way in the development of websites for organisations engaged in social action; this might be expected, but it is also supported by the other participants. There is acknowledgement that the internet is a significant tool for building social capital, as Shah, Kwak and Holbert found (2001), and there is some acceptance of Kavanaugh et al.'s findings (2005a; 2005b) that the internet is a tool which can build strong ties from the weak ties of those who exchange information. Participants also acknowledge that both bonding and bridging occur online so that online interactions widen and deepen experience, as Norris (2002) asserted. However, there is also resistance from some participants to the notion that strong ties can develop through use of the Internet without emotional and physical interaction.

There is no evidence that these young people are apathetic or disengaged from the issues in their community. However, it does appear that they do not relate to issues in the way they are usually presented to the general public, nor do they wish to take on the policy platforms of traditional party politics. These findings support the findings in Vromen's study (2007) that young people are likely to follow their own interests and concerns rather than adopting those of the mature adults around them.

By and large, these young people acknowledge that the creation of social capital is a public action. They do not necessarily need to belong to formal organisations to achieve it. It is enough for them to have taken part in something quite informal, as Onyx et al. (2005, p. 24) found. It appears that this notion of 'being a member' is being revisited,

and that 'membership' is being used to refer to both formal and informal arrangements. Although some have mentioned their membership of organisations like Amnesty International, others are involved in informal groups, like Jonathan's gardening club and Katherine's bushcare group, both of which are led by someone with the passion to bring people together and garner the expertise necessary for the task. None of the listservs or discussion forums referred to by the participants require people to become members, except possibly in the technical sense of needing to register to log in. The organisations with which Brett, Tom and Kelly are associated exist only online, without the need for formal membership, although those who register are able to access more information and a wider range of services, including posting information and opinions.

However, some participants do not consider the creation of social capital to be a public action of social allegiance, taking place outside of private living spaces. Indeed, some deliberately refrain from sharing information and experiences in contexts that can be considered public and part of the public record. Matei and Ball-Rokeach (2003) claim that use of the internet may mean that involvement in civil society is increasingly happening where it cannot be seen. Previously, involvement in civil society happened in public – 'outdoors' – whereas now there is evidence that people engage with civil society 'indoors', making it a private rather than a public action (Wellman et al. 2003, p. 6 of 29), as Tristan's involvement with the signing of petitions and other actions online (as described in Chapter 5) contrasted with his unwillingness to take part in public demonstrations shows.

The dichotomy of public and private actions may find a parallel in the two views of social capital expressed by some participants. Aimé's and Alastair's interviews provide evidence of two coexisting views of social capital. One view focuses on exchanging information to make the world a better place to live and the other on communicating so that one is supported in everyday life. Both participants acknowledge the power of communication through thoughts and ideas. Alastair puts considerable effort into constructing his identity online, yet he and Aimé would each place a higher priority on meeting people in the pub to seek support for the dilemmas of everyday life. In other words, they are using the 'outdoors' to create a kind of social capital that focuses on

them as individuals. They are also emphasising the importance of face-to-face interactions for creating 'private' social capital, 'indoors'.

It could be argued that Aimé views having private or personal social capital as a pre-requisite to being able to create public social capital. It may seem that there is a parallel here with Putnam's bonding capital and bridging capital, where bonding capital is seen to precede bridging capital. However, Giddens offers another way to conceptualise this (1991, pp. 214-216). He sees it as part of an approach to 'make the world a better place'. He categorises social action of previous generations as being 'emancipatory politics', where the goal was to take part in collective action aimed at righting wrongs, identifying injustices and bringing freedom to the oppressed. He dubs social action for Generations X and Y 'lifestyle politics', noting that young people are seeking to make decisions that will make their world one they feel comfortable living in. This is a significant shift as it means that social capital and action for social change are centred on the individual and that what is good for the individual comes to be good for others.

These findings appear to support Onyx et al.'s findings from a study of rural youth in Australia (2005, p. 24) that young people's view of social capital differed from that of older people to some extent. In particular, young people expressed the need for belonging to a group of friends through factors such as getting help from friends and feeling at home in the community. In this study, the need for belonging to a group of friends is expressed in a number of different ways, from Aimé's and Alastair's desire to spend time at the pub, to Katherine's insistence on the importance of the emotional in interactions with others, to the constant references to the use of email, phone and text messaging for keeping in touch. Onyx et al. also noted a strong emphasis on living by moral principles, which similarly was evident in this study (2005, p. 26). Onyx et al. found that young people engaged in 'unstructured social participation' indicated by activities such as the number of people one speaks to each day, and speculated that this could reflect a kind of 'youth social agency'. Although activities such as this do not seem to be of concern to these members of Generation X and Generation Y, there could be some link with the desire in the participants in this study to take action in matters that affect their own lives.

Following Shah, Kwak and Holbert's findings (2001) that views of social capital differ between and among the generations, there is evidence that the members of Generation X in this study view social capital differently from the members of Generation Y. The members of Generation Y in the study seem more likely to seek social and emotional engagement in the creation of social capital, although it is members of Generation X – Aimé and Alastair – who note the importance of the social and emotional engagement of private social capital in maintaining public social capital. They place importance on the way they give themselves credibility online and create a sense of authenticity. It is only the bloggers from Generation X – Alastair and Rachel – who express similar views as they deliberately construct their professional and personal credibility. The members of Generation Y in the study favour making conversation with others and they value the ability to establish discussions which can be continued over time and which may or may not be goal-oriented. The members of Generation X are more likely to focus on the exchange of information and goal-oriented actions. From this, one might anticipate that these members of Generation X would also expect a greater sense of the collective, of solidarity with others. Indeed it is three of the Generation X participants who discuss the lack of reciprocity in some of their relationships, where they observe that that they receive information but rarely have anything to send in return, they do not understand why people present information without knowing who will read that information and whether there will be any return, and they have observed others telling their story without any need for acknowledgement. It is also members of Generation X in this study who are more likely to say that they have been members of organisations. Similarly, they are more likely to have been involved in the creation of organisations that in turn create social capital. It could be claimed that these factors might be explained by their greater age and experience, yet when they were the age of the study's younger cohort they were already members of organisations and some were already involved with establishing organisations. It could also be claimed that they have differing personalities and motivations that lead to different outcomes, but the investigation of this claim is outside the scope of this study.

Conclusion

Their high level of education suggests that these members of Generation X and Generation Y would be more likely to be engaged in creating social capital (cf Putnam

2000), and in fact they were selected into the study on the basis of their involvement in civil society. Yet, in most respects, the findings of this study on social capital confirm and extend the findings from studies conducted in other places using other methodologies.

Three conclusions can be drawn about social capital. First, these members of Generation X and Generation Y actively seek to create social capital, but not necessarily according to recognised measures. They do not consider that young people are apathetic and uninterested in participating in civil society. However, they do not necessarily express their interests and action in ways that are acknowledged by older adults. Second, social capital seems to have two manifestations, the first and the predominant one being related to the creation of a secure personal environment which they are comfortable to inhabit, and the second being related to 'making the world a better place', in a wider societal sense, for example through an understanding of diversity. Third, embodied interactions are both necessary and not necessary for building social capital. When they consider social capital a good in society at large or in a wider community, these young people acknowledge that social capital can be created through online interactions, using the internet to interact with people they do not know and have not met. However, when they consider social capital something that relates to their own wellbeing and support, most of them require at least some face-to-face interaction or the possibility of meeting the other person or people.

Despite the congruence between these findings and those of previous studies, there is a need for further and ongoing research. The pace of change in the availability and use of information and communication technologies is such that these findings will soon be outdated both from the perspective of the individual and from the perspective of organisations that seek to engage people in civil society through the internet and other technologies. More significantly, the divergences noted in this study between the members of Generation X and the members of Generation Y suggest that there is a need to clarify whether these divergences are merely another example of younger people yet to adopt the thoughts and customs of the generations before them or whether these findings signal a fundamental shift in the way social relations and involvement in civil society are conducted, as Giddens (1991) suggests.

Chapter 8 BELONGING IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Perceptions of civil society

In this chapter, I explore the ways participants perceive civil society. The chapter is based on the interview data and seeks to uncover the perceptions that participants have of civil society and the ways they foster its development. The emphasis in the study was on belonging, so it was not surprising that participants focused on notions of inclusion. They presented several conceptualisations of civil society. Most participants tend to see civil society vested in organisations and societal structures, some consider that civil society is an essential element of the world they live in, and others see it as a way of being. Whichever approach they take, there is an inherent sense of shared values and of what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Yet this very focus on belonging to civil society also contained the basis on which people might not belong or might be excluded.

Conceptualising civil society

When civil society is created in organisations

There is no single view among the participants of what constitutes civil society. Yet there is something of a recognition that there is an almost expected response to the question, something akin to the answer to a question in an exam. Jonathan talks about "*your three circles, about state, civil society and the private sector*" and Tristan asserts that civil is "*all NGOs*". Annette says "*I know that the standard answer is that it's the third edge of the triangle, it's not the state and it's not the private sector ...*". Angela and Annette both refer to it as "*a contested concept*" which has a focus on organisations, and they seem to acknowledge that one can bring one's own interpretation to this concept.

Angela not only defines civil society in organisational terms but also gives an example of an organisation and its actions. She says:

I guess civil society brings to mind ideas of looking after the welfare of people in the community and upholding a sense of shared values and ethics, so GetUp – that's exactly what GetUp tries to do. It looks out for the rights of individuals, such as the democratic rights of people to have a fair trial, like David Hicks.

Annette takes a broader perspective and expresses concerns about the relationships between civil society and government and the reaction of other organisations who believe that they have a legitimate voice on issues. She notes that it is not easy to reconcile competing perspectives and she:

struggle[s] with [the concept of civil society]. ... I think a lot of people in development, civil society or social justice say we are not about government and we are not about the private sector and we're different and we do things differently and believe different things. And I think that's true in a lot of ways, but at the same time I think it's foolish to be completely separate and to not use the funding opportunities or the contacts or the ways ... I guess civil society ... is a way for people to come together to decide their own identity, to share their things in common, their values, a way to organise, but separate from the state. ... [I]n terms of politics and development, it's about people who share a common interest and a sense of goal and purpose ... and I also think that civil society in a development role or social justice [role] has a sense of its legitimacy or argues for its legitimacy, whereas other people question [that legitimacy]. You know, like the right wing think-tanks say: "Well, who do you think you represent? Why do you have a right to have a voice on these things?" ... But the fact is that they are doing the same things but for different ends.

David G. also starts from an organisational perspective but includes the state and the market in his view of civil society. He is not sure how far to go in including associations in civil society. He says:

> *definitely for me civil society includes the state and the market, the ways in which people get together, in formal ways, to advance particular concerns or interests that they have, and I guess I most commonly associate it with people who are active on social justice or environmental concerns. I have a less clear understanding of what civil society might be beyond those more formal associations, obviously NGOs and the media I would include and student associations ... But I'm not sure to what extent I would include ... something much more informal.*

When civil society is about interacting with others

Some participants see civil society vested in the actions and interactions of people and not necessarily formalised into organisations. James envisages civil society existing "*when the person receiving the email has the desire to connect with the people sending it*", a context which could presuppose the existence of an organisation or at least a group. However, for Alastair, civil society can be "*a network of people who are in contact to talk about their network, how it works and how it affects other people's networks*", and for David T., civil society forms when "*people begin to negotiate and discuss positions*". Brett similarly notes that:

> *civil society is about relationships between individuals and different elements of a community either structured or unstructured [and is a] counterpoint to government and to business*

and says he "*uses the words [civil society and community] interchangeably*".

When civil society is a way of being

"*Isn't everyone part of civil society*?" This was Rachel's outburst, as the alternative for her could only be "*uncivil society*". This view that civil society is something that we are

all part of was shared by Katherine, who noted that "*most of us participate in civil society every day, subconsciously*". Isaac, who is "*not really familiar with the term [civil society] ... might define it as communities in real life*". Sunil is reminded of Rousseau's notion of the social contract, where individuals agree to moderate certain behaviours in return for the government ensuring their security and a sense of freedom.

Some participants do not see civil society as being vested in the collective, but rather as being intrinsic to the individual, as a way of being. For some participants, this is conceptualised through focusing on the meaning of the word 'civil' at a personal level, a level of values. For Robert, it is about "*abiding by your principles and moral views*". Similarly, Isaac says that he just tries "*to do what I think is right*". Similarly, for Alastair, the notion of civil society may be related to the "*old-fashioned notion of civil*", that is to say, polite behaviour online "... *if for no altruistic reason [at least] for your own potentially financial or physical wellbeing*". Alan was "*not a big fan of the word civil. I have no idea what it stands for. For me, to be civil is very close to being humane. It's more than how you treat people.*"

Anna J. was involved in volunteering "*at St Vincent de Paul and a few sports camps, and some stuff in nursing homes through school*". Through these activities, she thought she might have "*contribut[ed] time and skills and knowledge ... to building up an organisation or a group of people that without that volunteer time wouldn't be able to progress*". She used an ironic gesture of 'air inverted commas' to emphasise that doing these activities was "*hopefully 'making the world a better place'*", indicating that this was possibly an outcome expected by others, but certainly an expected response in answer to a question about the reason for becoming involved in volunteering.

When civil society is a space for political action

For Tom, civil society is "*the democratic space in a society. ... It's the space where – it's hard to define, isn't it – I think it's to do with people's community participation and access to decision-making processes, access to having their voices heard ...*". For others, civil society provides a context to work for social change. Brett has "*chosen civil society as the place to achieve social change*", putting his "*energies in those places ...*

in civil society where I think we are able to articulate an alternative vision and also harness the resources to achieve that". He sees that it is part of his goal:

> *to build civil society and to build social capital and ... to create an environment where individuals and community groups and lobby groups and so on are able to work with what unites them as opposed to what divides them.*

Alastair comments: "*As grandiose as it seems, I'd like to be part of seeing a regime change in this country.*"

Kelly's vision of civil society through the organisation ActNow is also a political one, although based on the concept of the 'Everyday Maker', a notion she has gained through her reading. She describes this person as:

> *the person who wants to know more about issues, do something practical, you know, not be the expert citizen who joins the youth advisory board ... but people who do things everywhere, every day.*

When civil society is a multifaceted concept

Katherine sees civil society as a multi-faceted concept, concerned with at least three ways of engaging in it. She speaks in terms of duty at a personal level, at a community or smaller locality and at a global level. At a personal level, "*being politically aware and politically responsible is part of participating in civil society*". She explains:

> *I think that reading the newspaper is at the moment my way of contributing to the political civil society because I want to make myself as aware and up to date as I can for when the election time comes around [she would soon be voting for the first time] because I think that's one of the ways that a lot of people participate in civil society. And I think it's important to participate responsibly.*

At the level of the locality, Katherine has been involved "*participating in community drives, community events, Clean Up Australia, bush regeneration*" and "*probably through Scouts*". She also participates at the global level: "*In terms of the international civil society, I would participate by donating to charities and doing volunteer work.*" She elaborates on her understanding of civil society at a global level. In one of her university courses, Katherine learned about the concept of global civil society; "*about BandAid and how that triggered in the 1980s a real change in civil society and how civil society became an international responsibility rather than an individual duty*". She believes that there is a tension between civil society which exists "*by physically meeting people and coordinating initiatives*" and a global movement where "*Australia, for example, [might be] fulfilling its sense of duty to the civil society, not necessarily participating in it*". In discussing involvement of people she knows in the Oxfam IYP's online workshops, she makes a distinction between taking part in civil society and "*fulfilling one's sense of duty as an Australian citizen to help rectify a world problem*". In her view, the Australian organisation which supports the development and operation of these workshops is carrying out its global responsibilities and Australian participants involved in setting up or facilitating one of these workshops are fulfilling their role and duty as Australians.

Excluding and being excluded

Each of these conceptualisations of civil society not only sets out what it means to belong, but also carries the seeds of exclusion.

David G. shows one of the weaknesses of taking an organisational perspective when he considers that the definition of civil society he gives means he would then be excluded from civil society. He goes on to say:

> *I'm probably not part of civil society because I'm not part of a formal organisation, so I have trouble seeing how I'm part of civil society.*

Notions of what it means to interact in civil society led some participants to exclude others, a second mode of exclusion. Jonathan, who expects ongoing commitment in

civil society based on purposeful dialogue, finds the casual, conversational approach to discussion of issues unsatisfactory and dismisses it as "*just conversation*" (see p. 174). Alastair, the "*notorious pedant*", finds it difficult to take seriously someone who does not take care with the way they express their thoughts – bad grammar, sloppy expression and spelling mistakes all suggest that this is not a person whose views should be taken seriously (see p. 120).

A third mode of exclusion occurs when participants do not understand the way in which actions happen or when they do not have control over the consequences of their actions. Anna J. does not take part in the fundraising program her grandmother supports because she does not understand how clicking on a website leads to a cup of rice being donated (see p. 111). Tristan does not take part in actions where he might be photographed because he does not know how those photographs might be used in the future (see p. 121).

Another way of excluding oneself from civil society is to represent it as something that is seen to exist elsewhere, relating to a way of being for others. David G. refers to the irony of working in an organisation involved in civil society when he says: "*we talk about civil society all of the time, but it's in other countries*".

Interpretations of the literature can also lead to a sense of belonging to civil society as well as to exclusion. Kelly's view is that it is important to find in the literature conceptualisations that are closer to the reality of their lives, and she introduces the work of Henrik Bang. On the other hand, Ben argues that the way some writers use Habermas's notion of the public sphere excludes communications that do not meet their definitions of rationality, but he has not been in a position to take part in those discussions because "*I didn't have a vocabulary to speak back to them with*".

Interpreting civil society

The perceptions of civil society held by the participants in the study reflect positions apparent in the literature of civil society, with no one position dominant and with most participants simultaneously holding more than one perspective, often as they acknowledge that the approach they favour does not exactly match their experiences.

Taken together, these perceptions of civil society can be categorised according to the three factors which are at the heart of civil society for Edwards (2004), that is, the notion of the collective and belonging which counters individualism, the notion of creativity and the contribution individuals and groups can make to their society, and the notion of shared values and values-based action which, although not necessarily universally accepted, opposes both state ideology and the power of the market in some measure. However, there is a tension between the collective nature of Edwards' view of civil society and the individualism expressed to some extent by some of the participants.

One of the strongest links participants make is, not surprisingly, with the most commonly documented view of civil society, that it is a space of collective action, separate from the market, the state and the family. They place emphasis on organisations and associational membership and define their own sense of belonging in terms of membership of a formal organisation, a position reminiscent of Putnam's in *Bowling Alone* (2000). This position may be also derive from their involvement as volunteers, mostly in an organisational context (cf Putnam 2000, pp. 64–65). Annette notes the centrality of these organisations as they are often accepted as the spokesperson on an issue, but cautions that the membership cannot claim to represent the wider society.

Other participants consider civil society to be a space where people can discuss issues and where information and points of view can be exchanged in a manner reminiscent of Habermas's notion of the public sphere (1989). The emphasis they place on exchanging information, establishing conversation and conducting rational discussion which pervades much of the interview data, as explored in Chapters 6 and 7, reinforces the strength of this reflection. Thus civil society can be taken as the space where democratic processes are practised (Nielsen 2008, p. 39).

Another perspective which emerges from the data, for example in the interviews with James and Kelly, can be related to Beck's view that one does not have to be a member of an organisation to be part of civil society, one only has to work together with others as active citizens (Beck 2001, pp. 158-162). James emphasises the importance of wanting to create connections with others. One can, he says, maintain one's

individuality, making decisions in one's own best interests, at the same time as being concerned for others.

Some participants see civil society as a space for political action in ways that are reminiscent of Giddens' view of emancipatory politics and more particularly, especially from Kelly's perspective, of lifestyle politics (1991, pp. 214-216). Here, there is not necessarily any group of like-minded people to join; rather, as Giddens explains, as people make strategic decisions on how to live their lives and create the kind of world they wish to live in, they acknowledge the interdependencies which exist in a globalised world among markets, states, policies and consumers. A final perspective, expressed only by one participant, Katherine, shifts the focus from the involvement of the individual in a collective, which has the potential to acknowledge two levels of engagement – the personal and the collective – to a global level, where the sense of duty and accountability might overwhelm the sense of moral responsibility inherent in civil society from a personal or local perspective. This perspective seems to bring together Giddens' lifestyle politics with Beck's observation that "Freedom's children practise a seeking, experimenting morality that ties together things that seem mutually exclusive" (2001, p. 159).

The strong engagement with civil society is reflected in the perception of civil society online. There seems to be an air of optimism for what can be achieved in civil society through a website, especially in the fostering of information exchange, debate and discussion. Those involved in organisations which have a website and use information and communication technologies acknowledge the place these technologies have in the lives of their members and adherents, as discussed in Chapter 4. Organisations such as ActNow, GetUp and Vibewire could not exist without information and communication technologies.

The websites the participants in this study are associated with give their organisations the benefits which Naughton (2001) identified as significant in the development of civil society. In particular, they provide easier access to information and to published data, making it possible for groups to act outside of the traditional structures, bypassing gatekeepers and long-standing controls and helping people to create, find and maintain

communities of interest. Although at least one participant is aware of the potential inequities of access and subsequent damage to civil society at large, as Levine (2004) suggests , this optimism for what can be achieved online is almost completely untempered.

Reflecting on my interpretation of civil society

It is usually the researcher who interprets the data, the thought and actions of participants in a study. However, in this study, almost of all the participants engage in interpretation, referring to the conceptual views of others and using the literature as a mediator. They seemed to use it to create links between them and others and, significantly, between them and me. There are several ways of understanding this interpretation by the participants. Several of us had been involved in community projects where we had determined a common conceptual background by sharing articles and book chapters. To this extent, they are continuing norms and standards of behaviour set several years ago. They all knew I was doing a research study and perhaps they wanted to show me that they were well informed and thoughtful about one of the central concerns of my study. As noted earlier, a number of them approached the discussion of civil society as though they were providing short answers to examination questions. Many of them seemed to react as though they had to represent a view of associational civil society. Perhaps this comes from university studies, which then becomes part of the 'folklore' of engagement in community action. Each of these ways of understanding the interpretations of participants indicates that the participants use the literature itself as another way of establishing a civil society and of creating a sense of belonging and of contributing.

Thus, I turn to reflecting on the processes of interpretation at work here. I have acknowledged earlier (see p. 78) how I am both part and not part of the group. I can claim to be a peer when we work together on bush regeneration projects or on organisational or issue-driven events. In a discussion of civil society, I want to be part of this civil society and it probably inevitable that I will shift the interpretation into my conceptual space. So, I infer that, by and large, these participants behave as though they were in the public sphere. I take their concern for discussion, blogging, exchange of

information and so on as evidence of rational communication, something at the heart of civil society, because that is how I understand these behaviours.

I also see their concerns and behaviours as different from mine, but I seek to belong, conceptually at least, to their concerns for social change. Thus, I turn to Giddens' notions of 'emancipatory politics' and 'lifestyle politics'. The concerns for equality, social justice, universality and so on are an inherent part of my own view of the outcome of a well-functioning civil society. 'Emancipatory politics' encapsulates my approach to actions in civil society, the one I found in the literature and actions over many years as a citizen and activist. 'Lifestyle politics', taking on those issues which allow one to make the world more the kind of place one would want to live in, seems to reflect the way I understand and interpret the behaviours of the young people in this study. Giddens' categorisation allows me to link these young people and their perceptions of civil society to me, without claiming some universality of approach.

In making this claim, I reflect again and acknowledge that Beck considered scholarly information a substitute for personal experience (2002, p. 53), and this has given me another way to claim a link to the civil society of the participants in this study.

It would have been possible to conclude that the participants in this study would recognise Edwards' view of civil society (2004), but many would want to go beyond its concern for collectivity, to emphasise the importance of the individual and the individual's choices of action. But this would not have allowed the complex interplay of thought, experience and understanding of the scholarly literature to be set out. For the young people in this study, civil society is about thinking and enacting a set of behaviours which contain both belongings and exclusions. Through their thinking and enacting, they reflect on their own behaviour and the behaviour of others and they use what they have read and learned, incorporating and modifying the norms and standards for civil society they find in studies and in their practical experiences of civil society.

Chapter 9 UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I present different ways that the participants have conceptualised and experienced the notion of community. I explore their conceptions and experiences in the light of the literature on community and conclude that the concept of community is not obsolete for these young people. I also note that there is a disjuncture between their conceptualisations of community and their lived experiences. On the one hand, their conceptualisations tend to support a traditional view of community; on the other hand, their actions and experiences suggest the need to shift the boundaries of the concept. I also present an observer's interpretation of the community of these young people and suggest that community is both conspicuous and inconspicuous, and that it is inconspicuous community that seems to be more significant for the participants in this study.

Community from the inside

Intellectualising community

Participants in the study intellectualise the concept of community. Like the responses to the question of how they understood civil society, the responses to the question of what community meant often sounded like the answer to an examination question of the 'short answer' type. Rachel acknowledged this notion of the learned response with her exclamation of "*Ah, the biggest question!*"

For Tom, community has a social focus, perceived by those who are part of the group:

> *A community is a group of people who self-identify. They have something in common, whether that's an interest or a geographic location.*

For Anna J., on the other hand, community is based on common interest or collaborative action.

> *Community is people coming together to share a common interest or to support one another or to do activities with the aim of reaching a common goal.*

Angela described community as:

> *a group of people who have certain things in common, which are information, [connection] with each other and general support as well; in a general sense that's what I think community is.*

Isaac began with an apparently learned response before pausing and commenting:

> *it's really hard [to answer] because you can be part of many communities at the same time and communities overlap and they can interact with each other in quite diverse ways, so it's quite a broad question really, so it's hard for me to answer.*

Isaac's comment indicates that not only does he acknowledge multiple definitions of community and the existence of many communities but also that a single individual can belong to more than one community.

Annette, in measured tones, acknowledged that, whatever answer one gave, any definition of community could be contested:

> *I think it's difficult [to state a definition] because there has been a lot of academic debate about it and there's a lot of debate in different communities about what it means to belong to one or to another. For me, it's about a sense of belonging, about being with people that you have some sense of familiarity with and shared values and shared identity, a sense of recognition and of being able to be that identity within that space in quite a comfortable way.*

All but two of the participants seemed to look inward towards "*people that you have some sense of familiarity with ... a sense of recognition*" (Annette). Alastair and Brett both took the opposite view, with Alastair noting:

> *Community can form around people hating each other's guts because then you get the supporters and the peacemakers and all the various ecological niches of human beings that make up any society, fitting around a schism in their community*

and Brett observing that "*it can collectivise us because we have a common enemy*".

Living community

Throughout the interviews, participants in the study gave examples from their own backgrounds and experiences, which in many instances gave a clear picture of the way they lived the notion of community. The examples presented here represent a range of perspectives.

Therese has lived a sense of community based on geographic proximity and centuries of tradition, and now in Sydney experiences its absence:

> *not having gone to school here, I don't have family networks here ... I'm kind of lacking a connection ... coming from a small rural background where community was very definitely "in this place" and these people and my family have lived in this house for however many ... 200 years or something.*

Now the reality of living thousands of kilometres away has "*probably challenged my notion of community*". Therese explains how she has deliberately gone about getting to know people socially and professionally. She has joined a surf club and met "*a whole lot of Australian women ... I guess that's the community of interest thing*". However, she has recognised that her geographic community had a life "*around the local church or the local farmers' association or whatever*" and that she has had to "*go out and construct a civil participation, rather than feel naturally linked to it, but I think*

that's probably something people do in the big metropolitan centres". Her volunteering with Amnesty International and IYP and her work in civil society organisations has led her "*over time [to] become part of this community of practice*". Through her work in IT, she has also become part of online communities.

James uses the metaphor of the handshake, which, he explains, was developed by Ros Diprose, an Associate Professor at the University of New South Wales, to symbolise community as a reciprocated relationship. James has established a website promoting the concept of the commons, so that there would be a space for people to share ideas outside of the context of "*economic man and the utilitarian*". Through this venture he "*has tried to engage in the debates*":

> *[I don't] believe that we naturally form communities with anyone or civil society relationships with anyone, just based on a form of recognition ... you need to keep working at it. ... I think it has to be active or we just become strangers and I think that explains why we woke up one morning, why a lot of progressive Australians woke up one morning and saw Tampa*[2] *and couldn't understand why that had happened, you know, why the Australian public turned their back on some people who were really struggling.*

James reiterates the two interrelated ideas, that communities don't form naturally and that we have to be active to keep a sense of connection. In reference to developing this website, he comments "*I'm working at it ... you have to be active*".

Sunil, like James, sees the online environment as a kind of public sphere. Here, he "*can meet and engage with people with similar interests and viewpoints as [him]self rather than being forced by the limits of current media ownership to particular opinions or paradigms*". Because he is able to read different perspectives or points of view, he does not feel as marginalised as he otherwise might be by 'mainstream media'. He believes

[2] MV Tampa, a Norwegian vessel, rescued over 400 Afghans from a sinking fishing vessel in international waters between Australia and Indonesia in August 2001 and the Australian government under John Howard refused the ship permission to enter Australian waters.

that "*much of Australian media ignores people like me, who are labelled 'of ethic appearance' or more insidiously 'of middle-eastern appearance*"'. Here, his bodily identity does not intrude into his relations with others. In Isaac's experience, too, it is possible for community to form online even when postings are by people who cannot be identified. He gives the example of 4chan/b/, as discussed in Chapter 6. He asserts that, through an exchange of information, a sense of community can exist, even though people "*might not have a unified set of morals or ethics*". Unlike Isaac, who is not concerned by not knowing who he is interacting with, Sunil has found himself in situations online:

> *which were more disturbing than in real life ... as you could never know if the new person you were interacting with wasn't the same person you'd asked to leave you alone, except with a new user name.*

Sunil recognises the potential anomaly of his position and relates this fear of not being able to see someone's face to the debate taking place in Britain at the time about whether Muslim women in public positions such as teaching should be able to wear the *niqab*, which obscures the face:

> *In the UK ... there's a debate about the wearing of the niqab, the full-face veil worn by some devout Muslim women. Some politicians, like the former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and the Prime Minister Tony Blair (as well as John Howard), have raised concerns that being unable to see someone's face makes it difficult to relate to them personally. In many ways, the internet still suffers from this.*

Katherine, who considers that community is "*a sense of commonality or togetherness based on certain criteria and recognition of that by those involved and ... some tangible way of expressing that*", has "*never experienced a sense of community*" online. As discussed in Chapter 5, (p. 122), her concern is that computer-based communication prevents one from getting to know what might be paraphrased as 'the true person' and

that the emphasis on the exchange of information has the potential to transform people into artefacts that carry messages, such as "*a piece of paper saying bed for sale*".

Rachel has a long-standing involvement in online communities, and believes that they "*evolve organically*" and that "*to become a true community, [people] need to voluntarily create links to one another*". Yet she also notes that she often facilitates connections between people, trying "*to bring all of my contacts together, using the internet and using email*", giving people "*the opportunity to be part of that bigger thing*".

For Tristan, physical co-presence or its possibility is important for him to establish a relationship online with someone, although once he has made the acquaintance he attempts to keep up contact. One of his "*bizarre ethical rules*" is that he does not have any friends online that he has never met or is unlikely to meet. He thinks it is "*bordering on creepy*" to make contact with someone just because they share the same interests, and he favours having experiences in common even if the experiences were not shared. He recognised this might not seem logical to an outsider:

> *If you both like the same TV shows and movies you are probably going to have a fair amount in common, whereas if you both happened to have lived in Sydney, there's four and a half million people here and those connections aren't as strong, whereas in my mind they are.*

Communication technologies are important to Tristan as they are fundamental to maintaining the notion of community: "*communities were all about knowing what the other person was doing, feeling some connection to what they were doing*". This information would just be about "*ordinary things*", like knowing that a friend "*Just got up, very tired, had a big night last night*". This superficial level of community is matched by the transience of relationships:

> *[My] community changes all of the time, like at university, friendships aren't generally formed based on long sustained*

interaction at the start, they are fleeting – you really only know someone for a ten to twelve week period.

Conceptions of community

The concepts of community intellectualised by the participants reflect the literature. It may, therefore, be no coincidence that, as already noted in the discussion of perceptions of civil society, the responses sound like answers to an examination question, mirroring points that participants have learned formally. Annette refers directly to her knowledge of the scholarly debates, Isaac shows his understanding of the link between community and identity, and Angela, without acknowledging it, presents the three components which Rheingold (1994, p. 13; 2000, p. 109) considers are fundamental to community: social network capital, knowledge capital, and communion. The participants come from a variety of study backgrounds, taking different degrees from different universities, so that the prevalence of the examination answer style of response is not a feature of a shared academic background, but may be a reflection of one of the guiding principles of their social interactions.

The lived examples of community can be analysed to show the overlaps with and divergences from the concepts of community documented in the literature.

Therese's experience of community has been one of stability, based on locality and commonality, with a long tradition of social relationships. She makes the point that community and civil society were one and the same for her. This seems to fit with the traditional view of community. Yet, when she came to Sydney as a migrant, she found herself disembedded, individualised, because of the disintegration of that traditional community and thus, she found herself in a situation where she had to take steps to construct a new set of social relationships and where for some time her social network grew out of her work network, an occurrence which matches what Wittel (2001, p. 69) proposes. She also makes the point that she found it necessary to volunteer with organisations in order to re-establish herself in civil society.

James's emphasis on the reciprocated nature of community was, as he explained, linked to Ros Diprose's metaphor of the handshake and also to Marcel Mauss's idea of the gift,

underpinning exchange relationships. This also has elements of a traditional view of community. The establishment of the Commons Institute derived from his concern with common ownership over ideas and the expression of ideas, again potentially a notion that derives from a traditional view of community. Yet his concern with the need to work at maintaining community has elements of Wittel's notion of 'catching up' with people, swapping news, updating the exchange of information (Wittel 2001, pp. 66-67). It also has something of Nancy's notion of the need to constantly strive against the disintegration of society (Nancy 1991), so that, in the future, social relations that do not need to be mediated can once again exist.

Isaac's lived community is one that is based on the sharing of information, from which something new is created, and where there is no expectation that people will share values or beliefs. This might seem to be a close match for Wittel's notion of network sociality (Wittel 2001, p. 68). However, the 4chan/b/ community is also one which in its relatively short history (since 2003) has created a number of stories and narratives which have become part of the mythology of the community and beyond, and this might place it alongside Sennet's narrative sociality, closer to traditional notions of community (Wittel 2001, p. 53).

Sunil's experience of community online mirrors Anderson's notion of the imagined community (1983; 1991). He is linked through what he reads to others whom he will probably never meet, and he feels a connection to them that overcomes the marginalisation he senses in his everyday life.

Katherine's concern is for the way in which people, with their emotions and vivacity, can so easily be removed from interactions, transmuted into information, as in her example of the 'girl with red hair' being replaced by a 'piece of paper' and commodified in an exchange process which values written communication above the spontaneity of conversation. Her concern with commodification, this time her own, is apparent in her description of her reasons for not persisting in her membership of the Chinese social networking site and finds resonance in Knorr Cetina's notion of sociality with objects (Knorr Cetina 1997, pp. 11-12).

Rachel is not at all upset by the notion of the commodification of relationships; rather, her community is one based on exchange, where what is exchanged is her social relationships, commodified and technologised into the contents of her email address book or her 'MySpace friends' (Knorr Cetina 1997).

Tristan's lived experience of community closely parallels Wittel's overview of network sociality (2001). Four of the five features that Wittel identifies are evident in Tristan's description of his lived community. First, the use of information and communication technologies is fundamental to Tristan's way of life. Second, he is constantly creating social relationships and maintaining and updating them. Third, his relationships with people are transient and he rarely gets to know people beyond a superficial level. Fourth, he is content to exchange information with people in these transient relationships on trivial matters. He is not yet in the full-time workforce, so it is not possible to comment on the blurring of the boundaries between work and play, Wittel's fifth feature.

Understanding community from the outside

Conspicuous community

As an observer of the participants' intellectualisations of community and descriptions of lived experience, I form another understanding of their conceptualisations and behaviours, creating a categorisation which I label 'conspicuous and inconspicuous community'. I recognise that they are involved in creating and maintaining community in an open and public way. They engage in instrumental actions, following rational logical approaches and make a commitment over time to pursue objectives shared with others. These are the kinds of action that happen 'in the public view or 'outdoors' to use Wellman's phrases (2003). Community in this context is based around embodied collective action. There are sometimes paradoxes in their experiences of and reactions to conspicuous community.

Volunteering is important to all of the participants in this study. In this sense, there are links with Tönnies' notion of gesellschaft, associational community. Mostly, volunteering leads to conspicuous community because it occurs through membership of associations. However, Katherine's bushcare group is not an association but a loosely

coordinated group of people with similar interests, working towards a shared end. They are conspicuous on the days when they are working together on bush regeneration and inconspicuous the rest of the time, whereas ANTaR, where Anna N. has been active, has a continuing associational presence and is conspicuous through its website and mailing address.

The structural aspects of associations seem important to some participants as they formalise guidelines or rules to support their actions. Aimé discusses how it has been important to him to formalise bureaucratic structures to ensure that leadership, planning and action are agreed upon and are open to scrutiny. Robert and Marianne each emphasise the important of having rules and guidelines for online discussion forums.

Sharing interests and exchanging information can also be seen as key elements in creating a sense of togetherness. Annette considers herself a 'connector' as she identifies reports and articles that might be of interest to people and forwards them. Alan is involved in music and the theatre at a local level and considers that the internet allows him to tap into ideas and innovations from overseas and bring them into his local practice, creating links with people overseas and strengthening his relationships at a local level.

Taking part in embodied collective action is often seen as evidence of community, through shared concerns, so that people who engage in demonstrations or marches, such as the Walk Against Warming which GetUp adherents were invited to be part of, are actively part of conspicuous community. Kelly shows how conspicuous community can be created around social action for members of Generation Y. They create their own agenda for action, based on their own interests and concerns, then they share information and plan the actions. The intention may not be for collective action to emerge, but rather for each individual to determine their own interests and to adopt the course of action proposed by others, if that seems appropriate. These actions are proposed through the ActNow website and thus become conspicuous.

Inconspicuous community

For Wellman, community becomes inconspicuous when it is 'indoors', for example when it is created or enacted online. Jonathan refers to the *"visibility you have in an offline community"* and it may be that it is a lack of 'visibility' that enables Tristan to feel comfortable taking actions online. In the context of online interactions of the participants in this study, Anderson's 'imagined community' also leads to an example of an inconspicuous community. People who read GetUp postings on climate change or who sign an ANTaR hand for the Sea of Hands project become part of community, recognising that there are other people who think as they do but without knowing who those other people are. Tönnies identified communities of the mind as one of the three types of community. In their representation as communities of interest, they can easily remain inconspicuous when there is no mechanism to move them from the private, individual realm to the public realm. David T. is engaged in an active community of interest but is reluctant to post because he considers himself less knowledgeable than other members. He describes how "*There's thousands of us that sit on the periphery but are actually part of this group*".

Another 'imagined community' exists based around the scholarly influences these participants share. They have studied at different universities and in different fields of study, from sociology to computing science, from media studies to economics, from law to politics. Yet they are informed, engaged, using examples from the literature to make their point. Ben talks about Habermas and the public sphere to demonstrate his concern with rational discussion, Katherine introduces Richard Dawkins' work to explain her view on morality, and Kelly describes the work of Henrik Bang and his conceptualisation of the EveryDay Maker to position young people's ongoing actions as political actions, contrasting with the experts' positions from the past.

Community can be inconspicuous because its participants are not known to others. Tags and pseudonyms may prevent people from being identified but they do not prevent them from being known, and relationships can form beyond a superficial level in these situations, as Isaac asserts when he says, "*one would think that anonymous postings don't lead to community [but] they actually do*". Anonymity can protect one's identity when one needs a sheltered environment for expressing an opinion. Marianne comments

that in an anonymous discussion forum, "*young kids have become more themselves and it's one of the few places where they can be themselves*", although Robert's view is that anonymity is too often a cover for evading responsibility.

Community is not just inconspicuous because actions take place 'indoors' or because communications are part of an imagined community. It may also be inconspicuous because it is based around intangibles, such as trust, credibility and friendship, rather than action. It is trust that creates the inconspicuous community that Marianne describes. Angela was about to move into a new field and talked about the need to establish herself through her writing among people she does not yet know.

Friendships can lead to inconspicuous community. Friendships formed online may have different characteristics of intimacy and co-presence from those which develop face to face. However, a key feature of both face-to-face and online friendships is the sense of connectedness which exists. Isaac says "*I don't think it's necessary [to have a physical meeting in order to be friends because] from intellectual and emotional bonding you might be able to make friends*". Katherine referred to the inconspicuous community of friendship as "*an insurance policy*". In her view, one needs this sometimes in order to take the risks involved in some types of social action.

Conclusion

Community is a concept which the participants in this study intellectualise, which they can discuss in abstract or theoretical terms. It is something that they think about and which preoccupies them. This suggests that community is a phenomenon that still has a place in the scholarly repertoire, and it needs to be thought about, considered and discussed. It is not obsolete, nor is it irrelevant as an intellectual construct.

There is not necessarily a direct parallel between the intellectualised definitions of community and the lived experiences and stories the participants tell. The definitions, mainly given as short answers, rarely contain contradictions or logical anomalies. The lived experiences of community, which emerge over the course of the interview, do not fit a single concept of community, yet this does not mean that they present a fractured or disjointed view of community. The explanations, justifications and actions of the

participants all show that the notion of community is not only expressed in intellectual terms but is experienced strongly by them. It may not be overstating the case to suggest that the stories of the lived experiences give insight into the notion of the 'good society which Giddens (2000) suggests we seek as a result of being disembedded and which was a utopian ideal for Bauman (1999).

There is certainly much to indicate that participants value elements of community generally reckoned to be traditional, that is, the sense of belonging, of commonality, of recognising and being recognised, of sharing a past whether through stories or experiences. This can be seen to reinforce existing scholarly notions of community.

Yet at the same time, there is evidence of the need to shift the boundaries of those understandings. Each of the stories told here shows evidence of one or more of the elements which follow from the disembedding of individuals from their social relationships and shows to a greater or lesser extent how a person may react. These stories suggest that three possibilities for a concept of community emerge: an extension of Anderson's imagined community, which is perhaps strengthened through involvement in social networking sites such as MySpace; the network sociality proposed by Wittel as the "paradigmatic social form of late capitalism" (2001, p. 71); or the constant striving against the disintegration of society suggested by Nancy (1991).

Here is another reason why community may become inconspicuous, that is, it is subsumed within other concepts. While community is 'out there', conspicuous, in aspects of community that are close to the concepts of civil society, social capital and some forms of social relations, it is also 'in here', inconspicuous, in aspects of community related to social capital, other forms of social relations and aspects of identity or a sense of self. It is found in solidarity with others, as Durkheim proposed (1933), and it is found in shared instrumental action, as Weber suggested (1962). It exists in friendship and shared interests and in membership of associations, as Tönnies indicated (1974), cutting across his views of community and society.

I have created two categories of community – conspicuous and inconspicuous – parallelling the outdoors and indoors dichotomy established by Wellman to

conceptualise a shift in formerly public actions which the internet has permitted – the ability to move public actions, such as signing a petition, into the privacy of one's bedroom. I have done this to draw attention to the strength and influence of inconspicuous community, especially for these members of Generation X and Generation Y. Yet in creating these categories, I have to some extent gone beyond any distinction which participants in the study would make. The relationship between private and public is paradoxical. I would agree with Wittel (2001, p. 71) that the conceptualisation of public and private, of indoors and outdoors, of insiders and outsiders, is one of the key research issues for those interested in social relations and social practices.

CHAPTER 10 WHAT IT MEANS TO THEORISE

C. Wright Mills encouraged researchers to think theoretically, that is, to see the issues and problems in everyday life, to establish empirical studies based on theoretical approaches and to develop theoretical explanations. Theory is an attempt to explain what we observe in the world of human, social activity. It is important not just to observe what happens but to give reasons why things are as they are and to situate them in a much larger context (Mills 1959). Mills considered scholars to be intellectual craftsmen whose responsibility was to develop and use sociological imagination, a technique through which we think ourselves beyond our world of everyday life, giving ourselves the possibility of seeing that world in a broader perspective and being able to explain things in it that we would otherwise take for granted.

In developing our theories – our explanations of how the world around us is connected with the wider world – we do not start with a blank page. Rather, our views have been informed by the theories of previous scholars and researchers. We may incorporate their theories into our own intellectual explanations without any changes, acknowledging as we go our debt to their writings. We may focus on some parts of these theories, accepting some aspects while disagreeing with and rejecting others, and documenting our reasons for doing so. These theories may provide a starting point for us to develop our own thoughts, to elaborate on hints and suggestions or may even enable us to take these thoughts in a completely different direction.

It is this approach to intellectual craftsmanship and developing theory which I have taken as a starting point here. Following Mills, I have seen theories as attempts to explain social conditions which have been observed empirically. The process of explanation involves acknowledging those theoretical views of previous scholars which have informed my own thinking, challenging those which have brought me to disagree

with existing understandings, and propounding new arguments to complement what exists and thus complete the explanation.

However, without a sharper focus, this process of theorising would seem fuzzy, lacking the clarity that leads to understanding. Firstly, it is important to explore what is meant by explanation. The notion of explanation potentially contains three separate activities, each of which can have some part in the development of theory. These three are explication, interpretation and explanation. The term explication refers to a process of clarifying meaning through the use of examples; this process often makes explicit something which had not previously been expressed. The presentation of the participants' voices and perspectives in Chapters 4–9 is based on explication. Interpretation is a process of assigning meaning or significance to something. The discussion of findings in the light of the literature in each of these chapters encompasses interpretation, and these sections are written in the voice of the researcher. Explanation involves clarifying how and why something is so. That is the focus of the section that follows.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider the foundations of theoretical thinking. The theoretical thinking in this study began with the adoption of a theoretical approach from the writing of Clifford Geertz (1993). In his much-quoted passage about the concept of culture, he notes: "It is explication I am after" (1993, p. 5). He argues that ethnographic studies, interpretive studies, are resistant to conceptualisation and that theorising must stay "close to the ground" (1993, p. 24), that is, closely linked to the observed examples of human behaviour. But this does not mean that theories can only relate to what has already been observed. He argues that theories have to survive intellectually. They are adopted, reused, revised and refined, as long as they are useful. And if they continue to be used, they lead to new understandings, continuing their intellectual life. The purpose of theory is to provide a vocabulary in which social human behaviour can be expressed.

Theorising in this study

In this study, my approach to theorising has been informed by the ideas of both Mills and Geertz. I want to go beyond 'explication' to attempt to interpret and explain. In Geertz's terms, I have already developed 'thick descriptions' of the social behaviour of

a group of young people from Generation X and Generation Y in the findings chapters. In these chapters, I have presented conceptualisations based on observed examples of human behaviour, using them to clarify meaning and express a way of understanding thoughts and experiences. I acknowledge that, if I have done this well, I will have managed to "make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given" and importantly for the significance of this study, I will have "include[d] them in the consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1993, p. 30).

Working to create these 'thick descriptions' reminds me of the metaphor of myself as a spider, spinning a web of significance. The spokes of my web represent key ideas from the literature, and I will not have fully explored meanings if I do not explore how the findings in this study compare with findings from other studies and other theorising about community. Thus, each section of explication is followed by a section where these 'thick descriptions' are matched against the literature, so that they can be interpreted and another layer of meaning derived. I have attempted to write an ethnography and avoid producing a "second-degree image repertoire" (Geertz 1988, p. 90) in the process. I have tried to interpret sincerely what I have seen, heard and read. Importantly, I have done my best to steer away from what Geertz refers to as "metascientific reflection"(1988, p. 99).

Neither Mills nor Geertz would stop at interpretation. In this chapter, I take another step. This step is what Mills referred to as explanation, the process of clarifying how and why something is so. Geertz would continue with explication, seen now as a process of refinement. I have no expectation that this study will lead to a shared understanding, to a consensus, but I proceed with a hope that it will continue the debate around key conceptualisations of community. In this chapter, I will begin by following Mills and presenting an explanation. Here, I will seek to present the intellectual decisions I have made in coming to an understanding of the data and the factors that have influenced the making of those decisions. Next, I will emulate Geertz (1993, p. 27), developing a vocabulary for expressing the ideas, experiences and actions of these young people, showing also some of the relationships between phenomena or conceptualisations. This vocabulary will encapsulate words that separately and together

evoke community as experienced by the members of Generation X and Generation Y who participated in this study.

This vocabulary reflects the expressions of those who participated in the study and is limited by their experiences, characteristics and perceptions. There is no claim that this vocabulary would be used by other members of Generation X and Generation Y. These participants do not represent all people born in the 1970s and 1980s, nor even those who have lived in Sydney for some part of their young adulthood. Among the key characteristics which mark them out are their active engagement in civil society, which was one of the criteria for involvement in the study; their links with Sydney, a place where all of them have been involved in civil society and where most of them have been educated; and their level of education, with several of them having completed postgraduate studies and all of them having been involved in university education at the undergraduate level.

I cannot assume that this vocabulary can be taken as the basis for a common language for community; it is my interpretation, as scholar, of the thoughts and experiences of a particular group of young people, members of Generation X and Generation Y. I have attempted to maintain an awareness of myself in this process of interpretation. I as scholar cannot stand separate from 'I as citizen' or from 'I as activist', not only because the questions underpinning this study arise from the interplay of these elements of self but also because I am known to many of the participants as an activist and a scholar and this will have affected their interactions with me.

Before I begin the process of explanation, I will remind myself of the research question I set out to explore and its associated sub-questions.

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y, who are active in civil society, create and understand a sense of community?

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y create their identity and how do others react to this?

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y understand social action and how do they experience it?

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y create community through social relations?

How are members of Generation X and Generation Y engaged in the process of creating social capital?

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y perceive and live civil society?

How do members of Generation X and Generation Y intellectualise and live community?

Explaining community in thought and experience

There are themes that run through the conceptualisations and lived experiences of community, even though there is no single concept or abstraction, and it is important for the process of developing theory that these themes and their interrelationships be set out. Community is not an entity, in the sense of locality. It is a sense of connection with others which encompasses a sense of expectations and a familiarity. When Bauman writes about nostalgia for "community, for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to re-possess" (2001, p. 3), he is presenting a view that is held only by Therese. She is the only participant in the study who has experienced something close to the traditional, static view of community, in a village in rural Ireland. None of the others appear to have experienced this way of living or used it as the basis of their view of community. Thus, community is not associated with nostalgia.

This does not mean that community is not associated with emotion. A sense of connection to others is very much part of community (Lombardo, Zakus & Skinner 2002, pp. 369-370) and this can exist online in the experiences of most participants.

Katherine represents an exception as, in her view, online interactions reduce individuals to an objectified communication that is not only devoid of emotion but also commodifies them. Whereas other participants consider that the exchange of information and the developing of shared understanding are an essential part of creating community, believing that the expectations and familiarity which emerge through interactions are evidence of community, Katherine makes a distinction between the cognitive aspects of sharing intellectual understanding and the emotional aspects of knowing the person. The cognitive aspects of sharing information by itself, as proposed by Levy (1997), is not enough to constitute community in her view, because the social interaction disappears when she is confronted with the equivalent of a piece of paper. One could conclude that a sense of community can exist whenever people feel that they know the other person, but not when a mere transaction takes place.

The sense of community is formed through interactions, and these interactions can take place face to face or they can be mediated by some form of technology, such as mobile phone, text messaging, ICQ, email, discussion forums, social networking sites and other internet-based technologies, as researchers such as Wellman et al. (Quan-Haase et al. 2002; 2005; Wellman et al. 2003; Wellman et al. 2001; Wellman et al. 1996), Surman and Reilly (2003) and Rice et al. (2004) have indicated. These mediated interactions can take place at any point in the duration of the sense of community. They can signal the initiation of a relationship, its development or its maintenance. It is possible for a sense of community to develop without face-to-face interaction, but the possibility of meeting face to face sustains most interactions.

To a large extent, interactions revolve around a process of maintaining a relationship, updating information about people and their activities. These updates do not need to be lengthy or effusive; if they come from an organisation, they do not have to be personalised. One can see similarities between the online interactions of young people in Generation X and Generation Y and the way their parents send Christmas cards. It may be that all that is needed to maintain the sense of connection is the arrival of the Christmas card, the sense of connection being damaged if the card does not arrive. Thus, a sense of community online can be maintained through minimal contact; there

may be no need for interaction, nor even for an immediate response, although there should be some response sometime.

There is a paradox in community being formed in interactions online. On the one hand, community is constantly being formed and re-formed through interactions. One has to work at it all the time, as without that, in the end, the sense of community dissipates. The process of creating a sense of community, that connectedness, is reminiscent of Geertz's view of creating culture. It is created through interactions, the norms and standards, the behaviours and expectations, the modes of communication – all arise from the to-ing and fro-ing of social interaction. Each interaction is at the same time within the culture and part of the creation of the culture. Similarly, online, one is part of a community and at the same time renews or changes that community. On the other hand, the online community, which only exists when we are interacting in it, gives the impression of always being there. This is because it is separated from place and time. The action of logging on creates the feeling of being somewhere where other people leave their traces – simultaneously a place and a non-place – but not where one is now. This 'place' is always there for one to go to, its layout is familiar and one knows how to find the way around. The asynchronous nature of the communication, this possibility of finding the traces of one's colleagues and companions whenever one enters a discussion forum or social networking site or sends an email, and then engaging with them, reinforces the feeling that community online is always there.

Explaining civil society and the creation of social capital

In the view of community expressed by these young people, there are echoes of Durkheim's notion of solidarity, of collective consciousness (1933), although this is not the sense of shared understanding which exists as a starting point, as Tönnies believed was the case in the traditional community of gemeinschaft (1974). Rather it is a goal or objective, an end as well as a means. In other words, one might recognise an associational form of community, related to notions of civil society (cf Putnam 2000). However, engagement in civil society is more than the membership of associations or organisations. Some equate it with political action, some with the public sphere and others with a way of being. It has taken on a focus on the individual, so that civil society for some is created in their own image, to the point where at least two participants have

established organisations and others have had the management responsibility in newly established organisations which has allowed them to put their stamp on aspects of the organisation's functioning. Civil society for these members of Generation X and Generation Y is similar to Beck's notion of civil society arising from the process of individuals working together as active citizens (2001, p. 157) or to Giddens' notion of the 'good society', where civil society comprises the actions of emancipatory politics and lifestyle politics (1991, pp. 214-216).

In spite of this focus on the individual in civil society, there is still a need for organisations or associations. Organisations can act as a magnet for members of Generation X and Generation Y, helping them to gain skills and experience, particularly in active citizenship. Organisations have provided opportunities for volunteering for all participants and work for some. Information and communication technologies are important for extending access to associational civil society. However, in another paradox, they are also significant in allowing individuals to make choices about the ways they engage with civil society, so that they do not have to become affiliated with organisations (Naughton 2001; Surman & Reilly 2003).

The technologies enhance both the collectivity of civil society and the individualism (cf Wellman et al. 2003). For these young people, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are effective in supporting the creation of social capital. They enable social capital to be created as a public action aimed at strengthening the 'good society', but they also make it possible to take private actions, for example through online petitions, to support the creation of social capital. The boundaries between civil society as a place where social capital is created in public and the private space of the individual are becoming blurred, as engagement in civil society and the creation of social capital can take place 'indoors', 'in private' and 'in isolation' (cf Matei & Ball-Rokeach 2003; Wellman et al. 2003).

Social capital itself can also been seen as private and public, as both Aimé and Alastair demonstrate when they describe how they need to 'go to the pub' to establish the relationships which will sustain them and provide social networks for them so that they can then become involved in creating social capital in a wider sphere. It is difficult to

know how to interpret this distinction between private and public. It does not seem to be a re-labelling of the separation between the structurally different levels of social capital (Grootaert & van Bastelaer c2002). Nor does it seem to match the relationship between strong ties and loose ties identified by Leonard and Onyx (2003), where individuals use their stronger, closer relationships to establish a broader network. Rather, this distinction is made from the perspective of the individual and seems to suggest that the individual must acknowledge that private social capital exists before the risks involved in creating public social capital can be undertaken. This could seem closer to Fukuyama's notion of social capital being a private good in the first instance (1999) or to Bauman's notion of the individual as consumer, where "the ability to influence the conditions of their own life" is essential to the creation of the good society (2000, p. 51) – even though, for Bauman, this was something of a utopian ideal. However, the data in this study is limited, and more data from participants taking this approach would be needed to come to a clearer understanding on this point, thus there is scope for further research in this conceptualisation of the creation of social capital.

Explaining social relations

Social relations for the participants in this study are both the people and groups they are involved with and the connections between them (Elder-Vass 2007). It is easy to use 'belonging' as a surrogate for social relations and the sense of connection with the emotional comfort that the word evokes. However, this can obscure the pragmatic and cognitive aspects of social relations. The sense of connection is an inherent part of community. Yet this is not to be taken as a belonging 'as of right'; it does not connote a relationship one can be born to (Bauman 2004, p. 11; Lash 1994, p. 161). It does not even arise from a single defined set of interactions. Rather, there are senses of connection, different belongings, just as there are different interactions and differing motivations for engaging in them. These belongings can range from friendship to membership of an organisation, from the exclusivity of a 'small world' to the self-identifying tribe. They are based on choice (Bauman 2004, p. 91; Giddens 1991, p. 6).

It is the connectedness of friendship that seems most significant for these members of Generation X and Generation Y. David G. notes that he does not feel part of civil society because he does not belong to any organisation but instead focuses on his

relationships with his friends. This is similar to the 'being-for' which Bauman describes. Bauman notes that being-for assumes an emotional engagement with the Other before being committed to a course of action with the Other; that is to say, the other is a 'target' for emotion (Bauman 1995, p. 62).

Friendship may also stand as the replacement for kinship and social duty where longstanding relationships no longer exist (Huntley 2006, p. 28). Attempts to create togetherness online may be a way to overcome loneliness for those who have known a close-knit community of locality, as Therese explains. In this, one can see an example of the dis-embedding and re-embedding which Giddens highlights (Giddens 1990, p. 119). But for those in Generation Y who have grown up in a world where family members are separated by continents and interact through communication technologies, the use of information technologies to maintain connections is a significant aspect of everyday life (Huntley 2006, pp. 35-39).

The sense of connection is something that the individual recognises and acknowledges. Belonging is an action on the part of the individual, usually based on the assumption that others are like us in some way. In most cases, this sense of belonging is not seen as a commitment for life. People come and go and interactions wax and wane. Interests develop and fade. The young participants who belong to Generation Y are developing their friendships and interests. Some of these will last but many will represent 'just a phase' or "an accident of proximity" (Licklider &Taylor quoted in Flichy 2007, p. 41).The internet, discussion forums and social networking sites are just tools that facilitate interactions and which, at the same time, promote a sense of connection through being a kind of meeting place.

Sustaining the sense of connection requires trust, which, as Giddens notes, is fundamental to the process of re-embedding (1990, pp. 87-88). Trust is not a word used by these young people. Instead, they talk in terms of authenticity and credibility as they establish social relations online with strangers, and while for most the relationships remain in some way lesser than face-to-face relationships, perhaps equivalent to Granovetter's weak ties (1973), some acknowledge that real trust and real friendship can be developed online and that they can establish completely new relationships with

people not only not known to them in a social or emotional way but with people who are more unknown than strangers, people of whose existence they are currently ignorant.

Connections also exist with organisations, where belonging equates with membership, or acting according to the agenda of an organisation. Here, that sense of connection is based on the notion that something is shared between and among the participants, whether that be a hobby, an interest, a problem or the wish to achieve something that cannot be achieved alone. Although these groupings do not need to be named, they can be named, and in the naming lies some grasp of the differences between types of interaction and social relations. The community of practice envisaged by Therese is different from the tribe mentioned by Annette. The members of Generation X and Generation Y in this study were aware of many ways to name interest-based groupings and recognised the different collective behaviours that might be expected in these groupings.

It may not be possible to consistently conceptualise organisations themselves as social relations. They are external to the individual and many are organisations that have been formalised in some way. To that extent, they do exist regardless of the individual's association with them. Further, one individual or a small group of individuals can come together and establish the organisational infrastructure to link others together. However, when viewed from the perspective of a participant, an organisation encompasses the possibilities of social relations.

A set of basic skills exists to establish social relations online (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar 2003; Salmon 2000). Most participants in the study emphasise the ability to communicate, especially in writing, and to use the common courtesies of face-to-face interactions. For Ben, however, there is something elusive in some successful interactions online. He refers to them as "*illicit interactions*" where something transpires which is invisible to the casual observer and which cannot be taught to others.

Whether social relations lead to friendship or to membership of an organisation, the creation of social relations is still an individual act. It is something that individuals seek

or deny. Individuals can engage in multiple social relations (Giddens 1991, p. 83). Community, from this perspective, is something that individuals enter into. This metaphor of 'entering into' suggests location, and that social relations in some way constitute a place. However, to the extent that location is involved, the central location is the individual, with the connections radiating from the person, rather than the central location being the collective.

Connectedness, rephrased as belonging, encapsulates the notion of consensus, of choosing to be with others who are 'like us'. This notion of choosing suggests agency. Connectedness can be seen as socio-technical, the linking of individuals through information and communication technologies. Wellman and others have incorporated agency into the technical aspects of connectedness, through the notion of social affordances (Wellman et al. 2003), that is, characteristics of ICTs which invite their users to become involved in various types of action. In this context, we choose our connectedness to others, and the ICTs we use make it possible. Connectedness can also be viewed in social terms, an outcome of human agency. Although to some extent agency cannot be separated from the circumstances (structures) in which it occurs, and the choices we make around social relations are in part the outcome of the social relations in which we are engaged, in the end these choices are likely to be more influenced by individual decision-making, as Giddens suggests (1976, p. 75).

Explaining social action

Social action is more than the Weberian instrumental rational action of associations and organisations in civil society. It is not only about doing something for an agreed purpose on the agenda of an organisation. Social action is also linked to the creation of self-identity because decisions about identity are ones that influence the kind of world one can inhabit and the way one can live in it (Giddens 1991, p. 215) and thus the kind of actions one takes to shape that world. Social action is also linked to doing what is right. Thus, these decisions are potentially an expression of the morality that leads to social action (Beck 2001, p. 159).

These young people of Generation X and Generation Y choose to take decisions and actions about the kind of world they wish to live in. This would appear to support the

findings of Vromen (2003), who noted that young Australians are not apathetic, although it is important to remember that these young people were selected into the study on the basis of their involvement in social action. They may or may not see their actions as political moves. However, most of them would acknowledge the significance of not accepting the word of expert others without at least challenging the assumptions on which such statements are made. To that extent, they resemble Henrik Bang's 'Everyday Maker' (Bang 2005; Bang & Sørensen 1998), taking responsibility for making informed decisions about issues affecting day-to-day existence and about the broader future of the world they live in.

The notion of the Everyday Maker may, however, suggest a greater degree of autonomy than people really have in making their decisions around social action. It is clear that some individuals will have greater power than others in encouraging people to take social action. Organisations have agendas and ready-made actions for individuals to choose among. All participants have taken advantage of opportunities for instrumental, rational social action of this kind, choosing from actions made available to them although not always adopting the agenda of the organisation. A small number of individuals will be in a position to gather others around them, either as members of an emerging social movement or as those interested in a particular kind of action or outcome. In this study, there are such individuals. Their existence points up the distinction between them as the creators of opportunity for social action and others who use the opportunities for social action that they have created.

Taking social action has an element of civic engagement to it. This might mean working for a third sector organisation or becoming a volunteer either in an organisation or as part of a community-based initiative. It can also mean taking action online, finding out about an issue, signing a petition, donating money to a cause (Barraket 2005; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2003). Although these actions have often been seen as belonging to civil society, here they are signals that people are demonstrating their identity, taking action, and are therefore linked to others in some way, as Katherine's reading of the newspaper before the election or Tristan's signing a petition online linked them to others with the same ideas (Beck 2001, p. 162).

Taking action online does not necessarily require a great deal of effort, yet gives the emotional reward of connectedness and of having made a contribution. Online actions are often criticised because they are considered not to be a real test of an individual's commitment (Norris 2002, p. 4), as Brett noted. Yet, in a globalised world which operates through information and communication technologies, members of Generation X and Generation Y run their lives through online actions and know that strokes on a keyboard translate into bookings for concerts, or travel tickets or the transfer of money (Fallowes 2004, p. 19). Thus, for them there is no question that online actions are as effective as actions in the offline world.

Making decisions about social actions is not a task that can be taken by an isolated individual. Social actions by their very nature involve others, as Beck indicates in his phrase "cooperative or altruistic individualism" (Beck 2001, p. 162). To interact with others, it is essential to know how to behave and what to do. This is part of community, one of the ways in which people demonstrate their sense of connection or belonging, and, as Geertz notes, the foundations of culture (Geertz 1993, pp. 10 - 13).

Being involved in social action encompasses a moral dimension and can be understood in everyday language as doing what seems right or living by one's principles, as Robert indicated (Beck 2001, p. 159). For members of Generation X, being involved usually means acting under the auspices of an organisation in civil society to make a change in the world they live in. For members of Generation Y, being involved is more likely to reflect an engagement with the world they live in, in terms of contributing to a democratic society (Giddens 2000). The world they are involved in is one where to a large extent, as educated, thoughtful people, they can at least make themselves aware of the world around them, perhaps formulating questions of the experts and challenging those who make the decisions which shape the world in which they live. Thus, they take action with a sense of integrity, from an intellectual standpoint and with emotional engagement.

Explaining identity

If a sense of community is something that has to be worked at, and belonging is created among individuals rather than through an accident of birth or the playing of some

specific role, then individuals need ways to signal their intentions and identity is the way they do this (cf Goffman 1959). Identity is a sense of self and this is crucial to establishing social relations, creating a sense of belonging and a sense of community. It is the way that young people live in the world (Giddens 1991, pp. 187-200) and can be expressed as both a public self and a private self (cf Mead 1934), as Tom notes. Identity is also both what an individual expresses or portrays as well as what others interpret about that individual.

Individuals choose and develop their own identity, portraying their own sense of self (Giddens 1991, p. 53; Hall 1996). Creating their own credibility is important to members of Generation X and Generation Y. This is fundamental for the development of trust, without which there can be no real relationship with others, only trivial transactions. Authenticity emerges from the efforts to express oneself with integrity and is at least as important to a sense of identity as it is to the creation of social relations. Although they are aware of the process of creating an identity, there is little sense that these members of Generation X and Generation Y are creating a 'product' or commodity (Knorr Cetina 1997). Only Katherine notes that she has preferred not to spend time using social networking software because others might view her as something to be 'collected'.

A public self, portrayed online, will probably portray features of credibility, authenticity and integrity, even though it may bear little relation to the private self. The members of Generation Y are still developing their sense of self and some take the opportunity of using a pseudonym to explore through the internet questions and issues which they cannot easily confront offline (Turkle 1996), as Robert does. They work at keeping a narrative going (Giddens 1991, p. 54) and in that process create their identity. Isaac notes that, although it may be easy to take on a persona quite removed from the characteristics of oneself for a short time, it is difficult to maintain a persona over a long period of time, so that people who do sustain a persona online over a considerable length of time probably have something of that persona about them. However, even though the display of identity, the presentation of self-image, is important to members of Generation Y, they do not want to be held accountable as adults for actions and beliefs they may only be experimenting with (Boyd 2008). There is no sense from these

members of Generation X or Generation Y that creating and maintaining a sense of identity is a chore (cf Bauman 2004), nor that it is anything other than an ongoing part of life.

A sense of self emerges too through the groupings an individual chooses to establish relationships with. Bauman argues that identity has become a surrogate for community. He writes in the context of identity politics, where individuals focus on a characteristic of themselves, such as gender or ethnicity, and construct their identity around this, noting that in these cases the particular supplants the universal (Bauman 2004, pp. 79-80). However, in this study, identity and the sense of self are not based on a notion of identity politics. There is little concern for inequalities and injustices perpetrated on minorities or the disadvantaged, and little identification with these groups. The concerns demonstrated, for example through engagement in GetUp actions, are less about generalised concerns and more about a specific issue. David T. presents the view that adherence to a particular cause and identification with a particular group may indicate a lack of the tolerance that was fundamental to a group he belonged to.

Identity, then, is understood to go beyond the self and the immediate circle of relationships. Self-identity is a process of growth and development, of self-actualisation, which takes place beyond the constraints of time and place (Giddens 1991; Hall 1996; Turkle 1996) in the context of a globalised world.

Clustering concepts

This term, community, is an essential part of the language. It is part of the everyday lexicon of the members of Generation X and Generation Y in this study. They would disagree with Hobsbawm that they use the term indiscriminately or emptily (Hobsbawm in Bauman 2001, p. 15) and they would be surprised not to find it in the glossary of Giddens' textbook *Sociology* because it is so much part of their intellectual and social lives (Giddens 2006). Yet Giddens's reluctance to include the term in that glossary is understandable. While each participant in the study is clear about the meaning they ascribe to the concept and each individual's lived experiences are easily labelled 'community', on the face of it the only common core is in the undefined notion of

connectedness. The phenomenon and concept can be grasped fully only in the context of each individual.

On the basis of this study, it seems appropriate to re-establish the conceptualisation of community. It has often been touted as 'a concept we cannot live without', and so it seems on the basis of the thoughts and lived experience of these members of Generation X and Generation Y. However, this is not a concept in a scientific sense of something that can be operationalised, observed and measured.

Community is a surrogate for other concepts and other concepts are surrogates for it. For Durkheim, the surrogate was solidarity. Bauman substituted identity. Castells used the phrase network society. Wittel called for networked sociality. Albrow and Eade argued for a clustering of concepts rather than for a surrogate. They proposed that community was best understood in a cluster with milieu and culture, where the presence of one could be taken as a referent for the other two. They noted that loss of place was significant to shifts in meaning for each of the concepts and implied that culture was to be found at the heart of new forms of association. Taylor indicated that "community and the terms that surround it" (2003, p. 2) are "part of a language or discourse that has acquired considerable authority in recent years" (2003, p. 47).

In this study, members of Generation X and Generation Y seem to use a clustering of concepts to understand community. Their cluster comprises community, civil society, social relations, self-identity and social action. However, this is not a cluster of the kind that Albrow and Eade propose (1994). It seems closer to the notion of language suggested by Taylor, where words are linked and supported by "organising principles" (2003, p. 47). This linked group of terms appears to be sustained by another layer of notions, rather like a matrix, which pervades the five grouped concepts. This layer includes belonging, self-actualisation, a concern for the world around one and moral principles. Each of these is moderated or modified by a series of other requirements. It requires social interaction that includes the exchange of information, although the pervasiveness of communication technologies means that it does not need actual face-to-face interaction, only the possibility of embodied meeting. It requires an emotional dimension that can sometimes outweigh the strength of any cognitive or intellectual

dimensions. It requires action and engagement, but does not involve a lifetime commitment. Finally, it requires a means of communicating and a forum for discussion, but does not assume commonality of place.

The clustering of concepts represents the understandings of the members of Generation X and Generation Y who took part in this study. Continuing Geertz's metaphor of the web of significance, it would be possible to imagine something like the tangled web of Australia's redback spider. This is quite different from the orb web evoked in the Introduction to this thesis. The redback's web is an apparently disorganised web. It is always connected to the ground, by strong, shiny, sticky threads that serve as the trapping threads – the five clustered concepts.

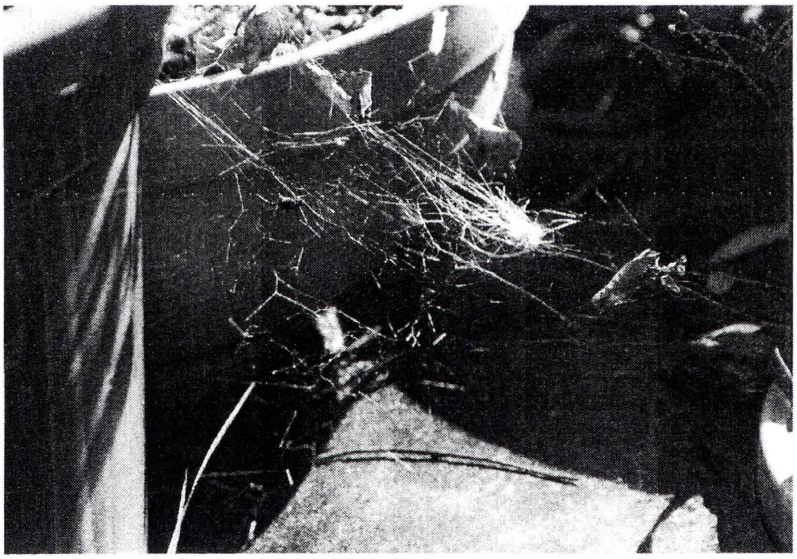


Diagram 6 The tangled web of a redback spider

Although the web may appear haphazard to the untutored eye, it has a structure. The trapping lines are connected and interconnected by the layer of belonging, self-actualisation, a concern for the world around and moral principles and is influenced by the requirements of social interaction. The tangled web is usually oriented to the sun and in its sheltered part contains a chamber of more tightly woven silk that can protect the spider and its eggs, symbolised here by friendship. The web is constantly repaired, its shape changing with each repair.

Developing a language

This creation of a variation on the metaphor of understanding the concept could serve as an end point for the thesis. However, I have attempted to move beyond the clustering of concepts and the metaphor of the web of significance to elaborate a theory of community. Thus, I will work with Geertz's notion of language as a method for establishing theory (1993, p. 27). The purpose is to document from the literature, from the expressions of the participants in the study and from my analysis of each of these the key terms that evoke community. The result will be a list of key terms that evoke a sense of community and which, importantly, give a voice to these members of Generation X and Generation Y.

The list begins with ideas significant for the participants, judged both by the number of participants expressing the ideas and the number of times each idea was expressed. An attempt was made to analyse the actual words used by participants, through the word frequency function of NVIVO, but controlling for word form and then for synonyms became an unwieldy task. Each of the words listed here has been used by at least one of the participants, but it has been my decision to standardise the vocabulary and provide a common label for ideas expressed in different ways.

In Figure 1, the words are presented in alphabetical order. 'Community' and 'civil society' were heavily used in the interviews because participants knew these concepts were the focus of my research concerns. The others emerged through the course of the interviews, linked to the notions of community and civil society and to each other in a variety of ways.

Figure 1 List of participants' terms

Participants' Terms
Anonymity
Authenticity
Belonging
Community
Civil society
Credibility
Dialogue

Embodied people
Friends
Generational differences
Identity
Information and communication technologies
Learning
Limiting or damaging community
Keeping in touch
Maintaining norms and standards of behaviour
Motivation/reasons for social action
Sharing knowledge
Social capital
Social actions
Sustaining conversation
Techniques for creating community

In Figure 2, these same words are presented in the convention of a tag cloud, the representation of the significance of index terms (or tags) in a blog. The larger and darker the typeface, the more significant the term.

Figure 2 Tag cloud from participants' terms

Next are the terms that emerged from my analysis of the literature and which have shaped my interpretation of the findings. They are the index terms or labels that I have developed through my reading to identify particular sections of books or articles and that are used frequently by the scholars whose works I have been reading. These terms are community, civil society, social capital, social relations, identity and social action and I have used them as topic headings to group together the literature and the findings. To this list I have added terms which pervade this literature and which might be identified as 'cross-cutting themes' running through the writings on each of the topic areas. These are terms which have emerged as important in the processes of explication and interpretation. These terms are: agency, belonging, collective, morality and moral principles, communicating, information and communication technologies, and public sphere. Organisations is included as a significant notion from the context.

Figure 3 Tag cloud of the terms used by the researcher

Figure 4 Comparison of participants' list with the researcher's list

Participants' Terms	Researcher's Terms
Anonymity	Agency
Authenticity	Belonging or membership
Belonging	Collective
Community	Communicating
Civil society	Community
Credibility	Civil society
Dialogue	Identity
Embodied people	Information and communication technologies
Friends	Morality and moral principles
Generational differences	Organisations
Identity	Public sphere
Information and communication technologies	Social action
Learning	Social capital
Limiting or damaging community	Social relations
Keeping in touch	
Maintaining norms and standards of behaviour	
Motivation/reasons for social action	
Sharing knowledge	
Social capital	
Social actions	
Sustaining conversation	
Techniques for creating community	

There is considerable overlap in the two lists and this is not entirely unexpected, given the familiarity with the literature which most of the participants showed. There are some terms on the participants' list which might be subsumed in the researcher's list and others which have no parallel.

Terms on the participants' list which may be subsumed in the researcher's list include: credibility, dialogue, friends, motivation/reasons for social action and maintaining norms and standards of behaviour. Credibility could be subsumed in social relations, but it appears that for the participants these ideas form two sides of the same coin and are fundamental to creating relationships with others. Dialogue could be taken as a fundamental part of the public sphere or it could be seen as a synonym for communicating. There is certainly some justification for considering it in this way. However, for the participants, dialogue contains the notions or a response from another person and the possibility of continuing communication. It seems to assume a greater level of interaction, and can refer to discussions on ephemeral or trivial topics as well as to those involved in negotiating complex agreements. Friends could be taken as an element of social relations. Yet, for the participants, friendship emerges as a necessary prerequisite to other social relations, a position traditionally held by family. I am aware that many of the members of Generations X and Y in this study are separated from some members of their family by huge distances, but I cannot draw conclusions about the impact this may have had on their view of the importance of friends. Motivation/reasons for social action can be taken together with norms and standards of behaviour. They can be subsumed in a number of terms, in particular morality and moral principles. Ethical or moral behaviour, doing the right thing, is an important element of identity for the participants. They take action from this perspective and explain their reasons for engagement in this context. I have indicated that norms and standards of behaviour can be brought together with motivation/reasons for social action because of the sense these participants give that they understand that there are ways they should behave and that they are prepared to call others to account if they do not behave according to these communally sanctioned behaviours. Integrity and authenticity are two words used by some participants to exemplify either their reasons for social action or the norms and standards of behaviour. Sharing knowledge is related to establishing dialogue; it is part of the reciprocity that underlies the development of ongoing social relations. In this sense, it is outward focused. Sharing knowledge is also related to learning and development of self-identity, as noted below. In this sense, it is inward focused.

Terms on the participants' list which seem to have no parallel in the researcher's list include: anonymity, generational differences, learning, limiting or damaging community, keeping in touch, sharing knowledge, and techniques for creating community. The ideas of anonymity and embodiment appear significant in the interviews. However, the main reason for this would seem to be that the participants sought to respond to ideas and expectations which I, as someone from an older generation, may have had about their interactions online, particularly in establishing dialogue. They do not use 'anonymity' to express fear of interacting with strangers and concern for their safety. Although interacting with strangers and constantly making new acquaintances is part of their everyday experiences, it is something that few chose to introduce into the interview.

They are concerned about generational differences and their impact on attitudes to and the use of information technologies. Several make the point that they are aware their attitudes to information technologies are different from their parents' attitudes. Several also note that younger family members use mobile phones and social networking software in different ways and for different purposes than they do, even though there might be only four or five years' age difference. The participants seem to portray these younger family members as engaging more easily in discussions with strangers through social networking sites and being more willing to initiate social relations, discussion and action through online contact.

Learning and personal growth and development were significant for a number of participants. On the one hand, this can be explained because of their age and stage in life – university students and recent graduates. On the other hand, this could also be explained as an indication that they are engaged in the project of the reflexive self, constantly remaking themselves and changing what they know and how they can interact with others.

The members of Generation X and Generation Y in the study are very aware of the skills and techniques needed for establishing links with others and creating community and they are also keen to list those factors which can limit or damage the possibility of creating community. This concern indicates that they consider social relations and

community as something which is perpetually in a state of becoming, which requires skills and techniques to maintain and which can be damaged through lack of skills or poor choice or use of technique. It also suggests that they have a sense of responsibility for the social relations and community in which they are engaged.

One of the notable differences between the two lists is that the terms on the researcher's list are almost entirely nouns – labels for entities – whereas a number of the terms on the participants' list are gerunds, denoting action or process. This reinforces the idea that the participants in the study are concerned with creating social relations with others and with their own self-identity, and it helps to explain the concern for skills and techniques that is pervasive in the interviews.

Another notable difference is that for concepts such as community, civil society, social action and social capital, these members of Generation X and Generation Y hold two orientations at the same time, for example one which focuses on the individual and one which focuses on a collective, or one which requires embodied interaction and one which can take place online potentially among strangers. This can be seen clearly in the approach to social capital. Social capital is used in two ways by the participants in this study and these can be categorised as public and private or outwardly focused and inwardly focused. They align with bonding social capital and bridging social capital, but are not the same. Social capital can be something that relates to their own wellbeing and support, and in this case it requires face-to-face interaction or at least the possibility of meeting others. This type of social capital takes precedence. At the same time, social capital can also be a good in the wider society, and in this context it does not require bodily interaction but can be created through the internet with strangers. That is, social capital can be created with people who are not only not known but are also potentially unlikely ever to be met face to face.

The vocabulary is not complete. Place is not included in this vocabulary. A few participants refer to websites and social networking sites as a meeting place which is available to them when they choose to go 'there'. The familiarity with which they speak indicates that in some way this location exists for them when they are not online.

However, for most participants, there is no place and it is their presence which creates any sense of place. They are mobile and interactions centre round them.

There are also "words that go missing" (Taylor 2003, pp. 62-63). For Taylor, these words relate to the "darker side of community", power and conflict. Missing from this common language are words acknowledged by only one or two participants – exclusion and coercion, for example. It is possible to claim that the focus of the study encouraged participants to speak from the inside, to be more concerned with inclusion, although an analysis of the assumptions made about community, civil society, social capital and social relations shows that the definitions participants used and the characteristics they ascribed to the concepts carried within them the seeds of exclusion (Yerbury 2008). It may also be possible to argue that these participants are unlikely to have much experience of being excluded or of being coerced. Only Sunil refers to a sense of being excluded because of his skin colour, and Robert and Jonathan note that community can exert conformity. The participants are amongst the most highly educated of their cohort and they create the impression that they are able to make decisions that affect their lives, rather than being subject to the will of others. Thus, the lived experience from which this vocabulary is derived may be one where participants have access to systems of power.

In summary, the members of Generation X and Generation Y who took part in this study have a vocabulary that they use to discuss notions of community. It brings together a range of ideas. This vocabulary contains nouns as the labels for concepts and a significant number of gerunds. The inclusion of gerunds – nouns ending in -ing which are derived from verbs – suggests process or action. Most of the words in the vocabulary can be shown to have two orientations, which can variously be labelled individual/collective, public/private, inward/outward, longterm/transient. These orientations coexist and even when they may appear to be contradictory, the resulting paradoxes are accepted by the participants in this study.

What seems to anchor this vocabulary and minimise the fragmentation which could arise from the holding of so many contradictory orientations is the integrity of self, the importance of friends and the belief in the significance of moral principles which guide

individual decision-making and action. Community begins with the individual. The boundaries of community can be seen to stretch across time and space because it emanates from the individual. It requires the bodily presence of others as 'insurance' (in an expression reminiscent of Bauman's "lifejacket of friendship" (Bauman 2004, p. 91) or a safety net, and once the insurance is in place, community can be built through the expression of ideas with anonymous others. The desire for community is intrinsically linked to the development of self-identity and to making the world a good place to live.

Community emerges here as a process rather than an entity and incorporates several abstractions. As I noted earlier, it does not exist as a single abstraction for the participants in this study, and they would probably be surprised not to find it in the glossary of key textbooks, as it is so much part of their lived experience. Thus, it may be appropriate to attempt a dictionary-style entry for a definition of community, taken as a snapshot in the time and space of this study, using the words and phrases of participants. Such a definition might read:

community, *n.*
2008 H. YERBURY *UTS Thesis* Actively and self-consciously creating self, making connections and engaging in actions which will make the world a better place to live in.

This definition may not conform to the norms and standards for dictionary definitions; it is not strictly grammatical, emphasising the action of verbs and their adverb modifiers rather than the nouns and adjectives conventionally applied in defining a noun. Nonetheless, community as it emerges from this study is recognisable in this definition.

Community continues to exist in the lived experiences and in the thoughts and expressions of these members of Generation X and Generation Y. A vocabulary exists to express these experiences and thoughts. This theorisation of community is far removed from the notions of community reflected in the literature up to the late twentieth century. Community is not seen as an entity into which an individual can be

absorbed, but rather something which grows out from the individual and which is endlessly created and re-created.

Reviewing the study

The process of theorising has given insights into how a group of young people, members of Generation X and Generation Y, experience and conceptualise community and it has suggested a language to express key ideas. Language is ever-changing and the process of research is ongoing. There are four aspects from this study which warrant further study. The first and second relate to the characteristics of the participants of the study. The third considers the possibility of a different conceptualisation of social capital. The fourth is concerned with the broader distinction between public and private.

There is support from the literature for the conclusion that, to a large extent, members of Generation X and Generation Y experience community differently from members of previous generations. Yet, there are also challenges to the way of thinking which allows this difference to emerge. Jenkins, for example, is critical of scholars who focus on the novelty aspect of identity. He argues that "Giddens privileges the preoccupations of an affluent intellectual elite as definitive of the late modern human condition" (Jenkins 2000, p. 22). My thoughts have been informed by the writings of Anthony Giddens and the participants in this study could be seen as 'intellectual', (although they might deny being 'affluent'). Further research among young people engaged in civil society online who do not have a university education could shed light on whether they are also concerned with self-identification and the "malleability and flux of identities" (Jenkins 2000, p. 22).

The second aspect of this study that warrants further exploration is the relationships that these young people have with knowledge. They use the thoughts and ideas of scholars almost as the common currency of conversation. They appear to seek information avidly through the internet and other sources for gaining additional perspectives or making decisions on their choices of social action. This information then appears to become part of them to some extent; they take on a role as a knowledgeable person and sometimes become reflexive. Beck proposes that scholarly information is used as a substitute for personal experience, particularly by "wealthier and more protected groups" (2002, p.

53). He also suggests that, when people are faced with a plethora of interpretations, "personality characteristics and personal networks tend to increase in importance for the practical application and utilisation of these interpretations" (2002, p. 182). Further research may be able to offer insights into the interplay of the three elements mentioned by Beck, that is, having limited personal experience because of living in a protected position in society, having limited personal experience because of youthfulness and using personal networks to suggest an appropriate meaning and action when faced with too many interpretations.

The third aspect of this study which could lead to further research is the finding that the young people in this study are interpreting social capital in two ways, with the private aspect of social capital appearing to be a prerequisite for developing the public aspect of social capital. The literature on social capital tends to note the existence of public and private forms of social capital although with no necessary link between them. There is scope for addressing more directly how young people similar to those in this study understand social capital, for example, using Onyx and Bullen's measurement instrument (Onyx et al. 2005).

The fourth aspect of this study which could lead to further research is the broader aspect of the paradoxical relationship between public and private. Wittel believed that it was possible to resolve the intellectual and practical inconsistencies in this relationship by positing a new approach to sociality, which he dubbed 'network sociality'(2001). This approach is attractive and some participants in the study would probably recognise elements of their own behaviour in this conceptualisation. However, there are two weaknesses in the approach: it does not give due weight to the dichotomy inherent in metaphor-driven extensions of the terms, such as indoors and outdoors, and it does not seem to explain what happens when the public act of signing a petition takes place in the privacy of one's bedroom and becomes an act one can engage in, secretly, because one cannot easily be identified, an issue which for Bauman was at the heart of contemporary political action (1999, p. 3). Thus there is scope for exploring directly the ways in which members of Generation X and Generation Y understand this paradoxical relationship.

Conclusion

This interpretive study has explored community through the perceptions and actions online and offline of a number of young people and added to the scholarly literature on members of Generation X and Generation Y, their creation of social capital and their interactions in civil society. It has shown the significance of friendship and the importance of information and communication technologies in developing and maintaining social relations. It has established that authenticity is important even though an individual may create a number of identities. It has shown that the participants are active citizens, engaged in making the world the kind of place they would like to live in. It has demonstrated that the participants both experience and intellectualise community. Finally, this study has set out key terms for a language to discuss community from the perspective of these young people.

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