COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the author’s prior consent.
Text Production in *Bebo*: a study of three children’s text production in online social networking sites

By

Clare A Dowdall

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Faculty of Health, Education and Society

March 2012
Abstract
Clare A Dowdall

Text production in Bebo: a study of three children’s text production in online social networking sites

This thesis aims to explore three pre-teenage children’s text production in online social networking sites. Social networking is a mainstream youth activity in the UK, conducted by (at the time of writing) almost 50% of 10-12 year old internet users (Ofcom, 2011, p.44). While social networking has been the subject of much interest amongst scholars and policy-makers, little has been published that documents the use of social networking amongst pre-teenage children. The literature that does exist is largely concerned with documenting usage (Ofcom, 2011; Livingstone and Haddon, 2010), and children’s safety in these contexts (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)/Byron 2010; DCSF/Byron, 2008; Livingstone et al., 2011a). This study aims to explore children’s text production in social networking sites with rightful regard for this concern, but with a focus on how children behave as text producers in these contexts.

Working from an interpretive qualitative research paradigm, a purposive sample of three children who used (at the time) the popular social networking site Bebo was selected. The children were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule three times between June 2008 and May 2009. Interviews were transcribed using a line by line coding method. To support these data and contextualise analysis, screenshots of the children’s profile pages were also collected at each interview. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), these data were analysed within data sets around each interview incident, and then synthesised to build a case study for each participant. This recursive process involved initial and focused coding, where following the construction of key codes for each data set, the codes were organised under thematic headings and finally used to construct tentative categories that described how the children behaved as text producers. Four tentative categories were constructed to describe the participants’ behaviour: text production to achieve social positioning; text production to achieve social control; text production to enact a text producing role; and text production for pleasure. Based upon the elaboration of these categories, a model of text production as mastery is proposed. In this model, children’s text production is regarded in relation two spectrums of mastery: a spectrum of social control and a spectrum of textual crafting. This study concludes by recommending that the social networking context must be recognised by educators as a meaningful context in which children’s mastery of these critical skills can be developed in order that they can they learn to be critical and masterful text producers in the new digital age (Gee, 2011 and Hayes, 2011).
# List of Contents

| Acknowledgments                                      | 15 |
| Author’s declaration                                 | 17 |
| **Chapter 1: Introduction**                          | 19 |
| Background                                           | 19 |
| Outline of contents                                  | 25 |
| **Chapter 2: Establishing a context**                | 29 |
| **Chapter 3: Review of literature**                  | 49 |
| Introduction                                         | 49 |
| The users involved in the act of social networking: the social networkers | 54 |
| The features of social networking sites: social networking sites as textual spaces | 65 |
| The practices of social networking                   | 70 |
| Conclusion                                           | 95 |
| **Chapter 4: Assembling a theoretical framework**     | 97 |
| Introduction                                         | 97 |
| The socio-political context: a macro-level framing    | 100 |
| Identity and literacy a meso level framing            | 111 |
| Identity                                            | 111 |
| Literacy                                            | 120 |
| Notions of text: a micro-level framing                | 127 |
| Conclusion: Assembling the theoretical framework      | 147 |
| **Chapter 5: Methodology and methods**                | 149 |
| Part one: The research paradigm                       | 149 |
| Part two: The methods                                 | 160 |
| Part three: The study                                 | 175 |
| Part four: The methods used to construct and analyse data sets | 188 |
| Introduction                                         | 188 |
| Assembling the data sets                              | 193 |
| Coding the data                                       | 196 |
Chapter 6: Presenting three case studies

Introduction ................................................................. 207
Case study 1: Jennifer ...................................................... 214
  Introduction to Jennifer ............................................ 214
  Coding process and category formation ..................... 217
  Thematic analysis: Jennifer ........................................ 221
Case Study 2: Chloe ....................................................... 234
  Introduction to Chloe .............................................. 234
  Coding process and category formation ..................... 236
  Thematic analysis: Chloe ........................................... 239
Case Study 3: Elley ......................................................... 252
  Introduction to Elley ............................................... 252
  Coding process and category formation ..................... 254
  Thematic analysis: Elley ............................................ 257
Conclusion: drawing the case studies together .................. 270

Chapter 7: Discussion of tentative categories

Introduction ................................................................. 275
Category one: Text producing to achieve social positioning .... 277
Category two: Text production to achieve social control ....... 281
Category three: Text production to enact the text producing role .... 292
Category four: Text production as a pleasurable activity ........... 305
Discussion .................................................................... 306

Chapter 8: Implications and conclusions

Introduction ................................................................. 319
Text production in the new capital age ............................ 323
Conclusion .................................................................... 338

Appendices

Appendix 1: The features of Bebo ............................ 344
Appendix 2: Research information sheet .................... 346
Appendix 3: First-parent consent letter ....................... 348
Appendix 4: First-participant consent letter .................. 350
Appendix 5: Second and third-parents’ consent letter ...... 352
Appendix 6: Second and third-participants’ consent letter  .................. 354
Appendix 7: Interview schedule 1 June 2008  ................................. 356
Appendix 8: Interview schedule 2 September 2008  .......................... 360
Appendix 9: Interview schedule 3 April 2009  ................................. 362
Appendix 10: The criteria for the evaluation of grounded theory studies  ................................. 364
Appendix 11: Example interview transcript (Data set J1)  
June 2008  ........................................................................ 366
Appendix 12: Example interview transcript coding (Data set J1)  
June 2008  ........................................................................ 370
Appendix 13: Example screenshot summary with initial provisional coding in red (Data set J1) June 2008  ...... 372
Appendix 14: List of initial codes from screenshot and screenshot summary (Data set J1) June 2008  .............. 374
Appendix 15: List of initial codes from interview transcript (Data set J1) June 2008  ..................................... 376
Appendix 16: Jennifer screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets J1, J2, J3  ............................................. 380
Appendix 17: Jennifer key codes by data set J1, J2, J3  ................. 400
Appendix 18: Jennifer key codes assimilated across the data sets  .... 404
Appendix 19: Chloe screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets C1, C2, C3  ............................................. 406
Appendix 20: Chloe key codes by data set C1, C2, C3  .................... 440
Appendix 21: Chloe key codes assimilated across the data sets  ....... 444
Appendix 22: Elley screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets E1, E2, E3  ............................................. 446
Appendix 23: Elley key codes by data set E1, E2, E3  .................... 464
Appendix 24: Elley key codes assimilated across the data sets  ....... 468

References  471
List of tables and figures

Table 1: Interview schedule ......................................................... 180
Table 2: Pattern of fieldwork ....................................................... 181
Table 3: Overview of screenshots ............................................... 209

Figure 1: Chloe Screenshot C2:1. Chloe’s ‘about me’ module ................................. 248
Figure 2: Elley Screenshot E2:1. Elley’s personal information ............................... 264
Figure 3: Developing social control through text production .................................... 289
Figure 4: Developing textual crafting through the enactment of the text producing role ........................................ 295
Figure 5: Model of text production as mastery in Bebo ................................. 314
Bound in publications:


Acknowledgements

This study was funded by the School of Education, Plymouth University.

I wish to express my thanks for all the expert opinions, assistance, encouragement and companionship that I have been lucky enough to receive throughout this study:

My supervisory team; Professor Victoria Carrington, Professor Linda la Velle, and Dr Nick Pratt

Staff working within Plymouth University’s School of Education PhD Programme, and the Faculty of Health, Education and Society’s Graduate School Research Programme; Professor Jane Seale, Neal Dando and Sarah Carne

Colleagues from the United Kingdom Literacy Association, in particular, members of the UKLA Digital Literacies SIG; Professor Muriel Robinson, Professor Victoria Carrington, Dr Julia Davies and Professor Guy Merchant

Core members of the ESRC research seminar group: ‘Play, Creativity and Digital Cultures’, in particular its convenors; Professor Muriel Robinson and Dr Rebekah Willett

Colleagues (past and present) from within the School of Education, Plymouth University; Howard Cotton, Brenda Duval, Arthur Shenton, Linda Pagett, Jan Foale, and Jenny Dick,

Staff from the Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth who supported my initial application and the transfer process; Professor Peter John, Dr Nick Pratt, Dr Pete Kelly and Dr Janet Rose

The participants and their parents who with real openness and generosity allowed me to interview them about their social networking and take screenshots of their profile pages

Particular thanks to Brenda Duval, whose technical support in the latter stages of this process was invaluable in formatting and presenting this thesis.

I would like to say a very special thank you to Professor Victoria Carrington. Her unstinting encouragement, generosity, support and friendship, have made the completion of this study possible.

Thanks also to my family and friends who have excused me, supported me and encouraged me throughout.

And finally, thank you to Martin, my husband, and Tyler and Cody, our amazing children.
Author’s declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

This study was financed by the School of Education, Plymouth University. As a permanent member of staff, a programme of part-time study was undertaken with the Graduate School, and supported by the Faculty of Health, Education and Society (previously the Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth).

Relevant conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented. External institutions were visited for the purpose of collaboration and consultation.

Publications


Presentations made and Conferences attended

United Kingdom Literacy Association 47th International Conference, Chester, July 2011

United Kingdom Literacy Association 46th International Conference, Bath, July 2010


Dowdall, C. (2008) *Performing and negotiating social identities through online text production* United Kingdom Literacy Association 44\textsuperscript{th} International Conference, Liverpool, UK


Core group member of ESRC research seminar group: 'Play, Creativity and Digital Cultures' March 2005 - July 2007

Core group member of United Kingdom Literacy Association SIG: Digital literacies, January 2006 - July 2007

**Word count of main body of thesis: 85301**

Signed: 

Date: 

18
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Social networking first came to my attention in 2004, when I received an email from my neighbour’s eleven-year old daughter, Clare. In this email, Clare asked me to complete an online quiz about her. In order to complete the quiz, I had to register with the social networking site Bebo\(^1\) and create a profile for myself. In so doing, I unwittingly became a member of Clare’s first fledgling online social network. In 2004, when I received this email, I hadn’t heard of Bebo, or social networking. In 2005, when I presented a conference paper based upon Clare’s use of Bebo to generate texts (Dowdall, 2005), many members of the audience hadn’t heard of Bebo, or had no direct experience with social networking either. However, due to the rapid uptake and associated media discourse that has blanketed the practice, the impact of social networking since this time has been tremendous, and has attracted the interest of the international research community, policy makers and of course, the users of social networking sites (see Chapter 3: Review of literature). This positions social networking as one of the mainstream youth activities undertaken in the UK in the early 21\(^{st}\) century – and significantly for this study, one that is largely enacted through the production and consumption of text (Dowdall, 2006; Dowdall, 2009a; Dowdall, 2009b: Dowdall, 2009c).

Capturing statistics to demonstrate the popularity and penetration of social networking is complicated by the issue that social networking is an ephemeral practice: conducted via a plethora of technology and affordances that have literally

\(^{1}\) See [http://www.bebo.com/c/about](http://www.bebo.com/c/about) for details about and access to the Bebo social networking site
during the lifespan of this study, taken hold like wildfire, and equally have disappeared like smoke. Access to rapidly evolving web 2.0 software, the semantic web (Berners-Lee, 2009; Palfrey and Glasser, 2008), and mobile hand-held and fixed internet portals means that social networking practices from technological, social and personal perspectives continue to evolve. In addition to this observable ephemerality, it can be argued that this study of social networking is located during a time when the very nature of childhood is being contested more vigorously than ever before (see Chapter 2: Establishing a context).

Part of this contestation has involved the renaming of childhood in relation to the socio-technological practices that define and are defined by it. In terms of her experiences of using technology to communicate and manage her social relationships, Clare can be described variously using terms that have emerged in the last ten years: as a digital native (Prensky, 2001); as a member of the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009; Tapscott 1998); as a member of the ‘internet generation’ (Livingstone and Bober, 2005); and as a child of the digital age (Marsh, 2005). Clare is a child who has grown up immersed in and engaged by the digital technology and social media around and through which her social world pivots. This recognition has contributed to the reconceptualisation by some academics of children in relation to their use of digital technologies and literacies. The Annenberg Research Network on International Communication (Castells et al., 2006), identifies the presence of a mobile youth culture based upon the peer-to-peer networks that are forming as a consequence of access to new digital technologies. While their work focuses mainly on the use of mobile phones, Castells and his colleagues observe that adolescents around the world are so increasingly immersed in ‘the digital lifestyle’ that a
“technosocial sensibility” results; a state where “nature and technology are brought together”, resulting in changes to the ways in which youth cultures relate to each other through time and space (Holmes and Russell, 1999, p.73, cited in Castells et al., 2006, p.142). As Ito has so eloquently described, perpetual connectivity with friends via the use of a mobile phone and SMS texting enables a ‘snug and intimate technosocial tethering’ (Ito et al., 2006, p.1), where the presence of one’s network can make itself known at any time and in any place. With its rapid growth and uptake amongst young people around the world, social networking can be viewed as an activity that contributes to this notion of a new technosocial sensibility, where the act of producing texts for one’s networked public (boyd, 2007)\(^2\) occurs as part of some young people’s essential everyday communication patterns and within their everyday play spaces (Davies, 2008). These issues will be unravelled in chapter 2: Establishing a context, but are also introduced here to lead into subsequent discussion. These constructions of childhood are largely positive. However, the contestation around childhood in relation to socio-technological practices also involves the construction of alarmist and protectionist views of childhood, where children are conjured in less positive terms as a generation of screen-obsessed narcissists who are vulnerable to the predatory behaviour of adults (Alexander, 2010; DCSF/ Byron, 2008; Palmer, 2007; Tapscott, 2009).

Despite the theoretical contestation of childhood and the recognition that social networking practices are ephemeral, the impact of social networking upon children’s daily lives cannot be denied. As a committed user of social networking sites, Clare

\(^2\) dana boyd always publishes her name without capitalisation and this will be respected throughout this thesis. See [http://www.danah.org/name.html](http://www.danah.org/name.html) for her discussion about her choice.
is not exceptional amongst her peers. In the UK, data from the Office for National Statistics (2011) claims that at the time of writing, 82.2% of the UK population use the internet, with the largest proportion (98.7%) falling in the 16-24 age group. Data from Alexa Internet, the web traffic monitoring site, shows that Facebook, at the time of writing is the second most visited website in the world, after the search engine Google. Clearly, these statistics suggest the rapid adoption of social networking as a mainstream youth activity worldwide and are supported by data that demonstrates its phenomenal uptake (Lenhart and Madden, 2007a; Lenhart et al., 2010; Livingstone and Brake, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011a; Livingstone et al., 2011b; Ofcom, 2007; Ofcom, 2008a; Ofcom, 2008b; Ofcom, 2011). Access to the internet is currently being championed in the UK for all sectors of the population. Race Online 2012 is a government organisation committed to making the internet accessible to all at an individual and organisational level. Digital Champion, Martha Lane Fox has been tasked, through The Cabinet Office to recruit a further 100,000 Big Society Digital Champions to support millions of adults online by the time that the Olympics comes to Britain. It can be argued that this digital inclusion policy currently being promoted by the British government is likely to further impact upon the uptake of social networking as the 18.7 million people who do not use the internet (identified in terms of disability, age, regional variation and gender) are supported to become internet users by 2012.

---

3 For information about Alexa Internet see http://www.alexa.com/
4 For information about Race Online 2012 see http://raceonline2012.org/
5 For further information about Digital Champions in the UK see http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/100000-%E2%80%98digital-champions%E2%80%99-get-britain-online
6 For information about UK usage of the internet see http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ia0511.pdf
This trend is not restricted to the UK. Key studies based in the US and Japan also argue that social networking is now a mainstream form of communication, offering new ways for children to communicate with their peers (boyd, 2007; boyd and Ellison, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2010; Lenhart and Madden, 2007a; Lenhart et al., 2007; Takahashi, 2008). In the US, the Pew Internet and American Life Project: Social Media and Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults (Lenhart et al., 2010) has built upon earlier studies of young peoples’ internet use (Lenhart and Madden, 2007a; Lenhart et al., 2007; Lenhart and Madden, 2005; Lenhart et al., 2005) and found that the use of social media is central to most teens’ lives with 73% of ‘wired American teens’ participating in this activity (Lenhart, et al., 2010). The Pew surveys do not focus singularly on social networking, but define the term Social Media more broadly to include online teens’ participation in any online content creation, including blogging; creating or working on a personal webpage; creating or working on a webpage for school, a friend, or an organization; sharing original content such as artwork, photos, stories, or videos online; or remixing content found online into a new creation (Lenhart et al., 2007; Lessig, 2008). The Pew survey notes that in all areas, a ‘participatory culture’ (Jenkins, 2006) where online content is created and shared, is blossoming amongst teens in the US.

Therefore, starting from the seed of interest that was planted by the email that I received from Clare in 2004, and my subsequent interest in the phenomenal development of the practice of social networking amongst young people, this thesis aims to explore how young people produce texts in social networking sites. In particular, through this study I will explore what text production in social networking sites involves, in order that those with responsibility for supporting
young people to become text producers can understand the process and implications for text producers better. Accordingly, the research question that has been formulated following a review of scholarly literature (see chapter 3) and process of sensitisation to some of the key accommodating theoretical concepts (see chapter 4) is: *How do three pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?*

It should be noted at the outset of this thesis, that its fruition has taken seven and a half years: a significantly longer time-scale than planned and one that has accommodated extensive changes to the practices, resources and technologies that underpin the act of online social networking. However, while this extended timescale means that data, collected as screenshots and interview transcripts between 2008–2009, might be regarded as already outdated and surpassed by recent developments, such as changes in particular social networking sites’ popularity, and increasing access to mobile hand-held smart and touch screen devices, the study’s focus on young people as text producers in a digital environment ensures that the findings are of relevance and have application, even though the surrounding context continues to shift like quicksilver. From the opposite perspective, the considerable length of time over which this research process has been conducted has reassured me that while the contexts that surround children’s text production may continue to evolve, the issues involved in children’s text production remain of paramount importance to educators, caregivers and policy makers.

Accordingly, six years after the publication of my first paper that detailed the dissonance that I perceived to exist between Clare’s text production at school and in
the Bebo profile pages she produced as part of the practice of social networking, I hope to use this thesis to demonstrate that my ongoing engagement with the area of social networking has supported a rigorous and timely consideration of how children behave as text producers in social networking sites.

Outline of contents

To achieve the aim of this thesis, the context in which social networking is conducted must be outlined, and the extensive literature that already documents the practices around the phenomenon of social networking must be presented. Accordingly, this thesis takes a conventional organisational approach.

Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2: Establishing a context some current conceptions of youth in relation to their socio-technological landscape are presented. This chapter aims to introduce and delineate the context within which social networking occurs and within which this study is located.

In Chapter 3: Review of literature a review of the scholarly literature in the area of social networking will be presented in order to identify the key themes that have emerged since the phenomenon aroused the interest of academics and policy makers. Within this chapter, three key areas of literature will be presented: literature that documents issues relating to the users of social networking sites; literature that documents the features and affordances of social networking sites; and literature that documents the social and textual practices of social networking. This review will identify that the literature around social networking focuses heavily on the social aspects of the practice, and that a detailed consideration of the production of
text by young people in social networking sites could contribute to the rich existing accounts of social networking as a social practice and reinvigorate interest in textual artefact creation amongst young people. One key research question has been developed from the review of literature to explore this issue:

- How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?

In Chapter 4: *Assembling a theoretical framework*, the theoretical framework which accommodates this thesis will be outlined. This framework assembles three layers of theory to arrive at an holistic account of text production in the new media age (Kress, 2010). These layers include an account of the broad socio-political context in which online text production can be conceived; the conception of text production as a social practice; and notions of text and the way that texts are created and used in the everyday construction of social realities. In melding these three layers, a framework that supports an holistic consideration of everyday practices around young people’s text production in social networking sites is attempted. This assemblage serves to further sensitise my awareness of the theoretical ground surrounding children’s text production in the digital age.

In Chapter 5: *Methodology and methods*, the approach and methods used to select participants and construct this study are systematically described. This chapter is presented in four parts: the research paradigm; the methods adopted to explore the research question; the study; and the methods used to construct and analyse data sets. The research question has been explored from within a qualitative research paradigm that blends methods derived from the fields of symbolic interactionism
and ethnomethodology. These methods were selected to support the construction of an account of children’s text production in online social networking sites that could accommodate the views of both the researcher and participants alongside a consideration of the textual artefact being produced. Drawing from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, a series of interviews with three pre-teenage participants provides data which has supported the construction of an account of the participants’ text production in online social networking sites. Drawing from the perspective of ethnomethodology, screenshot data of the participants’ profile pages were collected and described alongside the interview transcripts, and used to contribute to the account under construction for each participant. An analytical framework based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Charmaz, 2006), was adopted for the purpose of organising, synthesising and constructing the data into three case studies for presentation.

In Chapter 6: Presenting three case studies, constructed accounts of the three participants: Jennifer, Chloe, and Elley are presented in turn. Within each case study the participant is introduced, screenshot data are displayed, and a thematic analysis based upon the coding of transcript and screenshot data is presented. For each participant the process from initial coding through to tentative category formation is described. Tentative categories are then elaborated and presented as a case study for each participant, where the research question How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites? begins to be answered. Through this process a total of four tentative categories are constructed: Text production to achieve social positioning; Text production to achieve social control; Text
production to enact the text producing role; and Text production as a pleasurable activity.

In Chapter 7: Discussion of tentative categories the four tentative categories are assimilated and considered in their own right, but still with reference to the participants, in order to allow for a transition to a more conceptual stage of analysis. The aim of this chapter is to develop the tentative categories further and assemble them into a broader theoretical framework that will conclude this study. Based upon this conceptual analysis, two spectrums of text producing behaviour in social networking sites are proposed: a spectrum of social control and a spectrum of textual crafting. These spectrums are subsequently intersected to form a model of text production as mastery in Bebo. This model aims to reflect the potential for children to develop accomplishment along two spectrums of critical mastery. In both spectrums, the text producer’s criticality in relation to their audience, role as author and the textual artefact are of significance.

To conclude this study, in Chapter 8: Implications and conclusions the conceptual analysis and constructed case study data will be relocated within the wider context established at the outset of this study. Here, implications for those responsible for supporting young people to become text producers in the digital age will be proposed, and the limitations of the study will be acknowledged. In this way, the constructivist grounded theory approach adopted will become recontextualised and the model proposed will be accommodated within the theoretical framework originally conceived for this study, while allowing new directions to be constructed from the analysis and elaboration of data.
Chapter 2: Establishing a context

The aim of this chapter is to make explicit the context that has been constructed to accommodate this study. Methodological issues pertaining to the constructivist approach adopted for this study will be discussed in chapter 5 (methodology and methods), and within the subsequent analysis. A constructivist approach permeates all aspects of this study, and accepts that both data and analysis can be regarded “as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p.130). This perspective must be made explicit at the outset of the study, as arguably, the construction of the contextualisation for this study is predicated upon my experiences and beliefs, and will impact upon everything that follows.

In order to explore social networking from the perspectives of young people, text production and identity, some current conceptions about youth in relation to the new textual landscapes (Carrington, 2005a), must be noted and terminology must be clarified. It can be observed that in the field of new media and digital literacies, while the label youth is generally applied to older children (such as early adolescents), and childhood to younger children, these labels are sometimes used interchangeably (Ito et al., 2008; Marsh, 2005b; Carrington 2005a; Carrington and Marsh, 2005). The fluid labelling of ‘childhood’ is indicative of the contestation around achieving an agreed definition of what childhood actually involves and means for children, parents, educators and policy-makers in the 21st century. Through this contestation, issues of relationship, power-balance and “the navigation of life pathways and destinations” are brought into sharp relief (Luke, 2005,
foreword xiii). In this chapter, these issues will be briefly explored prior to describing the theoretical framework for this study.

Since Negroponte first speculated about the impact of the digitalisation process upon everyday day lives (Negroponte, 1995), and McLuhan argued for the acknowledgement of the significance of the media channels to the social world (McLuhan, 1964), the role of technology and its contribution to the social world has been well-documented. It is accepted that the landscapes inhabited by twenty-first century children are increasingly affected by the ongoing evolution of the digital age (Carrington, 2005a, 2005b; Carrington and Robinson, 2009; Drotner and Livingstone, 2008; Kress, cited in Bearne, 2005; Lenhart, et al., 2010; Livingstone and Bober, 2005; Ofcom, 2011), and that the technologies of the digital age feature pervasively in youth culture (Alexander, 2010; Carrington and Robinson, 2009; Castells, et al., 2007; Ito et al., 2008; Lankshear and Knobel, 2006; Marsh, 2005a; Marsh 2005b).

The digital age is characterised by the rapid transformation of the technological forms of mediation through which we communicate with and know one another (Baym, 2010). These evolving technologies have facilitated a range of communicative practices (Marsh, 2005b) that are observable in any number and variety of mobile and material contexts: in the car, on the train or bus, walking down the high street, sitting in the coffee shop, enacted in the playground, and conducted in the privacy of the home. These communicative practices take a number of forms and utilise a range of hand-held mobile and fixed devices which facilitate access to a range of social media. They depend on ubiquitous access to the internet; access which, according to data published by the Office for National Statistics (2010), has
nearly doubled amongst adults in the UK since 2006, and has almost reached saturation for the youngest sectors surveyed in the UK and the US (Office for National Statistics, 2010; Ofcom, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2010); and access to the ever-evolving technology that supports the practices. Ito et al., (2008) have, through a series of ethnographic studies for the MacArthur Foundation, explored the lived lives of youths and their social media use. They argue that, through participation in ‘networked publics’, youths relate to each other and learn from and with one another in tandem with the affordances of evolving technologies. As such, they note a sea-change in how youth operate, relate and are conceived. In particular, they note the growth of digital media production as an everyday form of expression as a significant outcome of this mass-participation (Ito et al., 2008, p.340). Ongoing access to rapidly evolving web 2.0 software, the semantic web (Berners-Lee, 2009), and new generation mobile hand-held internet portals means that the potential for this mass-participation in social media and in particular, social networking practices continues to evolve.

Consequences of the digital age in relation to media and social media use, production and consumption have been well-documented. Jenkins describes the relationship between the media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence facilitated by the digital age as ‘convergence culture’ (Jenkins, 2008, p.2). He argues that convergence culture and the ensuing collective meaning-making within popular culture forms is starting to change the ways that the world operates: consumer markets can be reached in new ways; traditional modes of artistic transmission are changing; learning increasingly occurs in informal learning communities; and activists can deploy new means of shaping the future (Jenkins,
In addition, Jenkins outlines how new technologies allow our lived lives to flow across multiple media channels (Jenkins, 2008, p.17). This recognition of the role of multiple media platforms in our lives supports Jenkin’s notion of the role of transmedia storytelling. A consequence of the affordances of digital technologies is the need for humans to construct and access coherent stories about themselves and others through the multiple channels available (Jenkins, 2008, p.21). Through his occasional paper for the MacArthur Foundation, Jenkins articulates how schools have been slow to respond to what he describes as the new ‘participatory culture’ within which large proportions of American youths operate. He argues that:

Schools and afterschool programs must devote more attention to fostering what we call the new media literacies: a set of cultural competencies and social skills that young people need in the new media landscape. Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. (Jenkins, 2006, p.4)

In response to this need, Jenkins has outlined a skill-set to prepare children for the demands of functioning in the twenty-first century media landscape. This involves increased recognition of the social and playful nature of learning, and the need for children to successfully navigate transmedia channels in order to participate fully. Alongside Jenkins’ scholarly contributions that explore implications of the digital age for childhood learning, Lessig has attempted to map changes to the culture of creativity afforded by new technologies. This involves the transition from what he describes as a ‘Read Only (RO) Culture’ to a ‘Read Write (RW) Culture, where the potential to produce texts is redistributed amongst the masses through access to media channels and the act of remix, ‘the right to quote’, which he argues should be accepted as a ‘critical expression of creative freedom’ (Lessig, 2008, p.56).
This transition has had consequences for how children are positioned as text producers. Due to the potential for children to produce as well as consume texts, children are positioned not only in relation to creativity, but also in relation to opportunity and risk. As a consequence the concept of childhood has been reimagined in relation to the digital landscape that supports and is supported by a variety of digital communication technologies. In terms of their experiences using a range of social media and technology to communicate, produce and consume digital media, children have been described variously as born digital (Palfrey and Glasser, 2008); digital natives (Prensky, 2001); members of the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009; Tapscott, 1998), members of the internet generation (Livingstone and Bober, 2005), and children of the digital age (Marsh, 2005b): children who have grown up immersed in and engaged by the digital technology and social media around and through which their social worlds pivot. The recognition that the digital age is impacting upon children has contributed to the scholarly reconceptualisation of children in relation to their use of digital technologies. Castells et al., (2006) as part of their work for The Annenberg Research Network on International Communication have identified that youth culture is becoming increasingly mobile and untethered and increasingly based upon the peer-to-peer networks that are forming as a consequence of access to new and evolving digital technologies. Castells and his colleagues’ work is based around youths’ use of mobile phones. Within this field they make observations that can be applied more generally to the area of digital technologies. Castells and his colleagues observe the emergence of a youth ‘technosocial sensibility’ based on the notion that world-wide, adolescents are so increasingly immersed in ‘the digital lifestyle’ that a ‘technosocial sensibility’ results; a state where ‘nature and technology are brought together’, resulting in
changes to the ways in which youth cultures relate to each other through time and space (Holmes and Russell, 1999, p.73 in Castells, et al., 2006, p.142). Ito has also considered the notion of a perpetual connectivity amongst youth via the use of mobile phones and SMS texting. She argues that this pattern of use enables a ‘snug and intimate technosocial tethering’ (Ito, et al., 2006, p.1), where the presence of one’s network can make itself known at any time and in any place. While this observation was based upon the social and cultural specificities of mobile phone use in Japan at the time of writing, it can be argued that this observation can now (in 2012) be applied in the UK, where the mobile phone has taken up the ‘keitai’s’ status, supporting digitally born communications that are a ‘constant, lightweight and mundane presence in everyday life’ (Ito, et al., 2006, p.1). The rapid growth and uptake of social networking amongst young people in the UK (Ofcom, 2011), through the use of mobile and fixed portals, positions this communicative activity as one that contributes to this notion of a new technosocial sensibility, where the act of producing texts for one’s networked public (boyd, 2007) occurs as part of some young people’s essential everyday communication patterns and within their everyday play spaces (Davies, 2008). However, while the uptake of technology is frequently portrayed as pervasive and universal, Ito has argued that technologies can be viewed as constructive of and constructed by specific historical, social and cultural contexts, and as such has lead to the contingent production of nuanced rather than generalised activity by a ‘wide range of actors’ (Ito, et al., 2006, p.7).

There are clear consequences for the recognition that the digital world is impacting upon notions of childhood. These have been invoked by scholars, governments and the media in various ways. Since Aries’ seminal publication *Centuries of Childhood*
(Aries, 1973), the concept of childhood has been forcefully contested and variously theorised (Kenway and Bullen, 2001, p.36). Historically, childhood has been described in polarised terms. From a naturalistic perspective, childhood is viewed in terms of a linear trajectory, invoking contingent adult/child power-relations, which position children as projects under formation and subject to the control of adult forces (Smart, et al., 2001, p.11). This view has been challenged by proponents who take a social constructivist view to define the concept of childhood as an ephemeral construction, subject to changing social, political and historical forces and contingent continuing reconstruction (James and Prout, 2005, pp.3-5; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998, p.5; Postman, 1994). In this view, children are recognised as co-constructors of their ‘personhood’ formed in response to a whole range of factors; and active agents able to negotiate rules, roles and personal relationships (Smart et al., 2001, p.12). In their discussion of childhood consumption practices, Kenway and Bullen (2001, p.35) build on this view. They describe how historical accounts of childhood have evolved across time and place, with significant changes in conceptions and practices around childhood being observable in the ‘so-called developed world’ over the last two centuries. Taking a social-constructionist view, they locate the construction of childhood within a consideration of the consumer-media culture in and around which childhood is played out. In so doing, they suggest that linear trajectories of childhood development can be challenged by the recognition that conceptions of childhood are mediated by the forces that play upon it, notably throughout history, the church, the state, and more recently, consumer-media culture (Kenway and Bullen, 2001, p.61).
The co-existence of these polarised linear and constructed views is further complicated when taking account of the rapidly shifting socio-technological landscape within which childhood is currently contested. This landscape has now long been recognised as impacting upon conceptions of childhood. Almost a decade and a half ago, in the introduction to *Kinderculture: The corporate construction of childhood*, Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) describe how due to the advent of new technologies, ‘new times have ushered in a new era of childhood (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1998, p.1). In their account they describe a crisis of childhood, where the ‘corporate production of popular kinderculture’ impacts upon notions of childhood for both children and those responsible for them. In turn, kinderculture becomes a mechanism for ideological refraction (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1998, p.11); one which illuminates the tension created as those in authority perceive a diminishing sense of control and traditional power dynamics are subverted. Luke and Luke (2001), describe how tension is created when these paradigms are set alongside one another. They describe how the existence of institutionally defined parameters (e.g. formal education) subject children to a pre-defined life trajectory driven by societal expectation and existing retrospective constructions of what childhood should be. They argue that this can be problematic within cultures whose ‘intellectual, labouring and signifying capacities’ are in transition and flux. In an attempt to ameliorate the tension caused by the coexistence of the linear passage of childhood as conjured by policy, and the social constructivist view that recognises childhood agents acting in symphony with changing social, political and historical forces, Luke and Luke (2001) describe the need for the conceptualisation of a more fluid trajectory from childhood to personhood, as traditional life pathways are increasingly replaced by opportunities for lifelong learning and educational
bricolage, where vocational and academic opportunities are mixed in response to the material and discourse conditions of the environment. While these authors were writing between ten and fifteen years ago, the relevance of their arguments is not diminished when considering children in relation to the digital age.

New technologies clearly support the constitution of the material and discourse environments of the twenty-first century. The view that childhood can, in part, be reconceptualised in relation to new technologies and contingent social and technological practices contributes to the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies and acknowledges that any notion of childhood is a construction, subject to ongoing contestation. Prout (2008) builds on notions of the role of materiality to argue more recently, that theories of childhood must move beyond the idea that childhood is simply *socially* constructed through narrative discourse. Instead, he proposes a version of childhood that recognises the place of technology as a material element present in the construction. Prout draws from what he describes as the seminal work of Bruno Latour ‘*We have never been modern*’ (Latour, 1993) to invoke a blended social, technical, material, and discursive reality, within and around which, constructions of childhood can be conjured (Prout, 2008, p.9). In Latour’s view, nature, knowledge, collectives and subjects are inextricably connected, but found to be ‘out of kilter’ when viewed by competing intellectual fields of naturalisation, socialisation and deconstruction (Latour, 1993, p.5). Latour argues for the holistic consideration of what he describes as ‘sociotechnical imbroglios’ (Latour, 1993, p.7) and invites the consideration of digital networks within the existing framework of network theory, which according to Latour, in its simplest but deepest sense, is of use whenever action is involved (Latour, 2010). Latour defines a ‘network’ as ‘the
shock that reveals, around any given substance, the vast deployment of its attributes’ (Latour 2010). While Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) has been subject to significant critique for the over-generous recognition given to the agency of inanimate objects within the network, this vision of interconnected substance and attributes supports Ito’s version of a ‘ketai-enabled social life’ (Ito, et al., 2006:1), where technology and social relations cut across singular constructions of child and personhood to incorporate methodological bridges between technology, media and communication studies (Ito, et al., 2006:5).

Viewed from this perspective, childhood is redefined in relation to the widening sociotechnical landscape, and as an evolving construct in response to the ever shifting and increasing availability of new communication technologies (Carrington, 2005a; Kress, cited in Bearne, 2005). Children are not merely subject to these changes. Marsh has identified that contemporary notions of childhood within the digital age are both shaped by and shaping of the changing communicative practices of the twenty first century (Marsh, 2005a, p.1). The role of new technologies in the construction of childhood has unprecedented implications for childhood agency and adult-child power relations. Carrington describes how shifts around technology, social structure and culture support the emergence of new textual landscapes within which contemporary childhood is played out (Carrington, 2005a, p.13). She describes how the shift away from print-dominated landscapes, towards children’s immersion in textual landscapes dominated by popular culture and emergent electronic textual forms allows the supervisory and controlling gaze of adults to be subverted. In the new textual landscape, information flow, traditionally controlled via adults and formal education systems, is more accessible and less containable
In addition, Kress argues that new publishing technologies provide children with new authorship opportunities, which in turn allows children unprecedented power as text producers (Kress, 2003, p.1). However, along with increased screen-based authorial opportunity comes a dilution in the power and authority of the author. Where once, print text was considered an elite form (Lessig, 2008, p.68), Kress asserts that new media forms see the former power and authority of text challenged (Kress, 2003, p.6). For Kress, these ‘new technologies are quite simply reconfiguring the social domain’. These shifts can be seen to be creating tension for those who assume responsibility for maintaining traditional notions of post-war childhood (Carrington and Marsh, 2005; Luke and Luke 2001).

The tension around childhood and new textual landscapes has not abated in the last five years. Conceptions of youth and childhood remain well-contested both within the scholarly literature and the media, particularly in relation to practices around new technologies. In particular, negative reporting can be seen to be contributing to alarmist and increasingly protectionist views of childhood. This is well-summarised in the final report of the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010), the most comprehensive independent review of British education for 40 years. In the review, the notion of childhood in contemporary British society is described as a ‘hot topic’ (Alexander, 2010, p.5). Alexander describes how in the media, different versions of childhood co-exist. Children are variously conjured as ‘suffering innocents’ who occupy a menacing world, and as ‘tiny tearaways’, who are beyond control ...‘an obese, screen-obsessed generation of couch potatoes, leading pampered and over-indulged home lives’ (Alexander, 2010, p.53). He draws upon The Good Childhood
Inquiry, (The Children’s Society, 2006), to report a perceived decline in childhood happiness amongst 91% of the representative sample of adults interviewed, who believe children to be less happy than during their own childhood, with computer games, television, the influence of celebrity and materialism being cited amongst the causes (Alexander, 2010, p.55). Alongside this data, Alexander also describes Palmer’s controversial assertion that children are experiencing a ‘toxic childhood’, with technology being blamed for harming children’s ability to ‘think, learn, and behave’ (Palmer, 2006, cited in Alexander, 2010, p.55). These assertions are not exclusive to conceptions of youth in the UK. Based on the commercially-funded ‘Grown up digital’ book project, Tapscott, writing from the US, succinctly describes ten negative myths that have been conjured as a response to the identification of the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009, pp.3-5). These myths include notions of dumbing down, of inactivity, of shamelessness, narcissism and disinterest in others. He argues that these myths are overly-hostile and depressing, and that they are born from a lack of understanding and fear of change (Tapscott, 2009, p.7).

To counter the negative accounts from the UK, the Cambridge Primary Review seeks the views of children themselves. In this report, children express nuanced views about their childhood, generally demonstrating a positive outlook in circumstances where schools work to explore and unravel children’s and parents’ concerns (Alexander, 2010, p.56). However, the Review identifies that adult voices and in particular media reporting overwhelmingly drown out children’s positive and optimistic accounts, and instead continue to present a negative and alarmist account of childhood (Alexander, 2010, p.63). In her original report of the Byron Review to the UK Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) Safer Children in a
Digital World, (DCSF/ Byron, 2008) and reported in the subsequent Review of Progress (DCSF/ Byron, 2010), Byron describes the alarmist account of childhood and technology use in terms of a ‘society that adopts a risk-averse approach to childhood’ (DCSF/ Byron, 2010, p.8). Byron attempts to position some of the negative media reporting by drawing from Buckingham (2008) to argue that concerns about children’s exposure to new media are located within the broader social discourse around deterioration in the health and behaviour of children (DCSF/Byron, 2008, p.24). She takes a largely positive stance, describing how children’s active participation involving new media, e.g. going online and playing video games are rivalling traditional forms of media consumption, allowing children to experience and participate in forms of media convergence (DCSF/ Byron, 2008, p.19). However, she acknowledges that parental concern is driven by this active participation, as children engage in Web 2.0 activities, beyond the traditional surveillance of the family and school (DCSF/ Byron, 2008, p.23). Byron describes the associated concern not in terms of a mis-spent childhood, but in terms of a generation digital divide, where children have greater experience of digital worlds than their parents (DCSF/ Byron, 2008, p.23). In her foreword to the Review of Progress since the 2008 Byron Review (DCSF/ Byron, 2010), Byron acknowledges that new technologies and the potential for creativity that they offer are integral to the lives of children and their parents. In this review she continues to argue that there is a perception that children will encounter harm online, which is both skewed and unhelpful (DCSF/ Byron, 2010, p.8).

While media-fuelled concern about the endemic presence of digital technologies in children’s worlds continues to flourish in the UK, beliefs about curricula and policy
as enacted throughout contemporary formal schooling remain fixed in pre-digital landscapes (Carrington and Robinson, 2009, p.2). In describing this disconnection, Buckingham describes a ‘digital divide’ that separates in-school and out-of school use of technology (Buckingham, 2007, p.96). This theoretical divide supports the construction of two parallel and co-existing versions of contemporary childhood. The version described already conjures children as actively engaged with the affordances of new digital technologies. Screen-based, image-dominated texts proliferate in their everyday lives. They socialise and communicate in and around new technologies, to which they are metaphorically tethered. Their daily existence is likely to involve the production and consumption of an eclectic mix of textual forms as children learn to read and write using a wide range of print-based and digital tools and resources. Children learn to navigate this textual landscape, where meaning is variously inscribed and decoded as part of their everyday existence. These are children of the new digital age (Marsh, 2005b), who, for as long as they can remember have been surrounded by ever-evolving digital technologies and the textual landscapes that they occupy (Carrington, 2005a).

However, despite the presence of the scholarly accounts, and the policy enquiries into the impact of the digital age and new technologies on childhood as detailed above, in the UK it can be argued that a version of contemporary childhood, disconnected from the digital context, is constructed by the policy makers who have been granted responsibility for managing children’s educational performance. The children of the new digital age are also the children who have been educated under New Labour’s education policies (1998-2010) and subsequently under the education policy of the new Coalition Government (2010- present). In 1997, the Manifesto of
the incoming Labour government described education as their top priority\textsuperscript{7}. Building from the previous Conservative government’s pilot study, the new Labour party introduced the National Literacy Strategy Framework for teaching (Great Britain, Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1998) and subsequently, the Primary Framework for literacy and mathematics (Great Britain, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2006), which was implemented via \textit{The National Strategies Online} website until its closure by the Coalition Government’s Department for Education (DfE) in June 2011. At the time of writing, the newly formed Coalition Government is currently reviewing and publishing the National Curriculum\textsuperscript{8} that will include a new Programme of Study (POS) for English. While the content of this POS is not yet known, the Government have been clear that they will maintain a strong degree of control over prescribed curricula and associated testing arrangements. In addition to the introduction of statutory requirements for teaching and testing of early reading\textsuperscript{9}, the recently published \textit{Independent Review of Key Stage 2 testing, assessment and accountability} (Bew, 2011) has made recommendations for the assessment of all English POS. In relation to writing, Lord Bew has recommended that:

writing composition should be subject only to summative teacher assessment. We believe this will encourage pupils to develop and demonstrate a broad range of writing skills over the course of Year 6, while avoiding the perverse incentives of the current system. While maintaining national standards is vital, we do not believe that this should come at the expense of promoting creativity. We believe teachers should assess widely across a range of genres and writing styles, and that this approach should give children more opportunities than the current system does to write in a

---


\textsuperscript{8} For details about the National Curriculum Review see http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum

\textsuperscript{9} http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a0068420/reading-at-an-early-age-the-key-to-success
wide range of ways. We recommend that teacher assessment of writing composition should be subject to external moderation.

We recognise there are some elements of writing (in particular spelling, punctuation grammar and vocabulary) where there are clear ‘right or ‘wrong’ answers, which lend themselves to externally-marked testing. We recommend that a test of these essential writing skills is developed. We therefore recommend that in future writing should be assessed through a mixture of both testing and summative teacher assessment. Due to its importance, we believe that teachers’ own professional assessments of writing composition should always form the greater part of the overall writing statutory assessment result. (Bew, 2011, p.14)

These measures demonstrate the continuing centralised control of the literacy curriculum.

In England, since the introduction of specific national strategies designed to improve literacy standards (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2006), a high-stakes assessment regime and era of teacher accountability has driven a functional and skills-based formal approach to literacy education (Grainger, 2004). This regime can be identified in the Bew Report, (Bew, 2011), which describes its remit as framed by the conclusions of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) who argue that ‘accountability is the key driver of improvement in education and particularly important for the least advantaged’ where pupil progress is systematically measured and schools are held to account (Bew, 2011, p.4). At the heart of this accountability has been the annual publication of national league tables for children’s achievement in reading and writing. This account of the recent and current educational and political context serves to describe how, within the new digital age, childhood can be viewed as still being constructed by policy makers in the retrospective manner

---

10 For The Independent Review of Key Stage 2 testing, assessment and accountability (Bew, 2011) see https://media.education.gov.uk/MediaFiles/C/C/0/%7BCC021195-3870-40B7-AC0B-66004C329F1F%7DIndependent%20review%20of%20KS2%20testing,%20final%20report.pdf
11 http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00192751/key-stage-2-test-results-published
articulated by Luke and Luke ten years ago (Luke and Luke, 2001), with the aim of reproducing a print-based set of skills and knowledge, as a vehicle for sustaining the reproduction of the structure of defined class relations.

However, despite the application of centralised literacy policy, children’s achievement as readers and writers of school-sanctioned text has not met Government expectations at national and international levels (DfE, 2011; Mullis et al., 2007). As a direct result, since 1998, the art and skill of composing and presenting print-based classroom texts has been made a top educational priority. Research projects have been funded to explore how best to motivate groups and sub-groups of children in order to improve their ability as writers as measured by statutory national testing at age 10-11 (Ofsted, 2003; Qualifications and Curriculum Agency/ United Kingdom Literacy Association, 2004; Younger and Warrington, 2005). The Talk for Writing materials, developed by Pie Corbett in conjunction with the Primary National Strategies (DCSF, 2008b) are an example of a series of didactic materials that aim to ‘support teachers in further developing children’s writing throughout the teaching sequence’ (DfCSF/ The National Strategies, 2008, p.2). In this series, teachers are provided with a linear model and suggested strategies to scaffold children from dependence to autonomy as writers of print-based texts. This series is typical of the ‘top-down’ curriculum designed by others for teachers to use that is endemic within the current educational environment in England (Myhill, 2010). Street (1995) describes this type of institutionally-driven, skills-based literacy as ‘autonomous literacy’, a view which recognises literacy as a

12 http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00192751/key-stage-2-test-results-published
'separate, thing-like object which people should acquire as a set of decontextualised skills (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, p.14).

In relation to the production and consumption of text, it can be argued that different versions of childhood are being constructed by the scholars, the media and the policy-makers of the new digital age. The children who exist in the twenty-first century textual landscape are at once pioneers, risk-takers, and under-performers. As they create digital and print-based texts at school and beyond, they compose a trail of textual artefacts that vary in their materiality and purpose. In relation to social media, Hogan distinguishes between actors and artefacts. He describes artefacts as “the result of a past performance (that)... lives on for others to view” (Hogan, 2012, p.377), and invokes the term to propose that artefacts are the relics of a recorded act that lack the unique aura associated with the original object. These artefacts are subject to exhibition in online spaces: an exhibition that is curated (organised and managed) by the author and the virtual curator in terms of the technological affordances at play. Hogan’s use of the term ‘artefact’ supports a conceptualisation of text in all its curated and recorded forms. The texts that children are required to create for their teachers are driven by the requirements of policy-makers. They provide textual artefacts of children’s educational achievement and support the positioning of children in relation to Government policy. At the same time, these same children are being documented as prolific producers and consumers of online text through their tethered everyday engagement to social media and digital technologies (Ito et al., 2008, p.340). While these texts vary in their materiality, from screen-based to paper; from being archived in teacher’s folders; to being curated online by the affordances of the technology and performance involved, these
textual artefacts serve to contribute to the positioning of children and conceptions of childhood.

In summary, this study will explore youth text production/content creation in social networking sites. This necessarily brief contextualisation aims to chart the recent depictions of the new digital media age in relation to youth, and to identify that notions of youth and childhood have long been theorised as ephemeral constructions, subject to social, political and cultural influences. In so doing, this contextualisation identifies a dichotomy. The rapid rate of technological change that has influenced the communication practices of contemporary childhood (Marsh, 2005), when set alongside the neoliberal educational policies of the day (Hill, 2006) can be viewed as contributing to two diverse yet interconnected constructions of childhood. In this dichotomy, the independent children of the new digital media age, with all its incumbent risks and opportunities, are set alongside the protected and scaffolded children of the neo-liberal educational strategies, designed to maintain existing adult-child power-relations and notions of a linear trajectory towards pre-defined educational success. Notably both these constructions of childhood can be seen to play out through the notion of text. It is through the formal assessment of school-made text that children are propelled along a linear passage to adulthood; it is through the informal unsupervised production and consumption of digital text forms that the constructions of child-at-risk, and child-out-of control can be conceived. This study is particularly concerned with children’s text production in social networking sites. Having described the broad context within which children’s text production in social networking sites is situated, and having constructed a line of argument that sets contrasting versions of childhood against one another, the next
chapter will consider the scholarly literature that documents social networking practices, prior to outlining the theoretical framework that has been assembled for this study in chapter 4.
Chapter 3: Review of literature

Introduction

To define what is meant by social networking is a complex task. The body of literature documenting the phenomenon of social networking is recent, varied, and substantial. It is comprised from many fields. These include academic research, government-commissioned enquiry and policy documentation, philanthropically-sponsored research, media reporting, and individual online publishing dedicated to the subject of social media and web 2.0 practices. In the US, early scholarship in this field was reviewed in a special issue of The Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, edited by boyd and Ellison, who summarised the key themes emerging from the literature in the field to this point (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Also at this time in the US, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning published a themed publication Youth, Identity and Digital Media (Buckingham, 2007), which had a strong focus on social networking, and its implications for sociability. In the UK, Ofcom overviewed the field and published Social Networking: A quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use, (Ofcom, 2008b) which sought to understand how people were using social networking sites in the UK. This report drew from a variety of sources, including key US publications, such as the Pew Internet and American Life Project report Social Networking Websites and Teens: an overview (Lenhart and Madden, 2007a), and the aforementioned papers by boyd and Ellison (2007) and boyd, (2007). These timely publications overviewed the field and established early

research priorities. Collectively they can be regarded as a significant body of work upon which subsequent lines of enquiry draw.

Since these publications, there has been rapid growth in research that continues to explore the same questions through new methodologies and also to interrogate new areas of study (Hargittai and Hsieh, 2011; Hargittai and Hsieh, 2010). Social networking can now be regarded as a field of study in its own right and also as a component within larger emerging fields of research, e.g. new network science (Barabasi, 2011). Livingstone notes that in addition to the existence of varied literature that draws from a range of perspectives, a wide range of parties have an interest in social networking. These include the users of social networking sites, the site developers, the ‘academy’, and public policy makers at national and international level (Livingstone, 2008). She argues that finding a definition for social networking is complicated by the overlap that exists between attempts to define the activity and the value judgements about the practice that are invoked in the process. Livingstone explains that any defining process involves political positions, and competing parties who attempt to harness and define the practice; problematise it, and bring it under their control (Livingstone 2008).

With this complex and ever-expanding context acknowledged, the aim of this review is to outline the published body of literature, and to summarise, synthesise and elucidate the key findings and observations that have informed the direction of this study. In order to make this review manageable, media reports and individuals’ blogs have not been trawled. Instead, this review draws from peer-reviewed academic sources and government-commissioned policy documentation in the
recognition that these literature sources will support the construction of an account that has been informed by available empirical research, and theoretically-informed peer-reviewed opinion.

A search within these parameters identifies that the literature can be organized under a series of headings which serve to begin to demarcate the field of social networking. These headings include:

- The users involved in the act of social networking: the social networkers
- The features of social networking sites: social networking sites as textual spaces
- The practices of social networking
  - Social networking as social practice
  - Social networking as text production

These headings will be used to structure the following sections and reflect that the literature that documents social networking describes it as an *act*, conducted by users of social networking sites, that gives rise to a *textual artefact*. The nature of textual artefacts and their materiality will be discussed in Chapter 4: *Assembling a theoretical framework*. This *act-artefact* duality is not as yet clearly articulated through the literature. Instead, studies and reports tend to collapse these perspectives and view them from a social perspective, meaning that both seminal and retrospective papers present a melded version of social networking, where the act of social networking, the texts involved and the affordances of the act and the text are considered together, with priority given to the implications for identity and society.
(e.g. boyd\textsuperscript{14} and Ellison, 2007; boyd, 2007, Livingstone and Brake, 2010). In order to extrapolate this act-artefact duality and to consider the realization of social networking through text, the selected literature will be reviewed using the themes described above, with the aim of identifying gaps in the literature and constructing a research question.

**Terminology**

Early on in their defining paper, boyd and Ellison acknowledge that the terms social network site and social networking site are used interchangeably by scholars in a range of academic fields (boyd and Ellison, 2007). They attempt to delineate the terminology around social networking and raise an issue relating to this. boyd and Ellison argue for the use of the term ‘social network site’ rather than ‘social networking site’ to reflect the notion that a ‘social network site’ is used by (my emphasis) someone’s social network, rather than as a mechanism to extend their social network, as the term social networking implies (boyd and Ellison, 2007). For the purpose of this review, and to reflect reported developments since the publication of this, I reject boyd and Ellison’s decision to delineate the act of social networking in this way. The rapid uptake of social networking as a practice (Livingstone, 2011) and the extent of the networks that users grow for themselves as they collect friends (Ofcom, 2008b:37), indicates that since boyd and Ellison’s seminal paper, the act of social networking has been shown to include the act of extending one’s network, as well as communicating within it. In addition, more recent investigations into the area have settled on the term social networking to

\textsuperscript{14} dana boyd always publishes her name without capitalisation and this will be respected throughout this thesis. See \url{http://www.danah.org/name.html} for her discussion about her choice.
describe the act (Ofcom, 2008b; Ofcom, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2007; Lenhart et al., 2010; Livingstone et al., 2011). Therefore for the remainder of this review, the terms ‘social networking’ and ‘social networking site’ will be used to reflect the nomenclature taken up by more recent enquiries into the area.
The users involved in the act of social networking: the social networkers

The literature reviewed pivots around the topic of social networking. In this section, the usage of social networking sites will be documented. The growth of the use of social networking sites by young people constitutes a remarkable and relatively recent phenomenon (Livingstone and Brake, 2010; Miller et al., 2009), that has been documented and reported upon by government and charitable policy-making bodies as well as academic scholars in the UK, the European Union and worldwide. In the UK, the genesis and evolution of young people’s uptake of social networking has been documented by the government Office for Communications (Ofcom), under the banner of promoting ‘media literacy’ following the passing of the Communications Act 2003 (Ofcom, 2006, p.1). Ofcom has conducted a series of media literacy audits, literature reviews and reports, since 2005 (Buckingham 2005; Ofcom 2006; Ofcom 2008a; Ofcom 2008b; Ofcom 2010; Ofcom 2011) that aim to provide an overview of the different elements of media literacy across key digital platforms (Ofcom 2011, p.8). The exponential growth of social networking among young people in the UK is identified in this series of publications, with the first specific reference to use amongst youth groups appearing in the publication of Ofcom’s media literacy audit (Ofcom 2008a), and Ofcom’s dedicated qualitative and quantitative research report into social networking (Ofcom, 2008b). These two publications outline uptake and user information, as well as describing purpose and creative potential.

Ofcom’s dedicated research report was conducted in response to the rapid growth of social networking, and related media interest (Ofcom, 2008b, p.1). This report
sought to understand how people use social networking sites and their attitude to this form of communication. In so doing it served to define the appeal of social networking, particularly among young people, and establish a benchmark against which future growth could be measured. The report clearly outlined the uptake of social networking, stating that in the United Kingdom in 2008, 49% of internet users aged between 8 and 17 claimed to have a profile on a social networking site, and 27% of children aged 8 – 11 who knew about social networking sites stated that they had profiles, regardless of the permitted entry age of 13 years (Ofcom, 2008b, p.5).

This report synthesised findings from government-commissioned qualitative research and cited third-party peer-reviewed research into children and adults’ use to attempt a typology of users. On the basis of their own qualitative enquiry, five distinct user groups are defined, based on behaviours and attitudes (Ofcom, 2007). Summary information explains that these user groups include: alpha socialisers, who use social networking sites to flirt and meet new people; attention seekers who post photos to get comments from others; followers, who use social networking sites to keep up with friends; faithfuls, who find old friends; and functionals, who use social networking sites to pursue interests and hobbies (Ofcom, 2008b, p. 28). Young people are positioned within the first three categories only, and are demarcated by gender, with alpha socialisers being ‘mainly male’ and attention seekers being ‘mainly female’. In this typology, demographics, socio-economic categories, propensity to use, and ‘style of use’ are identified for each user group. While providing a framework for considering social networking behavior and attitudes to it, this typology seems over-simplified, failing to acknowledge that each user’s behaviour and attitudes may vary according to context and have the potential to shift.
from group to group. At the time that it was published, this typology was unique, and as such attracted media attention. However, the continuing growth of social networking as an activity; the evolution and uptake of social networking sites themselves; and the increased uptake of supporting mobile and hand-held technologies have impacted upon the demographics of users of social networking sites, rendering this typology as a snapshot fixed in time, and now lacking in currency.

More recently, Hargittai and Hsieh (2010, p.518-519 have taken a nuanced view of usage and proposed a typology based upon frequency of use and the number of social networking sites used. They identify four types of user: dabbler, devotee, sampler, and omnivore to conclude that gender, access and context impact upon the most intense users (Hargittai and Hsieh, 2011, p.165). Thelwall (2008) conducted an exploration of the demographics of over 20,000 MySpace users to establish gender and friending patterns. He found that generally, females are more likely to use social networking sites than males, and that their use varies, with females being more interested in friendship, and males in dating. Thelwall typifies a MySpace user as ‘apparently female, 21, single, with a public profile, interested in online friendship and logging on weekly to engage with a mixed list of mainly female friends’ who are predominantly acquaintances (Thelwall, 2008, p.1328).

Alongside their special social networking report, Ofcom’s media literacy audit series has included data about children’s use of social networking sites, exploring increasing uptake and the popularity of different sites since 2007 (Ofcom, 2011, p.43). According to Ofcom’s most recent media literacy survey (Ofcom, 2011), the
use of social networking sites among children who use the internet continues to rise. In 2009, 35% of 10-12 year had a profile on a social networking site, rising to 47% in 2010 (Ofcom, 2011, p.44). As part of this series, Ofcom has monitored the popularity of different social networking sites among UK children. In 2008, MySpace, Bebo or Piczo were used by 55% of 12-15 year olds and 19% of 8-11 year olds (Ofcom, 2008a, p.26). Of these sites, Bebo was the most popular, particularly among 12-15 year girls, with 73% of these users having created a profile on it (Ofcom 2008a, p.55). By 2011, this had changed, with 96% of both 8-11 year olds and 12-15 year olds owning active site profiles using Facebook (Ofcom, 2011, p.44). Bebo’s popularity has dropped steadily since 2009, with just 14% of 8-11 year olds, and 24% of 12-15 year olds claiming to use it by 2011 (Ofcom, 2011:44).

Prior to the Ofcom media audit series, the UK Children go Online Project (2003-2005) aimed to investigate 9-19 year olds’ use of the internet in general. This project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of the ‘e-society programme’ and had four main areas for investigation:

- Access, inequalities and the digital divide;
- Undesirable forms of content and contact;
- Education, informal learning and literacy;
- Communication, identity and participation.

The final report stemming from this project, while not making reference to the area of social networking due to the timing of the study, raised concerns around inequality of access and issues of perceived risk (Livingstone and Bober, 2005). This project was followed by two European projects that focused in part upon social
networking in response to developments in internet use: EU kids Online I and EU Kids Online II. These projects continued to focus on issues around risk and access for youth internet users as well as providing data about usage and uptake. Findings from the most recent EU Kids Online survey *Risks and safety on the internet: the perspectives of European children* (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011a), finds that the pattern of uptake in the EU reflects the UK. Based on a sample of over 25,000 children aged 9-16 in 25 European countries, 59% have a social networking profile. This statistic is broken down and shows that while only 26% of 9-10 year olds have a site, 49% of 11-12 year olds, 73% of 13-14 year olds and 82% of 15-16 year olds do, suggesting that uptake is increasing over time, with age, and that the pre-teen age group appear to be highly susceptible to the appeal of social networking. Policy implications from this EU Kids Online survey (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011a) are indicated for multiple stakeholders, but focus on key issues relating to child safety and protection. They include: awareness raising and information for parents; increased industry responsibility for content and access; the increased need for children to develop personal responsibility and digital citizenship skills; awareness-raising for much younger children of primary school age; and the continuation of digital skills training for all children, including development of the use of creative opportunities (Livingstone *et al.* 2011a, p.8). These themes are expounded in the specialist report *EU Kids Online: Social Networking, Age and Privacy* (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011b), which states that in Europe, Facebook is used by one third of 9-16 year old internet users. Protectionist issues are raised in this report’s summary, which identifies that younger children are less likely to use privacy settings and are more likely to communicate online with people unconnected to their daily lives than their older peers. In addition it states that children who do not use privacy settings are more
likely to publish contact details online, and features designed to protect children from other users are not easily understood by many younger and some older children (Livingstone et al 2011b, p.1). As evidenced by the conclusion and policy implications, this report focuses exclusively on issues of control and risk and explores children’s social networking in relation to these issues, rather than focusing on the wider issues of creativity, production and consumption within these sites (Livingstone et al 2011b, p.11-12).

Research conducted in the United States, by the Pew Internet and American Life Project Social Networking and Teens (Lenhart and Madden 2007a) found that at this time, 55% of online teens aged 12-17 had created a profile on a social networking site. The observation that social networking sites had pervaded American youth culture was made by boyd and Ellison (2007) in the same year. In 2010, social networking was explored again in another Pew Internet report: Social Media and mobile internet use among teens and young adults (Lenhart, et al., 2010). In this report, 73% of ‘wired American teens’ (aged 12-17) are found to use social networking sites, a significant increase from previous surveys conducted in 2008 and 2006. These data are further broken down to show that social networking increases dramatically with age, concurring with EU findings: 46% of 12 year olds, 62% of 13 year olds and 82% of 14-17 year olds who use the internet use social networking sites (Lenhart et al., 2010: 17). Social networking sites profile ownership amongst young adults in the US is reported by Debatin et al., (2009) as endemic. They describe how student life without social networking is ‘unthinkable’ (Debatin et al., 2009, p.83) and explain how the ubiquity of social networking positions it as an invisible tool for and mirror of social interaction, personal identity
and network building among students. Szwedo et al., (2010) concur with this observation, noting that social networking sites form an increasingly important domain for the conduct of youth-peer relationships. However, Lenhart et al., (2010:17) suggest that while the uptake of social networking has increased dramatically, the use of social networking sites appears to be changing, and that while teens are still enthusiastic users, they are less ‘tethered’ to their sites, being less likely to use social networking sites to send messages or post to blogs than previously. However, contrary to this, no changes in users’ propensity to post comments to friends’ pictures, pages or wall is noted, suggesting that certain features are less ‘in vogue’ but that the act of social networking itself still remains current as a mechanism for communicating and identity work. The tendency for the appeal of social networking to ebb and flow was noted by boyd in 2007, when she argued that while sites are culturally significant amongst American teens and an important part of teen life, the early infatuation that was noted is diminishing (boyd, 2007, p.1). In this paper boyd also recognizes that despite its popularity, there are youth who choose not to participate in social networking.

While the term social networking is often used generically, the existing literature documenting uptake promotes the notion that social networking cannot be viewed as a singular activity. Amongst participants, the style of participation varies by age and gender (boyd, 2007, p.2; Ofcom, 2008b) and according to cultural and linguistic preferences (boyd 2007, p.5). Pasek et al., (2009) interrogate this notion by undertaking empirical research to challenge the assumed homogeneity of the users of social networking sites. In their study of MySpace and Facebook they find that different sites prompt site-specific culture which can equally hinder or support the
development of social capital. They argue that the affordances of social networking cannot be carried out in the aggregate, but must be considered within site-specific culture. Similarly, Choi et al., (2011), in their study of over 500 students in the US and Korea argue that social networking is a culturally driven practice, which has distinct practices relating to its context and the user. In their discussion they draw from Livingstone (2008b) who notes that it is the distinct interrelationship between the user, context and technology that frames the different modalities of communication that shape social exchanges. Similarly, Takahashi’s Japanese study of audience engagement in MySpace and Mixi describes how audience/ users behave differently according to the cultural values invoked by various social networking sites (Takahashi, 2010). Takahashi identifies four dimensions of audience engagement: information seeking, connectivity, bricolage and participation, as she explores how MySpace and Mixi frame the social behaviour of their networkers in relation to their audience.

In the UK, gender variation amongst young users is noted: girls are more likely to engage in social networking than boys of the same age (84% girls / 75% boys aged 12-15) (Ofcom, 2011, p.43). This trend has been observed in the US amongst adults. The most recent Pew Internet report Social networking sites and Our Lives finds that adult social networking sites users are disproportionately female (56% female/ 44% male) (Hampton et al., 2011, p.9). However, amongst teen users (12-17 years) it is observed that girls and boys are equally likely to participate in social networking (Lenhart et al., 2010).
Therefore it appears that while social networking is described as an activity, the nuances of the activity must be acknowledged. Equally attention must be paid to the various elements that contribute to this nuanced activity, for example, issues of access, issues around perceived risk, style of participation in relation to gender, age, cultural and linguistic preferences, and site-specific culture. Social networking sites alone are not found to mediate the distinctly nuanced social practices surrounding them, but that it is in the interaction between the sites and the social practice that distinct social capital can be realized (Livingstone, 2008). boyd identifies this interrelationship when she describes how although participation within sites and across sites is segmented culturally, the same structural forces are in operation (boyd, 2007).

In addition to the dramatic uptake and nuanced activity, social networking is noted for its ability to attract users to visit and revisit sites. Carrington (2009, p.11) explains that sites are designed to be ‘sticky’, encouraging users to return and engage frequently. The frequency of use has been documented by Ofcom (2011, p.37), who most recently find that 78% of 12-15 year olds use the internet for social networking at least once a week. This audit does not interrogate higher frequency usage rates, although it can be presumed that with 8.4 hours per week for 8-11 year olds, and 15.6 hours per week for 12-15 year olds spent online (Ofcom, 2011, p.5), many users are social networking on a frequent, even daily basis. A summary report for the National Literacy Trust (Jama and Dugdale, 2010) finds that technology-based materials are the most frequently read amongst children, with almost half of UK children claiming to read social networking sites and blogs at least once a week. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study of over 2000 US children: *Generation M2:*
Media in the Lives of 8-18 year olds has attempted to quantify the frequency and duration of use around social networking. This survey claims that American youth spend more time engaged with media than in any other activity. Their representative sample found that 70% of 8-18 year olds go online daily, and that in an average day, 11-14 year olds spend one hour and 46 minutes on the internet, with 29 minutes dedicated to social networking. (Rideout, et al., 2010, p.20). This report suggests that the uptake of social networking is a major contributor to the increase in time spent on line by youth over the five years leading up to this report.

In summary, the body of literature reports that amongst youth and adults, the growth of social networking and its impact has been phenomenal across the UK, Europe and the US; that children begin social networking in significant numbers (in the UK and Europe) before they reach the site’s authorized entry age; and that the popularity of different sites alters over time. Significant to this study is the identification that in the UK, almost 50% of pre-teenage children are claiming to participate in social networking. While the available literature provides user-data relating to this age group, (e.g. within the Ofcom Media Literacy Audit series), the sparse qualitative data available draws mainly from other international studies, e.g. boyd, (2007); Lenhart and Madden, (2007a), that tend to focus upon a teen-age group, and home-grown studies that focus mainly upon adults. With the exception of one report that claims a qualitative methodology: Social Networking research: A qualitative look at behaviours, attitudes and barriers (Ofcom, 2007), the literature trawl has identified scant qualitative data that explores social networking amongst the youngest users. For example, while Ofcom’s qualitative enquiry has a sample of 52 participants in total, the report draws from just 13 youth participants, with only three participants
being aged between 11 and 13 years. Throughout the report, there are relatively few references to this age group, and as such they are under-represented. The aforementioned Kaiser Family Foundation Study in the US takes a mainly quantitative stance (Rideout et al., 2010), and the recently published report by the Sesame Workshop Always Connected: The new digital media habits of young children, (Gutnick et al., 2010), reviews media consumption in general terms, but while noting that consumption increases around age 8, does not focus specifically on the area of social networking (Gutnick et al., 2010, p.30). In an ethnographic study of 16 British teenagers aged 13-16 years, Livingstone considers the different use patterns of younger and older children. She observes that participants in social networking sites are likely to present themselves in different ways, based on their age. Younger participants present ‘a highly decorated, stylistically elaborate identity’, while older participants aim to create ‘a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships with others’ (Livingstone, 2008a, p.408).

This differential use is of interest. It indicates that the youngest users are involved in social networking as a textual practice, using the affordances of the activity to construct and elaborate textual representations of themselves. At this point in the review of literature, it can be noted that despite their prolific use of social networking sites, pre-teenage children’s engagement with social networking has yet to be explored qualitatively, and from a perspective that recognises their motivations and purposes. While comprehensive data that documents the demographics of users, and the nuances of these demographics has been published, qualitative enquiry exploring the youngest users’ practices is under-represented.
The features of social networking sites: social networking sites as textual spaces

Alongside the documentation of the uptake of social networking and the attributes of users sits a body of data which aims to describe the features of social networking sites, the generation of profiles, and their associated affordances (boyd and Ellison, 2007; boyd 2007; Carrington 2009; Dowdall, 2006; Dowdall, 2009a, Dowdall 2009b, Livingstone, 2008; Livingstone and Brake, 2010.) In this section, the literature that describes the features of social networking sites as textual spaces will be presented.

In their seminal paper *Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship* 15 boyd and Ellison (2007) describe social network sites as ‘web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system’ (boyd and Ellison, 2007, p.211). They also articulate two key textual features that constitute social networking sites: the visible *profile* that represents the user to their network, and the user’s *list of friends* that is displayed for the network to view. The visible profile, containing the list of friends, is the textual space around and through which social networking pivots. boyd and Ellison (2007) additionally describe how users are required to decide upon privacy options, and make and

receive comments. These two features are also critical components of the process of profile construction and the contingent textual space.

In an earlier paper, I reviewed the features of *Bebo*, a flourishing social networking site at that time amongst adolescents aged 12-15 (Ofcom, 2008a, p.55). In this paper, *Bebo* is constructed as a textual space that affords specific social behaviours and is constrained by social and pedagogic style influences, including the *Bebo* discourse itself, where site designers are able to influence what child text producers can achieve (Dowdall, 2006, p.153-163).

From these early papers it is evident that concepts of social networking and social networking sites pivot around notions of text construction within an online context. This online context can be construed as another feature of social networking sites that is related to the textual space. boyd (2007) has overviewed online digital contexts in some detail in her work for the MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Learning. boyd’s paper provides a comprehensive introduction to and description of the generic features of social networking sites and associated practices, including an analysis of their affordances, the practices around them and implications arising from this. boyd describes the range of sites in operation internationally (at that time) and develops her and Ellison’s original definition (2007) to highlight three key features: ‘fundamentally, social networking sites are a category of community sites


that have profiles, friends and comments’ (boyd, 2007, p.5). boyd describes how these three features are common to a range of social networking sites and support generic practices: the public articulation of friends; the viewing of profiles; and the act of commenting on profiles. In establishing that comments are a key feature of social networking sites, alongside the profile and friend list, in this paper, boyd emphasizes the potential for reciprocity and mutual sociability as a key feature of social networking.

In addition, boyd develops the notion that any consideration of the features of social networking sites must be undertaken in relation to the context in which the sites exist and are used. She explains that the textual features of social networking sites (profile, friend list, comments) are bound by one significant contextual feature - that they are constructed in a public arena. Boyd sees this arena as a distinct feature of social networking and based on her work with Mimi Ito (Ito, 2008, p.2), describes this arena as a mediated form of ‘networked public’ (boyd, 2007, p.7). She explains that this context is distinctive because of four properties that separate networked publics from unmediated (e.g. face-to-face) versions. The properties of networked publics are persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audience. Persistence enables asynchronous communication and the extension of the existence of a speech act; searchability allows users to seek others out; replicability, disallows notions of misinterpretation; and the existence of invisible audiences, who may originate in different times and spaces from when and where speech acts originated, dislocates unmediated communication patterns (boyd, 2007, p.9). boyd explains these terms as the properties that impact upon social networking sites and as such
are key features of them. For boyd, the notion of ‘networked public’ surrounds the features and practices involved in social networking as a key structuring force.

In accounting for the features of social networking sites, the literature also finds that social networking is not bound to the online context in which its artefacts are created. As a site for textual production, a key feature of social networking sites is that while the site is materially bounded by its online presence, the impressions made by the profile page or associated comments are not. Instead, a feature of social networking sites is that they can be viewed as housing mundane connected online/offline activity with repercussions that ripple across online and offline contexts facilitating the development of social capital (boyd, 2006; Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe, 2007). In earlier work, I documented how the construction of one adolescent girl’s Bebo profile page is inextricably linked to real time and concrete social identity formation, and report how this has implications for identity, social interaction and text (Dowdall, 2006, p.158, see appendix 1). In this paper, I drew from Leander and Kim (2003) to defend the notion that the internet, and in particular the social networking site, is an artefact that is interlinked in complex ways to ‘everyday life’, and that this provides opportunities for identity work to be enacted ‘across the line’ (Dowdall, 2006, p.59). In her description of one early adolescent girl’s Bebo site, Carrington concurs, noting that the textual artefact created by an early adolescent girl as she monitors and updates the appearance of her Bebo site is a key component of her offline identity and an important form of her off-line social capital (Carrington, 2009, p.14). Livingstone, in her evaluation of the risk involved in creating content for social networking sites, also notes that the distinction between online and offline is increasingly blurred as the complex
practices involved in social networking become thoroughly embedded in daily life (Livingstone, 2008a).

In attempting to review the literature that describes the features of social networking sites, it becomes apparent that social networking sites can be conceived as textual spaces, but that these spaces are linked inextricably to the social context of their production. Accordingly, social networking sites can be regarded from a textual and social perspective that includes the profile page that is constructed by each user in relation to their social context, a list of friends that is built by each user and that constitutes the social network, the reciprocal comments uploaded by others in the network, and the potential for convergence across online and offline spaces within a wider social context. The literature most usually documents these features in relation to the practices that they support and are supportive of. However the next section of this review will attempt to delineate the social and textual practices of social networking in order to identify areas that are less interrogated.
The practices of social networking

Having overviewed the usage and uptake of social networking sites, and the features of social networking sites, in this third section, I turn to two types of practice that can be recognised as occurring within social networking sites: social practice and text production. This review will require that some literature that has already been presented is revisited in order to delineate these practices. Within the New Literacy Studies Paradigm (Marsh, 2005), literacy is widely regarded as a social practice (New London Group, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 2000). Marsh, (2005) has described the notion of social practice in relation to the digital age and describes how children of the digital age are shaped by and shaping new possibilities for communication and text production in digital spaces (Marsh, 2005, p. 4). As I have articulated in an earlier paper:

A new literacy studies perspective contends that the literacy practices of individuals are ‘inherently political and linked to issues of power, identity, inclusion and exclusion’ (Carrington and Marsh, 2005). In this paradigm, social, cultural and personal components interplay to position individuals in relation to others (Holland & Leander, 2004). In this way, identity, communicative practice and context can be viewed as an inextricably linked triad which gives rise to the production of texts as the triad interplays. The texts produced are viewed as motivated signs (Kress, 1997) and artefacts of identity (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, p. 108); spaces where social identities (Gee, 1996, p. 91) can be rehearsed, improvised and performed. (Dowdall, 2009a, p. 77)

This statement attempts to theorise how social practices, in the form of identity-play and communication, are melded with notions of social space through the realisation of text. Within the literature that documents the practices of social networking, this triad can be observed. Issues around identity, social practice and text are frequently interwoven. In addition, social practice and text are found to be associated interchangeably with the affordances associated with them. The term ‘affordances’, was coined by Gibson in relation to the field of visual perception (1979) to describe
what an environment can offer an animal (Gibson, 1979, p.121). Gibson notes that affordances are neither merely objective nor subjective properties, but that they reside in the relationship between the environment and the behavior of those occupying the environment (Gibson, 1979, p.129). The notion of affordances has been more recently been applied to texts, social technologies and social settings, as a way of providing a framework for identifying the characteristics of social networking sites (Parks, 2011, p.179). boyd (2011) succinctly explains this relationship:

Networked technologies introduce new affordances for amplifying, recording and spreading information and social acts. These affordances can shape publics and how people negotiate them. While such affordances do not determine social practice, they can destabilize core assumptions people make when engaging in social life. As such they can reshape publics both directly and through the practices that people develop to account for the practices. (boyd, 2011, p.45-46).

The practices and affordances of social networking are conceived variously, but frequently in relation to social practice and textual practice. boyd takes a social and textual perspective. She describes affordances in relation to the networked publics that social networking supports and depends upon. She coins the label ‘structural affordances’ (boyd, 2011, p.45) to describe the possibilities that are shaped by the architecture of the profiles, friend lists and tools for communication that comprise social networking (boyd, 2011, pp.39-40). Livingstone theorises the affordances of social networking from the frame of opportunity and risk (Livingstone, 2008a). In reviewing the field, Livingstone describes how the affordances of social networking continue to be documented from a variety of perspectives and under a range of subject headings. She also notes social and textual practices within her discussion. She categorises the variety of perspectives and identifies four varieties of account that relate to practice: optimistic accounts, where ‘new opportunities for self-
expression, sociability, community engagement, creativity and new literacies’ are stressed; critical accounts, where the traditional dominance of consumers by producers is overturned as an innovative peer-culture around youth content-creation develops; public policy accounts, concerned with the public’s development of transferrable media literacy skills that will protect against risk and transgressive representations of self; and finally, media accounts that amplify public anxiety and panic about issues relating to privacy, shame and narcissism (Livingstone, 2008a, p.5).

Papacharissi (2011, p.307) views the affordances of social networking in relation to activity rather than audience. She describes ‘expressive and connective’ affordances that support sociability and performance. In this description Papacharissi highlights the role of the creator, as she recognizes the opportunities for expression allowed. Parks (2011) extends this two-part definition. He describes ‘social affordances’, as ‘the possibilities for action that are called forth by a social technology or environment’ and identifies three types of social affordance that are required to form a social networking community: affordances of membership, expression and connection (Parks, 2011, p.109). The aforementioned reviews, through their consideration of affordances reveal that the practices involved in social networking can be regarded as social and textual. In the next section these practices will be delineated for discussion.

**Social networking as a social practice**

In the field of social networking, key papers document the uptake and development of social networking as a social practice. In these papers, two major themes recur.
These are the use of social networking sites for the creation of social capital (boyd, 2006; boyd, 2007; Ellison et al, 2011; Ellison et al., 2007; Carrington, 2009), and social networking sites as spaces for identity construction and performance (boyd, 2007; boyd and Ellison, 2007; Carrington, 2009; Dowdall, 2009a; Dowdall, 2009b; Dowdall, 2009c; Livingstone, 2008b; Livingstone 2008c; Liu, 2007). These themes can be observed to interrelate. Social capital formation can be viewed as an outcome of identity performance through social networking, and the ability to perform and manage identity can arise from the possession and use of social capital. These themes are complex and multifaceted, and as such have given rise to a number of other studies that explore detailed and connected areas within these grand themes, e.g. identity, friendship and audience.

**Social capital**

Social capital formation in social networking sites has been theorized variously by Ellison, *et al.*, (2011), and Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007). They draw from the work of Bourdieu to define, in his words, social capital formation as ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu, 1985, p.248). In their most recent chapter, they overview the Internet’s impact upon the formation of social capital and describe how in addition to positive, negative and supplementary perspectives, the notion of social capital formation in relation to social networking sites has been reworked to distinguish between online and offline forms (Ellison *et al*, 2011p.127), and to identify sociotechnical capital as a subset of social capital, (Resnick, 2001 in Ellison et al., 2011p.129). Ellison *et al.*, (2011) consider how social networking builds
social capital and how the formation of capital can vary. They rehearse Granovetter’s concept of weak ties and implications for network building in relationships (Granovetter, 1973) to argue that the potential for the building of social capital within a social networking sites is affected by the strength of the tie between members. They argue that distinct types of social capital, namely bridging and bonding forms (Putnam, 2000) are afforded by social networking in relation to strong and weak ties within the network (Ellison et al., 2011, p.127). Drawing from two research studies they suggests two trends: that the use of Facebook precedes social capital gains; and that users are more likely to use the site to connect with existing friends, than to develop new relationships (Ellison et al., 2011 p.136). They conclude that the use of social networking sites is positively correlated with the generation of social capital.

**Identity**

The issue of identity in relation to literacy will be explored from a theoretical perspective in chap 4. Through her study of Friendster users (boyd, 2006), and her subsequent ethnographic case study of 14-18 year-old MySpace users (boyd, 2007), boyd explores the interrelated themes of social affordances and identity. In these papers she raises questions about the popularity of social networking sites; what young people do as they engage with them; how participation impacts upon users’ lives; and how online friendship work relates to off-line relations. She finds that social networking sites provide spaces for youth to engage in identity and status negotiation amongst peers; that through social networking they learn to make sense of cultural cues and negotiate public life; and in so doing, they develop critical peer to peer sociality skills (boyd, 2007). Alongside the social affordances offered, boyd
also notes that social networking can be viewed as a motivating force and a form of peer-pressure. She explains that youth engage in social networking because their friends do it. In addition to this extrinsic motivation, she describes how personal pleasure is derived as users claim to engage in social networking for entertainment purposes (boyd, 2007, p.10). boyd concludes her discussion of social affordances by arguing that social networking is altering social dynamics and complicating ways in which young people interact (boyd, 2007, p.2). As a development of these findings, boyd articulates implications for youth as a whole. She describes how through their profile creation and subsequent use of their social networking sites, teenage users undergo an ‘initiation’, where they learn about socially appropriate behaviour and how to identify oneself through the careful selection of visual and textual information (boyd, 2007, p.10).

Identity performance in social networking sites is explored by boyd in this paper. Her discussions focus upon social networking sites as vehicles for impression management and situation definition which establish social norms and support the process of socialisation (boyd, 2007, p.12). In relation to the development of the skill involved in performing identity in social networking sites, she coins Sunden’s notion (Sunden, 2003), to argue that users must learn to ‘write themselves into being’, using text, images, audio and video as a way of constructing a ‘digital body’. This process involves the skill of conceptualizing an ‘imagined audience’ (boyd, 2007, p.14), whose presence frames the social networking act. Throughout this discussion, boyd draws from Giddens (1991) and Goffman’s seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), to theorise how impressions are reflexively formed and performed in mediated online spaces (boyd, 2007, p.12). Liu
(2007) also draws from Sunden to explore the online textual performance of self using the social networking profile. He describes how social networking sites users compose ‘taste statements’ using virtual manifestations of cultural signs, and perform these statements through their profile page. Liu categorises taste statements into four types of performance in a social networking sites profile: those that aim to convey prestige, difference, authenticity and theatre. Liu sees profiles as personas that are composed and performed, and that this performance is a key affordance of social networking. boyd and Ellison, (2007) also identify the potential of social networking as a tool for the development of identity and implications arising from this. They observe that social networking can be viewed as a tool for impression management and friendship performance, noting the potential for profiles to be playfully enacted; that social networking sites can be viewed as spaces for building networks and network structure, involving friendship and taste performance; and that social networking and social networking sites depend upon and promote a space that supports interplay between online/offline connections, and emerging privacy issues. The performance of identity in social networking sites is also described by Pearson (2009) in relation to Goffman’s theories of social performance (Goffman, 1956). She argues that identities in social networking sites are deliberately constructed performances that straddle public and private domains, and rely upon webs of social connections that support the playful and fluid construction of identity. Grimmelmann (2009) explores the social affordances of social networking, with a particular focus on privacy issues in relation to the use of Facebook. Grimmelmann, building from boyd’s work, identifies three aspects of social interaction enabled by social networking: identity (the creation of representative profiles); relationships (establishment of one to one connections with others); and community (occupation
of social space amongst peers) (2009, p.1143). Also drawing from Goffman (1956), Grimmelmann echoes boyd and Liu to suggest that social networking sites offer a direct tool for controlled impression management (2009, p.1152). He develops this argument to theorise how social networking sites both express identity and are constitutive of it. The interplay between the profile owner and commenting audience is noted, impacting upon the notion of ownership of the text, and the motivation of the networker to maintain control of the impression being created (Grimmelmann 2009, p.1153). For Grimmelman, key features of social networking include the affordance of reciprocity and the activation of relational impulses (Grimmelmann 2009, p.1156). In addition, Grimmelmann explains how social networking allows users to create a visual map of their social world, and the opportunity to navigate their social geography (Grimmelmann 2009, p.1158, which in turns allows the accumulation of friends and conspicuous signalling of belonging to desirable groups (Grimmelmann 2009, p.1159).

Prior to the mass uptake of social networking, Lewis and Fabos in their study of seven users of Instant Messaging, noted that users are skilled communicators, able to manipulate a range of linguistic elements in order to perform identity and enhance social relationships (Lewis and Fabos, 2005). This finding has also been observed in social networking sites, where cohesive identity construction and reconstruction is presented as a textual accomplishment (Carrington, 2009; Dowdall, 2008a; Dowdall, 2008c). More recently, Brake (2009) has explored personal blogging and finds that bloggers are less likely to be reflexive constructors of social identity. Instead, he finds that bloggers post to an imagined and ‘desired’ social context, and at times, a self-directed audience. Brake explains how these findings contrast with earlier
studies of computer mediated communication which argue for the strategic construction and presentation of self to ensure successful social interactions (Brake, 2009). This finding unsettles singular conceptions of identity construction through online textual practice, and indicates that further empirical enquiry is required.

**Friendship**

The affordances associated with friendship building are described in several papers. Implications for friendship and ‘friending’ are discussed in detail by boyd in relation to *Friendster*. She considers how social networking is affecting friendship behaviour and finds that the use of social networking sites mutates understandings of friendship. She observes a binary relationship between the concept of friendship and social networking, where existing friendship patterns appear to style the culture of the social networking sites, and in turn, the technological and social affordances of the site have implications for friendship behaviour (boyd, 2006). Similarly, in their ethnographic study of profiles in *Friendster*, boyd and Heer (2006) explore relationship building and theorise how social networking and profile construction acts not only as a representation of self, but contributes to the shaping of others within the system. In their view, profiles invoke and represent a communicative body in conversation, rather than a static self.

Ofcom (2008b), explore identity management and friendship. This report finds that at the heart of social networking is the act of setting up a profile, which allows users to create a unique profile and reveal aspects of character to others (Ofcom, 2008b, p.34). Ofcom take a singular but extending view of friendship, to describe how social networking sites ‘stretch the traditional meaning of friends to mean anyone
with whom a user has an online connection’ (2008b, p.7). They suggest that this has implications for information sharing, noting that users will share information that in the ‘offline world’ might only be shared with close friends. The emotional reward derived from contacting friends, participating in the activity and affirmation is cited as a reason for use along with the opportunity to experiment with identity and develop a wide online social network (Ofcom, 2008b, p.35). Relationship management is supported by using social networking sites, both in terms of developing new friendships and maintaining existing relationships (Ofcom, 2008b, p.36). Findings about children’s reasons for using social networking sites are presented as responses to a tick list of statements. Based on these statements, 92% of children claimed to use social networking sites to stay in touch with friends/family they see a lot; 92% to look at own and others’ pages and profiles; 79% to stay in touch with people they rarely see in person; and 59% to make new friends (Ofcom, 2008b, p.42). In this report, concern about implications for the user’s privacy and the opportunity for users to take risks that could impact upon their reputation were noted.

Thelwall (2008) in his study of over 20,000 MySpace users attempts to classify the ‘friends’ found within the site. He found that three different levels of friending exist. These are the development of friendship with close friends, acquaintances or strangers. Thelwall also found that the primary purpose of friendship in general social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook is to socialize for the sake of communication itself, using phatic expressions as well as discussing topics of shared interest. Carrington notes the binary relationship between the concept of friendship and social networking, and argues further that friendship in social networking sites
is reconfigured as an ongoing connection that builds community with others in on-line and off-line affinity groups (Carrington, 2009). Affinity groups have been described by Gee as the group of people associated with a given semiotic domain, and who recognise other group members as insiders (Gee, 2003, p.27). The potential for ongoing connection in social networking sites restyles the possibilities for friendship behaviour. This notion has been theorized within wider discussions of children’s increasing use of social media and mobile technology to allow continued communicative behavior (Gutnick, 2010; Ito et al., 2010; Ito et al., 2006).

**Audience**

Along with friendship, audience is recognized as a key force for mediating communicative acts in online spaces (Livingstone, 2008b; Marwick and boyd, 2010). Accordingly, the notion of audience has been elaborated. A key theme emerging from the literature in relation to audience is that users must imagine and navigate their networked audiences in order to participate in social networking (Marwick and boyd, 2010, p.2). boyd (2006) draws from Sunden (2003) to argue that as part of the act of constructing a profile and ‘friending’, users of social networking sites literally write their audience and community into being (boyd, 2006). This act allows the users to reflexively define themselves and the context in which they are operating, as a visible audience is imagined and articulated. Returning to the work of Takahashi (2010), she explores the impact of audience in different social networking sites in Japan and problematises this notion. She first argues that the term ‘user’ under-privileges the role of the intended audience in a given social networking sites, failing to account for their contribution to the act of social networking. Having argued for the use of the term ‘audience’ instead of ‘user’
to remediate this omission, she refers to an ethnographic study of 18-24 year old MySpace and Mixi\textsuperscript{18} users to consider how cultural variations may impact upon how youth engage with their audiences through the social networking sites MySpace and Mixi, and builds upon boyd’s work (boyd 2007; boyd and Ellison, 2007) to argue that Japanese young people use their sites reflexively to create and recreate themselves variably according to a specific site’s affordances. Takahashi identifies four dimensions of audience engagement that are afforded by social networking: information sharing, connectivity, bricolage and participation. She concludes that through these dimensions, individual social networking sites with varying affordances allow new audience relations to be supported (Takahashi, 2010).

Audience is also problematised by Livingstone (2008b:1) who draws from critical audience reception theory to juxtapose ‘audience’ with ‘viewer’ and consider issues of active reception and polysemy in practice as well as principle in the field of media studies. Livingstone describes how the critical consideration of the role of the audience in media supports the integration of the ‘analysis of audiences with that of production, text and context as part of a dynamic account of what Stuart Hall (1994) called the ‘circuit’ of meaning (or of culture, or capital). More recently, audience is considered by Marwick and boyd (2010), in relation to the micro-blogging site, Twitter. They note that to allow for the creation of textual artefacts, a user’s awareness of their imagined audience is necessarily bounded, but that in reality, the audience on a social networking sites like Twitter is at the same time potentially ‘limitless’. While Marwick and boyd do not discuss this duality in the light of the

\textsuperscript{18} Mixi is a mainstream social networking site in Japan http://mixi.jp/
privacy options that can be implemented, they make the observation that when writing posts in a textual rather than visual microblogging site like Twitter, one’s sense of audience is ruptured and that the ability to impression-manage is unsettled. They argue that individuals learn how to manage this conflict, but at the same time, issues around privacy, authenticity and intimacy remain unresolved.

These discussions of social capital, identity, friendship and audience are framed by the notion of social networking as a social practice. As has been documented in this chapter, the interest of policy makers and academics in the explosion of social networking has largely concerned the usage and uptake of social networking sites, the risks associated with this usage, and the notion that social networking is a social practice that affords new ways of conducting identity and friendship that involves the building of social capital and audience control. However, to achieve these facets of social practice, it must be accepted that the construction and consumption of textual artefacts within the context of social networking is of paramount importance. In the next section, the literature accounting for the production of textual artefacts through the process of social networking as a textual practice will be explored.

**Social networking as text production**

In order to actively participate in social networking, children must create texts to represent themselves to others. The practice of social networking can therefore be regarded as an act of text production and from a textual perspective due to the construction of textual artefacts that accommodate and are formed as by-products of the social practice, e.g. the profile page, the friend list and comments (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Texts and textual artefacts will be defined in Chapter 4: *Assembling*
a theoretical framework. However, while social networking can be described as a textual practice, little consensus over the nature of the textual artefacts produced, or the nature of the text production involved appears to have been reached by scholars working within the field. To complicate things further, the terminology associated with text production within social networking sites is not clearly defined through the literature already described in this chapter. For example, the following terms have been identified throughout the literature described already to describe the practice of social networking: users, producers, consumers, youth, creators, authors; texts, content, artefacts. This assortment of labels reflects the lack of clarity in the field and the relative emphasis that has been placed upon viewing social networking as a social practice, with less consideration for issues relating to textual practice. In this final section, the literature that documents the textual practices around production and consumption practices in social networking sites (terms, which cannot necessarily be separated as discussed in Chapter 4) will be presented in an attempt to seek clarity and focus this research project.

Notions of text and text production in digital contexts have been reconfigured by a variety of scholars (Carrington, 2005a; Carrington 2005b; Carrington and Marsh, 2005; Kress, cited in Bearne 2005; Marsh, 2005a; Marsh 2005b). Due to the affordances of digital technologies, text can no longer be considered merely as a ‘lettered representation’. Instead, our understandings of text have expanded to include combinations of image, sound, words, and movement (Kress, 2003). Specifically, profile pages within social networking sites can be described as ‘sophisticated interactive multimodal texts, containing words, still images, sound and video’ (Dowdall, 2009a:75). These texts can be viewed as ‘motivated signs
(Kress, 1997) and artefacts of identity (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, p.108), spaces where social identities (Gee, 1996, p.91) can be rehearsed, improvised and performed (Dowdall. 2009a:77).

Through the literature, text production in social networking sites is conceived as a creative and innovative act. Ofcom explore text production under the heading of creativity (Ofcom, 2008a). The Ofcom special report into social networking (2008b) and their ongoing media literacy audit series concern themselves with the promotion of media literacy, as an enactment of Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003.19 In the 2008 media literacy audit, Ofcom define media literacy as ‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’ (Ofcom, 2008, p.10). Three elements of media literacy are described:

- **Access** includes take-up of media devices, volume and breadth of use.
- **Understand** includes interest and competence in using the features available on each platform, extent and levels of concern, trust in television and online content and use of television and internet security controls.
- **Create** includes people’s confidence in engaging with creative content and their interest in carrying out creative tasks, most notably using social networking sites. (Ofcom 2008a, p.4).

Central to their notion of media literacy is the area of creativity, and a section of this report is dedicated to children’s ability to create content and interact online (Ofcom, 2008a pp.51-59). Here, social networking sites are noted as a ‘key driver of children’s desire and ability to create content online’ (Ofcom, 2008a pp.7-8) with girls being more likely than boys to engage in a range of creative online activities, particularly those related to communicating or sharing content with people’ (Ofcom,

---

of ‘creativity’. Instead they ask children to describe their experience of creative activities by nominating the activities that they do, or would like to do, using technologies, from a list of potential responses which include: setting up a profile; adding comments to a website; and uploading photos (Ofcom, 2008a p.51). When enquiring about children’s creative use of social networking sites, children are offered a variety of responses to choose from, including: talking to friends/ family; looking at other people’s pages; and listening to music (Ofcom, 2008a p.57). While these lines of enquiry seek to delineate what children do and why, the questions do not interrogate the possibilities for text production within social networking, and the questions asked by Ofcom reduce the potential for issues around text production and consumption to be explored.

Ofcom have more recently evolved their definition of media literacy to state that it is “the ability to use, understand and create media and communications” (Ofcom 2011, p.8; Ofcom 2010, p.7). While ‘to create’ is still present as a strand within this definition, the emphasis on creativity appears to have lessened. Instead there is an increasing focus on perceived benefits to the user, changing levels of parental trust, the increased usage of parental rules and controls and parental mediation (Ofcom, 2010; Ofcom 2011). In their 2008 report, the strands access, understand and create were used as content subheadings, with a dedicated section focusing on creativity (Ofcom 2008a, p.2). In 2011, the three strands are subsumed within a different set of content headings reflecting Ofcom’s evolving ontology. These more recent reports are framed by a concern about children’s knowledge and understanding of media; the extent of parents’ and children’s attitudes and concerns about the internet; and
the extent of parental mediation strategies (Ofcom 2011, p.2). In this study, Ofcom explore children’s experience of creative activities undertaken online using a list of ‘things people might do’ (Ofcom 2011, p.43). This list relates to text production, and includes setting up a social networking site, uploading photos, creating a character or avatar, setting up a website, making and uploading a video, setting up a weblog, signing an online petition, and expressing social and political views. Data reflects that the children in this survey are voracious producers and consumers of text. The most popular creative activity amongst 12-15 year olds was found to be setting up a profile (80%) (Ofcom, 2011, p.41). Uploading photos to a web site is delineated as a separate and the next most popular activity amongst this age group (61%). Amongst younger participants, 28% 8-11 year olds have set up a social networking site and 16% have uploaded photos to a web site (Ofcom, 2011, p.42).

Despite children’s avid use of social networking sites, Ofcom has not been tasked to explore children’s text production within this media form, and any possible implications. Instead of interrogating textual practices around production and consumption, their questions focus on social networking as social acts of ‘talking to’ and ‘looking at’ (Ofcom, 2008a, p.57), reflecting their social and political agenda.

Alongside creativity, innovation is another theme that houses the notion of text production in social networking sites. McPherson regards the communicative behavior that involves the creation of text in social spaces as a form of innovation (McPherson 2008). In her volume for the MacArthur Foundation20, she discusses a

20 For details of the MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning please see http://digitallearning.macfound.org/site/c.enJLQNIIFiG/b.2029271/k.98D4/MacArthur_Series.htm
variety of themes that emerge from a consideration of young people’s innovative use of digital technologies. The themes: history, context, engagement, participation, literacy development and flexibility, are presented as the foci of a series of rules for use when exploring future innovative practice. Through them, she reminds the reader that innovative behavior in digital spaces is situated within larger organizing systems such as schools, peer groups and commercial culture, and that these systems circumscribe innovative behaviour. In relation to text production, McPherson takes a pedagogical stance and describes how literacies (internet, information, media) need to be intertwined and fostered as technologies move on and youth and educators respond (McPherson, 2008, p.16). This pedagogical stance is developed by Livingstone in the same volume. Livingstone explores engagement and participation in digital contexts and argues that they are best understood through the gaze of what she calls ‘internet literacy’. She describes this literacy in terms of basic and advanced skills that can be linked with social practices to cross the boundary between formal and informal learning (Livingstone, 2008b). This ‘internet literacy’ is distinct from print literacy and comprises three dimensions: that literacy is a form of knowledge with clear continuities across communicative forms; that literacy is a situated form of knowing that is facilitated or impeded by economic, cultural and social capital; and that literacy is a set of culturally regulated competences that can be transgressed and valued (Livingstone, 2008b, p.106). Livingstone argues from her empirical observations that the literacies of youths in relation to their online abilities are sometimes assumed to be greater and more critical than they are. She also argues that skills are uneven and often don’t extend to making digital objects (Livingstone, 2008b, p.109). Through this consideration of internet literacy,
Livingstone is exploring the skills required for text production in social networking sites. However along with McPherson, her discussion is subsumed within a pedagogic framework, rather than a consideration of the textual practices and literacies invoked by the users themselves. Through these discussions and the review of literature to this point, it becomes apparent that what people do when they construct a profile within a social networking site is subject to multifarious classifications and framings. Profile construction as an act can be regarded variously as production, creation, innovation, literacy, usage. Through their discussions, McPherson and Livingstone reveal and reflect this conundrum.

Lessig (2008) explores creativity, textual production and consumption in digital cultures and provides a framework that can be used to reconceptualise profile construction within social networking sites. He theorises the context for text production within these spaces, arguing that we have moved from a ‘read only (RO) culture’ dominated by the dissemination of print text, to a ‘read/write (RW) culture’ where the potential to remix information is viewed as a creative act, enabled by digital technologies (Lessig, 2008 pp.7-14). A main implication of this new context is that a technological read/write culture supports the democratisation of creativity, allowing mass participation through access to digital technologies (Lessig, 2008, p.54). RW culture and its contingent potential for democratic activity can be regarded as a fundamental element of text production within social networking, where anyone with membership of a social networking site has the capacity to construct and disseminate ‘texts’ as widely as they wish. Within this democratized context, Lessig retheorises the role of text in what he describes as a ‘remix’ society. Lessig sets up an opposition between ‘media texts’ and the ‘written word’,
suggesting that in a digital society, written ‘text’ (e.g. the written word), becomes the currency of the elite, where ‘media’ becomes the currency of the masses (Lessig, 2008, p.69). Using available ‘media’ forms, remixed texts can be created, drawing from available resources. Lessig describes ‘remix’ as an act of collage that arises from combining elements taken from a read only culture to create something new (Lessig, 2008, p.76) and argues that these texts that are increasingly dominant.

Profile construction within social networking can be viewed as an example of this ‘remix’ process. In an earlier paper (Dowdall, 2009c) I describe in some detail how a member of Bebo mixes and edits modules provided by Bebo; uploads her own images and videos; and scribes her own text to compile her profile page.

As a text producer in a social network site, Chloe has to continually select and revise material from a variety of sources to upload to her profile. Consequently her page is an amalgam of her own content (photos, videos, original writing); Bebo-generated content (quizzes, blog templates, etc.); elements from her friends’ profile pages, where Chloe sometimes will ‘borrow’ ideas, photos, skins and elements from other user-generated-content sites, such as YouTube, where Chloe might upload video. (Dowdall, 2009c, p.95)

The example of Chloe provides insight into Lessig’s notion of remix. Chloe, in order to create a textual artefact depends on her abilities to skim and search for material that can be borrowed and re-presented as a unique textual amalgam. boyd (2007, p.11) recognizes ‘remix’ within social networking and describes it as the emergence of a ‘copy/paste culture’, where teens borrow from others and alter their profile using HTML or other code forms (in the case of MySpace, which allows this) to achieve personalization. boyd identifies that this culture is often collaborative, where users are likely to use a helper-site, or ask friends to do it for them if they lack the
technological skill-set. The skills involved in orchestrating ‘remix’ are creative skills that involve a range of masteries including social, linguistic and technological technical mastery (Dowdall, 2006).

In earlier papers, I have documented how users continually review and reconstruct their profiles as a textual practice in order to present a coherent and acceptable identity to their network (Dowdall, 2006; Dowdall, 2009a; 2009c). Carrington (2009) focuses on the skill-set required to manage the remix and construction of texts in social networking sites. She explains that texts constructed in social networking sites incorporate the different media forms afforded by the technology into one artefact. Through the act of remix and convergence, textual meaning is no longer held in print alone and accordingly, text does particular kinds of work for the creator. In order to successfully construct texts, Carrington demonstrates how users must make strategic choices about content and linguistic markers, using these skills to foreground aspects of identity and signal belonging. For Carrington, the act of profile construction is a ‘testament’ to the user’s literate skills within a particular domain (Carrington, 2009, p.12). The outcome of this literacy is that the user can construct a cohesive self-narrative that serves as a DIY biography for her audience (Carrington, 2009, p.14). In these accounts the textual practices associated with social networking can be regarded as formative. The text producer’s literacy in this domain achieves social reward. Therefore, the actual skill and mastery involved in producing texts is of great consequence for the author. Perkel (2008) considers remix and reuse as key concepts when considering the consumption and production habits of MySpace users via participant-observation in a community arts and technology centre. Perkel unpicks the terms consumption and production, drawing
first from the French cultural theorist de Certeau and then from the MIT scholar, Henry Jenkins to explain that reinvention (in relation to text) is an act of consumption as well as production (de Certeau, 1984, p.169), where a reader can invent in texts something different from that which was intended, and transform the experience into the production of new texts (Jenkins, 1992, p.46).

Using a small-scale study of 16 teenagers, aged 13-16, Livingstone (2008a) also focuses on the potential for convergence and remix when attempting to tease out the textual practices involved in social networking:

In terms of their affordances, social networking sites enable communication among ever-widening circles of contacts, and they invite convergence among the hitherto separate activities of email, messaging, website creation, diaries, photo albums, and music/video uploading and downloading. From the user’s viewpoint, more than ever before using media means creating as well as receiving, with user-control extending far beyond selecting ready-made, mass produced content. The very language of social relationships is being reframed; today, people construct their ‘profile’, make it ‘public’ or ‘private’, they ‘comment’ or ‘message’ their ‘top friends’ on their ‘wall’, they ‘block’ or ‘add’ people to their network, and so forth. It seems that creating and networking online content is becoming, for many, an integral means of managing one’s identity, lifestyle and social relations. (Livingstone, 2008a:4)

Livingstone’s observations around the convergence of a variety of creative acts involved in social networking reflects Lessig’s vision of a read/write culture and users concerned with producing and consuming content (Lessig, 2008). However, Livingstone does not develop the theme of production and creativity in social networking sites, other than to align this with identity management. Livingstone’s study aims to address the choices, motivations and literacies shaping the participant’s own profile; the semiotic and social ‘reading’ of others’ profiles (in terms of conventions regarding form, identity and peer norms regarding transgressive or risky practices); and the social and personal meanings of the
contacts sustained online and their relation to offline friends in everyday life (Livingstone, 2008a, p.6). Livingstone describes the making of profile pages as enactments and displays of identity and finds that a child’s social networking is framed but not determined by the practices and norms of the peer group surrounding the network, and the technological affordances of the sites themselves (Livingstone 2008a:7). Implications for text and practices around text do not figure in her discussion, which pivots around the act of creating an identity and self-actualisation.

Within this study, Livingstone also considers how the textual practices of teenagers in social networking sites vary with age. (Livingstone 2008a). Livingstone elaborates upon the appeal of social networking sites as spaces for the youthful construction of self and peer-relations and reiterates many observations made by boyd, (2007) and boyd and Ellison (2007) in relation to identity performance through text. In particular she notes that among her sample of youths, identity through social networking is enacted in two ways: with younger teens constructing elaborate displays of self; and in older users who had experienced this phase, as a way of seeking connection to others. Livingstone describes how her sample moved from the former to the latter with experience and explains that the opportunity to edit and revise one’s profile was relished as a textual practice. Livingstone notes this as an evolution from identity as display to identity as connection (Livingstone, 2008a, p.12). Through this paper, Livingstone notes that evolving textual practices invoke varying opportunities and risk and that as users mature, their identity work is conducted in this growing awareness. Miller et al. (2010) also explore risk in relation to profile construction. In their study they explore students’ awareness of risk to themselves caused by posting inappropriate material. They observe a
paradox, where students continue to post risky material, while being aware of the potential for future embarrassment. This suggests that the draw of social networking outweighs the potential for harm in the eyes of the participants and indicates that risk as a subject is viewed differently by users and those responsible for safeguarding them.

Profile construction is considered in the international research project *Mediatized Stories*\(^{21}\). This project has considered profile construction in *MySpace* as a form of digital storytelling by 16-19 year olds and aims to explore the influences and constraints that play upon the act of profile construction (Brake, 2008, Livingstone and Brake, 2010). Brake describes the construction of user profiles in terms of creative and social affordances. However issues around text production are found to be of less importance to users than the security provided by MySpace as an apparently secure site for communication, and consequently, social affordances become the focus of this report (Brake 2008). Another study focuses in particular on production in online contexts. Stern (2008) considers adolescent blogging and personal webpage construction to explore how youths view expression in these spaces. She argues that attention has been overly directed towards what youths produce, rather than why they produce online texts and aims to understand the motivations behind online youth expression. Stern distinguishes between personal webpages and social networking sites, but makes some new observations that stand alongside those relating to identity performance and audience. Stern argues that young people engage in production because they are curious about authorship, eager

\(^{21}\) For details of the Mediatized Stories research project please see
\[http://www.uv.uio.no/intermedia/english/research/projects/mediatized-stories/\]
to tackle the technological challenges presented, and anxious to establish their online presence (Stern, 2008, p.99). Pleasure and accomplishment are the rewards of this endeavour (Stern, 2008, p.100). In relation to adolescence, Stern also argues that users find a sense of satisfaction derived from the internal focus and reflection that these creative acts afford (Stern, 2008:101). These observations move attention towards the notion that text production in social networking sites operates as perhaps more than a purely social endeavour.
Conclusion

From reviewing the field it can be observed that theoretical and empirical accounts of the construction of profile pages in social networking sites have been attempted. However, detailed exploration into the act of text production in social networking sites, with a view to exploring what can be learnt about text production in this digital online context has not been fully accounted for. While the social practices that surround issues of identity, communicative behavior and context within social networking sites are comprehensively documented, the textual practices that contribute to and result from these social practices are less clear. Lessig’s notion of remix and creativity in a digitally mediated age (2008) and Stern’s articulation of pleasure and curiosity as motivating forces (Stern, 2008) offer a useful starting point for considering the act of text production within social networking sites. In these contexts, notions of creativity and innovation can reflect that social networking is concerned with issues of text production, consumption, participation and remix along with the social practices surrounding these textual acts. This literature review has identified that the literature in the area of social networking is vast, varied and developing as a reflection of the exponential growth of social networking itself. At the time of writing, the literature in this area is found to be concerned with the users of social networking, the features of social networking sites, and the practices of social networking, in relation to social practice and textual practice. Social networking has been well documented and theorised in relation to issues of usership and identity. However, the review of literature has also identified that the notion of social networking as an act of text production is less theorised, with less consensus being reached about terminology and practices. In particular, the youngest users of
social networking sites, while being large in numbers, are relatively under-represented by the literature.

Focusing on these perceived gaps in the research literature, this study aims to understand better the act of text production in social networking sites amongst pre-teenage children in the light of what has been reported and theorised about the users of social networking sites, the features of social networking sites and the social practices involved in social networking. As a result of reviewing the literature, one question has been developed:

• How do three pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?

This research question reflects my interest in the uptake of social networking by children who are categorised as ‘underage’ by the site owners, but who equally demonstrate their agency as users of social networking sites by the usage figures documented (see this chapter, section 1). These pre-teenage children are, by virtue of their age, subject to the protectionist discourse outlined in Chapter 2: Establishing a context.

In order to develop and rationalise a study that explores pre-teenage children’s text production in social networking sites, a theoretical framework that defines what is meant by text and text production in the new media age is required. In the next chapter, a three-level theoretical framework will be outlined and assembled with the aim of constructing a study that can accommodate issues of text, text production and the digital context in which text production occurs.
Chapter 4: Assembling a theoretical framework

Introduction

Concepts of youth in relation to the socio-technological landscapes that they inhabit have been introduced in the first chapter of this thesis. The Review of literature (Chapter 3) has identified that the field of social networking can be demarcated in relation to the users of social networking sites, the textual space associated with social networking, and the social and textual practices involved in social networking. In relation to young people’s activities with text in social networking sites, one research question has been derived from the work outlined.

• How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?

The aim of this chapter is to construct a theoretical framework that will support this enquiry. To achieve this aim, a framework that draws from three areas is proposed. These areas include the large-scale accounts of the broad socio-political context (Giddens, 1987), within which online texts are currently produced; socio-cultural accounts of identity and literacy in the digital age (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003. p.23); and social semiotic accounts of text and text production (Kress, 2010), to allow for a consideration of text, text production, and context to be melded in order to support the detailed consideration of children’s text production in social networking sites. In bringing together these accounts, a three-tiered theoretical framework has been assembled. For clarity, these levels are described discretely in this chapter. However in actually considering the research question, my argument is that the three tiers operate synergistically.
At a macro-level, perspectives pertaining to the broad socio-political context within which online text production can be conceived serve to contextualise the study further. Within this macro-level, a meso-level theoretical field involving selected views about notions of identity and literacy serves to support an analysis of youth text production as a social activity. These analyses accommodate a third, micro-level presentation of theoretical perspectives that explore notions of text, and the ways in which texts are created and used in the everyday construction of social realities. In this chapter, the discrete presentation of each level of theory seeks to achieve conceptual clarity in relation to notions of context, identity and text respectively.

The three levels can additionally be melded to form an assemblage of theoretical perspectives which in turn supports a more holistic consideration of children’s text production in social networking sites. This assemblage can be regarded in relation to the field of discourse studies. Discourse has been theorised within numerous academic fields (Van Dijk, 2011, p.1), but is defined by proponents of socio-cultural approaches to the study of literacy as “language in use” (Gee, 1996, p.90). For Gee, discourse is merely a connected stretch of language that makes sense. He defines it as part of a larger concept that he defines as ‘Discourse’, a term given a capital letter to distinguish it from lower-case ‘d’ discourse. Gee defines Discourse as:

...ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes. (Gee, 1996, p.127)

Discourse will be defined more fully in relation to social networking and identity later in this chapter. However, based upon this initial definition, taken metaphorically, Gee’s articulation of Discourses can serve to reflect the act of social
networking and support a rationale for theorising text production within social networking from an holistic and assembled stance. Inherent in any contemporary socio-cultural study of discourse is the need to give due regard to the interdependence of communicative events, text and language use (van Dijk, 2011, p.2). The assemblage of three levels of theory from which to construct an account of text production in social networking sites serves to achieve this.
The socio-political context: a macro-level framing

Recent theories of human practice relating to social positioning (Bourdieu, 1991, p.54), identity politics (Castells, 1997), and the negotiation and enactment of social identity (Gee, 1996; Holland et al., 1998) form a lens through which issues regarding youth and their text production in online social networking sites can be considered. These theoretical perspectives sit alongside and within the work of a range of prominent social theorists who have endeavoured to describe the current era in terms of reflexivity and mediation (Giddens, 1991: Giddens, 1987; Bauman, 2005; De Zengotita, 2005). While not labelled as such, their descriptions can be regarded as grand accounts that respond to the large-scale questions (Giddens, 1987, p.43), raised when contemplating the portrayal of social issues in a changing social world (Brey, 2003, p.38). For Giddens, writing over twenty-five years ago, attempting to answer these large-scale questions, for example “What are the major transformations currently influencing the trajectories of development of world history?” (Giddens, 1987, p.3) was an essential endeavour for the field of modern sociology, at a time when a focus on the micro-level issues were obscuring sociologists’ concern with the large-scale, long-term processes of social transformation (Giddens, 1987, p.42). Building from Giddens’ notion of large-scale questions, I propose that the accounts that attempt to answer them are conceived as ‘grand accounts’, despite the notion of the dissolution of grand, unifying narratives in a post-modern era (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Accordingly they form the first layer of theoretical perspective. As such, they serve to contextualise this study and form a backdrop for the consideration of youth and their text producing behaviour at a macro-level.
Giddens has long championed the contributory role of a macro sociology, which recognises the role of large-scale questions to explore specific social issues (Giddens 1987, p.41-45). Giddens’ argument was made within his elaboration of nine theses on the future of sociology, where he outlined how sociology would develop as an academic field at a time when interest in the subject was perceived as declining (Giddens, 1987, p. vii), yet globalisation and observable change to social movements required intense sociological analysis (Giddens, 1987, p.ix). Within these theses, Giddens’ proposes that sociologists must redevelop a concern for the “large-scale, long-term processes of social transformation” (1987, p.41) that have been neglected in response to an increased focus on detailed empirical study (Giddens, 1987, p.43). Giddens made this proposition based on his observation that the increasing pace of social change evident since the nineteenth century was culminating in a world defined by its ‘systemness’, and that this ‘world’ could bear analysis at a macro level (Giddens, 1987, p.43). The notion of ‘systemness’ sits within Gidden’s account of modernity (1987, p.26), and draws from Gidden’s theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984): his central endeavour to recognise the dualism of structure in the social world. In Giddens’ words:

Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the human activities which it recursively organises. Institutions or large-scale societies have structural properties in the virtue of the continuity of the actions of their component members. But those members of society are only able to carry out their day-to-day activities in their virtue of their capability of instantiating those structural properties (Giddens, 1987, p.61).

In drawing together the agent and the structures involved in any social process as mutually constitutive, Giddens outlines a macro framework that can be used to locate a study of how human practice, interaction and society can be accounted for. Within this framework, the production and reproduction of society and relationships
can be viewed as intertwined systems (Giddens, 1984, p.25). However, Giddens separates the notion of system from structure to clarify their constitutive roles, and emphasise the role that resources and rules play in the instantiation of social life (Giddens, 1984, p.24). According to Giddens, social systems are the activities of human agents, situated in various contexts; they are reproduced by the actor as part of social practice (Giddens, 1984, p.25). Put succinctly, systems can be regarded as the patterns produced by and monitored by reflexive human action (Craib, 1992, p.37). In structuration theory, systems implicate structures, which have been delineated by Giddens in three ways: as society’s available structural principles (the organising principles of society, e.g. capitalism); as available structures (the rules and resources that feature in society, e.g. money and economic forces), and as the structural properties of society (the reproduced social practices, e.g. the division of labour) (Kaspersen, 2000, p.44). Structuration theory brings the notions of systems and structures together to account for the reproduction of social systems (Giddens, 1984, p.25).

Through his account of structuration theory, Giddens can be seen to be arguing for the re-establishment of grand accounts of social behaviour within a post-modern (Lyotard, 1979/1984) or, as Giddens coined it, ‘late modern’ era (Giddens, 1991, Tucker, 1998, p.143).

Grand accounts of human practice must be located within a context and Giddens invokes the notion of modernity and late/high modernity, a fluid conception of the industrialised world to achieve this. In an industrialised world, Giddens describes how institutional dimensions and modes of behaviour are established as organising
mechanisms. These organising mechanisms include: *industrialism*, the ‘social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes’; *capitalism*, the ‘system of commodity production involving both competitive product markets and the commodification of labour power; *surveillance*, ‘the supervisory control of subject populations; and the notion of ‘total war’, where the potential for destruction through weaponry becomes immense (Giddens, 1991, pp.14-15). Modernity’s organising mechanisms contribute to the formation of the ‘nation-state’; a socio-political and geopolitical entity that develops as part of a wider, increasingly globalised state-system. Reflexivity, the susceptibility of the nation-state system to monitor and revise social activity and relations in the light of new information or knowledge (Giddens, 1991, p.20) is a major organising feature of modernity (Giddens, 1991, p.15).

Giddens’ notion of modernity and the contingent reflexivity requires that the social world is viewed in terms of organisations and organisation, ‘the regularised control of social relations across indefinite time-space distances’(Giddens, 1991, p.16). Writing at the end of the twentieth century, Giddens proposed a modern sociology, which would encompass the potential for social change brought about by increasing global interdependence, rapid technological innovation and the erosion of established manufacturing patterns and relations (Giddens, 1987, p.16, Brey, 2004, p.43). According to Giddens, three elements contribute to the condition of modernity and distinguish it from what Giddens describes as the ‘pre-modern era’: the separation of time and space through the use of ‘new’ mediated forms, such as the mechanical clock which allows the social world to be organised in such a way that place is not the key mediating factor (Giddens, 1987, p.142; Giddens, 1991, p.16);
the disembedding of social institutions, through the introduction of symbolic tokens, e.g. money, and expert systems (Giddens, 1991, p.18); and the development of institutional reflexivity: ‘the regularised use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as a constitutive element in its organisation and transformation’ (Giddens, 1991, p.20). In his invocation of modernity, Giddens opposes existing conceptions of a separate novel ‘post-modern era’ (Lyotard, 1979/1984; Harvey, 1990) to define an evolving era that ‘in our present-day world’ (writing just prior to the end of the twenty-first century), can be conjured as ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity (Giddens, 1991, p.3). Giddens describes high modernity as a condition characterised by an increasing unification of human experience (in relation to time and space), coupled with the simultaneous fragmentation and dispersal associated with the constitutive role of electronic media within the ‘single world’ (Giddens, 1991, p.5). Significantly for this study, within a late modern context, Giddens argues that the self is reflexively made:

Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity (Giddens, 1991, p.14).

High or Late modernity are the terms used by Giddens to describe modernity in its most reflexive phase (Tucker, 1998, p.144; Giddens, 1991, p.27, Giddens, 1991, p.29). Tucker (1998, p.144) analyses Giddens’ theory of late modernity and describes how reflexivity can be regarded as the most important dimension in the reproduction of personal and institutional life. Giddens distinguishes between institutional reflexivity and reflexivity as a human quality, noting that all humans are reflexive, but that in a post-traditional order, reflexivity becomes pervasive and impacts upon the reproduction of controlling systems (Tucker, 1998, p.78).
Accordingly, Giddens argues that the consequences of modernity are at once local and global (Giddens, 1991, p.22). They affect everyone living in conditions of modernity, and thus serve to structure social order.

Giddens’ account of the condition of the social world in a post-industrial and increasingly technologically-mediated society can be regarded as historically situated and superseded by the explosion of the use of the internet and Web 2.0 affordances in the early twenty-first century. However, while writing prior to the advent of the internet and social networking, Giddens explored the role of mediation in modernity, and the contingent potential for time-space transformations that the uptake of media forms allow. These observations bear relevance in the current era. Twenty years ago, Giddens turned to the seminal work of Marshall McLuhan (1964) to argue that modernity is inseparable from the media that it supports and is supported by (Giddens, 1991, p.26). Giddens here is describing the media of the day: printed and televisual text. Using these examples, Giddens elaborates how in the condition of modernity, virtually all human experience can be regarded as mediated by its own media forms (Giddens, 1991, p.23), and that two elements constitute this mediation. One is the sense of collage; that textual expressions are comprised of juxtaposed items that serve to order and unify experience (Giddens, 1991, p.26). The other is the sense of intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness; generating a sense of familiarity through media representation (Giddens, 1991, p.27). While this account pre-dates the explosion of social networking, Giddens’ recognition of the role of mediating forces within the late modern condition can be used as a starting point for contemplating the role of technology in the context within which online youth content creation occurs.
The act of social networking, with its recursive involvement of human agents, evolving technological structures and social systems, can be examined in relation to Giddens’ theory of structuration. In a given social networking site, the structural properties of the technology involved, and the structural affordances of the site itself (for example the web 2.0 capabilities that allow users to consume and generate content) support a social, communicative process that in turn constitute the social networking site and the act of social networking. The continuing use and constitution of social networking sites, by social networkers neatly exemplifies Giddens’ notion of structuration. In this example, the duality of the agent, and the structural properties involved can be regarded as recursively organising the social practice of social networking, so that they are, at once, the medium and the outcome (Giddens, 1984, p.25). By positioning social networking in relation to structuration theory, it becomes evident that a consideration of it will necessarily involve a large-scale consideration of social practice. In this way, a macro-level of analysis that seeks to explore issues around the “large-scale, long-term processes of social transformation” (Giddens, 1987, p.41), involving issues around technology and identity that can be argued currently to include the phenomenon of social networking can be justified.

Views of modernity as a context for contemplating social behaviour in relation to the role of technological mediation have recently been critiqued (Misa et al, 2004). In this critique, it is argued that the role of technology is under-represented and over generalised (Brey, 2004, p.58). Brey (2004) provides an account of (late) modernity in relation to developments in technological mediation. In this account he draws
from Castell’s theories of the information age, and network society (Castells, 1996; Castells, 1997; Castells, 2000) in a quest to reflect the impact of new technologies and associated practice on the construction of the social world. For Castells, any grand account of the contemporary condition must recognise the role that technology plays in the co-construction of society and the social struggle that ensues as individuals try to affirm their identities in the face of the global networks that technology supports (Brey, 2004, p.43).

Castells has long argued that the revolution around information technologies has contributed to the reshaping of material society along with other historically significant events (Castells, 2000, p.1). In Castells’ description, economic factors such as increasing global interdependency; the recognition of new-style capitalism dependent on flexible structures and networked modes of working; and the uptake of digital communication that operates at global and individual levels, synthesise with social and political changes to contribute to a new informational age and the concept of network society: a society where the possibilities of new information technology pervade the entire social structure (Castells, 2000, p.500). In Castells’ vision, network society is comprised of multifarious network systems that exist as interconnected nodes (Castells, 2000, p.501). These networks are characterised by their potential for inclusion and exclusion, and their potential for expansion. They are made possible by and support the Information Age and as such, ‘constitute the new social morphology of our societies’ (Castells, 2000, p.500).

In network society, social morphology, rather than social action is pre-eminent (Castells, 2000, p.500). By this, Castells means that we have entered an age where
“information is the key ingredient of our social organisation and why flows of messages and images between networks constitute the basic thread of our social structure” (Castells, 2000, p.508). However, alongside the influence of technological and economic change, Castells argues that in an historical period characterised by the deconstruction of familiar organisations and institutions that can be associated with Giddens’ notion of late modernity, identity becomes a main source of meaning (Castells, 2000, p.3). Within the network society, and because of the affordances of the network, people organise meaning around what they are, or believe they are, rather than what they do, hence social morphology, rather than action becomes primary (Castells, 2000, p.3). Equally however, network society has the capacity to include or exclude individuals, groups, and larger organisations. In this way, the network society has the potential to create a sense of social fragmentation and particularised identities as well as the network. This spectrum is described by Castells succinctly as society being “increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self” (Castells, 2000, p.3).

Brey accepts Castells’ proposition that issues of the Net and the self are in contention in network society, but argues that existing accounts of modernity do not satisfactorily accommodate technology, either as a structuring element of society, or as a socially shaped phenomenon (Brey, 2004, p.52). Brey, discounting the idea of a linear path of technological development that is implied by technological determinist views, describes three theories that meld notions of society and technology (Brey, 2004, p.52). Alongside weak and strong social constructivist theories that subscribe to the view that technology is socially shaped, and the converse view that society is technologically shaped, and part of the fabric of society, Brey draws from the work
of Bruno Latour to describe Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a third theoretical stance. Brey describes how, from this perspective, society can be viewed theoretically as composed of “sociotechnical networks, consisting of arrangements of linked human and nonhuman actors” (Brey, 2004, p.52). Brey draws from Latour, (1987) to describe the notion of actor-network theory as involving a principle of generalised symmetry, where any element within “a heterogeneous network of entities that participate in the stabilization of a technology has a similar explanatory role” (Brey, 2004, p.53). In this view, technological devices and natural forces both become actants, mutually involved in the stabilisation of networks and technology. While Brey acknowledges that each of these three theoretical perspectives is subject to critique, he argues most strongly that a consideration that conjoins macrotheories of modernity with microtheories of technology is required in order that the boundaries between notions of modernity and the relative role that technology plays, be explored more fruitfully (Brey, 2004, p.69).

Along with the description of the role of technology as a co-constructor of society, Brey explores how technology has impacted upon issues of representation in the information age. Brey draws from the work of Baudrillard (1995) to describe how the modern condition can be regarded as ‘an era of simulation, in which models, signs and codes determine new social orders’ (Brey, 2004, p.44). Recognising the role that technology plays in the construction of semiotic systems, Brey concludes that any contemporary account of modernity needs to unpack monolithic considerations of technology (Brey, 2004, p.57), and problematise the role of technology, rather than neglect it (Brey, 2004, p.55). In this problematisation, modernity’s social systems are viewed from a sociotechnical perspective, which
recognises the major role that technology plays in their working (Brey, 2004, p.54-55). This critique highlights how views about the relative position of technology and human agency contrast when attempting to conjure accounts of contemporary society. It is clear from Brey and Castells’ propositions, that any account of late modernity necessarily involves a consideration of society; the technological developments that play upon and are played upon by the construction of society; and notions of self, identity and agency. Context and technology have been discussed to this point. In order to conclude this macro-level framing, a consideration of the relative role of identity within this macro-level framing follows. This discussion has overviewed how a study of social networking can be viewed from the macro-level framing offered by theorists such as Giddens and Castells, and further, has attempted to defend the need to provide a framing at a level that can accommodate an enquiry that in contemplating the very specific, seeks to reflect upon the implications more widely. Accordingly, Giddens’ evocation of the modern/late modern era, with its emphasis on the self as a reflexive project existing within a social world that is reflexively constituted by knowledge; and Castells’ description of a network society can be used as the basis for a macro level framework within which an analysis of young people as the reflexive producers of text within social networking sites can be located.
Identity and literacy: a meso-level framing

Identity

Within the review of literature, the notion of social networking sites as portals for identity play and performance was introduced. Within the era of late modernity, issues of identity are crucial, with some clearly arguing that humans construct and negotiate their identities reflexively, discursively, and in response to the historical and socio-cultural contexts within which they relate to others (Bauman, 2004; Gee, 1996; Holland et. al., 1998; Marsh, 2005a; Marsh, 2005b). In this section, some perspectives on identity will be presented in relation particularly to the construction of identity and the forces that play upon this process within a late modern age. This notion will then be developed to consider how literacy is involved and can support the construction of identity.

Underpinning the notion of identity in the late-modern age is that of human action and agency (Giddens, 1984). Giddens defines human agency in the following way:

Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place... Agency concerns events of which the individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, in any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if the individual had not intervened. Action is a continuous process, a flow in which the reflexive monitoring which the individual maintains is fundamental to the control of the body that actors ordinarily sustain throughout their day-to-day lives (Giddens, 1984, p.9).

Giddens describes the distinct attribute of human agency as the ability to know what one’s actions are and why they are carried out, and to believe that one could have behaved differently in response to certain situations (Giddens, 1987, p.3). Building from the sense of human as agent, Giddens conceptualises the ‘self’ as a reflexive project (Giddens, 1991, p.75), where a person’s self-identity is found in their capacity to sustain an ongoing self-narrative that supports a feeling of biographical
continuity (Giddens, 1991, p.54). The challenge to an individual, in Giddens’ terms, is to be able to reconcile and integrate the various events that occur in the external world reflexively, so that a coherent ongoing self-narrative is formed that will support one’s capacity to understand the self in relation to the shifting contexts in which the self functions (Giddens, 1991, pp.53-54). Giddens’ use of the term self-identity reflects how he perceives that the “reflexivity of modernity extends into the core of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p.32). Thus the self becomes a “reflexive project” (Giddens, 1991, p.32), and identity becomes self-identity.

For Bauman too, identity is conceived as an individual, agentive and reflexive project “...something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target of an effort, ‘an objective’; as something one still needs to build from scratch or to choose from alternative offers and then to struggle for and then to protect through yet more struggle...” (Bauman, 2004, pp.15-16). Bauman describes identity in relation to a quest for individuality, a task that while being disguised as a personal endeavour, is situated within society and societal transformation (Bauman, 2005, p.19). Thus, identity and the quest for individuality become linked to the ability to consume, which in turn is a privilege of the ‘knowledge classes’ who have ready access to consumption and production practices, who are busy “composing, decomposing and recomposing their identities and cannot but be pleasantly impressed by the relative cheapness with which the job is being done daily” (Bauman, 2005, p.28). The Review of literature (Chapter 3) identified that in relation to textual and social practice, users of social networking sites demonstrate sophisticated knowledge and understanding as they construct profile pages to represent themselves to others and manage social relationships. As such, these users can be conceived as a modern-day
‘knowledge class’ of sorts: “The class of people who deal with the production and distribution of symbolic knowledge” (Bauman, 1988, p.25) in an evolving socio-technological landscape. This knowledge class can be defined in relation to their ability to understand the conventions of social networking (boyd, 2007, p.10) and the ability to use text to construct a digital body and in so doing, write themselves into being (Sunden, 2003).

Bauman conceptualises the consequences for identity in a rapidly evolving society. He has described the construction of a ‘liquid life’ lived in ‘liquid modernity’ to convey a more fluid sense of identity construction amidst a constantly changing social context within which individual players’ actions are unable to ‘consolidate into habits and routines’ (Bauman, 2004; Bauman, 2005p.1). In Bauman’s terms, this project depends on the belief that the world and all its occupying objects, inanimate and animate are cast as objects of consumption that will, at some point in time, lose their usefulness in the act of being used. This sense of obsolescence drives liquid life, where perpetual vigilance is required as an attribute to ensure that you are not consigned to waste (Bauman, 2005, p.9). Within this world, Bauman describes ‘liquid life’... a consuming life that involves ‘constant self-scrutiny, self-critique and self-censure’ (Bauman, 2005, p.10), which feeds upon ‘the self’s dissatisfaction with itself’ (Bauman, 2005, p.11). Within liquid life, Bauman describes identity formation as siege between the desire for, on the one hand uncompromising individuality, and on the other, total belonging surrounded by the force of consumption and deterioration (Bauman, 2005, p.9). This ‘siege' is impacted upon by market forces and patterns of consumption as humans battle to position-take within a post-hierarchical and ever moving (liquid) society, where any identity can
only ever be regarded as temporary (Bauman, 2005, p.31). Thus identity in the late modern age is variously constructed as a liquid, dynamic project; achieved using reflexion and the ability to construct an ongoing self-narrative through the process of ongoing consumption and self-scrutiny that is fed by dissatisfaction with the self. The Review of literature has identified that the act of social networking involves the ongoing revision and editing of one’s profile in the light of new available resources and information (Carrington, 2009; Dowdall, 2009c, 2009a, 2006). This act can be regarded as an act of liquid life, propelled by the dual forces of desire for individuality and the desire to belong. This ongoing act emphasises the temporary nature of identity in an online social network and raises questions about the nature of the textual traces of identity that are left as residues of social networking, and the implications for the temporary conceptualisations of identity that accompany the act of social networking.

Identity must therefore be regarded as a provisional state. Holland et al. (1998), attempt to theorise the temporary notion of identity in their study of identity and agency. They argue that, through their actions, humans produce understandings about and for themselves, but that these understandings can only ever be regarded in the light of their past and present actions, which are impacted upon by cultural resources. As such, they argue that identities are ‘improvised within the flow of activity within specific social situations – from the cultural resources at hand’ (Holland et al. 1998, p.4). As part of this improvisation, Holland et al. emphasise the agency of the individual, arguing that a modicum of self-direction is possible. They draw from Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’: the system of ‘structured, structuring dispositions’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.52) that circumscribe human behaviour (Bourdieu,
1990:53) to elaborate how improvisations, “the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation” (Holland et al. 1998, p.18) occur as “impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response” (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 17-18).

In his theories concerning practice, language and power, Bourdieu complicates understandings of improvisatory behaviour and identity to describe how human behaviour is circumscribed in relation to agency, disposition and social position within a field. According to Bourdieu, social identities are invoked through practice involving structural, structuring and agentive forces that are realised through “a feel for the game” and within a ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.66). For Bourdieu, the “feel for the game” describes the agent’s unconscious dispositions and describes “the almost miraculous encounter between the habitus and a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history, which makes possible the near perfect anticipation of the future inscribed in all the concrete configurations on the pitch or board” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.66). For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus, “systems of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72) has been used to theorise an individual’s disposition to act (practise) in certain ways, and therefore contribute to the production of observable order. Bourdieu described how human practice is generated by the integration of structural and agentive forces: the “internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality” described as a dialectic of incorporation and objectification (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72). This theoretical perspective resonates with Giddens’ descriptions of self-identity and practical consciousness that are implicit within his structuration theory (Giddens, 1984, p.6),
and Bauman’s concept of identity formation as a siege where market forces and patterns of consumption play upon the agent’s desires to position themselves.

This process can be associated with notions of identity performance in social networking sites, where individuals bring their dispositions to bear upon a sense of meaning that has been historically formed and will be projected into a field of power relations as new texts are formed to achieve specific tasks. Thus the act of social networking can be associated with the formation of social identity and regarded as driven by the inter-relationship between the ‘habitus’ and the ‘social field’ in which the ‘game’ of social positioning is occurring. Bourdieu further describes the ‘field’ as a space of social forces defined by objective power relations; the social arena in which negotiations and struggles, or in Holland’s term, ‘improvisations’, occur (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 229-230). Bourdieu’s concept of the game and field complicates the notion of improvisation in relation to practice. For Bourdieu, improvisation is always circumscribed.

The feel for the game is realised through practice, which Bourdieu explains, whilst being subject to reflexivity, can never truly be invoked through the process of reflexion, which necessarily changes it. Viewed from this perspective, reflexivity becomes a condition of agency, rather than a contributory factor. In addition, Bourdieu argues that the field also imposes power relations upon agents that are not reducible to their individual intentions (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 229). At the heart of this circumscribed improvisatory behaviour is the struggle for mobilisation and attainment of a desired social position within the social space (Bourdieu, 1991, p.230). Bourdieu describes how individuals continually perform a labour of
representation to impose a vision of their position in the world: their social identity. This social identity is born from the symbolic struggles that occur as individuals enter the field and in so doing, construct it and themselves (Bourdieu, 1991, p.234).

For both Bourdieu and Holland, the dual roles of habitus and the social field frame the negotiation of identity and position-taking struggles and lead to improvisatory practice, although to varying degrees. Bauman (2004, p.48) supports these views, and emphasises the structuring role of both agency and available resources in the process of identity negotiation. Bauman also complicates understandings of identity, agency and improvisation by describing the negotiation of identity as a means-orientated, rather than goal-orientated labour, where an agent does not begin by imagining the end-product and constructing it, but by endeavouring to assemble and re-ordering the resources which seem to be worthy of having (Bauman, 2004, p.49). This connects with Bourdieu’s labour of representation, where the act of identity construction is constrained by the available symbolic resources in the form of various types of capital (social, economic, cultural). However, Bauman unsettles the notion of circumscription that Bourdieu defends by describing a “fluid phase of modernity where structuring frameworks and institutions are subject to continual liquefaction” (Bauman, 2004, p.51). In this era, Bauman describes how identity work is ongoing, and not subject to an end goal.

Thus identity within a fluid modern or late modern era, can be regarded as involving improvisational behaviour in the light of the habitus of the agent; their reflexivity; and the availability of evolving technological resources that support new ways of constructing an ongoing story of the self. At the end of the first century of the new millennium, Papacharissi (2011) succinctly builds from Giddens and Bauman to
describe how accounts of identity construction can be viewed from the position of technological developments and online social networking as structuring forces:

The self, in late modern societies is expressed as a fluid abstraction, reified through the individual’s association with a reality that may be equally flexible. The process of self-presentation becomes an ever-evolving cycle through which individual identity is presented, compared, adjusted, or defended against a constellation of social, cultural, economic, or political realities (Papacharissi, 2011, p.304).

In this account, Papacharissi describes how technology, and in particular, the affordances of online social networking, provides a platform for this process, linking individuals with multiple audiences as identity negotiations and self-presentation occur. In describing a constellation of audiences and realities against which identity is presented, Papacharissi draws from Castell’s notion of ‘collective identity’ (Castells et al, 2007, p.144), where youth peer groups consolidate around shared values and codes of meaning that signal specific youth culture(s). From Castell’s perspective, the emergence of a ‘collective identity’ sits alongside a perceptible ‘strengthening of individual identity’ as each individual within the youth culture and community seeks affirmation and individuality through communication (Castells et al., 2007, p.144). Castells describes the culture within which these processes occur as the informational society (Castells, 1996; Castells, 2000, p.21), or ‘network society’ (Castells, 1996; Castells et al., 2007, p.6) a society where networking logic permeates all aspects of social life by the means of wireless communication technologies. In Castell’s view, identity: ‘the process by which a social actor recognizes itself and constructs meaning primarily on the basis of a given cultural attribute or set of attributes, to the exclusion of a broader reference to other social structures’, forms the organizing principle of an informational society, where the ‘self’ becomes a major project (Castells, 2000, p.22). In their study of global mobile
youth culture, Castells *et al.*, draw from Holmes and Russell to explore implications for identity and being in the technosocial age. Holmes and Russell (1999:73-75 cited in Castells, *et al.*, 2007) describe how the immersion of adolescents into a digital lifestyle, results in a ‘technosocial sensibility’, a state which emphasises the role of communication technologies not as tools, but as contexts that make possible new ways of being (Castells *et al.*, 2007, p.142). Castells *et al.*, build upon this notion to describe how peer groups and the individual are mutually constructed through the process of networked sociability, where the individual’s social world is formed around their affinities and choices, as the network becomes the context for the behaviour of its participants. (Castells *et al.*, 2007, p.144). Castells *et al.*, describe how the consolidation of peer groups around shared values and codes of meaning leads to the ‘emergence of collective identity’ (Castells *et al.*, 2007 p.144) that is realised within youth sub-culture. Within youth sub-culture, communication becomes central to the formation and maintenance of this ‘collective identity’ (Castells *et al*, 2007 p.144). Equally, Castells *et al.*, argue that alongside the sense of collective identity, the notion of individual identity is strengthened as individuals seek affirmation amongst their community. Thus network society is characterised both by a sense of collective identity and simultaneous individual quests for autonomy within a network (Castells *et al*, 2007 p.145). Based on Papacharissi’s account, identity in network society, a facet of the late modern age, can be regarded as not merely an individual endeavour, but, due to the affordances of the technologies involved, one that can be regarded against what she calls a “constellation of social, cultural, economic or political realities” (Papacharissi, 2011, p.34). In building this meso-level theoretical frame, notions of identity must be regarded as involving agency and reflexivity; consumption practices and
dissatisfaction (Bauman, 1995, p.28); provisionality and improvisation; the habitus of the individual and the collective habitus of the networked audience, all of which are circumscribed by and circumscribe the technological developments of the late modern age. In a society that came to be regarded as late modern, and networked, issues of identity are located at the fore (Giddens, 1991, p.1). Viewed from these theoretical perspectives, humans can be regarded as ‘social actors’ (Castells, 1997, p.8), who necessarily construct and invoke various social identities (Gee, 1999a, p.66) as they participate in liquid society. In order to construct and invoke these social identities, humans draw upon available personal, social and cultural resources and histories (Holland et al., 1998). Through this process of reflexive identity construction, language is used, social relations are sustained and texts are produced.

**Literacy**

Socio-cultural accounts of literacy practice that include the production of texts and discourse are positioned within the grand accounts outlined, and along with consideration of issues relating to identity contribute to what has been coined as the New Literacy Studies (Carrington and Marsh, 2005; Coiro, et al., 2008; Gee, 1996; Marsh, 2005a; Marsh, 2005b; Lankshear and Knobel, 2006; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, Street, 2003). The New Literacy Studies builds from the premise that literacy practices can be regarded as part of the social practice that occurs as part of everyday life (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, p.11). From this perspective, children’s social networking can be viewed as a social practice and has been theorised as such by many large-scale studies of children’s social networking (boyd, 2007; boyd and Ellison, 2007; Ito et al., 2010; Lenhart et al., 2010; Livingstone, 2008; Livingstone and Brake, 2010). These studies are positioned within macro accounts of social
theory and variously allude to the use of social networking as a tool for the performance and negotiation of identity. These studies make social networking and identity their focus, and draw from Goffman’s social theory *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1956), to articulate how the self (the social networker) interplays with a specific context and available resources (the social networking site and its audience) as a performative activity (Austin, 1955). Drawing from Goffman’s theoretical position, these studies implicitly accept that the performances derived from the act of social networking are invoked through the production of textual artefacts within the online social networking site, e.g. profile pages. However, these studies do not place text at the centre of their inquiry, focusing instead upon issues involving identity performance and relationship development. In this section, literacy as a social practice with its contingent implications for identity and text will be explored, prior to turning to a micro-level consideration of text and textual production in the final section of this chapter.

The New Literacy Studies paradigm (Marsh, 2005) has firmly established that literacy can be regarded as a social practice (New London Group, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1984), and that accordingly, as a social practice the literacies of individuals are ‘inherently political and linked to issues of power, identity, inclusion and exclusion’ (Carrington and Marsh, 2005). From the pluralistic perspectives offered by the scholars of the New Literacy Studies paradigm, literacy practices can be viewed as engaging the interplay of social, cultural and agentive components. As I have argued elsewhere, this interplay can be conceived as an inextricably linked triad, involving identity, communicative practice and context which gives rise to the production of text as the triad interplays (Dowdall, 2009a)
and culminates in the view that through literacy practices, and the production of texts, individuals position themselves, and are positioned in relation to others (Dowdall, 2006; Holland and Leander, 2004). The texts produced as artefacts of this process can be viewed as ‘motivated signs’ (Kress, 1997, p. 87; Kress, 2010, p.65); artefacts of identity (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, p.108); and spaces where social identities (Gee, 1996, p.91) can be enacted.

James Paul Gee describes the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of study that came to be known as the New Literacy Studies (hereafter NLS) in the 1970s and 1980s (Gee, 1996). He argued that this field was part of the larger ‘social turn’ that focused away from issues relating to the private mind and instead focused towards interaction and social practice (Gee, 2000; Gee, 1999b). Gee described how, as part of this ‘turn’, a large and varied group of scholars, including Brice Heath, (1983), Street (1984; 1995), and others, began to question the very nature of literacy in relation to traditional views that had associated it with psychological perspectives (Gee, 1996, p.39). Gee’s contribution to the field of the New Literacy Studies has been substantial, culminating in his theory of language and literacy that centred around notions of social languages and ‘Discourse (with a capital D)’ (Gee, 1996, p.vii). In this theory, Gee argued that to appreciate language in its social context, we need to focus on the ‘Discourses’ that constitute and are constituted by language in use (Gee, 1996, p.viii). According to Gee, Discourses involve language and much more: Discourses are ways of ‘being in the world’, that invoke various social languages and multiple social identities. Gee describes a Discourse as:

a sort of identity-kit, which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise (Gee, 1996, p.127).
Gee described how an individual enacts different social identities through their language-in-use on any given occasion (Gee, 1999a). For Gee, language is not ‘one monolithic thing’ but rather a composition of various sub-languages that can be used to communicate who we are and what we are doing in relation to the situation we are in. Social language-in-use can vary from one context to the next, and even within the same context. In this way, humans can be regarded as being able to adopt multiple social identities and a contingent variety of social languages, responsively and reflexively (Gee, 1996, p.66). This is aptly demonstrated by children in school who can usually adopt an appropriate written register for communicating with their teachers, and also adopt varying languages for communicating in different forms of writing (txting and instant messaging as examples) with their peers. The use of a specific form of social language can make visible a specific social identity, and act to affiliate or distance us from others. Thus, the creation of a written or spoken text, whatever modes are involved, can be regarded as an artefact of this negotiation of social identity. Put succinctly, Gee states that “The NLS is based around the idea that reading, writing and meaning are always situated within specific social practices within specific Discourses” (Gee, 2000, p.189), a statement that invokes the role of identity within communication. Gee’s work in social linguistics and the ethnography of communication can be used as a starting point for developing the meso-level element of the theoretical framework within which this study of children’s text production is positioned, as it illuminates the centrality of literacy as a specific social practice within an individual’s everyday existence. Viewed from this perspective, the construction of a profile page within a social networking site can be positioned as one of many specific social practices that support the constitution of social languages and social identities that are materialised through text. Thus the
construction of social networking profiles can be regarded from this meso-level perspective as accommodated within notions of identity, Discourse and late modernity.

Alongside Gee’s work, Brian Street (1984) has challenged the notion that literacy is a neutral practice, and instead recognises literacy as socially situated and ideological practice. On this basis, Street conceptualises literacy in terms of models of autonomous and ideological perspectives that are invoked and recognised according to the context, power dynamics and perspectives of the participants involved. An autonomous view positions literacy as a technical skill to be acquired; an imposition of one set of conceptions of literacy by one group onto to another (Street, 2003, p.77). The current emphasis by the coalition government on the preparation of new teachers to teach children to read using an approach described as systematic synthetic phonics provides a current example of this notion of imposition. Street gives the example of how the introduction of literacy practices through schooling and development programmes can be viewed from an autonomous perspective as it disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin these apparently ‘neutral’ practices and their benign effects. (Street, 2003, p.77). Conversely, Street argues that those adopting ideological models of literacy view literacy as “a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that [it] is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street, 2003, p.78). Street develops the terms ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’ to reflect this position (Street, 2003, p.78). Working from Street’s proposition, social networking can be constructed as a specific social practice that gives rise to literacy events and literacy
practices that have ideological underpinnings based around issues of identity and power (Street, 1995, p.135).

In order to fully locate a study of children’s social networking within the NLS paradigm, it should be observed that the assertions made by the New Literacies scholars have been contested. In particular some scholars argue that proponents of the NLS can over-emphasise the role of ‘local’ literacy practices and fail to acknowledge the imposition of autonomous features (e.g. statutory curriculum and policy developments relating to literacy) upon these local literacy practices and the contingent blended outcome (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p.1 cited in Street, 2003, p.79). Brandt and Clinton include technologies amongst these destabilising, non-local influences, leading Street to explain that the NLS is best characterised by attention to the relationship formed between local and ‘distant’ contexts, and to also clarify that ‘distant’ contexts are not necessarily less ideologically driven. Instead, Street clarifies that the NLS provides a framework that offers conceptual tools for considering the hybrid relationship between distant and local literacies and the associated hegemonic practices (Street, 2003, p.80). In conclusion to his discussion, Street also notes that the New Literacy Studies is subject to intense debate that is supporting wider consideration of how literacy can be related to wider issues of textuality, figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998, p.41; Bartlett and Holland, 2002), identity, and power (Street, 2003, p.87).

The notion of hybrid literacies allows social networking to be positioned as a social practice that melds local and global contexts within the era of late modernity. This can be recognised when contemplating the affordances of social networking, and
how the participant’s text production and the contingent implications for their social identity work is situated within local and global forces and structures. As such literacy can be regarded as a plural concept, with the production of text in a social networking site becoming one of and amongst many potential specific literacy practices that is driven ideologically, and linked to issues of power, identity and positioning. Using the platform of social networking, participants realise and make visible social identities, through their production of text in social networking sites.

In this section, theoretical perspectives pertaining to identity and literacy have been overviewed from within a broader macro-level frame to illuminate how socio-cultural accounts of identity and literacy can be conjoined to sit within and contribute to the grand accounts of late modernity described in the first section of this chapter. By beginning to assemble the core features extracted from the discussion to this point, a specific and accommodating theoretical frame begins to be achieved.
Notions of text: a micro-level framing

This thesis does not attempt to make finding a definition for text its main endeavour. Instead it is concerned with the act of text production in online social networking sites. However, in order to consider this act, and complete the construction of a theoretical framework that will support a micro level analysis of children’s text production in social networking sites, a consideration of what constitutes text in the new media age (Kress, 2003), and the contingent implications for authorship, or text production is required. Definitions of text have evolved since the late twentieth century in response to two separate but inter-connected forces. Sheridan and Rowsell conceptualise the evolution of the dual trajectories of sociality and multimodality in pluralistic terms as ‘the social and semiotic turn for digital media literacy’ (Sheridan and Rowsell, 2010, p.8). In the first instance, and as has been described earlier in this chapter, literacy has been reconceptualised by some scholars as a social practice (Gee, 1996; Marsh, 2005a; Marsh, 2005b; New London Group, 1996; Street, 2003; Street, 1984). Second, alongside these affordances it is recognised that the possibilities and affordances of new digital technologies have increasingly supported the proliferation of screen-based and image-dominated texts that form the new communication landscape. Within this landscape, adults and children navigate the technology required to produce and consume a variety of texts as part of everyday life (Carrington, 2005a). In this section, a working definition of text that will traverse both of these evolutionary trajectories proposed, and yet still serve to frame and limit what is meant by ‘text’ is required. These trajectories can be seen to converge around issues relating to text production, authorship and writing. Using the example of profile production in a social networking site, it is clear that possibilities for identity performance through text are influenced by the current
possibilities for text realised in the post-literate digital age (Gee, 2011, p.125) where the affordances of digital media impact upon communication. Accordingly in this discussion, attention will be focused upon these issues.

In his endeavour to outline a theory that accounts for communication in a contemporary digital landscape, Gunther Kress turns his attention to authorship. He argues that authorship is in urgent need of re-theorising in the information age (Kress, 2010, p.21). Kress identifies how a number of factors play upon notions of authorship and representation in relation to the redistribution of power in communication, that have been brought about by both the features of social and technological change outlined above. These include:

- the affordances of participation in current media technologies;
- the global and local reach of media forms (which he argues are one and the same);
- the notion of user-created content;
- the increased accessibility of persons and information;
- the convergence of representational, communicational and productive functions in technology and devices;
- and the potential for multimodality – representation in many modes (Kress, 2010, p.22)

These factors have been discussed earlier in this thesis, (Chapter 2), but it is useful to remain mindful of them when attempting to frame text and text production specifically in relation to social and technological change. In terms of authorship, and the construction of texts, Kress suggests that these social, cultural and technological factors are having a profound effect on how learning, knowledge, and the potential for the formation of subjectivity and identity are conceived (Kress, 2010, p.21). In forming a theoretical framework that supports the construction of an account of children’s text production in social networking sites, issues around identity in relation to authorship are of significance. Text has long been
conceptualised in relation to identity. As discussed in the previous section, scholars of the NLS have conceptualised literacy as a social practice and in relation to identity. It follows therefore that text, the product of social discourse should also be conceptualised in this way. Luke, writing fifteen years earlier in the field of critical discourse analysis, describes texts as “the artifacts of human subjects’ work at the production of meaning and social relations”. For Luke, texts are moments of intersubjectivity, used by humans to make sense of their worlds; position themselves in relation to others; and construct identities (Luke, 1995, p.13). Writing as a scholar of the NLS, Luke privileged the role of identity, yet melded this with wider social and cultural forces when considering the production of text. He argued that spoken and written texts are moments in which cultural representations and social relations and identities are articulated through language and other sign systems (Luke, 1995, p.18). Drawing from the work of Fairclough (Fairclough, 1992, 1993, cited in Luke, 1995, p.13), Luke proposed that texts can be conceptualised as existing within ‘boundaried instances of social interaction’ or discourse events. Positioning texts in this way allows them to be defined in relation to identity and meaning as well as form: “For human subjects, texts are not just something that they, as “child,” “student,” “teacher,” and “parent,” use as part of a stabilised or fixed role or identity; these texts are the actual media and instances through which their socially constructed and contested identity, or subjectivity, is made and remade” (Luke, 1995, p.14).

Luke’s contribution helps us to understand that as material artefacts, texts are not random or arbitrary productions. They cannot be regarded in isolation of their social context and making. For Luke, all texts are tied to particular social actions and
interests in the contexts of particular social institutions (Luke, 1995, p.15). Based upon this premise, and drawing from the work of Kress (1989, p.37), Luke is clear that the production and reception of texts has the potential to construct dynamic subject positions, and contribute to the identity negotiations discussed in section 2 of this chapter. Through an individual’s use of language for symbolic exchange, and recourse to other texts (Luke, 1995, p.13), the production of text constructs, reconstructs and enacts social relations and realises forms of social identity (Luke, 1995, p.15). Thus, viewed from the micro perspectives of authorship and identity, text, and its production can be regarded as both a portal and repository for social negotiations of the greatest significance. It is through the realisation of text that evolving social and technological affordances can be felt.

However, in the new digital age, text can be realised in a variety of forms as discussed by Sheridan and Rowsell (2010) within their study of design literacies. They isolate the notion of ‘text-only’ texts (meaning page and print-based texts) and set this alongside contemporary notions of multimodal textual forms to enlarge understandings of text, production and consumption in relation to participation and ‘transmedia navigation’ (Jenkins, 2006, p.4) in the digital age. By enlarging conceptions of text to include a plethora of forms and practices, a spectrum of textual artefacts and production practices can be imagined from school-based texts that are written by hand on paper, to digital texts that are materialised on screen. Therefore, when exploring notions of text, a spectrum of textual materiality is required to convey the material forms in which text can be realised. However, Kress has articulated that a clear lexicon for describing text production in the information age has not yet been integrated from the many disciplines concerned with text
(Kress, 2010, p.102). This section will therefore endeavour to identify theoretical concepts around text production with the aim of constructing a micro-level framework that will support the consideration of text production and text in social networking sites.

**How should we conceptualise text?**

Halliday and Hasan’s linguistic definition of text as a passage of language in use, either written or spoken, that constitutes a unit of meaning, forms the starting point for this discussion (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.1; Luke, 1995, p.13). In Halliday and Hasan’s terms, texts are identifiable as semantic units: units of meaning, rather than form, which are realised by an encoding mechanism. At the time of writing in the 1970s, the semantic unit in question was the sentence (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.2). For something to be regarded as a text it had to have coherence, and this was achieved through the semantic unit of the sentence. In the current media age, definitions of the semantic unit are more fluid and less subject to such straightforward binding. A child’s profile page, with its uploaded modules and images, background skin and fore-grounded comments can be regarded as a unit of meaning, rather than form. For this study therefore, at the outset of this iteration, texts can be defined simply as semantic units.

Implicit in their definition of text as a unit of meaning is the notion of texture. Halliday and Hasan argue that texture is what separates text from something that is not a text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.2), and involves the elevation of mere words and sentences to something more by the introduction of relationships and references into a cohesive and coherent unit of meaning. Within a text, texture is achieved by
the contribution of linguistic features that work together to form a sense of unity, and accordingly texts can be analysed in relation to their cohesive properties and patterns of texture (Halliday and Hassan, 1976, p.4). Despite Halliday and Hasan’s observations pre-dating the new media age, in a study of text production in online social networking sites, the notions of texture and cohesion in relation to semantics are useful tools for establishing what constitutes a textual form. Cohesion has been defined as ‘the set of resources for constructing relations in discourse which transcend grammatical structure (Halliday, 1994, p. 309 cited in Martin, 2003, p.35).

The sense that a ‘text’ must be elevated beyond any singular notion of words, sentences and grammar alone is meaningful in a study of text production in social networking sites: a process which involves the blending of multiple modes (words, images, video) and modules to construct a textured sense of unity. However, as Halliday and Hasan articulated in their earlier work, for a text to be defined as such, the register (coherence) and concept of cohesion must work together:

A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of situation, and therefore consistent in register; and it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.23).

Further, Halliday and Hasan extend their definition of text to consider the context of its making in relation to it as a unit of meaning (Halliday and Hasan, 1985, p.5). In so doing, they describe three elements that constitute the context for text production, and situate the textual product within a wider social and cultural arena. These three elements are the field, the tenor and the mode of discourse that surround and constitute the textual process and product (Halliday and Hasan, 1985, p.12). In relation to social networking, the field encapsulates the act of social networking: the total event in which in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive
activity of the text creator. The *tenor* is concerned with the participants involved and the relevant relations between them as they produce texts. The *mode* relates to the role that the language (and in the case of social networking, the text) is playing in the process. Halliday and Hasan describe this as the “function of the text in the event”, which includes the channel taken by the language and its genre (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.22; Halliday, 2003, p.437). These elements are also useful devices for contemplating text as a coherent device; one that must work in relation to the social world in which it is constructed.

Therefore, while this study will not attempt a Hallidayan functional analysis of the participants’ texts, Halliday and Hasan’s definition of text, as situated coherently within a social process, and as a cohesive unit, allows for the iteration to be developed further. In this iteration, texts are presented as semantic units that have coherence with regard to the situation in which they are constructed (social coherence in the form of register); and which have cohesion within themselves, making them cohesive as artefacts. The terms ‘coherence’ and ‘cohesion’ are useful devices for invoking the sense that texts serve a social as well as artefactual function.

A study of children’s text production in social networking sites clearly needs to consider the materiality of texts as well as the social influences. Building from the work of Halliday and Hasan, the extensive work of Gunther Kress can be used to further delineate issues around text, materiality and design. Kress identifies that textual materiality is a variable concept. According to Kress, spoken texts may leave no record of action, while written texts may. However, all texts are shaped by social
action that takes place within fields of power and are materialised as genres. This materialisation is a process that depends upon the ability to manipulate genres as part of text producing practice and enable full participation in social life (Kress, 2003, p.85). This manipulation requires the text maker to shape text. In so doing, text becomes a material entity that draws upon the resources of its production (Kress, 2003, p.87). In the production of text within a social networking site, this ‘shaping’ of language involves competence in working across a variety of communicational modes, e.g. the ability to remix material uploaded from other spaces; the ability to select images to represent the self.

Using Halliday’s terminology that describes the three functions of language (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.29), Kress attempts a definition of communication that invokes text as a complex material form:

a full theory of communication will need to represent meanings about actions, states, events in the world – the ideational function; to represent meanings about the social relations of those engaged in communication – the interpersonal function; and have the capacity to form texts, that is, complex semiotic entities which can project a complete (social) world, which can function as complete message-entities which cohere internally and with their environment – the textual function (my emphasis) (Kress, 2010, p.87).

From this perspective, Kress suggests that texts act as a complete unit of meaning that encapsulates the social world and content. Significantly for Kress, text is made and recognised by its completeness. As a complete entity, a text can function in a social environment, while sub-textual features will not function in the same way (Kress, 2010, p. 147). In this view, Kress conjoins text with communication to enlarge notions of text. This expansive definition focuses upon the social context of its origin, and its coherence in respect of this. As such, the issue of materiality is not
clarified. However, in earlier work, Kress proposes a material definition of text that serves to provide an analytical frame that is useful when contemplating the production of text in social networking sites. In this work he describes how although text represents “any instance of communication in any mode or in any combination of modes, whether recorded or not” (Kress, 2003, p.48), that the fixing and the shaping of communication into a material form, is the realisation of text: “Text is the result of social action, of work: it is work with representational resources which realise social matters” (Kress, 2003, p.47). Therefore, while speech can be defined as a representational resource, Kress delineates ‘texts’ as realisations with a material basis. For Kress, meaning is sometimes made material as text. He states that “texts have a site of appearance: simply they have to appear somewhere” (Kress, 2003, p.48). In his most recent work, Kress describes how meanings-as-resource become material ‘arrangements’ as texts, with a site of appearance and specific means of dissemination (Kress, 2010, p.145). This moment of realisation is described by Kress in terms of ‘fixing and framing’, where inner meaning is given outer ‘material’ form. Texts are limited by what Kress describes as ‘frames’. Frames separate one semiotic entity from its environment or from other entities (Kress, 2010, p.149). In the case of a social networking site, a profile page is framed by its distinction from other profile pages that it may be connected to. It is framed materially, by its compositional features, and generically, by the social conventions and understandings that ascribe ownership to the owner of the profile page (Kress, 2010, p.151).

In this study, the principle that texts have a materiality that depends upon their possession of a site of appearance and framing allows texts in social networking
sites to be distinguished from other communicative practices which are afforded by
digital technologies. Kress has long championed the idea that the screen has
surpassed the page as the dominant site for the appearance of text, and one that is
organised by the logic of the image (Kress, 2003, Kress, 2010). Further, Kress notes
that resources for representation are dynamic forces, subject to change (2003,
pp.168-169). Based on the discussion to this point, a definition of text that is
surrounded by the notions of identity and literacy that can be conceived in relation to
a late modern digital era is proposed. Text can be defined as a **coherent and
cohesive material unit of meaning, with a site of appearance that is subject to
changes in representational resources, and which is of social consequence.**

To develop this definition further and conclude the assemblage of this theoretical
framework, a consideration of how text is produced is required. To achieve this, the
field of social semiotics will be explored.

**How are texts produced?**

Kress, building from the semiotic as opposed to linguistic strand of the seminal work
has worked over a number of years and with a range of scholars to develop a social
semiotic theory: the consideration of the social origins and semiotic effects of texts,
that accounts for the make-up or shape of texts, the design logic, and the
implications from this (Kress and Bezemer, 2009, p.167). The key concepts within
this theory are: **sign, mode, medium, frame** and **site of display** (Bezemer and Kress,
2008, pp.168-169). Understanding these concepts helps us to think about the
potentials and constraints impacting upon the text maker, and their agency (Kress,
As such, these conceptual devices are helpful labels for identifying the potential and constraining elements that impact upon text production in social networking sites. The unit of social semiotics is the sign (a label to invoke the fusion of form and meaning in one site). Kress bases his social semiotic theory on four assumptions that relate to the design of signs:

- Signs are always newly made in social interaction
- Signs are motivated, not arbitrary relations of meaning and form
- The motivated relation of a form and a meaning is based on and arises out of the interest of makers of signs
- The forms/signifiers which are used in the making of signs are made in social interaction and become part of the semiotic resources of culture (Kress, 2010, pp.54-55)

Kress believes that signs are “the expression of the interest of socially formed individuals who, with these signs, realise - give outward expression to – their meanings, using culturally available semiotic resources, which have been shaped by the practices of members of the social groups and their cultures” (Kress, 2010, p.10). In articulating these assumptions, Kress places interest, agency, the resources for making meaning, and their potential as signifiers to be recognised at the heart of the process of text production (or sign making) (Kress, 2010, p.59). In this way, social semiotic theory becomes a significant tool because it moves the focus from contemplating sign making (or text production) as mere representation, to communication, a shift that brings the agency of the text producer (or sign maker) to the fore (Kress, 2010, p.72).

Within social semiotic theory, individuals are conceived as agentive and generative (Kress, 2010, p.54). Text-making is invoked as not as an act of mere production, but as an act of design; a process involving agency and content in equal measure (Kress, 2003; Bezemer and Kress, 2008, p.170). In invoking agency in this way, rhetoric
rather than convention can be regarded as the underlying logic that guides the design process. Using the metaphors ‘design’ and rhetoric, Kress and Bezemer argue that they can offer a fuller account of text making in the 21st century (Kress and Bezemer, 2009, p.168). In social semiotic theory, these metaphors are used to describe how the processes involved in the making of textual artefacts are evolved to account for the agency involved. Thus writing becomes text-making; composition becomes design, and convention becomes rhetoric, (Kress and Bezemer, 2009, p.167). In this section, design, rhetoric and finally the making of text will be discussed.

The New London Group (NLG) (1996)²², contributed to the conceptualisation of the New Literacy Studies as a multiliteracies framework, and in so doing, drew from Fairclough’s theory of discourse (Fairclough, 1992; 1995) to adopt the term ‘design’ as a metaphor for semiotic activity. Prior to Kress’ articulation of a social semiotic theory for contemporary communication, they described ‘design’ as an active process of meaning making that involves three inter-related elements: Available Designs, Designing, and the Redesigned (NLG, 1996). In this process, the term ‘Available designs’, describes all of the resources and conventions available to the designer. This includes the conventions associated with particular ‘orders of

---

²² The New London Group was composed of a group of ten scholars, who worked together in 1994, in New London, New Hampshire, in the United States to discuss literacy pedagogy. The scholars included, Courtney Cazden, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, USA; Bill Cope, National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, University of Technology, Sydney, and James Cook University of North Queensland, Australia; Norman Fairclough, Centre for Language in Social Life, Lancaster University, UK; Jim Gee, Hiatt Center for Urban Education, Clark University, USA; Mary Kalantzis, Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies, James Cook University of North Queensland, Australia; Gunther Kress, Institute of Education, University of London, UK; Allan Luke, Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, Australia; Carmen Luke, Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, Australia; Sarah Michaels, Hiatt Center for Urban Education, Clark University, USA; Martin Nakata, School of Education, James Cook University of North Queensland, Australia.
discourse’ (Fairclough, 1995), for example the discourse of social networking. The term ‘Designing’ is used to describe the intentional act of the designer as the available resources are drawn upon and transformed to shape, represent and re-contextualise emergent meaning, including the configurations of subjects, social relations and knowledge. This can be viewed as the act of text construction within a social networking site, and the implications for identity associated with this. The term ‘The Redesigned’ can be used to describe the new meanings that emerge, which may be variously creative or reproductive. In the example of social networking, the redesigned can refer to the textual artefact as a unit of meaning with social significance and a site of display. The new Redesigned meaning then becomes a new Available design for use in future meaning-making acts (NLG, 1996). The New London Group argue that these new meanings, while being grounded in existing cultural and historical patterns of meaning, are also unique as products of human agency. Thus, implicit in this design process is the notion that through it, meaning-makers remake themselves (New London Group, 1996). From this theoretical perspective, ‘design’ can be regarded as a process where the artefacts constructed from available representational resources are in fact ‘motivated’ signs: “conjunctions of form and meaning, produced out of the interest of the sign-maker whose use of representational resources is agentive and transformative” (Kress, 2003, p.169).

In more recent work, Kress and Kress and Bezeemer describe ‘design’ from a social semiotic perspective (Kress, 2010; Kress 2003; Kress and Bezemem, 2009, p.169). Within this work, their aim is to bring the notion of agency to the fore, as the text producer is conjured in relation to their intent in the social world (Kress, 2003;
Bezemer and Kress, 2008, p.174). By privileging the notion of agency, they position ‘design’ as a process that is distinct from ‘composition’. Kress explains this distinction in earlier work, where he describes composition as a composer’s adherence to convention and a display of competence that can be associated with traditional schooled views of ‘writing’. For Kress, composition is a retrospective process, involving competence as a measure against a set standard. Design, by contrast is a prospective forward-looking process that supports creativity (Kress, 2003, p.169). By making this distinction, Kress and Bezemer introduce the issue of rhetoric as an organising logic that sits alongside the designer as agent in the design process: “Design is the practice where modes, media, frames and sites of display on the one hand, and rhetorical purposes, the designer’s interests, and the characteristics of the audience on the other are brought into coherence with each other” (Bezemer and Kress, 2008, p.174).

Kress explains how rhetor and designer intent work alongside one another. In his theory, the act of design is sequential, involving first the task as imagined by the designer. The act of design that follows is a process where the arrangement of the ensemble of available resources that constitute the design is organised. This act of design configures affect (Kress, 2010, p.136). Put succinctly, “A design is the imagined projection of a complex, closely interrelated social array in which the designed entity, object, process is used, has social effects, meanings; and produces affect” (2010, p.137). Thus Kress describes how the act of design is a more self-conscious, social and power-driven act than that of mere representation. For Kress, representation is a bounded act, concerned with the interest of the producer who wishes to give material form to meanings as circumscribed by conventional forces.
Text production conjured as composition sits within this paradigm. For Kress, the term ‘design’ conveys the more outward looking and provisional process of communication. Its focus is upon the desire to make meaning available to others (Kress, 2010, p.49). As such, the designer can also be regarded as a rhetor who shapes their design based upon choices about content, environment, resources and awareness of the audience. Bourdieu (1990;1991) and Bauman’s (2005) descriptions of practice and identity work can be regarded in relation to Kress’ description of ‘design’, thus making connections between the micro-level theoretical frame and the meso-level already discussed. By introducing notions of audience and power, Kress defines rhetoric as the politics of communication. He argues that rhetoric becomes the mode of communication in unstable times when conventions and rules are absent, when power is contested in the social domain (Kress, 2010, p.49). Thus text production in Bauman’s liquid times (Bauman, 2005) becomes an act of rhetoric, where position within a social field (Bourdieu, 1991) is at stake.

To understand Kress’ notion of design and rhetoric, and the implications for this theoretical framework, it is necessary to contemplate where Kress derives his theory of communication from. Kress sketches a model of communication that draws from existing but highly contested models that have enjoyed dominance in the twentieth century (Kress, 2010, p.34). These models both imply social relations, but to different degrees. They also both disregard issues of modality. However, these models draw attention to the issue of authority and power relations (Kress, 2010, p.36) that evolve to issues around design and rhetoric. Drawing from the work of Saussure, Kress describes a dyadic interactive model of communication, with a social and psychological orientation that is materialised as interaction. In this model,
the possibility for meaning to be negotiated is available. Drawing from the field of electrical engineering, Kress describes a *sender-message-receiver* schema (Shannon and Weaver (1948), which emphasises a dyadic, unidirectional process of communication. This model is more authoritatively oriented, with the implication that the *receiver* recovers the meaning encoded by the (authoritative) sender (Kress, 2010, p.36). Kress builds from these models, and their critique by Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author*, (1968/1977), to articulate a model of communication from a social semiotic perspective.

Kress describes communication as social action that is socially shaped and socially embedded (Kress, 2010, p.35). In his sketch, three assumptions are described as fundamental: “communication happens as a response to a prompt; communication has happened when there has been an interpretation; communication is always multimodal” (Kress, 2010, p.36). Based on the notion that communication depends on the centrality of interpretation to the process, Kress describes communication as a two-stage process; stage one dominated by the interest of the sign maker, or the rhetor; stage two by the interest of the interpreter. For this theoretical framework, it is the interest of the sign maker that is in question. Kress describes the sequence that the sign maker engages with to make a new sign as follows:

- A prior prompt and its interpretation leading to;
- A new sign complex (based on the maker’s interest and sense of audience) leading to;
- A message (intended as a prompt) leading to;
- The interlocutor’s attention to and possible engagement with the message leading to;
In this model, the text producer is rendered as a rhetor, producing semiotic work. Kress describes how the constant remaking of meaning through the process of communication achieves a sense of stability in the social world where “the absence of noticeable gaps gives a sense to members of the community that things are as they have always been” (Kress, 2010, p.34). Equally, Kress explains that social interaction is a catalyst for change. Interaction is never predictable and always produces new meanings and possibilities: in other words, semiotic work is always socially productive. This tension between the stability associated with maintaining continuity of meaning and the instability associated with the potential for new meaning can be understood in relation to Kress’ notion of composition, which suffices as a representational mode in stable times and role of the rhetor/designer who operate in times of instability, when issues of power and politics are subject to contestation.

Further, Kress makes a distinction between the roles of designer and rhetor. Kress describes how design is shaped by the rhetor in response to the communicative environment, the participants, the content, and power issues involved. Communication involves choice which reflects the interest of the communicator, and which in turn, reflects the communicator’s assumptions about the interest of the recipient. On this basis, rhetoric is described by Kress as the “politics of communication” (Kress, 2010, p.43). Kress describes the present social and communicative environment as unstable, thus requiring a rhetorical perspective for communication. While a designer makes choices about the potential affect, the rhetor, first and foremost, makes choices about larger framings relating to purpose, audience, resources, and power (Kress 2010, p.44). Kress situates rhetoric within the
first of the two-phase structure of communication articulated earlier, and building from the interactive models provided by Saussure and Shannon and Weaver (1948). In this phase, analysis undertaken by a rhetor forms a sketch of a ‘sign complex’ which is elaborated by a designer, and then given material form by a producer (Kress, 2010, p.44). The role of the rhetor is matched, in the second phase, by the role of the interpreter. In Kress’ communicational theory, the rhetor “sets the ground”, and the interpreter “interprets the prompt”. Each has a distinct role in the process of communication (Kress, 2010, p.45). Kress describes this conception of communication in relation to a curator and a visitor; to writer and reader; to an uploader to a social site and to a site visitor. This theory provides the basis for considering the production of text in social networking sites. It is grounded in the social world and foregrounds issues of agency, power and design. Further it accommodates the liquid conditions articulated earlier in this chapter. In an unstable social world, Kress describes communicational acts, set within a context where the clarity of established generic forms is challenged, as provisional and unfolding, demanding a rhetorical approach to communication, e.g. recognition of the power negotiation involved in the absence of conventions and rules (Kress, 2010, p.26). In this liquid world, relations of power are less than certain. Communication within this world can be regarded as provisional, rather than driven by convention (Kress, 2010, p.46).

Kress takes the notion of communication in uncertain times and elaborates the relative roles of designer and rhetor in the design process (Kress, 2010, p.49) to include issues of ideology and textual shaping. Kress describes representation and communication as distinct social practices (Kress, 2010, p.49). He regards
representation as an inward-focused act, concerned with one’s interest in giving material realisation to meaning. Communication however is concerned with the need to make that representation available to others. Kress suggests that the dual frame of rhetoric and design can be used to define communication in social semiotic theory:

*rhetoric* as the politics of communication and *design* as the translation of rhetorical intent into semiotic implementation. *Rhetoric* is orientated to the social and political dimensions of communication; *design* is orientated to the semiotic (Kress, 2010, p.49).

Kress claims that in most everyday tasks of communication the two roles of designer and rhetor come together in one person, with design being the servant of rhetoric as the political and social interests of the rhetor are generative of and shaping for the potential for the designer (Kress, 2010, p.50).

Agency, as an organising logic is privileged by this social semiotic perspective. However, by moving away from social semiotic theory it is possible to conceive other influences in the design process. In relation to academic writing, Myhill has drawn from a number of scholars to describe the writing process in relation to design as a way of explaining the trajectory in writing development that can be observed as children become autonomous and agentive designers of text. Myhill, writing about older children’s development as writers, draws from Sharples, (1999) to describe their writing as an act of creative design. She explains how three processes are integrated as text producers (writers) move along a pathway from: the movement from speech to writing patterns; the movement from declaration to elaboration; and the movement from translation to transformation, as one becomes a ‘designer of writing’ (Myhill, 2009, p.412). For Myhill, the act of design implies the ability to innovate and regenerate. While this account draws from research in formal
schooled contexts, it would appear that the affordances of social networking sites can be regarded as supportive of the design process in younger and less developed writers. In these instances, progress along the trajectories described by Myhill is scaffolded or achieved by the social networking site’s template and affordances. For example, elaboration in a Bebo profile page is supported by the infinite availability of textual resources to copy, paste and mash into a new text, while being framed by available templates and existing models. In this way, the notion of writer as designer is evolved to include not only the agency of the text producer, but in addition, the affordances of the tools available, and the conventions negotiated within the discourse of using the tools.

Therefore to conclude this section and answer the question posed: How are texts produced, it can be observed that from the perspective of social semiotics, that text producers in the new digital age can be conceived as agentive rhetors and designers of signs, who utilise modes with specific affordances to construct multimodal ensembles (Bezemer and Kress, 2008, p.172). In this account, the producers of texts are positioned as sign makers where “signs are units in which meaning and form are brought together in a relation motivated by the interest of the sign maker” (Kress and Bezemer, 2009, p.168). The availability of resources and the aptness of resources constrain the process of sign making. In this theory, the agency and interest of the sign maker is of paramount importance and invoked as the dual frame of design and rhetoric. This dual frame is concerned with decisions about representation, e.g. how can I represent what I want to say; and it is concerned with communication, e.g. how can I realise the intended relationship with the audience. This complex process is circumscribed throughout by the social, cultural and
economic, political and technological environments within which the text is to be produced (Kress and Bezeemer, 2009, p.168).

**Conclusion**

The notion of text and the act of producing and designing text within a social networking site can therefore be located within, and connected to the macro- and meso- level considerations articulated in sections one and two of this chapter, to culminate in an assemblage of theoretical perspectives. This assemblage melds the socio-political context for text production, with issues of identity and literacy practice that are raised by text production, and notions of the textual product that is materialised through the text production process itself. While each level within this theoretical framework can be considered in isolation, it is also possible to locate notions of text and textual product within issues of identity and literacy practice, which in turn can be located within the socio-political context for text production. Accordingly this three-level frame can be viewed holistically, as each level, from macro to micro, accommodates the next.

In this assemblage the three fields identified include:

- A macro-level presentation where considerations of the social and technological features of late modernity can be regarded as supporting a knowledge class who reflexively and continually strive to construct and reposition their sense of self in a liquid, networked social field.

- A meso-level presentation which identifies that identity is a fluid and contested project, which can be in-part realised through pluralistic literacies that house specific social practices, and that in turn gives rise to specific literacy events and practices within a hybrid context that is
driven by local and distant ideologies and that supports the realisation of
social identities through the production of text.

- A micro-level consideration identifies that texts are the artefacts of
human subjects’ work at the production of meaning and social
negotiations. In this consideration, texts are complete, cohesive,
coherent, multimodal, material units of meaning, realised through
communication. They have a site of appearance that is subject to changes
in available representational resources. Text making is an agentive act of
design and rhetoric, which depends upon and generates social relations.

While these theoretical areas have been presented discretely, they are inextricably
linked from the micro to the macro, with any consideration of text necessarily
involving issues around identity and literacy, and any consideration of identity and
literacy necessarily involving consideration of the socio-political context. This
assemblage of theoretical perspectives has built from the review of literature and, in
the light of the research question, served to further sensitise my awareness of some
of the theoretical perspectives concerning text and text production within the digital
age. This sensitisation has contributed to the methods selected to explore the
research question, including the approach taken to the collection of data, the
subsequent decisions that have informed the construction of data sets, and the
selection of a grounded theory approach for the thematic analysis of data. In the next
chapter, the research paradigm that houses this inquiry, the methods adopted to
explore the research question, and the methods used to construct and analyse data
sets will be outlined and rationalised.
Chapter 5: Methodology and methods

This chapter is presented in four parts and will describe:

• the research paradigm within which the research questions were explored;
• the methods adopted to explore the research questions;
• the study;
• the methods used to construct and analyse data sets.

Part one: the research paradigm

In this section, the research paradigm within which the research question was formulated is described.

• How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?

This study aimed to explore specifically how pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites. This focus located children’s text production within the process of online social networking, with the primary intention of interrogating the act of text production itself, rather than the nature of communication that the production of texts in online social networking sites makes possible. The review of literature (Chapter 3) has demonstrated that the practice of social networking sites has been regarded through the lenses of communication, identity and performance (boyd, 2010; boyd 2008; boyd, 2007; boyd and Ellison, 2007, Ito, et al. 2008). This study sought an alternative perspective. By placing text production at the heart of this study, practical observations about the behaviour of children as text producers, and implications for educators and those responsible for...
supporting children’s development as text producers were sought. A methodology that supported this was therefore required. Accordingly, an interpretive qualitative research paradigm with the potential to construct and distil accounts of participants’ actions and experiences as text producers, in order to understand how they ‘create, modify and interpret’ their worlds was adopted (Cohen et al. 2000, p.7).

**Qualitative research paradigms**

Some researchers provide simple definitions for qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.10-11) define qualitative research as ‘any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification’. For them, an emphasis on the process of interpretation of data is a key characteristic of qualitative research. Building from the same premise, Maykut and Morehouse offer a more concise definition of qualitative research by contrasting it to a quantitative approach concerned with statistical analysis of discrete units. They state that qualitative research ‘generally examines people’s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants’ (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.2).

These clear definitions emphasise that qualitative research has a concern with representing the experiences of participants. However they do not tackle the complex ethical, epistemological and ontological issues around representation of the subject or phenomena in question that have been identified by other researchers in relation to defining what constitutes a qualitative research paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.157) argue that four concepts comprise any research paradigm: ethics, ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ethics is concerned with the
morality of the researcher in the world; epistemology is concerned with knowing the world and understanding the relationship between the inquirer and the known; ontology raises basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world; and methodology focuses on the best means for gaining knowledge about the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.157). When these four concepts are melded through the process of research, a definition for qualitative research can be realised. This definition is not singular, but exists as a construction that resides around the researcher, their biography and the research process itself (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.19). Denzin and Lincoln draw from Guba (1990, p.17) to describe this construction as a ‘net’: the creation of an interpretive framework which is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world, which may be invisible, assumed, or problematic (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.19).

That meaning is constructed, and not discovered was a central premise of this study. Constructivism is a major interpretive paradigm within qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.20). Constructivism has been defined by Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) as ‘the epistemological doctrine that social reality is constructed, that it is constructed differently by different individuals, and that these constructions are transmitted to members of a society by various social agencies and processes’ (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007, p.22). These assertions underpinned the this study, allowing for participant/researcher accounts to be constructed and modified during and after the fieldwork period in order to interpret and present the subject under consideration: children’s text production. Denzin and Lincoln neatly describe a constructivist research paradigm as one that:

assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knover and respondent co-create understandings), and a
naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. Findings are usually presented in terms of grounded theory or pattern theories. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.21)

Flick summarises qualitative research as a continuous process of ‘constructing versions of reality’ (Flick, 2006, p.19). In this discussion Flick defends an interpretive and fluid approach to qualitative research that resonates with Denzin and Lincoln’s description (Flick, 2006, p. 21). Here, Fick describes how the ‘pluralisation of lifeworlds’ requires the use of inductive research methods that can establish locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives (Flick, 2006, p.11). In this study, the construction of case studies, drawing from multiple collections of data over time allowed for the construction of relativist, situated accounts, and to some extent depended upon the acceptance of methodological bricolage.

Methodological bricolage has been explained and defined by Denzin and Lincoln in their introduction to the discipline and practice of qualitative research. At the time of writing, they argued that qualitative research could be considered in relation to seven different historical phases and contingent approaches, each of which impacts on the next (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp.1-27). The most recent phases described were ‘post experimental’ and ‘future’ phases of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.17), where researchers working within many different methodologies find opportunities for confluence as methodologies and perspectives are interwoven and interbred in order to inform and illuminate each other as necessary (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.164). They suggested that qualitative researchers can be regarded as bricoleurs, borrowing from a variety of disciplines and interconnected interpretive practices in order to construct a bricolage: a representative artefact that embodies the researcher’s aesthetic as well as the participants’ accounts of their realities (Denzin 152
and Lincoln, 2000, pp.3-4). In this study, methodological bricolage was engineered by choosing and combining appropriate methods and theories; by recognising the multiple perspectives of all participants; by incorporating researcher reflection and reflexivity, and by the use of a variety of approaches (Flick, 2006, p.14).

In order to construct data for this study, a methodological bricolage that synthesised methods arising from the perspectives of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986), and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), was devised. These methods were selected to support the construction of an account of children’s text production in online social networking sites that would meld the views of the participants in relation to the online texts that were produced. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, a series of semi-structured interviews with three pre-teenage participants were planned to provide data for transcription that would allow a participant/researcher account of online text production in social networking sites to be constructed. An analytical approach based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2000) was adopted for the purpose of data analysis and interpretation. From the perspective of ethnomethodology, screenshot data of children’s social networking site profile pages were collected and described alongside the interview transcripts.

These perspectives will be briefly described here. Symbolic interactionism as an approach within qualitative research is derived from the work of G.H. Mead (1934), and American Pragmatism, and associated with a range of other researchers: Blumer, Hughes, Becker and Goffman, who share similar but not unified interpretations of the term (Blumer, 1986, p.1; Cohen et al., 2000, p.25; Denzin
Symbolic interactionists seek to explore the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their activities and their viewpoints (Flick, 1998, p.17). According to Denzin (2004, p.85), interactionism is best understood as ‘stories people tell themselves about their lives and the worlds they live in, stories that may or may not work’. These stories are constructed and performed as representations (Denzin, 2004, p.85). Semi-structured interviewing techniques, interpreted via theoretical coding and content analysis can be used to access, construct and understand these stories (Flick, 2006, p.22). A symbolic interactist approach has implications for the construction and analysis of data. Vidich and Lyman (2000, p.38) explain that a central tenet of symbolic interactionism involves accepting that ‘the other can be understood only as part of a relationship with the self’. This fully implicates the researcher within the research process and the construction of data. Based on this notion, they suggest that qualitative methods that conceive ‘the observer as possessing a self-identity that by definition is re-created in its relationship with the observed – the other, whether in another culture or that of the observer’, be adopted (Vidich and Lyman, 2000, p.38). Gee (1999a) describes vividly how social languages are enacted by the interviewer and interviewee in relation to an interview situation, and how interviews themselves are co-constructed as ‘distinctive social activities’ (Gee, 1999, p.123). This methodological perspective accommodates and reflects the approach taken in this study, where the co-construction of a representation of the views of the participants in relation to the interviewer and the social field surrounding the focus of this study was sought.

Ethnomethodology allows an ‘empirical study of the mundane practices through which interactive order is produced’ (Flick, 2006, p.22). In this study, profile page
screenshots were captured during the interview with the permission of the participant, and then saved to be set alongside interview transcript data for interpretation and analysis. The profile pages are the texts that are created as part of the participants’ online social networking. While conversation and discourse analysis are methods commonly associated with an ethnomethodological approach (Flick, 2006, p.22), in this study, the collection and analysis of documentary evidence in the form of screen shots can be regarded as an endeavour to explore further how participants produce texts and make sense of their text production. While screenshots are not conversations to be analysed, they are the textual artefacts of social networking discourse (see Chapter 4: Assembling a theoretical framework, part 3) that can be captured for analysis and interpretation. These artefacts, when positioned alongside the data constructed from a semi-structured interview, and utilised as a focus of the interview, would complement and enrich the potential interpretations and analysis of data.

The melding of these methods can be regarded as a form of methodological bricolage that attempted to lessen the potential shortfalls associated with each method. In this study, seeking the views of participants through the use of semi-structured interviews alone could be regarded as an inadequate method for learning about children’s text production in social networking sites. An ethnomethodological account, concerned with how social reality is produced in and through interactive processes (Flick, 1998, p.19) might be deemed more insightful. However, this approach, would have involved the use of participant-observation, and was not deemed appropriate for reasons of ethics and practicality. In addition it was felt that for this study’s aims, a symbolic interactionist approach could be defended. In his
account of theories of agency and action, Denzin defends the use of a symbolic interactionist approach as a method for exploring the subjective meanings made in an individual’s ascription of sense. He draws from Gidden’s theory of structuration (Giddens, 1981, p.19) to challenge the argument that external social systems drive an individual’s subjective experience. Instead, he argues that ‘experience, structure and subjectivity are dialogical processes’ (Denzin, 2004, p.82). In his account, symbolic interactionists view humans as reflexive agents whose actions are skilfully and knowledgeably organised in time and space and which cannot therefore be separated from the processes of social interaction or the structures around it. Based on this notion, the use of a symbolic interactionist approach provided a practical and manageable lens through which to construct an account of children’s reflexive behaviour as text producers. However, to strengthen and embellish the participant accounts, screenshots were taken. These textual artefacts were anchored to the interview process through the screenshot process. Scrutiny of the screenshots supported the interpretation of interview transcripts and contributed to a richer construction of children’s text production in online social networking sites than might be achieved by interviewing or documentary analysis alone. This methodological bricolage enriched the potential for meaningful interpretations to be made.

The melding of methods from the perspectives of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology can be viewed as the construction of a methodological approach that supports a constructivist sensibility. In describing the narrative turn in symbolic interactionism, Denzin recounts how ‘symbolic interactionists study performed texts’, and how ‘symbolic interactionists are constantly constructing interpretations
about the world’ (Denzin, 2004, p.85). Denzin’s account of symbolic interactionism is both constructivist and interpretive. Along with this, Gall et al., argue that an underlying premise of ethnomethodology is that meaning is constructed reflexively through intersubjective interpretations (Gall et al., 2007, p.518). The methodological approach adopted for this study led to the construction of a reflexive account which resonated with the constructivist premise articulated at the outset of this section: that meaning is viewed as a construction based upon the interpretation of data achieved by the researcher and participant in tandem.

This approach served three functions. It allowed for data to be constructed into an account that contained the voices of the participants and the researcher as they combined through the research process; it recognised the expertise and insider knowledge of the participants, and allowed them to contribute to the direction of the research by the use of semi-structured interviews and screenshot collection; and finally it created an ethically acceptable method for this inquiry, which was located within a sensitive context.

For reasons of ethics, the use of participant-observation within an ethnographic approach was dismissed. Ethics had to be a frontline consideration in this study of pre-teenage children’s online text production in social networking sites. As has been documented in the literature review, the act of social networking depends in part on the knowledge that password security and insider know-how confines access to a solicited audience. For a pre-teenage participant, the certainty that texts posted as part of online social networking are not subject to unsolicited surveillance from parents or other authority figures can be viewed as central to the activity itself.
Girls’ face-to-face social networks have been previously regarded as notoriously impenetrable (Henry, 1996:150, cited in Hey 1997:45). In her ethnography of teenage girls’ friendship, Hey describes how complex it is to research girls’ relationships at the time of adolescence. She describes precisely how the ‘subterranean world of girls’ friendships’ (Hey, 1997 p.viii) are designed to keep intruders out. For this reason, participant-observation was considered too intrusive as an approach and less likely to yield insight into the process of text production than interviewing participants and discussing their textual artefacts might.

Ethnography was recently adopted by the large scale (three-year) investigation Kids' Informal Learning with Digital Media: An Ethnographic Investigation of Innovative Knowledge Cultures, sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation (Ito, et al., 2008). This investigation included over twenty projects and drew from over 5000 hours of online observations. The main methods used within this large-scale ethnography were participant-observation, interviewing, and conversation and content analysis, with the goal of understanding learning and digital media from ‘the kids’ point of view’ (Digital Youth Research: Frameworks and Methodology23). This study claimed to seek the views of the participants and drew powerful conclusions, based on multiple case studies. However, while the voices of some individual participants were presented through the major findings, the aim of this study was to generalise how new media practices are embedded into the social and cultural ecology. Consequently, the findings are descriptive and generalised: the participants are conjured as ‘youth’, and implications are directed through a White Paper to

23 See http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/node/18 for details of the methodology adopted by the Digital Youth Research project.
educators, policy makers and parents. In direct contrast, the aim of this study was to construct textured and detailed accounts of three pre-teenage children’s text production in online social networking sites. The use of informal interviewing and screenshot collection were selected as methods of enquiry that would support this aim, while avoiding the ethical tensions that participant observation might incur.

In designing this study, an array of ethical issues and considerations relating to participant privacy and researcher-participant relationship, from the design of the research process through to the construction and analysis of data were of significance. These will be discussed in the next sections.
Part two: the methods

Introduction

In this section, the methods adopted to explore the research questions will be described and rationalised.

Research questions in qualitative studies are derived in order to develop theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.40). However, the term ‘theory’ in qualitative studies is widely contested (Charmaz, 2006, p.122). Charmaz tackles the problem of defining ‘theory’ by considering it in relation to interpretivist views. She states that ‘interpretive theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.126), and is necessarily emergent and provisional in its construction. Based on this interpretivist view, the objective of this study was to construct and interpret an account of the participants’ text production in online social networking sites. Research questions in qualitative studies must achieve a balance between achieving breadth and focus (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.41). To achieve this balance, the following research question was constructed:

• How do three pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?

Grounded theory and constructivism have been brought together by Charmaz (2000; 2006) as constructivist grounded theory. In the next section, constructivist grounded theory will be described as the method used for constructing and interpreting accounts of the participants’ text production. This method allowed for the synthesis of ongoing data collection and analysis, thus allowing earlier data collection and analysis to impact upon subsequent lines of enquiry. Following informal interview
situations, data was constructed, using interview transcripts and the capture of participant profile pages by screenshot. Data analysis involved the use of line by line coding of interview transcripts, that were managed at the level of individual interjections, and analysis of screen shots. Case studies of each participant were constructed (Chapter 6). Data were compared and described using ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) thematically throughout the analysis of the case studies (Chapter 7). Subsequent theoretical sampling was planned to be used as required to explore perceived gaps in the data, and to deepen the possibilities for conceptualisation. The aim of this constructivist grounded theory approach was to construct a framework for contemplating pre-teenage children’s text production in online social networking sites.

**Grounded theory**

Grounded theory methodology has evolved tremendously since it was originally articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their pioneering book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Charmaz, 2000). However, a key feature from the original description of their approach endures. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.159) draw upon Glaser’s description to identify this key principle: that with a grounded theory methodology, the act of ‘doing’ research and generating theory, continually interplay to form two parts of the same, ongoing process (Glaser, 1978, p.2 cited in Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.159). In this study, the opportunity to attempt to generate theory throughout data collection and analysis, and to remain responsive to the potentially fluid and evolving contexts within which the research was situated, was appealing. The need to remain responsive to technological change and contingent participant behaviour as a text producer was of paramount
importance. It was recognised that the rapidly evolving context for this research, as has been described in previous chapters, would require an approach that could be broadly responsive within an interpretive paradigm. Changes to the power balance between researcher and participant might have occurred as technology and the practice of social networking, evolved. A lack of ‘insider knowledge’ had the potential to position the researcher as a ‘digital immigrant’ (Prensky, 2001), who enjoyed less understanding about the phenomena being researched than the participants in the study. This uncertainty was a significant feature of the research. A grounded theory approach, in bringing the generation of theory and the ‘doing’ of the research together, accommodated these uncertainties, while providing a framework for ensuring a rigorous approach that could lead to conceptual density.

Strauss and Corbin provide a clear and concise overview of the grounded theory method in two editions of their publication *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In the latter book, they usefully list the fundamental features of a grounded theory research approach to include:

- the grounding of theory upon data through data-theory interplay;
- the making of constant comparisons;
- the asking of theoretically orientated questions;
- theoretical coding;
- and the development of theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.179).

This extrapolation serves to anchor their version of the method at a time when they recognise the wide application that it has enjoyed in the social sciences (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.34). Charmaz (2006; Charmaz, 2000) overviews the evolution of
grounded theory from a method underpinned originally by positivism, to an updated grounded theory methodology where an interpretive constructivist approach that avoids depending on a positivist stance, yet that achieves conceptual density can be achieved. She calls this version *Constructivist grounded theory*.

**Constructivist grounded theory**

Constructivist grounded theory is evolved from Strauss and Corbin’s method. Instead of a traditional grounded theory approach that assumes an objective, external reality and espouses verification (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998, Glaser, 1978;1992 cited in Charmaz, 2000, p.510), Charmaz proposes a constructivist grounded theory, that

> assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognises the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and viewed, and aims toward interpretive understandings of subjects’ meanings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994). The power of grounded theory lies in its tools for understanding empirical worlds. We can reclaim these tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements.(Charmaz, 2000, p.510)

According to Charmaz, constructivist grounded theory allows the researcher to work from the premise that meaning is merely a construction between viewer and viewed; that there is no assumed external reality. Instead, the tools of grounded theory can be used flexibly to study empirical worlds with a focus on elucidating interpretive meanings instead of ‘objective, external reality’ (Charmaz, 2000, p.510). Accordingly, the aim of constructivist grounded theory is to construct and represent mediated interpretations of the respondent’s reality that exist among multiple possible interpretations. Charmaz explains, ‘Constructivists aim to include multiple voices, views and visions in their rendering of lived experience’ (Charmaz, 2000,
This study aimed to build on the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.41) and to view data as ‘reconstructions of experience’ (Charmaz, 2000, p.514), gathered from multiple sources, and subject to Geertz’s ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973).

Charmaz locates her description of constructivist grounded theory beyond objectivist grounded theory which, according to Denzin and Lincoln, rejects postmodern and post structural philosophies in its search for ‘credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.21). Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory is evolved in that it does not have verification as an aim. Her approach instead recognises that ‘the categories, concepts and theoretical level of analysis emerge from the researcher’s interactions within the field and questions about the data’ (Charmaz, 2000, p.522). In her words, ‘constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true’ (Charmaz, 2000, p.523); a distinction which appears to unsettle the role of verification. In this study, the research did not aim to construct claims to truth. Instead, a focus on small-scale theory generation based upon particular situations, where the qualitative researcher’s ability to construct an account, rather than capture lived experience became of paramount importance. A constructivist grounded theory approach was appropriate as a method to achieve this aim. This approach has implications for research validity which will be discussed later in this section.

**Case study**

It is widely recognised that a case study is not a methodological choice or a method (Gomm et al., 2000, p.4). Instead, case study can be defined simply as ‘a choice of
what is to be studied’ (Stake, 2000, p.435). In this study, a case study approach was selected to construct, manage, and present a detailed description of each participant (Gall et al., 2007 p.451). This approach insisted that attention was focused first upon what could be learned from each participant in turn, ‘with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance’ (Denscombe, 1998, p.32). ‘Thick description’ (Geertz: 1973) is the term widely used to describe the attempt of a researcher to depict a phenomenon in a qualitative study through the recreation of a situation (Gall et al, 2007). In this study it was decided that thick description would be achieved using a coding process for each participant, prior to a thematic consideration of data, where the data sets would be regarded collectively as a multiple case study (Yin, 1994).

Stake argues that case study can be conceived in three ways: intrinsic, instrumental and collective (Stake, 2000, p.437), and that these different types of case study are motivated in different ways. Intrinsic studies are motivated by the researcher’s desire to focus as closely on a unique case as possible, to the exclusion of preconceptions and ideas. Instrumental and collective studies, where the researcher enters the field choosing cases that will provide insight, are selected to advance understanding. Stake argues that with intrinsically motivated case study research, comparisons between cases are unnecessary and unhelpful: instead, the researcher must begin with the complexities that exist within the case before proceeding to compare to other cases (Stake, 2000). Stake defends intrinsic case study for its potential for particularity rather than its generalisability; as being of value not for its ability to ‘represent the world, but to represent the case’ (Stake, 2000, p.448). This, he claims, can be seen as a small step towards wider generalisation (Stake, 2000,
Stake justifies this assertion by giving an example of how the issues raised by one case may raise questions about existing theories and belief systems in wider populations (Stake, 2000, p.448). In this study an intrinsic approach to the analysis of individual case study data underpinned subsequent elaboration through a thematic analysis. Specific complexities were considered initially in relation to each participant in question as data sets were constructed. However, the sequential arrangement of data collection, where data was collected from each participant in turn led to inevitable comparison across the data sets, in the spirit of grounded theory, following each interview round. This meant that while data from each case was subject to thick description at an early stage of the analysis, and apparently exceptional or idiosyncratic behaviour was identified in relation to each participant, constant comparison across the data sets also contributed to this process. This served to enhance the richness of data constructed as the comparisons made across the participants’ data sets served not to dilute, but to enhance each case’s uniqueness and similarities. This process allowed questions to be raised across the sample, deepening the potential for analysis at a thematic level. In this way, the use of case study evolved from intrinsic to instrumental as insight constructed from each unique case contributed at the next level of grounded theory to the construction of a more generalised account.

**Participants**

Three participants were selected for this study. This number was chosen for reasons of practicality and to facilitate the constructivist grounded theory approach described. The use of three participants supported the process of constant comparison that underpins a constructivist grounded theory approach. Data could be
considered within each case study as it was built, and additionally supported the
construction of a thematic analysis where data from each case study was
extrapolated and compared.

Pre-teenage children (pre-teens) were identified as the participants for this study.
The label ‘pre-teen’ is a marketing term that has been used to target the group of
young people who are also sometimes referred to as the ‘tween generation’ (Handel,
1999 cited in Kenway and Bullen, 2000, p.48) or simply ‘tweens’ (Myers, 2004).
Myers defines this group using biological age (eight to twelve years) and describes
how this sector of the population ‘inhabits the half-world stuck between kids and
teenagers’. In marketing terms, Myers argues that this pre-teen group are identifiable
as consumers in their own right with influence over purchasing decisions. This pre-
ten group sits at the brink of adolescence, a phase defined by the World Health
Authority (WHA, 2004) as the time between ten and nineteen years of age.
Significantly the World Health Organisation recognises that defining pre-teens,
tweens or even adolescents by their biological age alone is a limited exercise.
Instead their definition extends beyond age to highlight the importance of social
growth and development at this time. (World Health Organisation, 1997, p.1 cited in
WHO, 2004, p.8)

The view that groups of children cannot simply be defined by their biological age is
echoed by the researchers within the Digital Youth Research Project (Ito et al.,
2008) who draw from the work of James and Prout (1997) to define childhood as a
socially constructed and contested category, rather than an incomplete
developmental stage (see chapter two for a full discussion). On this basis, the
participants were selected purposively (Cohen et al., 2000, p.103) to satisfy the following social, ethical and biological inclusion criteria:

- The participants were active users of online social networking sites
- The participants had access to a personal or family computer for their online social networking in their own home
- The participants’ parents provided informed consent
- The participants expressed a willingness to discuss their online social networking and share examples of it
- The participants would be aged between ten and twelve years at the outset of the study

The pre-teen ten to twelve year age group was of particular interest for the reasons documented in Chapter two (Establishing a context). From a personal perspective, my own pre-doctoral research into four, ten and eleven year old children’s out-of-school text production, conducted prior to the explosion of online social networking, had suggested that some pre-teens were choosing to ‘write’ of their own volition, by producing digital texts in their own time. Away from the surveillance of the school, I found that the children in this study were producing texts to affiliate themselves to others and to conduct friendships (Dowdall, 2006). Based on these observations, I began to question what it was that was driving these pre-teen children to produce texts in digital environments, and whether there might be lessons for educators to be learned from children’s informal text production that could be applied to the area of children’s schooled writing. As a development of this early interest, I conducted some small-scale preliminary research into one pre-teenage child’s use of social networking sites (Dowdall, 2009a). She was eleven and had recently made the
transition from primary to secondary education. This transition involved negotiating new friendships and relationships and reaching a stage of new autonomy, where she was able to visit town on Saturdays with friends, and independently navigate a range of digital technologies at home and school. Her text production using two social networking sites: *Bebo* and *MySpace* confirmed my earlier observation that informal text production was being used voraciously at this important time in her life. As these observations continued to interest me, an explosion of social networking activity and contingent media and policy-maker interest emerged. This explosion has been documented in Chapter three (Review of literature). In this review, social networking is found to be a social and textual process, driven by issues of identity performance and relationship.

By bringing my history and interests and these documented educational and social perspectives together, divergent constructions of pre-teenage children as text producers are evident. In educational settings, pre-teens’ text production continues to be constructed from a deficit perspective, where pre-teens are viewed as reluctant writers, failing to meet the standards required by policy makers. At the time of writing, the new coalition government have confirmed their commitment to external accountability as a tool for raising literacy standards through the publication of the *Independent Review of Key Stage 2 testing, assessment and accountability* (Bew/DfE, 2011), underlining this deficit perspective. Simultaneously, beyond the formally defined educational context, increasing numbers of pre-teens in England and beyond are documented as willingly producing texts in online social networking sites and as such can be viewed as active and engaged text producers (Ofcom, 2011;
Livingstone and Brake, 2010). This acute divergence supported the selection of pre-teen participants for this study.

**Ethical considerations**

The decision to work with pre-teen children raised a number of critical ethical issues. A full ethics review was conducted in line with University of Plymouth guidelines and approval granted (March, 2007). Guidance as detailed in the Research degrees handbook (August 2004) was followed to ensure that the following issues were addressed throughout the study’s duration:

- Informed consent
- Openness and honesty
- Right to withdraw
- Protection from harm
- Debriefing
- Confidentiality

However, in addition, a ‘sense of rightness’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.71), where my sensitivity to how the participants were appearing, moment-by-moment during the interview process, pervaded this study. This sensitivity was developed in response to my awareness that pre-teen participants’ willingness to contribute would be affected by how comfortable they felt to share the content of their profile pages through the screen shot process and their reflections. A list of basic principles which underpin quality research with young children have been summarised by MacNaughton *et al.*, (2001, p.9). These principles include the need for research to be critical and political, ethical, respectful of children’s participatory rights, purposeful, well designed,
transparent, and honest about assumptions (Roberts-Holmes, 2005, p.6). Although this study involved pre-teen participants, the same principles were felt to be worthy of consideration, particularly in relation to the participants’ participatory rights.

The research question in this study aimed to explore participants’ views about how they behave as text producers in online social networking sites. These views are not normally subject to overt adult surveillance. In order to gain access to these views, the participant-researcher relationships needed to be formed sensitively, and in such a way that the participants were happy to discuss their text production in online social networking sites, without feeling vulnerable, or exposed. To achieve and maintain these participant-researcher relationships, researcher reflexivity, where reflections about and adaptations to the interview process and content could be made on-the-spot, was fundamentally important. For the duration of the fieldwork, I needed to ensure that the participants were willing to share their views; happy to share examples of their profile pages; and happy to allow me to take screen shots. This involved showing me their profile pages at the time of the interview and allowing me to capture a representation digitally for subsequent analysis. A key principle of this research was that children should retain full control over my access to their online social networking activity. I did not therefore ask children to make me a member of their social network or to provide me with access password details. The aim of this approach was to protect the participants’ desire for confidentiality and to reassure them, and their parents, that information that children posted among themselves as part of their ‘normal’ social networking would not be viewed, without their permission and presence. However, as participants’ views about their text production were sought, it was recognised that discussions and screen shot examples might include other children within the social network. To protect these children,
participants were asked to not identify these children directly, and to refer to them only by their first names or screen names.

Alongside the need for researcher sensitivity, the recognition that it was unlikely that the participants would have been interviewed about their online text production before was significant. Children’s school-sanctioned text production has been assessed in relation to linguistic and technical mastery as part of standard assessment and target-setting procedures for some time (DCSF, 2008; QCA, 1999). These procedures position children as novice text producers rather than experts, and frame the writing process pedagogically, seeking to impose authoritarian judgements with the aim of raising standards in school-sanctioned writing, in line with current government priorities for literacy. A key challenge in this study was to develop a research persona that was acceptable to the pre-teen participants and their parents, and that would allow the participants to take on the role of expert when discussing their online text production.

A final consideration involved recognising the potentially sensitive nature of topics that may have been discussed during the interview or exposed through the screen shot process. Issues relating to friendship, relationships, peer pressure, bullying, behaviour that are likely to be viewed by parents and caregivers as inappropriate, were all topics that could have been encountered during the interview process. To manage this possibility, clearly defined expectations were established at the outset of each interview process. The participant’s right to privacy, confidentiality and to withdraw from the research was rearticulated at every interview. Parents gave their consent at the outset of the project, and were approached prior to each interview.
stage to check that they were happy for the process to continue. Cohen et al., (2000, p.145) clearly describe the interpersonal and practical challenges that face those involved in fieldwork. The decision to seek the participants’ views about their text production, rather than to access the social networking sites freely meant that unsolicited access to children’s online activity was not required. Current discourse around children’s online activities and perceived risk from predatory adults has been well-documented (DCSF/Byron, 2008; Livingstone and Bober, 2005). Therefore, by implementing this sensitive, open and honest approach, and by focusing on the participants’ views about their text production, rather than by attempting to gain access to their social networking sites, it was hoped that the potential for participant and gatekeeper concern was ameliorated. However, while the participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, it was recognised that there was the potential for participants to unwittingly disclose information that indicated they were at risk from other children or adults, through their online activity. To address this possibility, the informed consent process involved explaining to the participants that in those circumstances I would have to tell the participants that I must share this information with parents/carers. Throughout the fieldwork period, clearly defined boundaries were negotiated between the researcher and participants to support the construction of accounts of text production in online social networking sites. This approach can be rationalised as a way of seeking to introduce the voices of the participants into the polarised debate that currently sits between the two domains concerned with children’s text production described earlier.
Setting

Interviews were conducted in the family home around the computer used by the participant for social networking. The interviews were recorded using a small digital voice recorder. This was necessary for the smooth running of the interview and the effective collection of data, but equally it was recognised that this choice would have an impact on the setting, possibly making the participant self-conscious and more guarded in their willingness to discuss their text production. It was hoped that the repeated use of the voice recorder at each interview would lessen the impact of the technology on each subsequent interview. The choice of setting for the data collection was impacted upon by ethical and practical considerations. The use of the home setting provided an opportunity to reassure the ‘gatekeepers’ (Lecompte and Preissle, 1993 cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.144) from whom I had initially sought permission. In practical terms it assured that the computer was available and that connection to the social networking sites could be achieved. It allowed screenshots to be taken and saved as part of the data collection process. This use of the participants’ homes for data collection was circumscribed by practical and ethical considerations, although it was recognised that these settings might not truly reflect the extent of the settings used by each participant for their online social networking. However, using the setting of the family home allowed the participants to be positioned as the experts in this research process. To ensure the participants’ of their confidentiality, privacy for the duration of the interview was requested and granted by the participants’ family members.
Part three: the study

In this section, the study and the methods for collecting data will be described and rationalised.

Study design

To obtain data for this study, three scheduled semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2006, p.204; Cohen et al., 2000, p.146) were used to seek three participants’ views about their text production in online social networking sites during a nine month period. Semi-structured interviews are characterised as interviews where the thematic direction allows the interview to focus on certain topics. Cohen et al. argue that semi-structured interviewing is a popular interview technique used in qualitative research. It depends on the use of a prepared schedule of questions that is sufficiently open-ended to allow for digression and further probing in response to the participants’ comments (Cohen et al., 2000, p.146). Flick describes how the form of semi-structured interview is determined by the requirement for the interviewee to be open and to provide subjective viewpoints (Flick, 2006, pp.204-5). Generally, it is accepted that naturalistic research methods should be fit for purpose and permit flexibility (Cohen et al., 2006, pp146-147). The careful planning of each interview was important for the success of the implementation and analysis stages of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Careful consideration of the processes for collecting data was given and is described below.

Recruitment

A purposive sample was required for this study. A friend and former professional colleague with a pre-teenage daughter who met the criteria for inclusion was
approached. The research project was introduced using an information sheet (see appendix 2) and the first-parent consent letter (see appendix 3). Having obtained her parents’ consent, their daughter (Jennifer)\textsuperscript{24} was invited to participate in the study using the first-participant consent letter (appendix 4). This letter explained the research process and issues around anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. In addition, this letter asked her to approach two friends (who would be unknown to me) who also fulfilled the inclusion criteria to participate in this study with her. The aim of this recruitment strategy was twofold. First it was to build a sample. Second, through my professional familiarity with the Jennifer’s mother in her professional role, it was hoped that this approach might ameliorate gatekeeper’s concerns about my interest in their child’s online activities. At all stages in this process, opportunities for the Jennifer to decline were offered orally and within the information and consent documentation.

Jennifer invited two additional participants: Chloe and Ellie. The second and third-parents’ consent letter (appendix 5) was sent to their parents/carers to introduce myself; to explain the purpose of my contact; and to request that they might telephone me if they were willing for their child to be involved in this research project. During this telephone conversation I was able to explain more fully the purpose of the research and issues around scope, anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. This letter was completed by Chloe and Ellie’s parents and the

\textsuperscript{24} Jennifer is not a pseudonym. A pseudonym cannot be used in a study of social networking as this would render analysis of screenshots impossible. In line with the approved ethical protocol for this study, anonymity was assured by using full first names (not on-screen names) only and by restricting the publication of any identifying data, e.g. screenshots that showed the participants’ profile shots along with their on-screen profile name, to this bound thesis.
second and third-participants’ consent letter (appendix 6) was completed by Chloe and Ellie.

**Timescale**

To achieve the construction of a data set that would bear thick description, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, over a period of nine months. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and screenshots of the texts discussed were collected. This timescale was planned to be sufficient to provide a window of opportunity for each participant’s text producing behaviour to evolve and change, and still form a coherent case study. Burnett and Wilkinson (2005) conducted a study of children’s informal internet use over a six-week period. They found that this timescale allowed key questions to be returned to and explored further, while providing insight into how children’s use of the internet changed over time. Burnett and Wilkinson argue that the provisionality of web-based texts supports changing usage by children. Based on this observation, and experience gained while undertaking preliminary work for this study, I would concur that an individual’s use of social networking sites is highly changeable and subject to current interests and trends within the social network. Three interview opportunities were planned for each participant. This number of interviews aimed to provide enough time for the participants to have engaged with the act of text production; to support the construction and revision of data in the light of new events and contexts; and for a rapport to be developed between the participant and researcher.

A nine month time-scale was also chosen to achieve a balance between maintaining children’s interest in the study and ameliorating the effects of researcher interest, which it was deemed might initially impact on children’s online text producing
behaviour. It was hoped that the use of a nine month fieldwork period would allow for any sense of novelty about the researcher’s interest in the participant’s online activities to lessen, and for the participant’s comments about their online text production to refer to increasingly to their naturally-occurring practice rather than activities that might have been contrived for the purpose of impressing the researcher.

**Interview procedure**

The three participants were interviewed individually, and in turn, three times each over the course of nine months, using a general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). The aim of each interview was to allow intensive exploration of the participants’ interpretations about their experiences of text production in online social networking sites (Charmaz, 2006, p.25). For each interview, a schedule comprising of a series of open-ended questions was prepared (see appendices 7-9). The questions were designed to form the structure for each interview and allow opportunities for the interviewer to digress and respond to each participant’s idiosyncratic contributions in the spirit of a semi-structured interviewing approach (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p.146). Charmaz (2006, p.27) argues that qualitative interviews support the construction – or reconstruction of a reality that accounts for particular points of view. She defends the use of a qualitative interviewing approach for grounded theory by describing the close match between the methods associated with qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. Both are flexible in that they are open-ended, while being directed by the researcher’s awareness of sensitising concepts; shaped, while also able to be responsive; and paced yet unrestricted (Charmaz, 2006, p.28). She also describes qualitative interviewing as a process
which allows the interviewer to assume a degree of control over data construction and analysis. The combination of control and flexibility offered by qualitative interviewing allows subsequent analysis to become increasingly focused on the emerging issues (Charmaz, 2006, p.29). In this study, each interview was analysed prior to the construction of the next interview schedule, as well as after (in a CGT approach). In this way, each subsequent interview schedule became increasingly focused upon the themes that required further exploration; while other themes were discarded or set to one side as saturation in relation to the theme was achieved. Each participant interview formed the basis of one complete set of data.

Three interview rounds were planned initially, with the aim of achieving a sense of theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006), and to allow for theoretical sampling as required. Each participant was interviewed in turn to allow data for each participant to build as a case study and to allow data to be explored across each interview stage (see Table 1: interview schedule). Within each set, the actual date of each participant’s interview was affected by practical issues. For example, Jennifer’s computer was broken and she could not be interviewed first, despite being the primary participant. As a consequence, each participant was not interviewed in the same order within each set. However, this did not prevent data from each participant’s interview informing the subsequent interview schedule for each participant.
Table 1: Interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Interview 1</th>
<th>Interview 2</th>
<th>Interview 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>July 2008 J1</td>
<td>September 2008 J2</td>
<td>April 2009 J3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>June 2008 C1</td>
<td>September 2008 C2</td>
<td>April 2009 C3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>June 2008 E1</td>
<td>November 2008 E2</td>
<td>May 2009 E3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews were organised and conducted as described below.

- Informed consent and ethical clearance was given.
- The participants’ parents were contacted to arrange each interview.
- The interview schedule (Cohen et al., 2000, p.146) was prepared.
- The participant signed into their social networking site
- The schedule for the interview was shared with the participant. Confirmation that they were happy to discuss their text production and show me their profile page was sought. The participant was reminded that they did not need to show me anything that they do not wish to; that the interview was confidential;’ and they would not be identifiable in any presentation of data that might subsequently be made.
- Participants were reminded that discussions and screen shot examples might include other children within their social network. To protect these children, participants were asked to not identify these children directly, and to refer to them only by their first names or screen names.
- The interview was recorded using a small and relatively unobtrusive hand held digital voice recorder.
• The participant shared examples from their social networking site by referring to the computer as they wished.

• At the end of the interview, permission to take screen shots of the profile page and save them to memory stick was sought. Screenshots were taken.

• The participant was thanked and the next interview date was provisionally arranged.

Interviews were planned to last between thirty minutes and an hour. This duration was chosen to allow familiarity to be established between the participant and interviewer and to allow time to obtain a range of insights about each participant’s online text production.

**Overview of fieldwork**

Table 2 describes the pattern of fieldwork planned for the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview number</th>
<th>Type of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>Preliminary semi-structured interview and screenshot collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview and screenshot collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview and screenshot collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final interview (if required)</td>
<td>Theoretical sampling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Pattern of fieldwork*
Interview 1: Preliminary semi-structured interview and screenshot collection

This semi-structured interview schedule (see appendix 7) was designed to allow digression and flexibility. The schedule was planned as a series of starting points for discussion that would cover a range of pre-determined themes, while allowing for additional topics to be pursued. Questions could be omitted, and additional questions formulated in response to the participant’s responses. The interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Field notes were written immediately after the interview to record additional information. Screenshots of the participant’s profile pages were taken and saved using a memory stick.

Interview 2 and 3: Semi-structured interview and screenshot collection

Following the preliminary interview, two subsequent interviews with each participant were planned (see appendices 8 and 9). The second and third interview schedules were designed to deepen the understanding of themes found in earlier data, and to allow for new themes to be constructed.

Final interview

To conclude the study, a final semi-structured interview was planned to allow for theoretical sampling if a point of saturation was not observed in the data analysis.

Research validity

The design of this interpretive study sought to achieve trustworthiness and credibility, terms that have been described by Denzin and Lincoln as replacements for the traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.158). Lincoln and Guba problematise validity, describing it as an
‘irritating construct, one neither easily dismissed nor readily configured by new-paradigm practitioners’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.178). They explain that within interpretive research traditions, researchers must aim for interpretive rigour: the sense that cocreated constructions can ‘be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomena’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.179). However, they go on to argue that researchers may never know whether their constructions are faithful enough to act upon, and instead suggest that authenticity criteria (fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity), and the use of new metaphors, e.g. crystallization, can be utilised to achieve trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.181). Flick additionally describes how prolonged engagement with the field and triangulation of different data are cited by Lincoln and Guba as strategies for increasing the likelihood that credible results will be produced and trustworthiness achieved (Flick, 2006, p.376).

In this study, research validity, in the form of trustworthiness and credibility was attempted in a number of ways. In her account of constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2006, p.182; 2005) presents four criteria that can be used to evaluate grounded theory studies. These criteria are: credibility; originality; resonance; and usefulness. A series of questions for the researcher is compiled under each heading for evaluating how constructed theory has rendered data. These questions are presented in full in appendix 10. These criteria can be used to evaluate the quality of the prolonged engagement involved in a study, and the value of the scholarly contribution made (Charmaz, 2006, p.183). These criteria were used throughout this study via the process of reflexion that underpins a constructivist grounded theory approach. In addition these criteria were considered at the conclusion of the analytic
Alongside Charmaz’s criteria, the concept of crystallisation was used as a metaphor for considering whether a rigorous engagement with the data was achieved. Janesick (2000, p.392) concurs with Richardson (2000) to describe how the metaphor ‘crystallisation’ can be used to consider issues of validity in postmodern accounts of qualitative research (Richardson, 2000, p.934) as a replacement for the term ‘triangulation’, in a research project with a postmodern ontology and epistemology. The use of the crystal metaphor recognises that when we seek to find out, what we see ‘depends on our angle of repose’ (Richardson, 2000, p.934) and rejects a positivist notion of truth seeking as a basis for approaching a research project. This metaphor allows for the incorporation of multiple methods in qualitative research design in order to achieve complex data that can be viewed from varying angles of approach; that reflects, refracts and creates patterns and colours according to the perspective of the viewer (Richardson, 2000, p.934). Janesick builds on Richardson’s view that ‘crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic’ (Richardson, 2000, p.935). In this metaphor, it is suggested that we know more from our data, but paradoxically always know that there is more to know, (Richardson, 2000). This premise was appealing when considering the notions of trustworthiness and credibility in relation to the constructivist sensibility implicit in this study’s research design and methodology. Crystallisation has been proposed as a transgressive metaphor for validity (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p.181). This assertion supports the idea that the
research process, while being trustworthy and credible, may never provide a complete and full account.

The aim in this study was to construct rich data that would support thick description (Geertz, 1973), culminating in the construction of a framework through which children’s text production in social networking sites could be described. To consider the study’s validity, the crystallisation metaphor can be used in relation to the claim that this study was conceived from an interpretive paradigm, and that the methods devised aimed to support the construction of an account that was recognised from the outset to be a partial construction of a changing reality, rather than the truth. To this end the study’s design aimed to incorporate opportunities for variety and intensive study (Stake, 2000, p.446). Continual comparison of the participants’ data was planned to be undertaken until saturation from the data in relation to the research questions (Charmaz, 2000) was perceived. Theoretical sampling was planned to be used as necessary to explore perceived gaps in the data throughout the duration of the study, and to deepen the possibilities for conceptualisation. This design therefore sought to achieve ‘trustworthiness’ in the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, in Flick, 2006, p.376). The layering of data and analysis over time allowed each participant’s views about their text production in online social networking sites to be constructed at different moments, and in relation to different events and people. This approach created a ‘prolonged engagement’ within the field, as each participant account could be considered in relation to earlier and later accounts, and in relation to the accounts of the other participants. In so doing, credibility and trustworthiness were aspired to.
Whilst claims for trustworthiness were made in relation to the study’s design, other issues relating to validity were noted. My relationship with Jennifer had a personal basis, whereas my relationship with Ellie and Chloe was formed purely through the research process. I was interested to observe whether this difference would affect each participant’s willingness to be open about and forthcoming with information in response to my interview questions. In particular, I was curious about whether my relationship with Jennifer’s parents might limit her preparedness to discuss her text production in online social networking sites. However Jennifer did not appear to feel inhibited when discussing her text production. While she appeared to carefully design her page, she freely discussed the content and her decision process with little self-consciousness. Throughout the fieldwork, this observation could be applied to each participant and each interview session. Social networking seemed to have attained such a normal, routine, everyday status amongst the participants that awkwardness and self-consciousness about even the content of their pages that had the potential to cause embarrassment – such as the use of swearing or sexually suggestive comments from friends – were dismissed, but not masked from my scrutiny. The apparent ordinariness with which Jennifer, Ellie and Chloe described and presented their text production using social networking sites surprised me, but reflected the attitude described by the marketing body for commercial television in the UK, thinkbox who, in their research project Generation Whatever, describe children as having unprecedented access to digital technology and content, and a what-EVER attitude to match (Brennan, online). In addition to the prolonged engagement with the participants in the field, the participants’ ‘whatever’ attitudes gave me confidence that the profile pages being described and performed might not
be completely contrived and censored for the purpose of each interview, further enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

Equally, while it became apparent that Jennifer had chosen to work on her profile page immediately before our first interview, it was also evident that despite impacting on her text producing behaviour, my researcher presence was not a strong enough force to entirely alter the choices that she made or the content that she displayed as a text producer. As an invited onlooker, I became merely one of many within the participants’ extensive social networks. My status as a researcher and an invited onlooker might have promoted a degree of tidying up and manicuring, but was not significant enough to trigger full-scale changes, as ultimately the texts were visible to a much stronger and more important audience than myself: the peer group. These observations are included to demonstrate that throughout the data collection period, an attempt to respond sensitively to the circumstances surrounding and impacting upon the data collection process was made. Wolcott (1990, in Flick, 2006:, p.374) suggests that this sensitivity is realised in the account of the research that is constructed by the researcher working reflexively.
Part four: the methods used to construct and analyse data

Introduction

Throughout this study, ongoing data collection and analysis allowed data to be layered-up and explored incrementally and cumulatively using a constructivist grounded theory approach. This involved line-by-line coding of transcript data and analysis of screenshot material. Data construction and analysis was based on Charmaz’s constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, Charmaz, 2006). This approach recognised that data can be regarded as a co-construction by interviewer and interviewee that can be explored for themes and motifs in order to develop a grounded theory. From a constructivist perspective, the process of constructing and analysing data allows ‘single events to become linked as part of a larger whole’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.10), where our theories are constructed ‘through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices (Charmaz, 2006, p.11). In this study, three interviews with each of the three participants provided the basis for the construction of nine discrete sets of data that would be synthesised through a coding and analysis process.

To build each set of data, three elements of data were constructed for analysis following each interview:

- An interview transcript
- Screenshots of the texts discussed
- A screenshot summary
Interview transcript

Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Following each interview, its recording was listened to in its entirety to provide a sense of the interview as a complete unit of meaning. Then the recording was transcribed, and a digital transcription was created. The transcription of each interview served to construct a record of the interview that could be coded. In creating this record, it was recognised that as the interview discussion was translated into a documentary form, the data constructed would be a reduced and interpreted representation of the discussion that was had about text production in social networking sites, (Cohen et al., 2000, p.281).

Different systems can be utilised for transcribing data (Flick, 2000, p.288), and it is argued that any transcription must be viewed as a decontextualised and ‘frozen’ artefact (Cohen et al., 2000, p.282). Therefore the system chosen and its usefulness had to be justified. Flick (2006, p.290) argues that different approaches to transcription are appropriate depending upon the degree of exactness required by the subject under study. Where linguistic exchange is acting as a medium through which to study certain contents, he draws from Strauss, (1987) to defend the choice to transcribe ‘only as much and only as exactly as is required by the research question’ (Flick, 2006, p.290). Flick draws from the work of Bruce (1992, p.145) to present some general criteria for evaluating transcription systems. He argues that transcription systems should be ‘easy to write, easy to read, easy to learn and easy to interpret’ (Flick, 2006, p.290).
The purpose of the interviews in this study was to probe each participant’s about the construction of texts within social networking sites. The purpose of transcribing the interviews was to render the discussion in a form that could be coded, line by line. For this reason, a precise transcript that accounted for the specific linguistic detail of the interview, e.g. utterance length, or pause length, was not felt to be necessary as this level of data would not enhance the coding and the interpretations of the data that could be constructed. Instead, for the interview to be captured in a meaningful way, all utterances were transcribed verbatim, and each interjection was numbered for ease of reference.

The first interview with each participant was transcribed manually (J1, C1, E1). This lengthy process allowed close engagement with the data in the early stages of the study. Following transcription, transcripts were checked for accuracy against the original recording and to regain an overview of the interview as a complete event. As the subject under consideration became more familiar, and for issues of practicality, a transcription service was used to transcribe interviews Jennifer J2,J3, Chloe C2,C3, and Elley E2,E3. Close engagement with the second and third interview transcripts for each participant was achieved through the coding and comparison of each transcript. An example of an interview transcript is included in appendix 11.

**Screenshots**

At the end of each interview, complementary data in the form of screenshots of the participants’ profile pages were collected. The collection of these screenshots rendered the participants’ online texts as personal documents (Lincoln and Guba,
textual artefacts which could be analysed alongside the interview transcript. While the screenshots were collected during the research process, the profile pages had been constructed by the participant as part of their social networking practice and could be regarded as extant rather than elicited texts (Charmaz, 2006, p.35). To support analysis, the screenshots were described using the construction of a screenshot summary. However, it was recognised that the collection and construction of the screenshot summary had some limitations. In rendering the online texts as textual artefacts, the materiality of these artefacts was altered. The online texts created within social networking sites are not routinely saved as permanent texts, and do not usually present to the audience in a fractured frame-by-frame way. For example, when viewed online, a social networking site profile page appears as a long continuous text which the reader scrolls down through, hyperlinking to elements as desired. The screenshot is therefore a limited and flat representation because it does not allow for hyperlinking to different layers of content, such as photograph albums with associated comments, or to other people’s profile pages and comments. In addition, the isolated consideration of screenshots dislocated the text from the associated temporal, contextual and social factors that played upon its production. However, despite these limitations, the capture of screenshots was justified because of the potential for the screenshots to complement the data gathered through the interview process (Charmaz, 2006, p.37). Screenshots for each data set are included within each participant’s case study (Chapter 6).

**Screenshot summary**

Screenshot summaries have been constructed as a form of memo: ‘informal, analytic notes... that record, chart and detail a major analytic phase’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.72).
As Charmaz explains, writing memos ‘expedites your analytic work and accelerates your productivity’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.72). In this study, the writing of memos has served as a tool for constructing an account of each participant. Analytic notes, made as part of the scrutiny of the screenshots were crafted to construct a descriptive screenshot summary.

Following their collection, observations and thoughts about the screenshots were recorded initially as memos, and subsequently crafted to form a screenshot summary. Charmaz describes how memo writing ‘provides a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, and to fine-tune your subsequent data gathering’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.72). The construction of the screenshot summary, following the interview, but preceding the transcription process, provided this ‘space’, and supported the subsequent transcription of the interviews. The screen shot summary aimed to complement the data that had been generated through the interview and transcription process. In addition the screenshot summary was used to provide extra contextual information, for example the participant’s profile photograph could be described with reference to the other people in the photograph, or the setting of the photograph, constructing ideas about social relationships and contextual information. In this way, the screenshot summary served to construct a context around the profile page, contributing to issues around the author’s purpose, working conditions, and intended and actual audience (Gall et al., 2007, p.292). It was also hoped that the construction of this summary would support and enrich the subsequent analysis of each interview transcript by providing additional information that may have not been recorded as part of the interview. The use of textual analysis in isolation of other methods has been criticised as an
inadequate approach to theory generation (Charmaz, 2006, p.39). However, in this study the use of textual analysis, alongside qualitative interviewing, aimed to value both forms of data in symbiosis, and ultimately strengthen the understandings made possible.

To frame the construction of the screenshot summary, three questions were used:

- What textual elements can I see?
- What might be the effect of this textual element?
- What might this mean to the participant and her social network?

These questions were derived from the questions formulated for the first interview schedule. In establishing these questions, the construction of the screenshot summary was focused primarily on issues relating to the texts produced and each participant’s text production. This strategy ensured that the summary constructed was relevant to the research questions and manageable for coding purposes. Screenshot summaries for each data set are included within each participant’s case study (Chapter 6).

**Assembling the data sets**

Each complete data set consisted of three elements of data that varied in their construction:

- An interview where meaning was constructed jointly between the interviewer and the participant during the interview itself;
• Screenshots of the participant’s online texts, where meaning was constructed jointly between the interviewer and the participant in relation to the participant’s audience during the interview;

• A screenshot summary, where meaning was constructed by the interviewer in relation to the screen shot, beliefs about the participant’s intentions and behaviour, and beliefs about the participant’s relationship with their audience.

The manual transcription of the first interview with each participant, and the construction of each screenshot summary served as preparation for the coding process which followed. Constant comparison of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was the analytic method by which the discrete elements within, through and across the data sets was achieved.

To facilitate constant comparison, the data sets were managed in three ways. For each incident of data collection, the three discrete elements (interview transcript, screen shots, screen shot summary) were considered individually and then synthesised through the data set construction and coding process to form a salient whole. This resulted in the construction of nine sets of data (J1,J2,J3,E1,E2,E3,C1,C2,C3), each of which could be managed initially as a distinct occasion. Charmaz describes how within the same interview, statements and incidents can be compared to find similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006, p.54). The data set construction allowed similarities and discrepancies to be noted, and raised issues to be included in the second and third interview schedule.
Second, the three data sets for each participant were synthesised to contribute to a growing, multilayered representation of each participant’s online social networking over time (J1-3; E1-3; C1-3). Each set of data was treated as an episode for each participant, which could be compared with other episodes for that same participant. Comparisons were sought from one interview to the next within the same participant’s data sets. On the basis of this synthesis, a case study for each participant was formed. This process is described in detail in Chapter 6: Presenting three case studies.

At the end of the coding process for each participant, their data set (e.g. J1-3) was trawled again for contextual information about their history as a user of social networking sites. This information was collected and used to form an introduction to each participant’s case study.

Finally, the case study for each participant was used for drawing comparisons across the sample. Each participant’s case studies (and data sets) were compared to the other participants in the study and this comparison promoted the construction of tentative categories.

In the spirit of grounded theory, this method allowed the interplay of data collection and coding to inform schedules for subsequent data collection, constant comparison of data, and also to indicate when saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.136) occurred, e.g. when subsequent data collection provided no new theoretical insights or revealed no new properties of the core theoretical categories being developed (Chamaz, 2006, p.113).
Coding the data

The development of an emergent theory about the participants’ text production in social networking sites was the aim of the coding process in this study. Charmaz describes the coding of data as ‘the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to describe the data’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.46). Coding has been defined and conducted in many ways, depending upon the priorities of the researcher who is using the technique. ‘Open coding’ has been defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.101) as ‘the analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data’. The notion of discovery in this definition does not reflect that meaning is constructed through the coding process. Charmaz (2006, p.10) evolves this earlier work to argue that concepts are not discovered, but constructed. In her articulation of a constructivist grounded theory she values the role of the researcher and their impact on the analytical process by arguing that coding is a process where ‘we attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.3). Flick reflects this constructivist sensibility. He describes how coding can be understood as ‘representing the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways’ (Flick, 2006, p.296).

Each data set was coded directly following data collection. This allowed the construction of subsequent interview schedules to focus on areas of ambiguity and perceived gaps in the data. As the screenshots provided contextual documentary evidence upon which each interview pivoted, it became apparent that the screenshots and accompanying commentary should be constructed and coded prior to the coding of the related interview transcript. This allowed the interview to be coded, with
reference being made to the screenshots as necessary to aid clarity. This process evolved through the analysis of the first three sets of data (J1, E1, C1), and was repeated for each subsequent participant and round of data collection within the study. An example of interview transcript coding is included in appendix 12. An example of screenshot summary coding is included in appendix 13.

Initial and focused coding

The process of coding serves not only to construct conceptualisations of the data, but also to reduce data and make it manageable. In addition to the notion that data is constructed, not discovered, Flick describes how theoretical coding reduces data, leading to the development of theories through a process of abstraction (Flick, 2000, p.296). To achieve reduction, abstraction and the development of theory in this study, a two-staged coding process, based on Charmaz’s approach to constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) was adopted. This process involved two main coding stages: initial coding, and focused coding. Initial coding allows the researcher to remain open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities can be discerned in the data. Building upon this, the process of focused coding allows the researcher to take a more conceptual approach, sifting through data using existing codes and seeking to determine their adequacy and analytical sense (Charmaz, 2006, p.57).

Initial coding

In this study the initial coding of segments of data from each data set was conducted following the approach described by Charmaz as ‘line by line coding’ (2006, pp.50-53). This process involved the scrutiny of each element within the complete set of
data (screenshot, screen shot summary and interview transcript), and the construction of codes to describe segments of data which included single words, phrases, single interjections, whole stretches of discussion, or in the case of screen shot summaries, researcher notes. Either *in vivo* or constructed codes (Charmaz: 2006, p.55) were used to describe each segment of data. This facilitated the interrogation of each element within the data set for the largest possible number of codes, with the intention of staying as close to the empirical data as possible (Charmaz, 2006, p.68; Flick, 2006, p.296). At this stage, provisional initial codes were recorded on the data, which led to the formation of extensive lists (see appendices 14-15).

Prior to coding the transcripts and screen shot summaries, the immersive manual transcription process utilised during the first round of data collection had already raised some key themes for consideration that might go on to feature as codes. For example, participants talked willingly about how they borrowed and copied ideas from their friends. This type of information began to suggest codes even before the initial line by line coding process was undertaken. Charmaz warns against data being forced into preconceived notions and extant theories, and defends the use of line by line coding as a way to avoid this and to ensure that data is seen afresh (Charmaz, 2006, p.68). This advice was heeded.

During initial coding of the screenshot summary and screenshots, provisional codes were recorded on the data, and additional notes were made to record ideas and questions (appendices 12 and13). Following the coding of the screen shots and screen shot summary, the related interview transcript was coded with reference to
the screenshots and screenshot summary. As part of this process, each recording was
listened to as a whole prior to the coding process in order to check transcript
accuracy, and to attune to the content. Provisional codes were created against
comments made by the participant and the interviewer, particularly where the use of
open-ended interviewing facilitated discussion rather than mere questions and
answers. Notes were made on the transcripts to record ideas and questions. This
process aimed to recognise that both the participant and the interviewer had a role to
play in the co-construction of meaning, and that this construction was a dynamic
process. The outcome of this process was the construction of an extensive list of
codes for each element within each data set (appendices 14-15). The initial coding
for each data set served to begin to reduce the data, and fed into the construction of
each subsequent interview schedule.

In order to ensure that analytic attention remained focused upon the research
question, the interview transcripts were coded using the following rules for
inclusion:

- Is the participant describing a text producing behaviour?
- Is the participant describing a social behaviour that leads to or results
  from text production in online social networking sites?
- Is the participant describing the use of online social networking texts to
  perform a function?

Transcript data that did not satisfy these rules was eliminated from the coding
process.
Coding was a necessarily recursive process. Each transcript and screenshot summary was revisited throughout the coding and analysis process and codes were interrogated and revisited for their ability to construct meaning by rechecking them against the original data source, e.g. by asking when rereading a code, did it represent what I thought it represented? This process continued throughout the initial coding and focused coding stage.

**Focused coding**

Charmaz defines focused coding as the second major coding phase. She describes how focused coding can be used to synthesise larger segments of data and to select the most significant codes. In addition, she explains that a key goal of focused coding is to determine the adequacy of the codes ascribed (Charmaz, 2006, p.57). In this study, the focused coding stage aimed to achieve both of these objectives. In order to develop the credibility of the data and to assure that the codes constructed portrayed the subject under study, the initial codes were re-read in the absence of the transcript and screenshot summary to check that they represented the content adequately and could convey meaning to a wider audience (Charmaz, 2006, p.182). Next, the transcript and screenshot summary were re-read to ensure that the coding had been comprehensive. At this stage, some new codes were noted, and some editing of codes was conducted (to remove duplication). As an additional safeguard, a sample of the coding of transcripts, screenshots and screenshot summaries was scrutinised by a colleague to check that the codes selected communicated what they were intended to communicate.
Following this scrutiny, focused coding was used to begin to synthesise and order the data to form three case studies. Charmaz describes how focused coding is an active process, where data is ‘acted upon’, rather than just read. At this stage, the analysis became increasingly directed, with a synthesis within each participant’s data as the main aim. To achieve this, codes from each element within the data set were compared with each other and assimilated. For any instances of apparent code duplication, e.g. where the same code appeared more than once, the individual codes were interrogated against the original data to check that the meaning was the same. In these instances, assimilation was used to remove any duplication. Following this, codes were compared and considered for their analytic direction. On the basis of this scrutiny, codes within each data set were sorted into groups with similar themes. These groups were assigned a descriptive label. The outcome of this process was the construction of provisional themes for each data set that were used to describe each participant within a case study.

Once the three data sets had been coded, and provisional themes had been constructed for each participant, focused coding was used again, this time to achieve comparison of data across the three data sets. The constant comparison of data within and across data sets supported the identification and prioritisation of specific themes which were elaborated as tentative categories. Categorizing refers to the summary of concepts into generic concepts and to the elaboration of the relations between concepts and generic concepts, and categories (Flick, 2006, p.296-297). Flick describes how the development of theory involves ‘the formulation of networks of categories or concepts and the relations between them’ (Flick, 2006, p.297). These relations may be hierarchical, or observed between concepts that exist
at the same level. In this study, the construction of data and coding culminated in the emergence of tentative categories that could be explored for their properties in an attempt to delineate them and identify areas of possible intersection with other elements within the data set and across the data sets.

Throughout the initial and focused coding process, code notes (Flick, 2006) were increasingly used to support initial and focused coding, and the construction of themes and categories. These code notes were elaborated as memos (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.217; Charmaz, 2006, p.72) and ultimately became the vehicle for exploring the codes that were constructed, particularly through the focused coding stage of analysis. The act of memo writing provided space for reflection and forced deeper analysis of the relationships between the provisional codes; codes and categories; and categories and categories (Charmaz, 2006, p.81-82). The memos also served to form the spine of the written case study analysis and the thematic analysis that followed the case study presentations.

It should be noted that while the initial and focused coding phases, and memo writing have been described in stages, these activities were not always discrete processes, conducted in a linear fashion. Instead the act of constant comparison across the data sometimes required that data and codes were revisited as focused coding and memo writing raised new areas for consideration, or the need for additional verification. Charmaz describes how memo writing can serve many varied functions: category definition; the exploration of processes subsumed within codes or categories; comparison of data; the introduction of raw data into the analysis; the defence of analytical claims using empirical data; conjectures for
checking in the field; identification of gaps in the analysis; the interrogation of a code or category (Charmaz, 2006, p.82). Memo writing in this study provided the opportunity to undertake these functions as they were required, and interrupted a linear and tidy analysis. This process, where data is constructed tentatively, and then examined strategically, specifically and systematically through further empirical enquiry is described by Charmaz as theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006, p.103). This process is used to elaborate and refine theoretical categories and is an emergent practice (Charmaz, 2006, p.104). In this study, theoretical sampling allowed theoretical categories to be interrogated and delineated. It also qualified the point at which the planned data collection could be curtailed. Three rounds of data collection with each participant were initially planned, with the proviso that further rounds of data collection would be conducted as necessary to achieve the saturation of theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006, p.113; Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.143).

Charmaz draws on Glaser (2001, p.191) to explain that saturation is a theoretical concept. Finding repetition in data does not indicate saturation. Instead, saturation refers to the point when ‘gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights’ (Charmaz, 2006, p.113). In this study, the memo writing and theoretical sampling process, conducted after each data collection round, and at the culmination of the three rounds of data collection, allowed concepts to be considered alongside one another and for fresh insights. Following the planned three rounds of data collection and analysis, a notion of saturation in relation to the study’s research objectives and the children’s online activity at that point was indicated because memo writing did not support the construction of new observations. However, as Charmaz argues, the notion of saturation has been strongly criticised. She draws from Dey’s analysis to argue that saturation is an imperfect metaphor, implying that
data has been exhaustively coded, and that saturation is a closed system (Dey, 1999, p.257 cited in Charmaz, 2006, p.114). In this constructivist study, the notion of exhaustive coding and closure are anachronistic. Instead, Dey’s preferred term of ‘theoretical sufficiency’ (Dey, 1997, p.257) was applied to rationalise the moment at which additional data was noted for not providing new insights, either for each participant, or across the sample. In practical terms, sufficiency can be defended as a metaphor for ending the analysis stage in a study such as this, where the context and children’s practices in relation to it are evolving so rapidly, that the potential for new theoretical insights might never be exhausted. In this study, while a fourth interview round was planned to allow for necessary theoretical sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.73), the interweaved coding and memo writing processes for the planned three interview rounds proved so extensive that theoretical sufficiency was felt to be achieved in relation to the research questions without the need for further sampling. Therefore the data collection process was curtailed at the end of the memo writing and case study construction for each participant.

In the following chapter, data is presented as a case study for each participant. In this presentation, the key codes have been subsumed within thematic headings that are organised under tentative categories for Jennifer, Chloe and Elley in turn. Each case study will present themes that are common to each participant as well as idiosyncratic. Based on these case study data, a thematic analysis, for each participant is presented. This thematic analysis has evolved throughout the initial and focused coding process across each data set, leading ultimately to the formation of tentative categories. A category can be defined as ‘a construct that refers to a
certain type of phenomena’ that has a label and a definition (Gall et al., 2007, p.467). These tentative categories will be further elaborated in chapter 7.
Chapter 6: Presenting three case studies

Introduction

In this chapter, three case studies are presented in turn. Each complete case study contains the following sections:

- *Introduction to the participant*
- *Screenshot data and summary (see appendices 16,19,22)*
- *Key codes by data set (see appendices 17,20,23)*
- *Key codes assimilated across the three data sets (see appendices 18,21,24)*
- *Thematic analysis*

These headings help the reader to understand how the coding process has been conducted and how a constructivist grounded theory approach has been followed. However, for the sake of coherence and readability, the case study presentation included in this thesis transitions from the *introduction to the participant* to the *thematic analysis* for each participant in turn. The *screenshot data*, *screenshot summaries*, and *lists of key codes*, are presented in for each participant in the appendices as follows:

- Jennifer: Appendices 16-18
- Chloe: Appendices 19-21
- Elley: Appendices 22-24

This allows the reader to make reference to follow the process of analysis and construction that has led to the thematic analysis, but with the understanding that the
thematic analysis reflects an account of a recursive process, rather than an end point. Each section’s role is described below.

**Introduction to the participant (see main thesis)**

A simple sketch of each participant’s history in relation to their online social networking is constructed by extracting and compiling the contextual information from each interview transcript. This introduction is restricted to include only factual information as given by the participant in response to direct questions during each interview, *e.g.* when did you begin social networking? This introduction serves as a backdrop for the subsequent presentation of data.

**Screenshot data and summary (see appendices 16, 19, 22)**

Screenshot data taken at the time of each interview is presented, accompanied by a brief screenshot summary. The screenshots serve to capture a permanent representation of each participant’s profile page. The limitations of this representation are noted in chapter 5. Screenshots are numbered to represent each interview, *e.g.* (J1:S1) refers to the first screenshot taken of Jennifer’s profile at the time of the first interview (table 3: overview of screenshots).

The screenshots attempt to provide a sequential view of the profile page. If joined together vertically, they would reflect the entire profile of the participant in 2-dimensional form, which could normally be viewed online by scrolling downwards from top to bottom. Only screenshots of the profile page as it presents to the audience are included. No screenshots of pages that can be hyperlinked to or from the profile page have been included (*e.g.* entire photograph albums, whose ‘lead’ photograph is included on the profile page).
The screenshot summaries vary in length, serving to provide an initial description of each participant’s profile page, and subsequently to account for how each profile page has evolved since the previous interview. This data can be regarded as contextual, providing a representation of the reference point for discussion during each interview, and also providing a representation of the textual artefact that has been analysed in association with the interview transcript. In this way, the screenshot summary and screenshots contribute to the data set and the analysis of the interview transcripts.

**Key codes by data set (see appendices 17, 20, 23)**

Following the comprehensive initial coding process described in chapter 5, the constructed and in vivo initial codes from each element were manually assimilated and organised with the aim of making the list manageable, yet still comprehensive for each data set. To allow comparison, these codes were organised alphabetically.
for each participant. They were then compiled and are presented as a list of **key codes by data** set for each participant.

**Key codes assimilated across the three data sets (see appendices 18, 21, 24)**

The key codes by data set were then acted upon further by combining them. For example, the codes from the three data sets J1, J2, J3 were set alongside each other and considered for suggested themes and duplication. Codes that were duplicated were reduced. In an attempt to begin to organise the data, key codes were grouped by the theme that they suggested. For example, the following codes from interview transcript J1 were checked and then grouped together under the key code heading *Celebrity as a text producer* because they all suggested a quest for recognition:

*Aspires to be the originator; to be copied (J1:212-214); Aspiring for originality (J1:212); Originality (J1:166); Quest for originality (J1:168).*

Throughout this process, the codes were interrogated for meaning by returning to the original source of the code. The new list of codes is presented as a **key codes assimilated across the three data sets** for each participant, and grouped under **key code headings**. This completed the initial coding phase. However, it should be noted that due to the recursive nature of grounded theory, in practice, it is difficult to identify exactly where initial coding ends and focused coding begins.

The initial coding process allowed each case study to be built sequentially, and supported the use of constant comparison within and across data sets as a mechanism for organising initial data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The process of building from initial codes to key initial codes and then to the construction of key
code headings ensured that prolonged engagement with each data set was achieved and that credibility could be claimed (Charmaz, 2006:182).

**Thematic analysis (see main thesis)**

Following the initial coding stage, a focused coding process served to further reduce the data and support a more conceptual thematic analysis. The headings that had been constructed for the groups of key codes as they were assimilated across the data sets, and the codes within them, were further subjected to a process of focused coding that was used to organise, sort, refine and re-position the assimilated key codes under a series of thematic headings that were suggested by the data and that could satisfactorily accommodate the codes within them.

Focused coding involves ‘using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data’ (Charmaz, 2006:57). As part of the process of moving from initial to focused coding, a thematic heading was constructed for each group of key codes and recorded in bold. Sometimes the heading was derived from an existing code; sometimes a new code that would encompass initial codes was constructed. The role of this thematic heading was to facilitate the organisation of the data for analysis in response to the research question: *how do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?* and to reflect the move to analysis at a more conceptual level. The creation of thematic headings for the groups of key initial codes thus began the process of tentative category formation that would occur through the construction of a thematic analysis.
For example, in case study 1: Jennifer, the thematic heading conducting friendships through text production was constructed to accommodate the key codes grouped under the heading role in friendships. This set of key codes, when re-visited supported the construction of an account of how Jennifer used text production to conduct her friendships, e.g. that she regarded Bebo as a pastime to enjoy with friends; she used Bebo with and alongside her friends; she denied the importance of Bebo to her friendship; she aligned her Bebo friends with her school friends. Additionally this group of codes indicated that there was a discrepancy between Jennifer’s view of the importance of Bebo to her friendship, and the extent that she used Bebo for friendship work.

This thematic analysis began as a memo-taking and note-making process. It involved regular comparison of data across data sets, frequent revisiting of the raw data, and the re-organisation of ideas. Through this grounded theory approach, an account of each participant was constructed and crafted during the period of data collection and for the following twelve months, as the case studies were built and tentative categories formed.

Following this extensive close work with the data, tentative categories were constructed from analysis of the thematic headings, and by revisiting the data that comprised each thematic heading as described above. This analysis was conducted and crafted using further memo writing and re-interrogation of the data sets. For each participant, memos were explicated under each thematic heading and presented under a tentative category heading that could accommodate each theme, e.g. the theme conducting friendships through text production was explicated under the
tentative category heading *text production to achieve social positioning*. These memos are presented within each case study as part of a *thematic analysis* for each participant.

**Note regarding coding conventions**

Data from interview transcripts and screen shots has been described and referred to using a simple numbering system. Each participant has been named within the case study and coded using the initial of their first name. Each interview has been numbered from 1-3. For example (J3:112) refers to Jennifer’s third interview, transcript line 112. (J3:S2) refers to Jennifer’s third interview, second screenshot.
Case Study 1: Jennifer

Introduction to Jennifer

Jennifer began using *Bebo* in August 2006 when she was 11. Jennifer was three years younger than the age limit of 14 that is stipulated by *Bebo*. A friend from school who already had her own *Bebo* profile page introduced her to it. This friend helped Jennifer to register with *Bebo*, to create her own profile, and learn how to use it. Jennifer has regularly used *Bebo* since this time and at the time of this fieldwork, claimed to use it several times each day (J1:73-75). In June 2008, Jennifer’s family’s computer was attacked by a virus, and as a result, Jennifer’s first *Bebo* profile was deleted. The family computer was out of action for a month while it was mended. During this time Jennifer went on *Bebo* with friends at their houses, but did not have her own profile. Jennifer rebuilt a new *Bebo* profile in July 2008, when the computer was mended and prior to our first interview.

Jennifer has been a loyal member of *Bebo* since 2006. At the time of the fieldwork (June 2008 – May 2009), she had not created a *MySpace* or *Facebook* account, although she thought that some of her friends had (J3:112). She had tried to sign up for Twitter, but had discarded it, having found it confusing (J3:114).

As well as *Bebo*, Jennifer uses Microsoft MSN messenger and SMS texting to communicate with her friends (J2:244). Frequently she will be using all three applications at the same time, moving from one to the other (J3:37). She goes on *YouTube* regularly (J3:36), but does not use other social networking sites. Her communicative behaviour appears to be typical of many British 8-12 year olds: she uses *Bebo* amongst a range of social media devices for entertainment and to
communicate with her friends (Ofcom, 2008a; Ofcom, 2011). Jennifer’s network grew from 44 to 64 friends between the first and second interview (J2:6) and from 64 to 128 friends by our final interview (screenshot 3). The majority of Jennifer’s contacts are in her year at state secondary school. She explains that she sometimes adds people from other year groups, but her profile is for close friends in her year mainly, who she sees on a daily basis (J1:47).

Jennifer uses *Bebo* at home on the family PC and at friends’ houses on their PCs or laptops. Jennifer claims to use *Bebo* a couple of times a day, which she feels is ‘a bit too much really’ (J1:73-75). Jennifer claims to have a regular, daily *Bebo* routine (J3:50). She uses *Bebo* after school and around daily events, e.g. eating and watching favourite TV programmes (J3:56). She claims to change her profile regularly, as often as every week (J1:142, J2:8, J3:18), and had made changes immediately prior to our first interview (J1:146). Jennifer’s mother told me that Jennifer had been discussing the upcoming interview with her friends, including Elley and Chloe, and was slightly aggrieved that the family computer’s malfunction meant that she was the final participant to be interviewed instead of the first, as originally planned.

Jennifer had worked on her profile page for our first interview and had clearly thought carefully about the impression she hoped to create through her text. It must be noted therefore that the interview process had impacted upon the creation of the text and the text itself, although the discussion around the text related to Jennifer’s routine and ongoing use of *Bebo* as well as the changes that had been made that day.
Jennifer uses Bebo to share information about herself and to talk to friends (J1:4). She describes how communication using Bebo is a slower process than other forms of communication and depends on leaving messages which may not be seen until the next day (J1:10).
Coding process and category formation

Jennifer’s case study was the first to be constructed, and the process was refined and made more transparent for Chloe and Elley. In Jennifer’s case study, the list of key codes assimilated across the data sets is comprised of the lists of the key codes constructed from each data set (J1-3) (see appendix 17). In appendix 18, they are grouped together and given a key code heading that aims to represent my theoretical definition of the issue (Charmaz, 2006:93). This sometimes includes an existing key code, e.g. the thematic heading borrowing and sharing contains the key codes, borrowing, borrowing ideas, borrowing content, sharing material. However, some key code headings are labels that were especially constructed to house the key codes without repetition of language, e.g. celebrity as a text producer contains the key codes, aspiring to be the originator, being copied as a sign of esteem etc.... (see appendix 18).

Thematic headings (see below) were subsequently constructed for Jennifer based on further interrogation and assimilation of the key code headings, and memo writing. These thematic headings sometimes accommodate only one key code heading, but are renamed through the process of elaboration, e.g. conducting friendships through text production is a thematic heading that accommodates the key codes found under the key code heading role in friendships. This process involved refining the key code headings to better represent the key codes that they represented.
Thematic headings

- Conducting friendships through text production (role in friendships)
- Affiliating with others through text production: (borrowing and sharing; movement across sites; positioning)
- Achieving collaboration through text production: (collaboration)
- Text production as an organising role (site as a vehicle for the integration of popular culture and identity; personification of Bebo)
- Text production as an editing role (control and power; change)
- Text production as an originating role (celebrity as a text producer)
- Text production as an expert role: (conventions and strategies)
- Text production as performance (performance and audience; awareness of impact of different audiences on text production)
- Text production for personal satisfaction; entertainment, ownership)

Through the memo writing process, thematic headings were in turn interrogated further, assimilated and organised as tentative categories. For Jennifer, three main tentative categories have been constructed under which the thematic headings can be positioned. This process is exemplified through the thematic analysis for Jennifer that follows. In this analysis, concepts are discussed with reference to interview transcripts to allow the reader to understand the process of data reduction and the construction from codes to key codes to key code headings to thematic headings and ultimately to tentative categories.
Tentative categories

- **Text production to achieve social positioning**
  - Conducting friendships through text production (role in friendships)
  - Affiliating with others through text production: (borrowing and sharing; movement across sites; positioning)
  - Achieving collaboration through text production: (collaboration)

- **Text production to enact the text producing role**;
  - Text production as an organising role (site as a vehicle for the integration of popular culture and identity; personification of Bebo)
  - Text production as an editing role (control and power; change)
  - Text production as an originating role (celebrity as a text producer)
  - Text production as an expert role: (conventions and strategies
  - Text production as performance (performance and audience; awareness of impact of different audiences on text production)

- **Text production as a pleasurable activity**
  - Text production for personal satisfaction; entertainment

The first two categories appear to be constructed more comprehensively from the thematic data, than the third category (pleasure). However while the notion of pleasure could be subsumed within the first two categories as a thematic heading, the data constructed for Jennifer indicates that pleasure is derived from the act of
producing texts and achieving social positioning, supporting the construction of pleasure as a category in its own right.

In the final section of this case study, a construction of Jennifer as a text producer will be presented using thematic headings and tentative categories as organisational tools.
Thematic analysis: Jennifer

Text production to achieve social positioning

Jennifer uses text production within Bebo in diverse ways in order to achieve social positioning: she uses Bebo as a tool/vehicle through which she can conduct her friendships; she uses Bebo strategically as a way of positioning herself amongst and within her network; and she uses Bebo as a locus for collaboration in face to face contexts. In this set of ideas, Jennifer’s text production and use of Bebo is catalysed by social interaction.

Conducting friendships through text production

Jennifer’s views on the use of Bebo as a tool for conducting friendship through text production, evolve throughout the fieldwork. Initially, despite regular (daily) use of Bebo, Jennifer claims that Bebo does not play a big part in her friendships: It is just like there to go on after school (J1:63). She also claims that her friendships are not affected by owning a Bebo profile. She does not believe that you become closer to friends through its use; although she does accept that she might meet new friends by having a Bebo profile (J1:229). Jennifer can be dismissive about the role that Bebo plays as a vehicle through which she conducts her friendships. She describes how when her Bebo profile was cancelled, it did not affect her friendships as she could use MSN and texting to communicate with friends outside of school (J1:66-69). However, in the same interview, Jennifer also claims to use Bebo a bit too much really (J1:73), meaning a couple of times a day.
Jennifer acknowledges that having *Bebo* has increased the amount of communication that she has with her friends out of school. By our third interview, Jennifer describes how *Bebo* is a normal, accepted part of friendship behaviour *it is just something you do. I could obviously live without it but I mainly want to go on there to see what everyone is up to. It is your own little page and it is really cool (J3:88).*

*Bebo* also impacts on how Jennifer conducts her friendship by acting as a focus for discussion in face to face contexts. Jennifer describes how events can be materialised through the production of text within *Bebo*, and can seep into face to face conversations and back. Texts made in *Bebo* appear to serve as topics of discussion in the playground, like other artefacts of popular culture. She explains how *like you will often say ‘I like your skin on Bebo’ or things like that just like at school or whatever (J1:88).* For Jennifer, *Bebo* pervades her face to face friendship as well as accommodating her online friendship work.

*Bebo* acts as a channel for Jennifer and her friends to conduct their friendships via the commenting process. For Jennifer, comments are often routine gestures of friendship *we just talk about stuff, everyday things (J1:182).* The content is not as significant as the fact that you have commented *You just sort of say like ‘hey’, just like ‘yeah’ (J1:182).* Comments are also used for practical tasks. Jennifer discusses how she has experienced *fall outs (J1:81)* when using *Bebo*, but how *everyone understands (J1:83)* that misunderstandings occur. She appears aware of the potential for misunderstandings to occur particularly when comments are misinterpreted, or thoughtlessly written.

222
Friendship is conducted less directly through the composition of modules which serve to showcase who Jennifer is and what she wishes to communicate to others. Jennifer composes *about me* statements, through which she directly addresses her audience, conveying a sense of dialogue through her linguistic choices. Within her first *about me* text (screenshot J1:1), the use of the word *apparently* reflects the ongoing and dynamic interaction with peers which the profile page facilitates. This text is Jenni’s, yet it appears that through her composition of the *about me* statement, she is aware of the potential polyvocality of her profile page, where her audience’s comments are invited, featured and reviewed in tandem with her own compositions. *Bebo* is a tool which helps Jennifer to conduct her friendships by staying connected to her network through the consumption and production of text. In a typical *Bebo* session she signs into *Bebo* to check *what is happening on Bebo, other people’s profiles and stuff, see if they have got any photos or anything* (J3: 32). She claims to go on others’ pages rather than her own profile to make changes.

**Affiliating with others through text production**

Jennifer uses *Bebo* to affiliate with desired people and for positioning and repositioning herself within her social field. The profile photograph in screenshot (J1:1) was taken collaboratively with her friends and serves as an artefact of belonging to a group (J1:162). She is aware of the impact that her text will have on others and is very aware of the importance of the appearance of her profile (J1:128). Sometimes Jennifer will capture and reflect other’s behaviour, through the use of images which replicate those from her friends’ pages. In our second interview she describes how the same photo taken using a phone when out with friends will often be shared and uploaded by several of her friends within the network (J2:36-47). In
other examples she describes how she mirrors friends’ text construction, facilitating affiliation with others: *because on her page she’s put it about me, so I thought I would put it about her as well (J1:276).* According to Jennifer, it is a sign of esteem to have your modules copied and used by another friend. It also appears to be a mechanism for showing affiliation.

Several examples from Jennifer’s screenshots show how she is prepared to adopt trends in text production in order to affiliate herself to others. The style of her profile name *Jenii, jeenniii* (screenshot J1:1, J3:1) signals that Jennifer is conforming to a trend that is popular amongst her social network and peer group. The style of her *someone special* text (screenshot J1:1) reflects a high school yearbook entry, and draws from the current teen movie culture that Jennifer engages with. This module is constructed for Jennifer’s social network to read. It is a carefully composed homage, which reflects the extent of Jennifer’s feelings for her new best friend and also performs Jennifer’s identity as a member of this network.

**Achieving collaboration through text production**

*Bebo* can be described as a locus around which Jennifer collaborates to achieve and sustain friendship. Jennifer describes how she uses *Bebo* collaboratively with friends who share expertise and show each other how to produce texts (J1: 22-26). To do this, Jennifer and her friends will sit at the computer to consume and produce *Bebo* texts, as well as to develop their networks. Jennifer explains that following the demise of her first *Bebo* profile, she rebuilt her profile with a friend at the friend’s house. A fundamental act when rebuilding her site was to construct the audience very early on and with collaboration. In this way, through the process of rebuilding
her profile, Jennifer has added friends who she has contacted through her own and other friend’s pages (J1:34). Both Jennifer’s text production and the building of her social network can be described as collaborative and peer-supported in this example (J1:38).

In all these examples, it is evident that Jennifer’s profile page and text production in Bebo are made significant by the existence of the network who can view it, contribute to it and collaborate around it. As a text producer, Jennifer is clearly motivated by issues around friendship and the consequences for social positioning which can be achieved through text production. As a text producer, Jennifer appears to have an eye on the text she is producing; the outside world; and her position within it. Through her ability to focus simultaneously on these elements, she can use Bebo and the text production which it facilitates as a tool for achieving social ends.

**Text production to enact the text producing role**

In addition to using text production to achieve social positioning, Jennifer’s text production can also be considered as a primary endeavour which allows her to enact an identity as a text producer with a range of text producing roles: organiser, editor, originator, expert, performer. Viewed from this perspective, the role of the text producer assumes as much significance as the texts produced. Throughout the three interviews, Jennifer relates to Bebo as a ‘my Bebo’. She is able to reflect on how her text production has changed within Bebo: in the second and third interviews, she claims to have shortened and simplified the content on her profile page **just like to shorten it and get to the point basically** (J2:52-54; J3:10). She also describes how her network’s use of Bebo has evolved: initially everyone created pages that bore
resemblance to each others’, but now everyone writes their own thing so it is okay (J3:132). The interview transcripts demonstrate that Jennifer’s responses to interview questions about her own text production are frequently thoughtful. In describing her role as text producer, her profile page (my Bebo) is her primary endeavour, and this in turn acts to catalyse social consequences.

**Text production as an organising role**

Jennifer is an organised text producer. She has control of the process and the ensuing product. Jennifer describes her Bebo as pretty boring at the moment (J1:120). The words at the moment suggest that Jennifer’s profile is dynamic and subject to change. To manage the changes that she likes to make, Jennifer prepares modules and stores them within Bebo for use on her profile page when she is ready to use them (J1:126). Jennifer is a careful creator of text. She appears to be thoughtful rather than impulsive: you can make them appear how you want, so it might be like different styles. (J1:128). Her choice of photo album in screenshot J1:4 has been carefully chosen to reflect the style of the skin. This demonstrates Jennifer’s ability to control the style and effect of this profile page on her audience. Jennifer’s control achieves a consistent impression of who she is throughout her profile page.

Comments contribute to Jennifer’s page and therefore the overall impression that it creates, but are very different to the contrived and carefully prepared elements that Jennifer invests time and effort into. Her page in its totality is an interesting combination of phatic expressions and highly choreographed textual representation (J1:194).
As well as organising and planning her profile page in a measured way, Jennifer likes the opportunity to make instant decisions as she works on her text: *it is quick choices – do I like that song? – yes, let’s put it on (J3:98)*: She displays a liking for autonomy as a text producer and the organisational choices that this allows her. She also likes opportunity within text production to subvert conventions. The choice of profile photo (screenshot J1:1), where Jennifer chooses to upload a group rather than individual photo, signals Jennifer’s confidence to break with convention and make decisions about her profile page based on artistic content as well as affiliation and conformity.

*Text production as an editing role*

Change is a key feature of Jennifer’s text production and a theme that recurs throughout the interviews in a number of ways. Jennifer continually changes the appearance of her page *Yeah I change it like every week (J1:142)*. She reiterates this claim in our second interview (J2:8). She makes major changes to the appearance: *I changed, you know, where you write about yourself? I changed all that and I changed where everything went and I changed my skin and I like deleted some photos and I changed the video (J1:148)*. Jennifer also alters the artefacts that she uploads to her page. For example she may edit photographs. Jennifer describes how she continually changes her background skin (*J1:106*). Her skin in screenshot J1 was inspired by a friend’s profile page. Jennifer went to the skin maker to find another similar skin because she liked her friend’s. Taking ideas from others and using them or adapting them is a common practice amongst Jennifer and her friends (*J1:112*). Jennifer likes to upload videos from YouTube, or take them from friends’ pages.
**Text production as an originating role**

Jennifer aspires to be an *originator* within her profile page. *I don’t really copy other people, but if I see something on somebody else’s page that I think wow that’s actually quite cool, I might use that idea but try to make it original* (J1:166). Jennifer also claims that other people do not influence her decisions: *It is my page, so it is how I want it to be* (J1:170). Equally according to Jennifer, she does not use others’ ideas: *They don’t really, I just use my ideas* (J2:186). She also describes how her friends *just do their own thing really* (J2:206). Sharing material is seen as acceptable practice by Jennifer and as a compliment to the originator. Jennifer seeks this role for herself and aspires to create something that others will imitate or take for themselves like… *on the ‘about me’ they might find something to put on there and they might share it with other people so it is good* (J1:214).

**Text production as an expert role**

Jennifer has a sense of *expertise* as a text producer in Bebo. This expert identity is referred to in the second interview, where Jennifer explains *I do like being creative with it a lot more. Last time I don’t think I was really bothered, but I have put a bit more effort into it* (J2:168). She is also aware of the critical skills that are necessary in order to use Bebo safely and successfully. She clearly articulates the need for online safety measures, such as using privacy options and not giving personal information away (J1:231). In relation to literacy skills, Jennifer describes her expertise as a text producer who can produce texts in a range of contexts. She explains that it can be easy to mistakenly use the language conventions from social networking and MSN texting in school work, but that this is not an issue for most children and teachers *I mean everyone uses txt writing but most people know not to*...
Text production as performance

Performance is a key driving force behind Jennifer’s text production: I like the idea of having a profile for my friends to see (J3:100). Jennifer likes the opportunity to display herself. She claims that she does not understand people who use Twitter because there is no profile (J3:116) I don’t see the point because you don’t know them (J3:117). Jennifer performs in her role as text producer by assimilating references from popular culture and uploading them to her profile. Jennifer includes lyrics from the group Paramore on her profile page to signify her musical taste (screenshot J1:1). The inclusion of these lyrics can be viewed as the 21st century, more subtle, online equivalent to covering a school book with a page from a teen
magazine like *Smash Hits*. In this example, an artefact from popular/teen culture is being assimilated into the identity of the ‘performer’ through the text production process. This allows a complex form of performance and affiliation, where Jennifer is aligning herself with all other *Paramore* fans, as well as the micro-fan set which exists within her social network.

The *Best Profile Survey* (screenshot J1:5) is an opportunity for Jennifer to literally perform her identity. She has included this lengthy module where she answers prompts about her likes and dislikes and habits. This is a structured performance, where she composes texts within a framework provided by *Bebo*. This differs from the less constrained *about me* statement that she composed earlier in the profile (screenshot J1:1). Jennifer has invested time and effort into composing this module. She explains that this module is one of the most important in her profile page as people see it first. The first half of her *about me* statement is full of phrases which suggest excessive degrees of emotion. This use of language reflects the discourse found in popular American school movies, such as the *High School Musical* series, and *90210* and serves to locate Jennifer within her peer culture. The second half of the statement is less brash and more reflective as Jenii describes how she has watched people change *for the better and the worse*, and how she feels about her life at the moment. The effect is that Jenii, through her text production, is presenting herself in an open, honest and direct manner. It is a skilful composition, which combines references to self and popular culture in equal measure. In turn, this demonstrates how Jennifer is using text to meld influences that are external and integral to her sense of identity and to compose and perform a complex artefact of self. The statement works as a complete entity. However, it also mixes with the
other modules on the page as Jennifer composes and orchestrates the complete text to perform who she is to her audience.

As a text producer, Jennifer is clearly accomplished and insightful. She constructs her profile with a strong sense of purpose, in order to achieve social and personal gain and pleasure. Her ability to discuss this process through the interview process indicates that Jennifer occupies the role of text producer with insight and enthusiasm.

**Text production as a pleasurable activity**

Jennifer derives pleasure from her text production in *Bebo*. She takes pride in her profile and clearly enjoys working on her own page *Yeah it's nice to change it (J1:206)*, *It is your own little page and it is really cool (J3:88)*. She exhibits a sense of self-satisfaction from her efforts and particularly sees being original amongst her peers as a source of achievement: *Just knowing that it looks better and also you can ... look on other people’s pages and you do decide to copy it to yours, you can tell your friends that and they might use it so you can feel quite like you started something (J1:212)*. This pleasure can be attributed to Jennifer’s use of text production within *Bebo* for social positioning, as well as to her satisfaction with the texts that she produces. This is demonstrated by the way that Jennifer uses *Bebo*: she spends time viewing other’s pages; but on other occasions, she likes to spend time working on her own page. She describes these activities as separate events *Yeah, some days I always look at people’s, but some days I really want to focus on making mine look a bit better (J1:204)*.
Her quest for pleasure can also be observed when Jennifer describes how she uses *Bebo* for her own entertainment, rather than for entertaining other people (J2:174). She is also clear that her page is primarily made for her and driven by her choices: *most of the time it’s like I like what it looks like and that’s all that matters because it is my page* (J1:216). When challenged about this she claims not to have made any changes in response to feedback from others (J1:217). When she makes changes, she claims to do this for her satisfaction (J1:222). The changes that she makes are carefully orchestrated, and the elements that she feels are most important in conveying an impression (the skin and the about me blurb) are the elements that are given the most attention (J1:225).

During the first two interviews, Jennifer is certain that she constructs her *Bebo* profile primarily for her own satisfaction. However, by the third interview, Jennifer is unable to decide what she likes most about doing *Bebo*: *That is a really hard question. Having the page and all my friends having it; Going on everyone else’s page and seeing it; I don’t know how to answer it* (J3:92). This response indicates that the social function of *Bebo* and Jennifer’s use of *Bebo* to position herself amongst her peers is competing with the personal pleasure that she derives from producing her profile pages as a motivational force.
Conclusion to case study

Jennifer can be viewed as a controlled, engaged and purposeful producer of text within *Bebo*. Throughout the interviews she presents herself as a reflexive agent who has a strong degree of personal drive and awareness. She has developed a relationship with ‘her’ *Bebo* and appears to relate to *Bebo* with a degree of introspection as a text producer. Equally she is able to reflect upon how she constructs text for social gain and to contribute to her friendship and social positioning. Jennifer is an accomplished text producer. In this role, she manages the construction of her profile with confidence, and simultaneously micro manages the individual modules and elements with careful control. Jennifer integrates external influences and personal preferences in order to realise a complex artefact of self and social positioning. Based upon this extensive coding and analysis process, it can be argued that Jennifer finds pleasure in producing texts in online social networking sites. As well as being a socially-driven text producer, she appears to be proud of her profile page, and she enjoys her engagement with it. Jennifer’s agency as a text producer in this context is powerful, and the satisfaction that she derives from being able to exercise her agency is evident.
Case Study 2: Chloe

Introduction to Chloe

Chloe began using Bebo in November 2006 when she was 11. Chloe was three years younger than the age limit imposed by Bebo. Prior to this, Chloe’s family had relocated 180 miles, away from her school friends and father. Chloe’s fourteen year old brother, who moved with the family, was using Bebo at this time. Chloe explains that when she moved, ‘all her (new) friends had it’, so her brother ‘made one for me’ (C1:11). She was then taught how to use it and ‘do stuff’ (C1:19) by Jennifer, who she ‘got most of it off’ (C1:19).

Chloe has regularly used Bebo since she built her profile in 2006. She is an avid user of social networking sites and digital communication, and claims that she cannot stop using either Bebo or MSN because of ‘addiction’ (C3:179). At the time of the first interview (June 2008), she had not created a MySpace or FaceBook account. Later in the fieldwork period, she created a FaceBook page to use to communicate with her father and step mother (C2:2). However, she claimed to rarely use it (C2:22). By the third interview, Chloe explained that she uses both Bebo and Facebook regularly (C3:10) as a lot of her family use Facebook, ‘so it is the best way to keep up with them’ (C3:4). However, she still claimed to use Bebo more, because ‘all my friends are on there’ (C3:8). Chloe describes how Bebo and FaceBook serve different functions for her: she uses one for communicating with friends and one for her family (C3:22).

At the time of the first interview, Chloe claimed to txt, use MSN Instant Messenger and Bebo to communicate with her friends. In the third interview she describes how
she uses *Bebo* and MSN simultaneously to discuss the same event with friends (C3:101). Chloe uses different digital media for different types of communication. She explains that she uses MSN as a tool for organising events (C3:176). When asked to describe which sites she uses, Chloe claims to ‘normally go on *Bebo*’ and sometimes YouTube to ‘use the videos’ (C1:2). She also uses the computer for homework and to pursue her hobby of horse riding and showing.

Chloe’s *Bebo* network grew from 169 friends, all of whom she ‘knows’ (C1:75) to 178 friends between the first and second interviews. By the third interview, Chloe had accrued 277 friends (C3:307). These friends are from her current and previous schools and local community.

Chloe uses *Bebo* at home on her own PC in her bedroom, and at friends’ houses on their PCs or laptops. Chloe claims that she doesn’t go on *Bebo* a lot, because she normally has other things to do, but she does go on it in her spare time, which would ‘normally be every other day ‘(C1:23). Chloe claims to use *Bebo* to have fun (C1:27). She also uses it to catch up with friends she hasn’t seen for a while, and the friends she sees throughout the day (C:29).

Chloe works on her profile when she is bored with it (C1:193). She likes her page to be fun (C1:189). However, she claims that she doesn’t spend a lot of time looking at and working on her pages, because she has ‘other sort of better things to do’ (C1:262).

Chloe claimed not to have worked on her profile page prior to our first interview.
Coding process and category formation

Thematic headings

These headings are constructed from the key codes assimilated for Chloe across her data sets (see appendix 21). These thematic headings are the labels used for the grouped key codes. Presented in this way, the journey from code to key code to thematic heading is a logical presentation. However, this does not completely reflect the recursive process of data construction and organisation that the CGT approach demanded.

- Pleasure (pride)
- Pastime
- Addiction to Bebo
- position-taking
- Bebo as a force to be managed
- Popularity
- Power play
- Social responsibility
- Promoting a distinct image
- Categorising profiles
- Performing a role
- Collaboration
- Strategies for text production
These thematic headings have in turn been assimilated and organised as tentative categories. For Chloe, three main tentative categories have been constructed under which the thematic headings can be analysed.

**Tentative categories**

- **Text production as a pleasurable activity**
  - Pleasure
  - Pastime
  - Addiction to Bebo

- **Text production to achieve social positioning**
  - position-taking

- **Text production to control social positioning**
  - Bebo as a force to be managed
  - Popularity
  - Power play
  - Social responsibility
  - Promoting a distinct image
  - Categorising profiles
  - Performing a role
  - Collaboration
  - Strategies for text production

These categories differ in one main way from the categories constructed to describe Jennifer. While Jennifer describes the act of text production in Bebo from the perspective of the role of the text producer, and clearly derives pleasure from this
text producing role, Chloe's use of Bebo appears to be driven not only by her desire to achieve social positioning, but more significantly, by her desire to control her social world through the act of text production within Bebo. She is a critically aware text producer, who is able to articulate her motivations and manipulate the impact of her texts upon her social world. In so doing, she positions herself as a powerful and knowing text producer in relation to Bebo as a force in its own right. Equally, Chloe is able to rationalise Bebo as a pleasurable pastime. In so doing, Chloe further controls the process of text production, enabling her to feign disinterest and position herself as beyond the addictive grasp of the habit. Chloe’s profile pages are a complex remixing of material that she has generated herself and uploaded from a number of sites in order to achieve distinct aims. While she clearly participates actively and reflectively in the text producing role, this role is subsumed within her overall quest for control through the process.

In the final section of this case study, a construction of Chloe as a text producer will be presented using thematic headings and tentative categories as organisational tools.
Thematic analysis: Chloe

Text production as a pleasurable activity

Chloe discusses text production in Bebo in terms of fun (C1:27). She describes her profile as something that she makes for people to enjoy (C1:189), and to make them happy (C1:191). It is a hobby where she can share and build on happenings from the face to face world (C1:230). Chloe describes text production within Bebo as one of several pastimes that compete for her attention. During the first two interviews she is almost dismissive about the role that Bebo plays in her life.: I go on it, like if I’ve got spare time (C1:23); ...if I am bored (C1:274); If I get a bit bored and I am not out with the horses or anything, I will just go on this (C2:126). However, her apparent disinterest is contradicted by her active engagement with Bebo and the pride that she takes in her profile, and can be interpreted as an act of denial. Chloe claims to spend time most days producing and consuming texts on the site. She uses this time to craft and edit her own profile page, and to surf other profile pages looking for ideas and catching up on the events of the day, which she describes as ‘fun’ (C1:27-29). Chloe describes how she regularly updates her profile pages. She changes her skin, the images that are displayed, the modules that are included and the text that is written. She visits sites where skins are made and selects them from there, or copies and adopts them from other people’s profile pages. The reason that Chloe gives for making these changes is ‘boredom’ (C2:54), rather than a desire to participate in social networking. Despite this fact, she updates her profile and surfs Bebo regularly. When challenged about her attitude to engaging with Bebo, Chloe describes her use of Bebo as less important than her other pastimes: looking after her animals and seeing friends face to face. She claims, I don’t spend a lot of time on it...
because I have sort of got better things to do (C1:126). In addition she describes how Bebo doesn’t impact on her social life: ...not a lot...because I am normally out with friends or riding. I normally only go on it in the evenings (C1:288). Chloe’s defensive positioning of Bebo as a pastime is interesting. While she doesn’t appear to relate to Bebo in the same possessive way that Jennifer does, her repeated denial of the appeal of Bebo, imbues Bebo with the qualities of a habit that she is wrestling to take control of. She eventually describes her use of Bebo as an ‘addiction... you are constantly wondering who has commented and what’ (C3:179), admitting the hold that this powerful pastime has on her. However, throughout the three interviews, Chloe consistently denies this hold, and defends her use of Bebo as a fun pastime. Chloe additionally takes a pride in the appearance of her pages and derives pleasure from her role as a creator of elements, as well as her ability to use the Bebo template.

Text production to achieve social positioning

Position-taking

Over the course of the interviews, Chloe describes how she has used text production in Bebo as a vehicle for positioning herself socially. Since her introduction to Bebo, she has engineered a trajectory, where her position within the network has evolved from that of apprentice/new member, to an established member who has mastery of the rules and conventions, and ultimately to a group leader who assumes responsibility for originating new material and safeguarding others.

Chloe’s use of Bebo initially helped her to ‘fit in’ with desired friends (C1:280), especially having moved from near London to a new school. Chloe explains that her
brother created her profile because her friends had it (C1:11). To construct her first profile she used material from a friend’s page (C1:19), demonstrating her social awareness and desire to echo what the friends that she desired were doing.

As an established member of her social network, Chloe has adopted the peer group’s micro language, which involves the use of emoticons and rules that are used and understood by her social network. Chloe explains that the use of this system helps the friends to avoid misunderstanding (C1:147-149). In addition it can be observed to bind the group and reflect their affiliation to each other. Chloe uses personal tributes to affiliate to others with increasing frequency throughout the fieldwork period (C1:220; screenshot C1:2; C2:1; C3:1; C3:3; C3:5). These outbursts follow a similar format: they describe the friend and their behaviour, or the event, what they mean to Chloe, and finally they address the friend directly. This is a public demonstration of friendship and serves to create an exclusive audience; an in-club who understands the comment and is part of the surrounding discourse. This belonging to an in-club is further demonstrated when Chloe explains how modules are shared by her friends and copied from friends’ pages so that each friend’s page carries the same modules and in-jokes. As an example of this, Chloe describes how ‘everyone’ posted the same video from YouTube to their profile: Charlie bit my finger (C1:177)... and everyone sort of loved it... and everyone went round school going Charlie bit me, and it was like everyone knew about it (C1:175-183). In interview 2 she describes a similar process involving a music video (C2:212). Chloe also uses the familiar technique of uploading profile images of herself that are taken using a mobile phone and a mirror (screen shot 2:1, photo in mirror). This echoing demonstrates how Chloe’s texts are used to affiliate, and position herself amongst
her peers dialogically. All of these text producing behaviours position Chloe as an insider, with access to the group’s rules and conventions.

Throughout interview 3 Chloe continues to demonstrate her use of text production for social positioning by describing how friends share content and reflect each other’s interests (C3:126-133). She also describes, in some detail how she, along with her friends, has subverted Bebo’s privacy and security measures by sharing passwords, hacking into each others’ sites and playing with the profiles (C3:46-58). This act can be regarded as validation of membership to a trusted group and one that further affirms Chloe’s position within her social group. Therefore, while Chloe presents herself as a confident and accomplished text producer who chooses to use Bebo on her own terms, it is also possible to construct Chloe as a text producer who uses Bebo as a vehicle to gain access to a social group and demonstrate her belonging.

**Text production to control social positioning**

**Bebo as a force to be managed**

As a text producer, Chloe relates to Bebo in a different way to Jennifer. Chloe does not aim to possess Bebo; she does not describe it as My Bebo. Instead, she alludes to it as a force that must be managed. Chloe has a sense of Bebo attempting to control her text production, and how text production can be used as a way of controlling her social world. Chloe refers to Bebo as an external force and shows resistance to it: it will try to get you to toggle other friends... it will send them an email and say do this quiz. I never do it (C1:65). In addition to resisting Bebo as a force, when describing her attitude to it, she claims indifference: Like a lot of conversations go on about
Bebo so it sort of helps me to fit in but if it wasn’t here it wouldn’t kill me if that makes sense... it doesn’t sort of make any difference really (C1:280). In so doing, she invokes a sense of Bebo as a force that requires management; that carries power. By apparently feigning disinterest, Chloe skilfully asserts her control over the process. The construction of text production in Bebo as a pastime serves to position Chloe as distinct from Bebo; rather than as possessing, or even occupying Bebo, as Jennifer appears to.

**Popularity**

Chloe is clear that anyone can participate in social networking using Bebo. She explains: *It’s like open to everyone, so no one can say you are not allowed; you are not in this. You are not in the cool club...* (C1:134). While she is describing how the use of Bebo can be viewed as an inclusive activity, her choice of language also suggests that Chloe is aware of the potential for displaying popularity and peer-acceptance within Bebo. The opportunity to position herself as popular amongst her peers is important to Chloe. This notion is reinforced by her view on how friends develop their networks in Bebo: *I never add people... people normally add me right* (C1:110). Chloe derives pride from the fact that she is so popular that she doesn’t have to instigate the process of gaining new members for her site. Her text and text production is acting as a showcase for her popularity and can be used to reinforce her confidence as a powerful player in this domain. She is equally critical and transparent about how friends can be positioned within her profile page to reflect their relative popularity and importance: *whoever is at the top is your favourite and then it goes down and down and if they are not on then it’s just...* (laughs) (C1:124).
**Power play**

Chloe’s critical awareness of the potential for power play through text production in *Bebo* is another area that can be identified within the data. Chloe understands that *Bebo* is a platform for gaining prestige. When describing how text production in *Bebo* can impact on your reputation she explains in the first interview: *you get powerful by having good ideas* (C1:291); *I don’t normally cut and paste off people* (C1:224). The notion that originality is desirable is echoed in the second interview: *Have you been influenced by what you have seen on anybody else’s do you think? No. Or are you original and try and do your own thing? Yes* (C2:159-162). Chloe appears to desire originality because of the impact it will have on her reputation amongst her peers, giving her exclusivity and prestige that is not attainable by everyone.

Chloe appears to engage consciously in power play as part of the text producing process. She is a critical text producer, with an overview of how her page makes her appear to others, and how it can include or exclude the audience from her network. In-jokes and unspoken rules for participation are used by Chloe and her network to suggest the existence of a powerful inner-audience and to exclude those not in-the-know. The term *Crewage* is a made up word used by Chloe’s close friends to mean their gang. She describes how she uses this word as a label for her *friends* module, and how it is recognised by her close friends (C1:43). Chloe and her *friends* have negotiated conventions that are used to eradicate misunderstandings: *You don’t know whether they’re being serious for a start, and then, but normally, like all our friends always put either a kiss or ‘lol’ which stands for laugh out loud, so we sort of know whether they’re joking...* (C1:147).
Chloe and her close friends allow each other to ‘hack’ their sites. They provide each other with their passwords and a window of opportunity to edit each other’s profiles. Then they change their password, removing the opportunity for their friends to keep hacking their site. Chloe describes how you might ‘put your name everywhere... put a comment on there,’ to make you look popular (C3:47-58). This subversive power-play can be constructed as a form of control, where Bebo’s rules and conventions are being over-turned by a group of knowing participants to assert their expertise.

Social responsibility
Along with the play opportunities that arise through the hacking game, Chloe also describes how she acts as a guardian for a friend. A friend has given her access to her password so that Chloe can maintain an overview of the comments that are posted and delete any unpleasant comments for her, following a bullying incident. This friend does not manage to access Bebo everyday, and Chloe has assumed a guardian-like role, caretaking her profile and ensuring that her reputation isn’t adversely affected in any way (C3:270-306). This further supports Chloe’s control of her social world. In all these examples, power is consciously being invoked and managed by Chloe through her text production and engagement with Bebo as a way of controlling her social position.

Promoting a distinct image
In addition to this power play and assumed responsibility for others, Chloe seeks to control her position by capitalising on the opportunities that her profile page offers for promoting a distinct image. She acknowledges that people contrive an
appearance within their profile page to create an effect. She describes how when she moved from near London to her current home she redesigned her profile to create a different impression: *Ermm well, when I moved to... when I moved to Devon, I was sort of, well a lot of my friends were sort of chavvy, if that might make sense. So my page was sort of a lot of chav, if that makes sense, and then I just sort of changed, because when I moved down from Kent... people sort of looked at me, because when I was at school, I didn't sort of seem that sort of person and then, so I just sort of completely changed it* (C1:266). Chloe’s critical use of Bebo is again apparent as she articulates her sensitivity to the dissonance between her online and face to face presence. However she is not keen to position herself as a person who is over-concerned about their image: *I am not one of the major people who have to look great all the time and stuff. I don’t really; I am not really like that* (C1:198); *I normally just smile (not like) Jenny. She is like a massive poser, and she will pose at every photo and she likes to... She is very... She is not afraid of the camera at all and she will let the camera take away and stuff* (C1:200).

Throughout the interviews, Chloe demonstrates a powerful critical awareness not only of the effect that people can have with their profile pages on others, but also of the effect that text production in Bebo can have on an individual’s behaviour as they produce texts.

*Categorising profiles*

Chloe is able to categorise Bebo users according to the styling of their profile page and is reflective about how different groups of children use Bebo to form a representation. She observes that children of different ages use Bebo in different
ways: you will notice that the younger people on Bebo have got more sort of quizzes and stuff and the older people...they have both got a lot more about themselves (C1:184). She further describes Bebo users as occupying categories that she defines based on her belief system about social groups within her face to face social world.

She describes four distinct groups: *emos*, whose pages are dark and moody; *funny people* who aim to make their pages entertaining (Chloe includes herself and her friend Georgie in this category); *Posers*, who work very hard to control their image (Jenni); and *Gangsters*, who Chloe describes as like the people from where she used to live: *...this boy he is sort of into rock, and people class him as an emo... and his page is sort of dark... and emotional ... and just sort of very dark. Yeah, like moody, yeah, and then you go on my friend Georgie's. She's more, she's funny as well... yeah yeah, me and Georgie are like two peas in a pod and we... make our pages fun. And there's obviously Jenny, who you will sort of see is like very, very... ermm yeah (laughs). She is a bit of a poser, and she like well... Do you know what I mean?* (C1:204-210).

By the third interview, Chloe has evolved her categorisation to include three groups of profiles: *emos, chavs* and *normal* (which includes her and her friends) (C3:232-238).

As well as categorising *Bebo* users and their profile pages, Chloe also believes that she can identify her friends by the style of their pages alone, so powerful is the impression that each creates: *If they didn’t have a picture, I would know it would be their page, just by the way they write* (C3:225).
Chloe has a strong critical awareness of the effect her page might have on other people: *I make sure it’s not like slutty if that makes sense...and that people would get offended by it and stuff and make sure that people won’t think “Oh My God”* (C1:234). She states that she has a strong sense of audience (C1:235-7) and that she uses her profile to construct an impression of herself. She describes her profile as just a sheet of paper, well not paper obviously, but like it’s a bit of space you can just put anything about, like if you want to, about yourself... (C1:36).

Chloe inscribes her desired identity into her text, choosing words and images to convey a specific image. In her *about me* modules, she adopts the language of her peer network (Figure 1, Screen shot 2:1) to perform her identity and affiliate to others within this group. However, it is clear that while this section of the profile is a site that Chloe authors in order to improvise her negotiations of identity, this endeavour is circumscribed as much by the conventions that are acceptable within her peer network as by Chloe’s agency.

*Figure 1: Chloe Screenshot C2:1. Chloe’s ‘about me’ module*
Performing a role: entertainer

As a text producer, Chloe has a clear sense of how she wishes her page to be viewed: *I like my page to be fun, I don’t want it to be depressing and stuff* (C1:189). She explains that she chooses the *current sort of stuff that makes people happy* (C1:191). She is propelled by competing forces of cultural influences and audience awareness when uploading modules. She appears to feel a responsibility for her audience’s enjoyment and therefore chooses to include many modules for her friends’ entertainment, including videos and quizzes. These modules attract comments and help to validate her position as an entertainer, and as a text producer who conjures a sense of responsibility for others.

Collaboration

Chloe engages explicitly in collaborative text production, through the use of the hacking game. She is aware of the possibilities for joint composition by uploading comments and modules alongside others, and in dialogue with others. She controls this process carefully and is vigilant about the impression of her profile page.

Strategies for text production

Chloe is an adept composer of text. The decisions that she makes are guided by her desire to control the impressions that she creates. Chloe’s text production can be seen to contribute to her ability to control her social world. Like Jennifer, Chloe skims and scans others’ pages for ideas to borrow. She crafts these ideas into her profile page, where they meld with her original contributions to form a complex text that is driven by her critical awareness of how the text will be received and what
effect it will have. In this way, Chloe uses text production to achieve control, rather than for aesthetic reasons.
Conclusion to thematic analysis

Chloe can be viewed as a knowing and independent producer of text within Bebo. Throughout the interviews she presents herself as a critical user of the site, who has understood the rules of play and who is able to conform to or subvert the rules in order to position herself socially. Chloe is the only participant who feigns indifference to her use of Bebo. This is indicative of Chloe’s critical understanding of how she can attain a powerful position as a text producer by choosing to engage or not to engage in the process. Despite this indifference, Chloe does engage regularly as she is driven by her desire to ‘fit in’ and lead others in this domain. Chloe is a reflective participant who is able to provide extended answers to questions throughout the interview process. She possesses confidence as a text producer and as a critic of the text producing process. She has a particular sense of awareness about the significance of text production within Bebo as a tool for social positioning and social control, and the implications for power-play that this facilitates. Like Jennifer, Chloe can be constructed as a reflexive agent. Her pleasure as a text producer is derived by her ability to showcase her social control and responsibility through her text production.
Case Study 3: Elley

Introduction to Elley

Elley claims to have been using *Bebo* since she was ‘ten or eleven’ (E1:5). Her profile supports this and states that she has been *on Bebo* since May 2006 (screenshot E2). Elley describes how her older brother had his own *Bebo* profile and made one for her. Elley remains loyal to *Bebo* throughout the fieldwork period. She describes how she has tried to use *MySpace*, but that it is ‘not as good as *Bebo*’ (E1:208). Elley places a large degree of importance on the role of *Bebo* in her social world. In interview two, Elley claims that *Bebo* is really important to her (E2:217). Since Elley’s brother made her a *Bebo* profile, she claims to have shown her friends how to make one (E1:436). She also claims to have been one of the first children in her class at primary school to have a *Bebo* account (E1:438).

At the beginning of the fieldwork period, Elley can be constructed as an avid *Bebo* user. She uses the family computer at home and her friends’ computers to access *Bebo*. She claims that she goes on *Bebo* more than she watches television and that she sends more messages using *Bebo* than by txt (E1:401). This is because it is free and also because ‘they will be on’ (E1:403), indicating that she appreciates the opportunity to be continuously connected to her network. Elley describes how she would have loads of free time if she lost her *Bebo* account (E1:399). However, Elley positions *Bebo* as of secondary importance to face to face communication, coming second to the events that she wants to do with friends (E1:419).

In the first two interviews, Elley claims to go on *Bebo* regularly: ‘everyday or every other day’ (E1:59); and nearly every day (E2:10). By interview three, Elley’s
interest in *Bebo* appears to have reduced. She claims to use it just once or twice a week now (E3:14) stating: ‘My interests have changed a bit; I realised that I was going on it a lot and now I don’t go on it as much’ (E3:4). In line with her reduction in use, Elley’s page is simplified throughout the fieldwork period (screenshots E1-E3). Throughout the fieldwork period, Elley describes how she is an active user of *Bebo*: she changes her profile ‘quite often now’ (E1:291) and is always trying to perfect her page (E1:338). During the second interview, Elley claimed to sometimes change her profile two or three times a day (E2:26). By the third interview, Elley describes how she changes her page to keep it from being boring (E3:60).

Elley is a socially driven *Bebo* user. In interview one, Elley claims that she uses *Bebo* and MSN to communicate with her friends, although she feels that ‘not many people go on MSN anymore’ (E1:47). In the second interview, Elley claims to use MSN and *Bebo* simultaneously (E2:220) and to discuss the same events in both contexts (E3:115). By the third interview, Elley explains that she has used *Bebo* less because other things have taken over (E3:6).

At the time of the first interview, Elley had 83 friends, whom she claimed to know in person (E1:197) By the second interview, she had 105 friends (E2:236) and by the third interview, 140 friends (screenshot E3:2).
Coding process and category formation

Thematic headings

These headings are constructed from the key codes assimilated for Elley across her data sets (see appendix 24). These thematic headings are the labels used for the grouped key codes. Presented in this way, the journey from code to key code to thematic heading is a logical presentation. However, this does not completely reflect the recursive process of data construction and organisation that the CGT approach demanded.

- social positioning
- allegiance and affiliation
- performance and feedback
- social control
- Bebo in online and face to face contexts
- copying, searching, editing
- popular culture

These thematic headings have in turn been assimilated and organised as tentative categories. For Elley, one main tentative category has been constructed under which the thematic headings can be analysed.

Tentative categories

- text production to achieve social positioning
  - social positioning
  - allegiance and affiliation
  - performance and feedback
In contrast to Jennifer and Chloe, one main key area can be constructed from Elley’s data. For Elley, the act of text production in online spaces appears to be driven almost entirely by social forces. Even the codes relating to text production reflect that Elley’s text production is circumscribed by the behaviour and texts of others. As a relatively early adopter of Bebo (E1:438), and a pioneer amongst her friendship group, it seems surprising that Elley’s text production is circumscribed so forcefully by social influences. However, the influence of Elley’s brother as her initiator should not be underestimated, and Elley’s willingness to take up the mantle can be interpreted as an act of affiliation rather than a pleasure-driven act. Throughout Elley’s interviews there is very little direct reference made to any pleasure that she derives from the act of creating a profile, or to satisfaction and pride. Instead, Elley can be constructed as a social user of Bebo for whom the creation of text is merely a by-product of the Bebo process. Throughout the interview period, Elley continues to worry about creating the right impression. She seems divided between wishing to be an originator of ideas, and not wishing to behave outside the conventions that are defined by the others in her her social world (E3:194). For Elley, this tension never abates. As a consequence, one main tentative category has been constructed to reflect the dominance of this force: text production to achieve social positioning.
Throughout the fieldwork period, Elley’s data reflects how her use of *Bebo* reduces, and how her profile page is simplified as a textual artefact. This simplification is a trend amongst her network (E3:20-25), demonstrating how *Bebo* allows Elley opportunities for allegiance and positioning through artefact production in relation to her friends, as well as for positioning through online communication with them, and positioning through offline communication relating to *Bebo*.

In the final section of this case study, a thematic analysis will be constructed using the thematic headings and tentative categories as organisational tools in the development of a grounded theory.
Thematic analysis Elley

Text production to achieve social positioning

Social positioning

Elley primarily uses Bebo to affiliate to others and to continue to conduct her friendships that occur in her face-to-face world (E1:258). As a new profile owner in 2006, Elley sent Bebo quizzes to friends in order to attract their attention and to build her network (E1:15). Since this time, Elley describes how Bebo has achieved an important role within her social world. She states that now, everyone she knows uses it regularly (E1:24-29).

Bebo acts as a locus for Elley’s social positioning work in different ways: Bebo acts as a focus for discussion between Elley’s friends in face to face contexts: we say like have you seen my new song on Bebo and everything and do you like my new skin and stuff like that (E1:265-270). Bebo also acts as a channel through which communication occurs online. She likes to keep up to date with what is happening to her friends (E1:385); to talk to others, communicate with my friends (E2:104). In this way, Bebo allows Elley to perform allegiance in both face to face and online contexts and across both contexts.

Bebo also allows Elley to enact different social roles. She uses it to communicate and perform her own preferences and news: to show people what you like (E1:395); to tell them what I like and what is going on and the trend (E2:104); it shows what your interests are and what your personality is like (E3:94). In addition, Elley claims to like using Bebo because I like seeing people, how they have labelled it and
how they have set theirs out (E2:154); it is a good way of seeing what people are like and seeing their styles (E3:164). In all these examples, Elley positions herself in a range of roles: as communicator, performer and audience. Each role is contingent upon social interaction and contributes to her ability to position herself amongst her network. Elley’s social identity as a text producer is further demonstrated by her use of the plural pronoun ‘we’ when she discusses her page creation and adaptation: we saw someone had done it and we thought it looked nice so did it ourselves (E2:75).

For Elley, text production in Bebo is an entirely social process. Every aspect of her text production, from her identity as a text producer to her use of the page to contribute to her social endeavours is driven by her sense of herself within the social world.

Allegiance and affiliation

In Elley’s social world, her texts perform as uniforms, signalling affiliation and allegiance to socially accepted and negotiated conventions and groups (E:189). The photographs included on her profile page are taken with friends. Her second profile photograph (screenshot E2:1) shows Elley and Georgie taking a shot of themselves in a mirror. Elley explains that a lot of her friends create pages in this style for their profile pages (E2:38). Elley can identify and conforms to the current trends within her network. Her second profile has been simplified because this is a trend at the moment (E2:72).

Elley further indicates that text production is form of allegiance to her network when she describes how she creates modules collaboratively with friends for inclusion on her pages. Elley explains that her friends search magazines for ‘looks’ which they
attempt to recreate. They photograph each other and upload these images to their profile pages: *Like in my photo album. Like I have some with friends and we do loads of different looks... and just sort of play around with it* (E1:306-311). In this situation, Elley is engaging in social activity that is catalysed by the existence of *Bebo*. *Bebo* is allowing the display of self and, as a precursor to this, the opportunity to experiment with social identity and positioning through module production alongside others.

Elley’s text production is driven by her desire to conform and be like her friends. Elley describes how she changes her profile page prolifically (E2:22) and how she is driven socially to achieve this. According to her, everyone changes their pages quite often and she likes to keep up with others (E1:357-360).

**Performance and feedback**

*Bebo* offers Elley a space to showcase who she is; to perform for others and equally to measure and obtain feedback about her popularity and success. Acts that are driven by Elley’s own desires, such as the projection of a new image or the wish to affiliate more strongly with members of her peer group, are only made meaningful in relation to her audience. Equally though, Elley’s audience is only made meaningful if Elley decides to invest in it. She is competitive about her popularity and measures this using counters for screen views and the kudos that having a profile page since 2006 provides: *it’s like a bit like a contest like how many times you can view your profile and that*: (E1:421-423).
For Elley the perfect page would be one that stands out and that everyone goes on and sees (E1:342). Elley is proud of the recognition that she receives from her page. She has a counter on her page which states that over 3000 views of her page have been registered (E1:345) since its creation. Impression management forms part of her quest for perfection. Elley describes how she thinks that the about me writing, the skin and the picture are the most important because that is what you see first when you first click on it (the profile). So it makes a good impression if it is good (E2:122-124).

The text producing process involves looking at what other people have used and see(ing) if I get any ideas from that... and you are always trying to perfect your page... (E1:338). Elley is also driven by friends’ feedback to improve her profile. She describes how if a friend comments that a picture is nice, she might use that picture as her main profile shot (E2:160). Elley is driven to be the first to upload a meme that will be adopted by others. She regards this as a quest; a competition to be cool.

Elley admits freely that she seeks approval from her friends about the appearance of her page and will alter her page if a friend does not like it: (C) Do you worry about what people think? (E) Yes but there are certain things that I do and certain things that I don’t. And like if I say to or ask a friend if that’s all right or something and they say yes. Or they say no, it looks a bit strange or something then I will just go with what they think. (C) So you might change it? (E) Yeah (E1:346-348).
At one point in the first interview, Elley suggests that her text production is not entirely driven by the presence of her audience: *you just try to make it like what you would like, not what your friends would like* (E1:279); *you just put things that you would like* (E1:281); but by the end of this short section, she situates these comments within a social context: *you like describe what you like so other people can see* (E1:283) and divulges that she sometimes she just follows what her friends’ pages look like and even changes her page entirely to conform (E1:287-291).

**Social control**

Elley uses *Bebo* as a mechanism for obtaining social control. She chooses whether to accept or block friends from seeing her profile (E1:198) and positions and repositions friends within the *friends* module according to her relationship with them. In this way, Elley controls her network’s access to her performances of identity and her relative position within her network. Comments are important to Elley and are also used and managed as a way of exercising control. The first thing that she does when she opens her *Bebo* profile is check to see if a friend has left her a comment, and then respond to it (E3:72). She explains that she maintains an overview of the comments that are posted to her profile and checks for them regularly (E1:132). Comments that are left on her page can be deleted by her, or embellished by her; she can make and allow people to leave comments that are for private or public consumption according to how she arranges her privacy settings. Through this behaviour, Elley is endeavoursing to control the impact that others can have on the impression that her page is creating. In addition, Elley also controls whether friends can take photographs from her slideshow module for use in their
Elley is exercising her power as a text producer in relation to others, and is enjoying the ability to control what others can do.

Social control is also achieved by Elley through the text production process. Due to the distance from her audience afforded by the online context, Elley is able to give consideration to her texts and the impact that they might have on other people before uploading them. She describes how Bebo allows her the opportunity to express herself better to other people, avoiding making herself vulnerable because you always worry that someone will point the finger (E3:168-170). Despite this facility, Elley is not confident at creating original text on Bebo. Her awareness of audience and correctness appears to circumscribe her willingness to take risks as a text producer: (C) Would you describe yourself as somebody that starts a new trend with how your page looks, or do you like to be like other people and fit in with how lots of peoples’ pages are looking? (E) In between because I don’t like to start new trends in case they are wrong but I wouldn’t like to just follow in someone’s footstep. It would be a bit boring (E3193-194). Elley has a clear sense of the potential for right and wrongness as a text producer. While social control is achieved by Elley through her use of Bebo, it appears that social vulnerability also impacts on her confidence to compose and break free from what she regards to be the ‘trends’ that are acceptable within her network.

Bebo in online and face to face contexts

Elley’s Bebo texts pervade her friendship work in face to face and online contexts. The creation of texts within Bebo is something for discussion in the face to face world. Equally, activity and discussion in Elley’s face to face world can lead to the
creation or adaptation of a *Bebo* text. For Elley, social networking is an interest that bridges online and offline positioning work. She values face-to-face feedback from others about her pages and describes how *Bebo* pages are a subject for discussion in the face-to-face world (E1:265-270). She also describes how changes to *Bebo* profile pages are the subject of discussion in the face to face contexts (E1:391-392).

In the second interview, Ellie explains that she has posted a joke that someone told her at school onto her profile (E2:140). In the third interview, Elley describes how social activity in face to face contexts influences her text production. If she goes *out with (her) friends... and we take some photos, I will upload these into my album and I will change my photo* (E3:122). These photos are then shared amongst the friends involved (E3:142). In these examples it is clear that Elley uses *Bebo* for social positioning by invoking it as an additional context for the continuation and origination of social interaction.

**Copying, searching editing**

Elley takes a social position when constructing her page and modules within it. For Elley, text production in *Bebo* is literally a searching and editing role: *You can paste, copy and paste* (E1:71); *No, you copy them off other people’s Bebo if you like them and you can make them* (E1:139). Her text producing behaviour is consistent across the three interviews (E1:139, E2:158, E3:72). She repeatedly describes how she takes ideas from elsewhere and in an act of bricolage, assembles them to form her own page: *(C) What I am noticing... is that a lot of the writing on there you don’t actually have to write it yourself (no) it is more about borrowing it from other people (E) yeah, and you can just add your own little bit (E1:276-277); If you see on*
somebody’s Bebo like the hearts, I didn’t make them myself, you copy and paste them from people’s profiles (E2:158).

Elley rarely describes the initiation of her own text in terms of writing. Instead, when asked what she has created herself, Elley describes that she has downloaded that myself (E2:88), pointing to song lyrics. She does describe her about me statement as something that she has written (Screenshot E2:1: E2:92), but this features only some personal information and an in-joke from school (Figure 2):

![Elley Screenshot E2:1](image)

Figure 2 Elley Screenshot E2:1. Elleys’ personal information

This notion of writing differs from Jennifer’s text producing behaviour, where lyrics are uploaded and tributes to herself and her friends are composed as a way of creating the profile page (Screenshot J1,J2,J3). In Elley’s profile, modules where she has originated content are sparse. One exception is where Elley has made a slideshow from her own photographs as a way of presenting her photographs within one of the modules on her page (E1:216). Elley does not like to make herself
vulnerable as a text producer (E3:168-170), and the absence of material that she has originated supports her claim.

For Elley, originality is achieved by downloading or uploading something that others will copy, rather than composing within a module herself (E2:177-180). Through this process, she explains how her friends’ profile pages all bear resemblance to each other (E1:189). In considering Elley as a text producer, it becomes apparent that even the creative act of text production is subsumed within the surrounding social structures.

**Popular culture**

Instead of originating material, Elley’s text production can be seen to depend on her engagement with the local and more extensive popular culture that is significant within her social world. Elley describes how she uses ideas from magazines as inspiration. She will search magazines with friends for ‘looks’ that can be recreated to be photographed and uploaded (E1:306-11). Video clips and images that contribute to Elley’s peer group’s popular culture are added to profile pages, with friends often featuring the same video clip as each other. Popular memes will reverberate through networks, as the spaces are used to demonstrate the ‘insider’ knowledge required to be a credible member of the group (screenshot E1:4 Britain’s Got Talent Video). Elley uses her profile page to demonstrate her immersion and ‘savvy’ in relation to the local teen popular culture scene. Elley enjoys performing her knowledge of local popular culture, for example the music that her friends like and this can be seen in screenshots E1,2 and 3, where music, bands and music videos are all included as modules. Elley’s text production is framed by a culture of
consumerism and celebrity and reflects the fashioning and refashioning of celebrity that is so prominent in Elley’s social world.
**Conclusion to case study**

For Elley, text production in *Bebo* is a dynamic, everyday process that is circumscribed by social structures, and her desire to position herself within her network by conforming and aligning herself with others. Elley, does not articulate a personal relationship with ‘her’ *Bebo*, as Jennifer does, Elley only ever invokes *Bebo* as an adjunct to her social life.

Elley is continually revising and reworking her page in an attempt to ‘keep up’ with her friends (E1:347-358) and through this activity, she attempts to exert her agency amongst her peers. Unlike Jennifer, who described the text producing process with a sense of personal satisfaction, Elley can be constructed as a more socially driven and responsive text producer. Elley’s texts and text production are always situated within a social context. She does not appear to derive a personal satisfaction from text production; neither does she reflect upon *Bebo* as a text; rather as a vehicle for achieving social ends.

Elley can also be constructed as a less reflective user of *Bebo* than Jennifer. She claims that she doesn’t know why she uses *Bebo* (E1:23) and frequently answers questions with one word throughout the three interviews. When asked to reflect on the process of creating profile pages for others to see, Elley is casual about the activity. She describes the act of constructing her profile with indifference: *You just put stuff about yourself...and what you like* (E1:67-69). Elley does not articulate her insight into or control of the text producing process. She does not describe how she produces her profile. When explaining how she adds video clips she says: *ermm I don’t know really, but like I get it from my friends’ pages* (E1:83). Friends’
behaviour appears to drive her text production. She explains how she copies ideas from friends and checks their pages for ideas (E1:85). In this way, Elley’s text production becomes subsumed within her social world.

Elley clearly uses Bebo critically, displaying awareness of the consequences of creating and presenting text to friends, as evidenced by her socially driven text production and reluctance to break with convention. However, she cannot or chooses not to articulate this in our first two interviews. By the third interview, Elley does begin to demonstrate more of a critical awareness as a text producer, and a sense of agency that had only previously been implied. When discussing how her profile had changed she says *I thought they were getting a bit old and the styles were changing and they didn’t really match* (E3:136). This signals that Elley is able to articulate her awareness of how the total effect of her page is affected by the individual modules that contribute to it. However, when asked what influences her page design, Elley is unable to be definite: *I am not really sure... I have seen other people do it and I thought it looked nice, so I tried* (E3:192).

Elley’s texts and text production are always situated within a social context. She does not appear to derive a personal satisfaction from text production; neither does she reflect upon Bebo as a text; rather as a vehicle for achieving social ends. Elley was the least confident of the three participants which may have impacted on the quality of the responses that I was able to elicit. This may be explained methodologically by the quality of my interviewing. Elley was the first participant to be interviewed in the first round, and my technique improved with practice and confidence. In addition, it must be noted that unlike Jennifer, I was unknown to
Elley and her family. However, throughout the three rounds of interviewing, while Elley was always willing to be interviewed, she remained the least forthcoming participant in the data set.
Conclusion: drawing the case studies together

In this chapter, three case studies have been constructed. The process for constructing the data evolved throughout the analysis stage, but demanded that close consideration was given to each participant in turn as codes, key codes, key code headings and thematic headings were constructed and scrutinised to eventually build to the articulation of four tentative categories. Throughout this process, data were compared within each case study, and, as more data became available, across the three participants. This allowed the process of analysis to become increasingly theoretical as it progressed, demanding that codes were challenged and rechallenged for accuracy, relationship to one another and relevance to the study’s question (Charmaz, 2006, p.179). This act of constant ongoing comparison was conducted manually, by literally sorting and organising codes and key codes; and iteratively, by drafting and redrafting memos to explain the codes and the themes in which they resided.

The case studies reveal that despite the fact that each participant shares the common goal of producing profile pages within Bebo, each participant can be constructed as a text producer who behaves, to some degree, idiosyncratically. These idiosyncrasies are illuminated by the analysis, organisation and presentation of data that has culminated in the construction of four tentative categories that were built through the process of analysis:

• text production to achieve social positioning;
• text production to achieve social control;
• text production to enact the text producing role;
• text production as a pleasurable activity
These categories are presented using a case study format in response to the question raised by this study: *How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?* They are necessarily grounded in the study’s data, and as such remain close to the participants and are descriptive in nature.

Set alongside one another, each case study provides insight into the process of text production in an online social networking site. While every participant uses text production to achieve social positioning, the comparison afforded by the construction of three case studies supports additional observations, e.g. that text production can be constructed as an activity that is undertaken to derive pleasure; to enact a text-producing role; and to achieve social control.

Each case study also affirms findings discussed in the review of literature. As has been comprehensively documented, some children engage in social networking to achieve social positioning and control. The construction of the categories above demonstrates simply that this can be viewed as being achieved through the construction of text. Equally, the construction of these categories reflects that some children use the process of social networking to enact a text producing role and to derive pleasure. As described in the conclusion to the review of literature, this notion has been less explored by the literature, and forms an area for further consideration which will be attempted in the next chapters.

Taken as a whole, the four tentative categories begin to offer a conceptualisation of how pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites. This conceptualisation places children as producers of text, and their text production
at the core of this consideration of social networking. It is this positioning that allows for new perspectives that relate to the research question to be sought. Moving beyond the case study presentations, in chapter 7, these tentative categories are discussed. Presented discretely, they are offered as a framework for beginning to consider how children behave as they learn to produce texts beyond the immediate control of traditional educational institutions and family. Based upon such a small sample, these categories are presented as tentative because it is recognised that a larger or different sample may allow for additional categories to be constructed and contribute to this framework. Equally, within each category, access to a larger or different sample of participants may raise additional thematic headings for consideration, e.g. hypothetically, a child may claim to produce texts with the intention of deceiving someone; or to play a prank, supporting the construction of key codes: deception; ‘prankster’ing. While these hypothetical examples did not occur through the data in this study, it is feasible therefore that, based upon a larger sample, a larger set of key codes could be constructed. However, these exceptional key codes could be assimilated into the tentative categories raised by the construction of data for this study: text production to achieve social positioning; text production to achieve social control, thus supporting a claim that for this study, a point of saturation, adequate for this study was achieved. This claim can be defended methodologically by Charmaz’s observation that “categories are saturated when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p.113). The process conducted to construct these categories was extensive and comprehensive in relation to the participants involved, at the time of their construction. Ongoing analysis through the process of coding, organising and construction was realised through the
crafting of extensive memos in the form of case study data. This allowed for instances of repetition to appear in the data, in the form of repeated codes, or even key codes. These repeated data were integrated into a conceptual analysis where each code was interrogated systematically through a process of returning to the most raw level of data and checking that they did not yield new or different properties that had not been already constructed. In this way, a more sophisticated form of saturation, as articulated by Glaser (2001, p.191, in Charmaz, 2006, p.113) was assured. Accordingly, the categories, while presented as tentative, can be considered as robust in relation to this study.

Additionally, it must be recognised that implicit in this construction and use of grounded theory, are my own (researcher) views, priorities and experiences. As an act of symbolic interactionism, the construction of these data is impacted upon by my desire to explore the participants’ activities and the subjective viewpoints that they attribute to them (Flick, 1998, p.17). Any conceptualisation of how children behave as text producers in social networking sites is grounded not only in the construction of data and the tentative categories presented, but also in the beliefs and understandings about children as text producers that derive from my experiences. As a friend of Clare, my first awareness of social networking and its enactment through text production was awakened in 2004, almost ten years ago. As a text producer, student, teacher, initial teacher educator, researcher and parent, my perspectives and beliefs about children’s text production have evolved in relation to my professional and personal circumstances since 1994, when I embarked upon my own initial teacher education. These experiences are melded to form an ontological framework
that must be acknowledged. Its presence is captured and recorded throughout this thesis, but especially in chapter 2, where the study is contextualised.

In the next chapter (chapter 7), each tentative category will be discussed in order to begin the development of an analytic framework, where the constructed codes, key codes, themes and tentative categories will be integrated into a broader analytical framework that will endeavour to continue to answer the research question raised by this study.
Chapter 7: Discussion of tentative categories

Introduction

In the previous chapter, four tentative categories have been constructed and used to organise a description of each participant as a text producer in Bebo. In this chapter these tentative categories will be discussed and elaborated. This discussion, rendered through writing will reflect the ongoing and recursive process of analysis afforded by a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006, p.154).

Charmaz describes how a constructivist grounded theory approach involves acknowledging that any resulting theory is an act of interpretation that cannot stand aside from the researcher’s view. She requires that researchers are aware of their presuppositions and how their analysis is situated contextually (Charmaz, 2006, p.130-131). In this chapter, each tentative category will be subjected to a contextual analysis which will be shaped by my (researcherly) interests, yet which (through the process of reflexion in the light of the theoretical sensitivity demonstrated in chapters 2-4), will remain open to new theoretical possibilities (Charmaz, 2006, p.134-135). This means that implicit in the elaboration of these tentative categories are my perspectives and interests. Accordingly this discussion will consider the power relations and opportunities that surround children’s text production, and with which I am concerned.

In addition to grounding this study contextually, and acknowledging the researcher’s role, the development from case study to category elaboration will allow for a transition to a more conceptual stage of analysis, where categories may be developed
further and assembled into an analytical framework that will conclude this study.

The four tentative categories will be discussed in turn:
Category 1: Text production to achieve social positioning

This category was constructed for each participant. As such it can be positioned as the most universal text producing behaviour demonstrated by the participants. This claim is reflected in the existing literature that documents social networking as a social practice (see literature review conclusion). Each participant is constructed as using their text production to achieve social positioning within a defined network of friends. For the participants, the acts of skimming, scanning and surveillance of other profiles are involved in the text producing process, and allow the participants to knowingly position themselves amongst their networks. To this end, each participant’s text production can be regarded as goal-orientated and circumscribed in part by their social world. In order to produce texts, the participants adopt a market-perspective: they conduct ‘research’ by attending to the appearance and content of others’ profiles; they know their audience by being confronted with their presence in the form of profile pictures and comments; and they aim to position themselves within their social network accordingly. However, it is evident from this study’s data that while the use of text production to achieve social positioning can be described as a universal behaviour, each participant’s behaviour is highly nuanced, and that the measures adopted to achieve social positioning vary:

For Elley, the use of Bebo is entirely concerned with achieving social positioning. Ongoing surveillance and attention to the texts of others allows her to gain entry to a social world that she aspires to belong to. Using mimicry and by conforming to the conventions that she observes, Elley is able to position herself amongst her peers. Her use of Bebo is driven by her sense of who she is and who she wants to be in relation to her social world. Although Elley wishes to be an originator and creator of
texts that work just to please her, she is restricted and controlled by her concern with
the opinions of others. As a text producer, Elley achieves social positioning in a
specific way: concerned foremost with creating the ‘right’ impression, she responds
to her social world and uses text production to affiliate with others. Accordingly,
Elley’s profile pages are composed of the ideas that she has borrowed and
downloaded from elsewhere. Her use of original material is limited as her text
production is circumscribed almost entirely by social influences. Throughout the
data collection period, Elley’s profile pages reduce in content. This can be regarded
as reflecting her desire to keep up with others in her network who are also
simplifying their pages. However, this also indicates that Elley is increasingly aware
that her textual product is of consequence in her social world. Her response to this
growing awareness and criticality as a text producer is to limit the potential for her
texts to ‘do’ social work for her, and contribute to others’ impressions of her.

For Jennifer, the use of Bebo is catalysed by social interaction, but not exclusively
motivated by the potential to achieve social positioning through the production of
texts. In addition to this, Jennifer produces texts to enact a text producing role,
which will be discussed later in this chapter. Jennifer desires kudos and celebrity
through her profile page construction, and this influences how she uses text
production to position herself. Through her willingness to originate ideas and
achieve a status in Bebo, Jennifer seeks not only affiliation amongst her network, but
approval and recognition. By aspiring to this status, Jennifer attempts to gain social
control, but in so doing can be constructed as depending upon others for the
realisation of this role. Jennifer’s use of text production to achieve social positioning
accompanies other goals, including the derivation of pleasure and creative
expression. Accordingly her use text production is not merely responsive to others, however it still depends on others in order that Jennifer can realise her goals.

Chloe actively uses text production to access her social network and demonstrate her belonging. However, in addition to achieving social positioning through her use of the techniques described for Elley and Jennifer, she can be constructed as having understood and mastered the process to such an extent that she can exert control over how she positions herself and is positioned. Chloe therefore conforms to the text producing behaviour that she observes within her social network, achieving affiliation and belonging, but with a more critical awareness of the implications for social positioning than Jennifer or Elley. This is achieved with subtlety. By being dismissive about the act of social networking (despite being ‘addicted’ to it), and by adopting a safeguarding role where she assumes responsibility for others, Chloe can be constructed as using text production in Bebo to perform her independence and autonomy in relation to her social world. For Chloe, the use of text production to achieve social positioning can be regarded as a platform that allows her to develop further social skill and mastery and that gives her an element of control over the social positioning process.

For each participant therefore the nuanced use and production of the Bebo profile is significant in achieving social positioning. The textual artefact acts as the focus, the process and the repository for the participants’ endeavours to market and position themselves. The examples constructed within each participant’s case study demonstrate how the acts involved in text production can be used for different effects and to realise social identity (Luke, 1995:15). While the existing literature
focuses upon the use of social networking to perform identity and friendship, this
detailed consideration illuminates the nuanced behaviour of child text producers and
begins to raise the issues of control and criticality for further consideration.
Category 2: Text production to achieve social control

The use of text production to achieve social control can be set alongside, but not within the broader category of text production to achieve social positioning. The use of text production to achieve social control is a discrete category, and is only constructed for Chloe in the case study presentations. However, on returning to the data through the process of ongoing analysis, it can be argued that Jennifer and Elley desire to control their social worlds, but that their actions as text producers are not evolved to the critical extent that Chloe’s are. As a consequence, they do not achieve the same degree of control of their social world through their use of Bebo. In part, Chloe achieves control by the way that she positions her use of Bebo as a pastime, albeit an addictive one. Bebo is described by Chloe as an accessory to her social life. Her Bebo profile becomes a tool that works on her behalf. As a result of her critical skills (demonstrated by the way that she categorises audience types and reflects upon the implications of text production), her Bebo texts are reduced in status to a serving role, while she, as a text producer, is elevated to a status of controller. Jennifer and Elley in comparison do not achieve the same status. Jennifer relates to ‘her’ Bebo more closely, and with more dependence. Consequently, she does not control the text production in the same way, and cannot be constructed as using her text production to achieve social control to the same degree. Elley depends on her Bebo and produces texts as a response to others. She is agentive, but, again, to a lesser degree than Chloe.

A distinctive feature of the participants’ ability to use text production in Bebo to achieve control of their social world is the development of criticality in relation to audience awareness and participation. This is demonstrated by Chloe and Jennifer
through their recognition that their page is not only read by others but, to some extent, co-authored. While choices about the inclusion of modules on each profile page are controlled by the text producer alone, the entire content of each module is not always subject to this control, as ‘friends’ are able to upload comments and change images that contribute to the textual artefact that is the profile. Each participant selects friends to display on their profile page. They arrange these displays to reflect who is important to them. These displays are edited over time to reflect how friendships are changing. The images of the friends displayed contribute to the appearance of the profile page, and the profile owner can adjust who shows in response to this. However, friends can change their profile images at will, and the participants have no control over the image presented by their friend, except to be able to remove the friend from the display. Accordingly, each participant’s profile page is actually an amalgam of images that work together within the Bebo profile page as a composite artefact. This artefact, and the overall impression is composed by the profile owner, but created by the entire network who comprise each individual image that is selected for display.

Equally, along with the profile owner, the participants’ friends can upload comments and iconic gestures, e.g. “loves” to the participants’ modules and photographs. While these comments can be monitored by the participants, they contribute to the overall profile, and the impression that it creates. This commenting process, to an extent, occurs beyond the control of the profile owner. While the participants can oversee their profiles, and remove posts, the ability to manage the profile’s appearance is retrospective and responsive. Therefore, while the appearance of their composite co-authored profile pages are controlled by the participants, the pages can
be also be regarded as dynamic, shifting textual entities that are tethered to the social worlds of others. These notions of co-authorship and tethering are significant because when applied to the context of text production in social networking sites, they contribute to formulating new ways of regarding communication and text production (Dowdall, 2009).

Ultimately this means that the use of text production to achieve social control involves the recognition that the textual artefact is composed by a medley of contributions that are made by multiple contributors, and that are subject to change. Text production to achieve social control requires the development of a basic mastery: the understanding that the textual product is both co-authored and dynamic. Each participant in this study can be regarded as developing this mastery, and along with it, the ability to take measures to monitor and address the contributions of others, by regularly overseeing their profile; by their ongoing surveillance of other profiles; and by their responses to the contributions of others. Chloe has the most control. She addresses her friends and co-authors directly, and has negotiated conventions that are understood by an inner-audience only. Chloe understands the commenting process and the potential for impressions to be altered by comments made. The inner-audience’s hacking game, where they explicitly co-author and play with impression creation reflects their understanding of the implications for co-authored texts. Using text production in Bebo, Chloe manipulates the impression that she creates. She is propelled by dual forces: that of audience awareness and that of cultural influences. Part of Chloe’s mastery is her ability to conform to social and cultural conventions, and at the same time to stand apart from them. This is demonstrated by her ability to create a profile that is acceptable to herself and her
peers, while at the same time, dismissing its significance. This mastery is also demonstrated by her ability to participate in *Bebo* and simultaneously adopt a safeguarding role, where she establishes responsibility for others in the network. Chloe’s use of text production to achieve social control reflects a complex mastery, where her endeavours are circumscribed variously by her desires, her agency, her awareness of the active role of the audience as co-authors, her awareness of the conventions that are acceptable within her network, her awareness of cultural influences, and her adoption of a dismissive, yet safeguarding attitude. These elements are orchestrated with finesse and subtlety in order to achieve a degree of control not attained by the other participants.

Online text production to achieve social control can be regarded as a critical skill for development by children, that occurs to different degrees in varying contexts with the support of their social networks, educators, other communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), and affinity groups (Gee, 2003). However, the potential for children to develop this skill can be regarded as subject to the restrictions imposed by the current educational and political context that constructs children as text producers from a deficit, rather than asset perspective (Dowdall, 2009, p.46). As described in the second chapter of this thesis, in relation to their literacies, children are currently positioned within a protectionist media discourse and a context of high-stakes educational accountability, culminating in competing versions of childhood text production. The presence of these discourses serves to reduce the potential for children to develop their abilities as independent text producers, and the critical digital literacy skills that facilitate this independence. To alleviate this restriction, children’s text production needs to be reconfigured as a social as well as academic
skill for development. If children’s text production is viewed from the New Literacy Studies paradigm, skills-based autonomous definitions of literacy can be subsumed within broader definitions of literacy which begin from the notion that children’s text production forms part of their wider social practice. In order to attain full competence as a text producer, children must develop their potential to interrogate and recognise the power relations that concern themselves, others and their texts, and that are realised through their text production (Dowdall, 2009, p. 51). If these skills of interrogation, subsequent criticality, and reflexivity are developed, then like Chloe, other children will be afforded the opportunity to use text production to achieve social control, as well as to merely position themselves amongst their networks. This ability is reflected in Chloe’s use of text production. The creation of her profile page is socially motivated, and she has reflected upon the enactment of power and positioning that can be achieved through selective text production in Bebo. Her texts represent the most sophisticated mastery of social skill demonstrated by the participants in this study. She purposefully controls the performance of her own social identity(ies), and has reflected upon how profile pages work on behalf of their makers, and how the re-design of her own profile on entry to her new secondary school realised the performance of a new identity. The hacking games that Chloe and her friends play for their amusement, where privacy rules are subverted and reintroduced; and the adoption of a safeguarding role; indicates that Chloe is a critically literate digital text producer. Based upon Freebody and Luke’s ‘Four Resources Model of Reading’ (1990), which requires that interaction with texts (both reading and writing) involves pragmatic and critical competence in addition to code-breaking and meaning making skills, it can be argued, that in a social networking context, Chloe as a text producer, has developed the ability to
challenge text for underlying power relations and ideologies (Luke and Freebody, 1999) and control elements of her social world through this behaviour. This ability involves understanding that her texts are co-authored and dynamic; and that as such they require ongoing supervision.

By setting the categories *text production to achieve social positioning* and *text production to achieve social control* alongside one another, children’s text production in social networks can be regarded as an act of significance for educators. The spectrum of critical mastery demonstrated by just three participants using *Bebo* suggests that parents and educators can have a role to play in supporting the development of a critical digital literacy, as the context for children’s text production evolves (Dowdall, 2009; Merchant 2007). Equally, this study has demonstrated that educators have much to learn from children who produce texts in social networking sites. This learning involves educators understanding how text production in social networking sites is used by children, and to what effect. The review of evidence from the JISC-funded study, *Thriving in the 21st century: Learning Literacies for the Digital Age (LLiDA project)*, (Beetham, McGill and Littlejohn, 2009) recommends that, in college and university settings, educators should strive to be aware of and build from students’ idiosyncratic social media and digital practices. While this study recognises that the resources required to facilitate this individualistic pedagogy are extensive, it recommends that educators must utilise students’ use of social media as a form of information technology that will support learning in an era of uncertainty and technological change.
However, while these recommendations are made for older college students, in relation to younger children, it is less simple to make such recommendations. While pre-teenage children’s use of social networking sites continues to be constructed from a deficit perspective, (as described in chapter 2), the potential for educators to learn about children’s text production in social networking sites is thwarted. This dilemma is reflected in the recent EU Kids Online report *Digital Literacy and Safety Skills* (Sonck, *et al.*, online) which, based upon a sample of 25,000 European 9-16 year old internet users, sought to establish the risks encountered by digitally literate children. This report classified children’s online activities in one of three ways: as content-based; as contact/communication-based; and as conduct-based/peer-participation-based. Further it recognised that these three activities are not mutually exclusive, but are partially overlapping. Unfortunately, by classifying online activities in this way, the active use of social networking sites, e.g. the production of profile pages in social networking sites was rendered invisible. The activity of visiting a social networking profile was listed as a contact-based activity; the action of putting or posting photos, videos, or music to share with others was listed as a conduct/peer-participation activity. However, the act of creating or updating a social networking profile page, a significant act, undertaken by 47% of 10-12 yr old internet users in the UK (see review of literature chapter 3, Ofcom, 2010), was not included in this list. The act of profile creation was not acknowledged. Text production was further excluded by the report’s conceptualisation and discussion about digital skills. Three skills are noted in the report: instrumental skills (basic or functional); informational skills (understanding, navigation, evaluation); and social skills (communication, self-disclosure, privacy). However, the *EU Kids Online Survey* only reported upon the instrumental and informational skills possessed by
participants, choosing not to comment on social skills. Therefore, while this report concludes that low skills among 11-13 year olds pose a challenge for teachers, parents and others, it does not report this in the light of children’s social networking practices that include both social and production facets (Sonck, et al. online).

This dilemma is caused in part by the age restrictions that social networking sites impose. Despite the fact that children below the age imposed by site owners have profiles on social networking sites (see chapter 3, literature review), these arguably ineffectual age restrictions persist, and serve to introduce ethical complexity for researchers charged with the responsibility to find out about youth practices online, reducing the opportunities to interrogate the social skills and practices involved.

In order to remediate this dilemma, children’s text production in social networking sites might be reconstructed from an asset perspective. This would involve parents, educators and policy-makers in recognising that children’s social networking activity involves genuine text production with functional, informational and social facets. Equally it would involve individual educational and safeguarding institutions reviewing their perspectives about allowing children access to such activities. If children can be constructed as potentially critical of and empowered by the text producing process, they will be encouraged to produce texts which are meaningful and of consequence. If this activity can be sanctioned by those with a responsibility for safeguarding children, rather than constructed in alarmist and protectionist terms, the potential to support children to be safe online, rather than to curtail their text producing opportunities will be realised. In realising this potential, more children
may be given the support that they need to learn to use text production to achieve social positioning and social control.

To conclude this discussion, the categories *text production to achieve social positioning* and *text production to achieve social control* can be located along one spectrum that reflects the text producer’s ability to achieve social control as a development beyond the achievement of social positioning, reflecting the development of critical awareness of issues around audience, co-authoring and control. By constructing this spectrum, the two categories are synthesised in relation to accomplishment (Figure 3: developing social control through text production). This allows the participant’s ability to achieve social control using their text production in a social networking site to be tentatively located along the spectrum. On this spectrum of social control, and based upon the data constructed for this study, the participants can be located at different points, reflecting Elley as the least accomplished social text producer; Jennifer mid-way along the spectrum; and Chloe as the most accomplished social text producer.

![Figure 3: developing social control through text production](image)

By constructing the participants in this way, implications for each participant amongst their network, their educators and care-givers are realised. Put succinctly, children who are not able to imagine the repercussions of their text production in
Bebo, or other social networking sites, may be disadvantaged in relation to developing profitable social relationships in the future. Thus educators have a role to play in supporting children to develop their text production as a ‘goal-orientated’, rather than a ‘means-orientated’ endeavour (Bauman, 2004, p.49). Social control can be best achieved when children are aware of the potential for their textual artefacts to contribute to their social identity formation and subsequent positioning. This requires that children are helped to explicitly reflect on their agency (Giddens, 1987, p3) and ability to make choices as textual agents as they create textual artefacts. In this way, children, through their use of social networking can develop as part of the modern-day knowledge-class (Bauman, 2005, p.28) who can achieve goal-driven identity through the knowing production of text. According to Jenkins (2006), and Rheingold (2012) the ability to perform, interact meaningfully, work with others, network and negotiate belongs to a set of core social skills and cultural competencies required by young people if they are to be ‘full, active, creative and ethical participants’ in what they describe as an emerging participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006, p.56), where knowledge is distributed and responsibility for its creation is shared. The sense of goal-orientation and critical awareness that is implicit in the ability to produce texts to achieve social control can be regarded as a vital attribute that will stand alongside this skill-set, and contribute to achieving success in the participatory culture that is supported by social networking practices. To ensure that child text producers are not made vulnerable, and are given equal opportunities for success in the digital age, the development of these critical skills is obligatory.
However, while this spectrum highlights the different degrees of criticality that can be attained in relation to achieving social positioning and social control, it does not provide a full account of the participants’ text producing behaviour. Accordingly, discussion of the remaining two categories, *text producing to enact the text producing role* and *text producing as a pleasurable activity* must be considered.
Category 3: Text production to enact the text producing role

The notion of children enacting a text producing role in social networking sites invites consideration of what this role might involve. Of the three participants, Jennifer can be regarded as the text producer who reflects the most on her text production and the textual artefacts produced. While she seeks kudos and celebrity as a goal, Jennifer additionally finds pleasure in the creation of her profile page. She can be observed as having a real relationship with her Bebo, and enjoys enacting the role of text producer as a way of demonstrating her accomplishments. For Jennifer, while social positioning is achieved through her text production, the creation of the textual artefact can be regarded as a discrete and, at times, primary endeavour. She is driven to create a page that she finds aesthetically pleasing. Accordingly, throughout the fieldwork, Jennifer can be constructed as a text producer who enacts the identity of text producer. This enactment involves adopting of a number of roles: organiser, editor, originator, expert, and performer. Her agency is realised through the control that she develops as a text producer in these roles. This control, while contributing to it, differs from the development of social control already discussed. It is circumscribed in different ways and by different forces, e.g. the desire for kudos, and the desire for satisfaction. To unravel this phenomenon, a theoretical perspective based upon the production of children’s text is required.

Kellogg (2008) argues that the construction of text is an unnatural cultural achievement. Viewed from a cognitive perspective, he draws from Bereiter and Scardamalia’s account of writing development in competent writers (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987) to describe how children are taught to become competent writers through exposure to schooling, and who through this process and maturation, move
from a stage of knowledge telling to knowledge transformation using text. It can be observed that this competence is driven by the requirements of the statutory curriculum, which in turn is driven, in part, by economic and political priorities. In the UK, the economic and political concerns that underpin educational priorities have been made explicit through ongoing intervention in the form of curriculum, policy and assessment arrangements for the last ten years (see chapter 2). The ability of children in England to ‘write’ has long been a cause for concern. In 2011, England’s chief school inspector was reported as stating that too many children leave primary school unable to read and write well enough (Harrison, 2010), supporting claims made consistently by those charged with reporting children’s attainment (Ofsted, 2009; Ofsted, 2003; Ofsted, 2000; QCA, 1999). This context frames any consideration of children as text producers in educational settings and beyond, as the political agenda can be recognised as directing the energies of those responsible for supporting children in their progression towards what is defined as competence. At the time of writing, in England, children’s text production is being repositioned by the introduction of a new assessment framework, where, at age eleven, children’s ‘essential writing skills’ (the use of spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary) will be tested and externally marked, alongside ongoing teacher assessment judgements of writing composition (from 2014) (Bew, 2011, p.14). This political context to some extent defines what educators understand writing competence to involve, and interpretations of what competent text producers, or knowledge transformers, can do. While the incoming assessment arrangements acknowledge the importance of children’s creativity, and argue that

25 For the news report describing Christine Gilbert’s (Chief inspector for Ofsted) comments about children’s underachievement in reading and writing see http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11735317
teachers will be better able to support the promotion of this using a combination of moderated teacher assessment and test results (where the teacher professional assessment is given precedence), the judgement, in part, of writing competence as involving testable skills ‘where there are clear right or wrong answers’ (Bew, 2011, p.14) will contribute to limiting definitions of text production and rendering them in functional and instrumental terms only (see Sonck, et al. EU Kids Online Survey).

To counter this narrow political focus, Kellogg’s work can be used to enlarge views of competence and include the wider social and informational elements involved in children’s text production. Kellogg attempts to develop Bereiter and Scardamalia’s account of writing competence by demarcating three instead of two stages that text producers move through in a trajectory towards competence. He describes these stages as: knowledge telling, where the act of writing is driven by the needs of the author; knowledge transforming, where the act of writing is undertaken for the benefit of the teller as author, and in the light of the text under production, (suggesting greater intentionality and agency); and finally, knowledge crafting, where the ‘professional’ act of writing is undertaken with consideration for the reader’s interpretation, the words of the text itself, and the author’s ideas (Kellogg, 2008, p.5). Kellogg uses the label ‘professional’ to reflect that knowledge crafting is a stage only achieved by some. Kellogg states that while young children can take account of their readers’ perspectives, they do not have sufficiently developed working memories to allow the orchestration of author, text and audience that knowledge crafting demands (Kellogg, 2008, p.9). Knowledge crafting is characterised by the three-way interaction between representations held in the writer’s working memory of the reader’s interpretations, the author’s interpretations...
and the message contained in the textual form. According to Kellogg, in order to attain the status of knowledge crafter, sufficient executive attention for processing information in relation to the task context and working memory is required. He draws from Hayes and Flowers’ study of competent adult writers to elaborate this argument (Hayes and Flowers, 1980, cited in Kellog, 2008), and argues that children learn to write best when they serve an apprenticeship model of training into the craft.

Based upon the data constructed for this study, and Kellogg’s account of competence development in writers, a second spectrum can be formulated which reflects that text producers knowingly enact and enjoy enacting the text producing role to different degrees. This spectrum builds from Kellogg’s notion of developing textual competence and recognises growing achievement as progression from knowledge telling, which involves little awareness of the audience and intentionality in relation to this force; to knowledge transforming, where the act of text production aims to bring about benefits for the author, and which involves awareness of audience and intentionality; through to the ultimate professional act of knowledge crafting, which requires the greatest degree of reflexion in relation to aesthetic responses to the text, awareness of the audience and social effects, and awareness of the effect of the text upon the author (Figure 4: developing textual crafting through the enactment of the text producing role).

![Figure 4: developing textual crafting through the enactment of the text producing role](image_url)

**Figure 4:** developing textual crafting through the enactment of the text producing role
Jennifer is constructed by the data as having achieved the most competence on this spectrum of textual crafting, and through her use of Bebo engages in text production to enact the role of text producer. In so doing, she can be constructed as working towards attaining the status of ‘knowledge crafter’, a status that reflects Jennifer’s concern with the textual artefact, the social effects of it, and her own pleasure. Jennifer’s adoption of the text producing roles constructed from the data (organiser, editor, originator, expert, and performer) when assembled, reflects Kellogg’s notion of a ‘professional act’. In this act, the impact of the text upon the audience, and the consideration of her audience’s interpretation of her text is driven and realised through her desire to perform the role of text producer, and the pleasure that she derives from this. The ability to combine and arrange the components of her profile page, as realised through her organisational and editing sensibilities reflect Jennifer’s consideration of the text itself. Jennifer is a highly organised and careful creator of text. She endeavours to create texts that convey a consistent impression. Her ability to control and style the effect of her page is constructed by the data to such an extent that her page is described as a highly choreographed textual representation (J1:194). Jennifer’s quest for originality and claims of independence as a text producer, alongside her cautionary behaviour and expertise reflect that her text production is an agentive act. It is circumscribed by her social world but conducted with her own interests and quest for creativity occupying an important role. Jennifer’s ability to combine these facets of text production in Bebo as she enacts the role of text producer supports the claim that Jennifer is attaining the status of text crafter and can be positioned at this end of the spectrum.
Elley and Chloe on first consideration (as presented in their case studies) are not constructed as crafters of text. However, on returning to the data, and challenging it further, it is possible to locate them along this spectrum. Elley can be located as a text producer who creates a textual artefact as a by-product of her desire to affiliate herself socially, rather than for aesthetic reasons. Elley’s intentionality is driven by her desire to achieve popularity and to fit in. Decisions about what to upload are propelled by the feedback from others and taking ideas from other profiles. While she claims to desire to be original, this is driven by her quest to be recognised amongst her social group. She is reluctant to draw attention to herself through her textual artefact, and modules where she has originated content are sparse. Elley’s Bebo profile is an adjunct to her social world, not an artefact that she has crafted and enjoyed. Elley can be constructed as a knowledge transformer: one whose texts are produced in the light of the imagined audience, but with less regard for the crafting of the textual artefact itself.

Chloe derives pleasure from creating her profile, but describes this pleasure in social rather than personal terms. She explains that she makes her profile for other people to enjoy, indicating that she adopts a role as an entertainer with responsibility for others. While she can be constructed as a knowledge transformer who also constructs texts for an imagined audience, this act is circumscribed most forcefully by Chloe’s ability to manipulate and control social relations through text production, rather than by crafting text. Chloe primarily demonstrates a powerful critical awareness of the social impact that a profile page can have but does not reflect upon her personal satisfaction in relation to aesthetic pleasure. On the spectrum from text producing to text crafting, along with Elley, Chloe can be positioned as a text
producer who knows her audience and transforms knowledge in the light of her critical awareness about the effects of her profile pages upon others. However, Chloe uses this critical mastery to control her social world, rather than to enact a text crafting role and realise aesthetic pleasure.

I would like to suggest therefore that the use of Bebo allows the participants to enact the text producing role to varying degrees and attain the status of ‘knowledge crafter’ by scaffolding the composition process in two specific ways. The first relates to notions of the text as remix; the second relates to notions of audience. The data for each participant can be constructed to demonstrate how these affordances liberate executive attention, allowing aesthetically-driven decisions that involve awareness of audience and reception to be made.

First, by acting as a modular template and writing frame, Bebo allows the remix of text from a variety of other online sources and social networking sites (Lessig, 2008), culminating in the formation of a cohesive unit of meaning (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). Jennifer’s profile page is a cohesive unit. It can be read as a flow of information from top to bottom. It has a beginning and end that is dictated by the logic of the screen. It is unified by the use of a skin, which she has chosen with care. Readers scroll down to read and consume the complete cohesive entity. In addition to this two-dimensional presence, Jennifer’s profile page has hyperlinks that allow the reader to navigate to additional levels of information, for example, online albums of photographs. This affordance gives the text a three-dimensional presence. However, the logic of coherence allows these two dimensions to operate together as a whole. In this way, her profile page is a cohesive unit. It is bound by its context.
and by its content, regardless of the dimensions in which it is operating. Jennifer is aware of her profile as one working unit. She edits her page and organises modules with consideration for the total effect of the page, rather than individual modules. This claim can be made for each participant, such is force of Bebo’s scaffolding.

However, each participant’s profile page can be regarded as nuanced in terms of the nature of the individual modules that are selected to comprise each page. For example, each page is a complex remixing of material from a number of sources. These sources are both local to the participant, such as Chloe’s use of word-play (crewage), which is recognised by a close inner circle; and more widely recognised, such as the use of links to, and images from the participants’ popular culture, e.g. YouTube clips from popular entertainment shows. Some of the modules are personally crafted, such as Jennifer’s homage to a best friend; others are adopted from other friend’s sites and Bebo itself, for example Elley and Chloe’s quiz modules. As text producers, each participant is confronted with endless choices as they compile and craft their page. Consequently, a profile page can be regarded as an amalgam of different textual elements that are orchestrated with greater or less mastery and attention to the various personal, social and aesthetic influences that play upon it. While Bebo scaffolds the participants’ ability to construct cohesive profile pages, mastery over the text crafting process involves the ability to orchestrate the varying types of modules available. This mastery is evident in Jennifer’s profile pages, where she takes pleasure in combining modules that allow her to represent her inner feelings, using photographs, ‘about me statements’ and extensive displays of personal preferences, along with others that reflect her wider social circle’s preferences, e.g. shared video clips and music. This mastery, less
evident in Elley’s pages which rely on uploading modules from elsewhere, affirms
Jennifer’s status as text crafter.

The textual product itself, due to the modularised organisation of the Bebo profile
template, where composers can draw up from previously crafted modules that are
stored in readiness, or immediately upload images and video from mobile sources
and other screen-based technologies, can be formed without recourse to the
memory-trawling act that can overload young writers as they struggle to orchestrate
the demands that the writing process places on them in print-based context, as
described by Hayes and Flower (in Kellogg, 2008). Instead, elements are mixed and
remixed in an act of collage that is scaffolded by Bebo itself. Jennifer is thoughtful
rather than impulsive when choosing and editing modules to include. Her profile
photograph is chosen to complement the skin that she is using, and she regularly
makes changes to her profile to reflect current memes and events in her world.

Jennifer is an expert text producer. She is able to compose and control her profile,
using the available modules to orchestrate a textual artefact that performs her desired
image to an audience who are realised materially.

Kress uses the metaphor ‘orchestration’ to conjure the sense that texts are assembled
from modules of meaning (Kress, 2010, p.157). A module is described as a “catch-
all term to name the units which serve to make up texts”. Kress explains that a text
can be regarded as a ‘multimodal ensemble’, the result of an orchestration process
that involves assembling, organising, and designing materials in order to meet a
rhetor’s interest. The product of this orchestration is a textual ensemble; a semiotic
entity; a text (Kress, 2010, p.161). In the new media age, and utilising the
affordances of digital technology, Kress describes how orchestration amongst young
text producers involves the acts of downloading, mixing, cutting and pasting,
mashing, sampling and recontextualisation (Kress, 2010, p.24). He explains this
process of modular composition as a form of (bric-) collage: a dominant form of
composition in which the module is a central element (2010, p.147). As has been
documented in the review of literature, the profile pages of social networking sites
are composed of multiple modules, dominated by image and video. Viewed from
the theoretical perspective of social semiotics, the issue of multimodality affords the
page or screen a new semiotic function with implications for agency and
communication. The page becomes a specific site of appearance, being one of
display, rather than a site of telling (Kress and Bezeemer, 2009:167).

This material realisation of audience (in the form of their presence, and their ability
to contribute to the text) is the second way that Bebo scaffolds the participants’ text
production. Kellogg (2008, p.4) argues that only professional writers develop the
knowledge crafting abilities that involve imagining the reader’s interpretation of a
received text. In order to achieve this, he describes how the text producer must be
able to hold representations of the author (self), text and reader in storage
components of the working memory. In the participants’ Bebo profiles, the audience
involved is represented materially. Face shots of friends are visible on the friends list
and comments made by the friends appear underneath or within modules uploaded
by the profile author. This rendering of audience means that in order to enact the text
producing role, the composer does not need to hold representations of self and other
in their working memory. The potential audience is visible throughout the
composing process in material form, thus reducing the demand on the composer to
construct an imagined audience for their text. The realised audience, in addition, supports the development of textual crafting by providing feedback in the form of comments and posts, or by reflecting other’s acts of text production in their own pages, through their own remix activity. In this process, text producers are at once scaffolded by and scaffolding each other towards the status of text crafter. This is an evolved collaboration, where individual text producers, who are propelled to satisfy and impress their audience, develop the ability to reflect upon their own textual artefacts and their effect through the commenting affordance. In this construction, the development of mastery as a text producer who enacts a text producing role supports the attainment of a professional text crafting status. This process is supported by Bebo which realises the imagined audience in such a way that it is no longer merely invoked, but is made visible as a material entity who the composer interacts with and responds to.

The recognition that the affordances of Bebo described (in relation to modularity and audience) support the development of mastery along a spectrum that builds from the less reflective production of texts through to the maximally reflexive process of text crafting (involving awareness of audience, textual artefact and self) allows the role of the text producer to be re-evaluated in relation to their audience. Barthes has argued that, temporally, the author is always located in the past; that a line separates the author from the reception of the text (Barthes, 1968). This is evident in contexts where children’s writing is assessed and the child’s text is passed to an assessor for subsequent assessment. In this scenario the control and the realisation of text is passed from the text producer to the recipient. However, the affordances of Bebo allow the author to be retained as a living force. This changes the relationship
between text producer and recipient, and repositions the production of text as an activity where the producer can be valued along with textual artefact and the recipient or ‘sign-maker’ (Kress, 2010, p.34). In his discussion, Kress describes a two-stage process of communication (2010, p.36)

Stage one is dominated by the interest of the initial maker of the sign-complex, the rhetor, with his or her intent of disseminating the sign-complex as a message and for the message to be taken as a prompt. In stage two, the interest and the attention of an interpreter is in focus: it leads to selection of what is criteria for the interpreter in the initial message and to the framing of the selected aspects of the message as a prompt; which is, subsequently interpreted....Both stages are instances of semiotic work; both result in the making of new signs.... The rhetor and the interpreter both perform semiotic work; but it is different work with different effects. (Kress 2010:36-37).

Here, Kress identifies the author and recipient as separate entities: as rhetors and interpreters. Further, he describes how the semiotic work of the rhetor and the interpreter, whilst both being of significance, are not equal. He describes their functions as different, attributing the setting out of ground to the rhetor, and the selection, framing, transforming/transducting and shaping of signs into an inner-sign complex, to the interpreter (Kress, 2010, p.37). The data from this study instead presents a process where the role of rhetor and interpreter can be constructed as achieving some synthesis. Jennifer, when enacting the role of text producer in Bebo, and due to her awareness of herself, her text and her audience (who are materially present), can be constructed as a text crafter, adopting both roles simultaneously: rhetor and interpreter. Regarded from the perspective of social networking and its affordances, these roles can be constructed as conjoined at times in a synthesis that has implications for how the text producing role is enacted. This builds on the notion that the production of text in a social networking site can be conceived as a goal-orientated process. Jennifer, as a developing crafter of text is learning that the roles
of rhetor and interpreter are inextricably linked; and that her ability to exercise her creativity is constrained by her awareness of how her text will be received. Therefore, while Jennifer claims that her page is ‘for her’, and she enjoys enacting the text producing role, her ability to imagine its reception and effect circumscribe her creative freedom.

The construction of the category *text production to enact the text producing role* has allowed a consideration of what is involved as *Bebo* profile pages are crafted and created. However, as the elaboration of the categories is developed, it becomes evident that one cannot be entirely separated from another. In this study, to this point, children’s text production in *Bebo* has been presented as involving mastery in relation to achieving social positioning and control, and mastery in relation to textual production and textual crafting. Implicit in both of these forms of mastery is the text producer’s critical awareness of the role of the audience, who in relation to the development of social control, must be imagined in a receptive mode; and in relation to the development of textual crafting, must be imagined as collaborators and co-authors, as well as recipients. Although each form of mastery can be invoked in isolation theoretically, both are circumscribed by social influences. Therefore, while the act of text producing in *Bebo* allows a text crafting mastery to be developed, this development is made meaningful in relation to others in the social network. Equally, the category *Text production as a pleasurable activity* can be regarded as subsumed within the main categories already elaborated.
Category 4: Text production as a pleasurable activity

The final category, *text production as a pleasurable activity*, was initially constructed as a separate category for two participants: Jennifer and Chloe. Through the dynamic grounded theory process of elaborating and refining each category, this tentative category has been assimilated into existing categories. Jennifer takes pride in her profile page. She claims to use *Bebo* for her own entertainment as well as, by the third interview, for social positioning. Her pleasure is realised mainly in relation to her mastery as a crafter of text. The use of text production to achieve pleasure can therefore be subsumed for Jennifer, mainly within the category *text production to enact the text producing role*. Chloe produces her profile to make others happy. She engages with the process for fun, as a hobby amongst others. Chloe’s pleasure is socially rather than aesthetically driven. The use of text production to achieve pleasure, for Chloe can be subsumed within the category of *text production to achieve social control*. Elley does not describe her text producing in terms of pleasure. This category was not constructed for her by her data. In terms of both of the spectrums constructed from the analysis of the tentative categories, Elley displays the least mastery of the three participants. This is possibly because Elley engages with text producing in *Bebo* as a responsive act rather than as an activity over which she exerts some control. Accordingly, pleasure can be noted as accompanying the development of mastery, and can be subsumed within each spectrum.
Discussion

To conclude this analysis, a consideration of the crafting process in relation to the development of social control is required. The crafting of text has been theorised by Kress within the field of social semiotics as a form of ‘multimodal orchestration’ that is realised as a ‘multimodal ensemble’ (Kress, 2010, p.159). The notion of orchestration is helpful as a metaphor for considering the text producing behaviour of the participants as they develop mastery as crafters of text, and can be recognised in Jennifer’s and Chloe’s case studies.

The issues of orchestration and ensembles are entirely related and yet distinct; the former names the process of assembling/ organising/ designing a plurality of signs in different modes into a particular configuration to form a coherent arrangement; the latter names the results of these processes of design and orchestration (Kress, 2010. p.162).

The orchestration metaphor invokes many of the qualities involved in enacting a text producing role. By bringing the process of design and orchestration together, Kress recognises that text production is a multifaceted process that involves issues of intent, realised through design; and organisation, realised through proficiency as a text producer. Further, this metaphor resonates with my early attempts to elucidate children’s text production in social networking sites that have been published prior to the completion of this study. This earlier writing, which has contributed to the realisation of this thesis (see Dowdall, 2009c), proposed that a framework that could describe children’s text production in online profile pages was required. The aim of such a framework was to help educators understand how children’s text producing behaviour was evolving in response to social and technological developments. In this early work I tentatively constructed a such a framework and appropriated the thinking of Vassily Kandinsky, the Russian abstract artist to achieve this.
In his artistic journey from figurative work to abstraction, Kandinsky reflected upon the act of representation in art (Fischer and Rainbird, 2006). In this reflection he described a struggle between the roles of inner emotion and the outer world that occurs as part of the representational process. This work was recorded by Kandinsky in his published paper *Concerning the spiritual in Art* (Kandinsky, 1977). According to Kandinsky, the creation of representations involves variable processes. These are described as ranging from loose improvisation to finely rendered composition. Kandinsky described how two competing forces play upon his acts of representation, determining their ultimate form. These forces are the degree of reference that the artist can make to their outside world, and the pull of the inner emotion of the artist (Behr, 2006; Kandinsky, 1977). As a development of this observation, Kandinsky argues that his representational work exists as a spectrum that includes Impressions, Improvisations and Compositions. In my earlier work, I attempted to align the two competing forces described by Kandinsky with the forces of structure and agency that I observed to be at play as I described how Chloe created her profile page (Dowdall, 2009, pp.97-98). My analysis has progressed since the publication of this work, through the recursive process afforded by a constructivist grounded theory approach, and I will now endeavour to develop this work and accommodate it within this discussion. Some duplication with my published work is unavoidable. However, embedding this earlier tentative theorising within this analysis gives additional detail to its form.

As described already, Kandinsky identified three parallel terms to describe his representational work and the degree of reference he was making to the outer world. He called these modes of representation Impressions, Improvisations and
Compositions (Behr, 2006: Kandinsky, 1977). To paraphrase Kandinsky, these terms conjure three different sources of inspiration when representing ideas in artistic terms:

(1) A direct impression of outward nature, expressed in purely artistic form. This I call an ‘Impression’.
(2) A largely unconscious, spontaneous expression of inner character, the non-material nature. This I call an ‘Improvisation’.
(3) An expression of a slowly formed inner feeling, which comes to utterance only after long maturing. This I call a ‘Composition.’ (Kandinsky, 1977, p. 57).

The spectrum of textual crafting demonstrated by the participants in relation to the control that they are able to exercise over their social world can be understood in the light of Kandinsky’s modes of representation. His terms Impressions, Improvisations and Compositions can be applied to the nuanced process of text production in Bebo and the varying materiality of the modules produced. While Kress’s notion of orchestration can be regarded as the participants’ compositional ability to macro-manage their profile page and its construction; within this overarching skill, the ability to create and combine elements of texts that range from being improvisational through to being carefully managed; and to control their effect, can be regarded as a skill of design that contributes to the full crafting process.

To elaborate this notion, an example is required. Each profile page can be regarded as an amalgam of modules that are macro-managed (orchestrated and remixed) by the producer; circumscribed in different ways; and that are combined to create a coherent whole. Some elements are carefully designed to achieve specific effects. Skins are chosen to reflect and perform taste, video clips are uploaded to reflect and perform preferences for music and popular culture; ‘about me’ statements are crafted
to create an impression that pleases the producer and performs an identity to be realised. Using the affordances of *Bebo*, the participants can express the preferences of their outer, social world, and in so doing construct Impressions, and behave Impressionistically. These elements and modules can be regarded as direct Impressions of the participants’ outward nature: they are performance-orientated and driven by social mastery and awareness of social expectations. They are crafted over time and are used to attempt to control social positioning and affiliation. They are used to perform identity and to reflect the participants’ social prowess. Within a *Bebo profile*, Impressions are highly crafted elements that are designed to attempt to bring about social control. Their production may give pleasure to the text producer, and they reflect the text producer’s awareness of the audience’s role as a recipient and as a collaborator.

Alongside these impressionistic modules, and to a lesser degree, Improvisational modules can be found. These modules are the largely unconscious spontaneous expressions of inner character that are the least polished and contrived aspects of the profile: the comments left by the profile owner in response to a friend’s feedback; a photograph or post that is uploaded in the moment to respond to an event from the day. These elements are transient and driven by impulse. They are responsive, rather than controlled. They are supported by the material realisation of the audience and the opportunities for profile pages to be co-authored. Within a *Bebo* profile, Improvisations are the less crafted elements that left unchecked and unedited could jeopardise social control and ultimately, the pleasure derived from the process of text production. The concept of improvisation is challenged by Kress’ notion of framing (Kress, 2010:149). Kress argues that texts are complete entities, and as such
they are framed. However, the profile page can be regarded as perpetually connected (Ito, 2004) to other pages in the network. Authorship is recursive, reflexive and multiple as owners post modules against which comments from others can be made and replies posted. Profile pages can be regarded as artefacts that are subject to continual change, improvisation and connection. As such their materiality is dynamic and sits beyond a finite framing.

Within all three participants’ profiles, Improvisational and Impressionistic modules can be found. They are an affordance of Bebo itself. Their inclusion, role and relative importance in the profile page is managed by the text producer to varying degrees, reflecting the text producer’s mastery as a crafter of text and as a controller of their social world.

In previous work, I used Kandinsky’s notion of Compositions to describe a third element found within profile pages: the most polished and refined modules, for example, the profile photograph and the ‘about me’ statement. In this thesis I will revise this proposal. In the light of the continued recursive analysis of the data, I now argue that the most polished modules are also Impressionistic; designed always to reflect outwards and bring about pleasure and control. Accordingly all modules within the profile that are subject to inclusion or exclusion are either Impressionistic, or Improvisational. Based upon the ongoing analysis of the data and accompanying reflection I would now like to suggest that Kandinsky’s notion of Composition, ‘the expression of slowly formed inner feeling’ (Kandinsky, 1977, p.57) relates instead to the participants’ potential ability to orchestrate both the crafted impressionistic and the impulsive improvisational elements that form their profile page, with due
regard for the social implications through their process of text production. Improvisations are the created (but not crafted) and responsive elements within the texts whose production supports social positioning, but not control, and are realised in collaboration with the audience as co-author; Impressions are the highly crafted elements, formulated as the role of text producer is enacted to bring about pleasure in the textual product and to achieve social control. Impressions are formed when the text producer enters a synthesis of rhetoric and interpretation that is made possible by the design affordances of Bebo itself. The most masterful text producers are, in Kandinsky’s terms, Composers. Their profile pages are Compositions, pages where “consciousness, reason and purpose play an overwhelming part – but of the calculation, nothing appears, only the feeling” (Kandinsky, 1997, p.57). Text producers who can orchestrate Composition have achieved mastery over text production to achieve social control and mastery of text crafting to achieve a pleasing textual artefact, which in turn contributes to social control and the derivation of pleasure from the process. To achieve this, they work from a goal-orientated, rather than means-orientated perspective. As Composers, they maximise the impact of the Impressionistic elements of their texts, and limit the potential for damage (loss of social control) from Improvisational elements. Elley’s response to remove modules and reduce the content of her profile can be regarded as a goal-orientated act, but one which due to her lack of confidence in textual crafting, also reduces the potential for her profile to achieve positive social identity work for her. Jennifer and Chloe are more goal-orientated. To differing degrees, they craft their texts and use them to derive reputation (Chloe) and aesthetic pleasure (Jennifer). The pleasure that Jennifer derives is as a result of her ability as a knowledge crafter (Kellogg, 2008), who can enact the role of Composer and is learning through active
engagement with text production how to manage her audience and strengthen the Impressionistic features of her pages.

Thus text production in Bebo is rendered as a mastery over social control achieved through the development of a critical awareness of the role that textual artefacts play in the positioning of the self. Text production is also rendered as a mastery of textual crafting, involving recognition of how the crafted textual artefact works to achieve social control and how the enactment of the text producing role can achieve pleasure in the textual artefact.

Based upon this evolved analysis and ongoing consideration of the three participants in relation to the tentative categories formed, it is possible to construct a model that accommodates the two proposed spectrums described:

- *The spectrum of social control* where critical awareness directs the text producer’s attention to the control of the impact that the textual artefact may have upon others;

- *The spectrum of textual crafting* where critical awareness directs the text producer’s attention to the crafting of the textual artefact so that it is aesthetically pleasing to the producer and their audience and as a result contributes to the impact that the textual artefact may have upon others.

The model aims to reflect the potential for children to develop accomplishment along two spectrums of critical mastery: from the ability to use text production to achieve social positioning to the ability to use text production to achieve social
control; and from the ability to create texts, to the ability to craft texts. In both spectrums, criticality in relation to audience, author and text are significant. In the spectrum of social control, the text producer’s critical awareness of the audience in a receiving role is key. This critical awareness directs the text producer’s attention to the control of the impact that the textual artefact may have upon others. In the spectrum of textual crafting, the text producer’s critical awareness of the audience in a contributing role is required. This critical awareness directs the text producer’s attention to the crafting of the textual artefact so that it is aesthetically pleasing to the producer and their audience and as a result contributes to the impact that the textual artefact may have upon others.

Accordingly, the two spectrums can be intersected to allow for the holistic consideration of the masteries of individual text producers in contexts that draw from the affordances provided by digital technologies, e.g. social networking sites like Bebo. The realisation of this model, in part, attempts to respond to Kress’s claim that authorship needs reconceptualising in the digital age (Kress, 2010, p.20). It aims to make explicit the various forces that play upon children’s text production in Bebo, and to give them all a presence in one space. The data constructed have presented three forces that interplay to affect children’s mastery as text producers in Bebo: the force of the audience; the force of the author, and the force of the text itself. These are not new (Sonck, et al. online; Kellogg, 2008; Kress, 2010), but have not previously been conceptualised in such a way that the full range of mastery involved in producing texts in social networking sites is reflected. The following model attempts to do this (Figure 5: Model of text production as mastery in Bebo).
Using this model it is possible to position the three participants as text producers in Bebo. Chloe can be positioned along the horizontal axis towards the right hand side to reflect her mastery of social control and achievement as a text creator (C). Jennifer would be positioned along the vertical axis towards the top to reflect her mastery of textual crafting and achievement of social achievement (J). Elley would be positioned at the intersection of the two axes to reflect her achievement of text creation and social positioning (E). This positioning would emphasise that Elley produces texts with some degree of success, but that she has not achieved mastery (yet) along either spectrum. Chloe is the most accomplished social controller. She can be regarded has having developed a social mastery through her text production. Jennifer is the most accomplished text crafter. She can be regarded as having developed a textual mastery through her text production.
Thus, two intersecting masteries that are circumscribed to varying extents by the participants’ social worlds are proposed in response to the research question: *How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites?* The participants are constructed as exhibiting varying degrees of mastery over social control and textual crafting as they produce texts in one online social networking site, *Bebo*.

Halliday and Hassan’s notion of Cohesion and Coherence (1976, p.23) can be used as a device to help analyse text production as mastery in a social networking site. The notion of cohesion allows a text to be defined as a unit of meaning that is bounded in some way. Text crafters can construct maximally cohesive artefacts. Profile pages can be read as a flow of information from top to bottom. They have a beginning and end that is dictated by the logic of the screen. Readers scroll down to read/consume the complete cohesive entity. In addition to this two-dimensional presence, profile pages have hyperlinks that allow the reader to navigate to additional levels of information, for example, online albums of photographs. This affordance gives the text a three-dimensional presence. However, the logic of cohesion allows these two dimensions to operate together as a whole. In this way, a profile page is a cohesive unit. It is bound by its context and by its content, regardless of the dimensions in which it is operating. Masterful text crafters understand the ‘completeness’ (Kress, 2010, pp.147-150) of their profile page and how all the elements contribute to the impression it creates. Jennifer’s aesthetic awareness supports her ability to produce cohesive and appealing texts from discrete modules that coordinate in an elaborate symphony of textual Composition.
In addition, masterful text producers craft texts that are socially coherent. Implicit in this notion of textual crafting resides concepts raised through the theoretical framework and the data that involve awareness of audience and reception, and text production as a form of consumption (Perkel, 2008). These include the potential for remix (Lessig, 2008) facilitated by the modular format and opportunities for profile surveillance that *Bebo* affords; the act of multimodal orchestration (Kress, 2010, p.159) that involves the twin processes of design and organisation and that are facilitated by the synthesis of the text crafter in role as rhetor and interpreter (Kress, 2010, pp.36-37), as demonstrated by Jennifer as she enacts the text producing role; and the evolved skill of ‘knowledge crafting’ (Kellogg, 2008, p.5), that requires that text producers undertake a ‘professional’ act of writing that pays equal regard to the author’s ideas, the text itself, and the reader’s (audience’s) interpretations.

Thus, in building a model of text production as mastery, texts can continue to be delineated as units of cohesion and coherence (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). However, educators and caregivers must recognise that young text producers may need to be supported to achieve cohesion and coherence in their informal texts, like *Bebo profile pages*, and particularly to understand the consequences for social identity, social positioning and social control, when cohesion and coherence are not achieved.

It must be noted at this point that this model simply serves to capture children’s text production at any moment in time. It is not designed to be used to assess children’s text production. The dynamic nature of children’s behaviour as text producers and the texts produced as part of the social networking process requires that this model is
not used as a vehicle to assess children’s achievements. Rather it is proposed as a model that helps to illuminate the complexity of the process of text production in social networking sites like Bebo, and raise awareness of those involved in promoting children’s text production to consider the range of forces: social, authorial and textual that are at play in social networking sites as two types of mastery: developing the skill of textual crafting and developing social control are facilitated. This model therefore aims to develop existing critiques and studies of the social behaviour of children in social networking sites (see chapter 3: review of literature), and value the mastery of textual crafting that contributes to children’s overall success and pleasure as users of social networking sites, as they use text production to position themselves and control their social world.
Chapter 8: Implications and conclusions

Introduction

The aim of this research project was to seek to answer the research question: How do pre-teenage children behave as text producers in online social networking sites. This question has been answered in two ways: via the production of descriptive case studies for each participant; and via the elaboration of tentative categories that have supported the construction of a model of text production as mastery that reflects text production as two intersecting spectrums: social control and textual crafting. The model proposed in response to this endeavour aims to elevate the status of the act of textual crafting and raise awareness of its contribution to the overall act of text production. A rationale must therefore be provided for the elevation of this facet of text production. In this final chapter, the building of such a rationale will be attempted by way of articulating implications for those concerned with children’s text production.

Prior to this, several points relating to method must be made. The three participants who formed the purposive sample for this study were all female. The review of literature revealed slight differences in the use of social networking sites by gender amongst the youngest users surveyed (12-15 yr olds) (Ofcom, 2011, p.43), with female users being more likely to have a profile. While this trend has been noted, this study has not considered the text production of boys. The findings therefore are limited by the gender make-up of the sample. To develop this work, a study that explores a larger number of pre-teenage users of social networking sites, of both genders is recommended, particularly as boys’ attitudes to schooled literacy and achievements relating to writing continue to be reported from a negative perspective.
An inquiry that focused on boys’ achievements as text producers in social networking sites might contribute to the construction of nuanced accounts of boys’ text production in the digital age.

Equally it is recognised that while this study documents the inequalities relating to access to digital technologies in the review of literature, it does not explicitly seek to address these issues through its recommendations. This is a further limitation that in a subsequent study might form the focus of a new line of inquiry. For example, the Model of textual mastery constructed proposes four quadrants. The participants in this study are tentatively positioned in the middle to upper right quadrant (see Figure 5, Chapter 7), suggesting that they have all achieved a degree of success. Consideration of a wider sample would perhaps illuminate issues facing those children with issues that impact upon their ability to master social control, or textual crafting in social networking sites, e.g. children with visual impairment.

Conversely, the focus on just three participants has supported a fine-grained analysis of their behaviour as text producers, and a genuine attempt at constructivist grounded theory that builds from close analysis of interviews and screenshots using an initial and focused coding approach, to the construction and elaboration of tentative conceptual categories using a memo-writing process. Four criteria for evaluating constructivist grounded theory studies were outlined in chapter 5: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness (see appendix 10). The questions detailed for these criteria have served to frame this study and the construction of this thesis. Based upon consideration of these questions it became apparent that
theoretical sampling had occurred throughout and in response to the nine interview opportunities, and that these opportunities were sufficient to elaborate and refine the categories (Charmaz, 2006, p.96). While opportunities for additional theoretical sampling had been planned, they were not deemed necessary, as the data constructed had served to answer the research question, and as such, a point of saturation, where interrogation of the codes and key codes did not yield new concepts, was reached. The theoretical sampling that did occur allowed for the reconstruction of Chloe and Elley as crafters of text, albeit not masterful ones. It also allowed for the collapsing of the category Text production for pleasure into the main three categories elaborated.

To conclude this grounded study that has remained so close to the participants for the duration of the analytic process, the findings must be recontextualised in order that they become of relevance to those with responsibility for supporting young children to become text producers in the digital age. This requires that the findings constructed from the data be revisited and reconstructed in the light of the theoretical framework originally conceived for this project. In this way, a constructivist grounded theory approach becomes re-contextualised and located within the theoretical frame, while allowing new directions to be built from the data. Charmaz, (2006:135) describes this process as an act of theoretical playfulness, a process where openness to the unexpected is predicated upon theoretical sensitivity. Through this process, categories and the emerging themes are subsumed within a more conceptual interpretive frame and data is further organised and explicated (Charmaz, 2006:140). This act of interpretive analysis is defended by Charmaz as ‘imaginative rendering’: a distinct, yet eclectic process that allows us the liberty to
“cut through ordinary explanations and understandings and attend to certain realities and not others” (Charmaz, 2006:149). Through this rendering, the role of the researcher becomes fully implicated in the theorising process and theory that is ultimately constructed (see chapter 5: Methodology and methods, part one).

In Chapter 4: Assembling a theoretical framework, three theoretical fields were identified and melded to form a composite theoretical frame to be utilised in the analysis of data. These fields included:

- Considerations of the social and technological features of late modernity, which can be regarded as supporting a knowledge class who reflexively and continually strive to construct and reposition their sense of self in a liquid, networked social field.

- Considerations of literacy as a plural concept that houses specific social practices which give rise to specific literacy events and practices within a hybrid context that is driven by local and ‘distant’ ideologies and that support the realisation of social identities through the production of text.

- Considerations of texts as the artefacts of human subjects’ work at the production of meaning and social negotiations. As artefacts, texts are complete coherent multimodal material units of meaning, realised through communication, that have a site of appearance that is subject to changes in available representational resources. Text making is an agentive act of design and rhetoric, which depends upon and generates social relations.

In Chapter 7: Discussion of tentative categories, the meso and micro-level theoretical fields can retrospectively be recognised as having influenced the
construction of the *spectrum of social control* and the *spectrum of textual crafting* respectively. Researcher sensitivity to existing accounts of the use of text to perform identity and position oneself, and to text production as an act of design and rhetoric, underpinned the analysis of data, the category construction and the proposed *Model of text production as mastery*. To recontextualise this analysis further, and identify the widest-reaching implications, the macro-level theoretical field will be used as a basis for a final discussion that will begin to consider the issues raised for educators and policy makers with responsibility for supporting children to become proficient and empowered text producers in the digital age.

**Text production in the new capital age**

Building from the macro-level framing suggested using Giddens’ articulation of the late modern age and Castells’ depiction of the informational age in Chapter 4: *Assembling a theoretical framework*, children’s text production in social networking sites can be constructed in relation to ‘new global capitalism’ (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.108).

Social networking and text production within social networking sites can be imagined in relation to Giddens’ account of structuration theory where the structural principles involved in the organisation of society, e.g. capitalism; the structures, the rules and resources that feature in society, e.g. economic forces; and the structural properties, the reproduced social practices, e.g. the division of labour, combine to form systems that are reflexively monitored by human agents. The act of social networking can be regarded as contained within and contributing to the organisation of society, through the uptake of technological resources and ways of behaving.
around these resources and affordances, which in turn contain and contribute to the production and reproduction of social practices. The act of social networking can be analysed in relation to the social systems and structures that constitute it, but to understand text production within a social networking site, these systems and structures have to be recognised as mutually interdependent and generative.

Gee’s description of literacy in the new capitalist age builds from Castells’ views of capitalism in informational societies. These perspectives can be used to form a starting point for proposing that children can be regarded as being apprenticed into the production practices of the new capital age through text production in social networking sites. Based upon the data presented so far, these production practices can be regarded as involving the development of text production as mastery involving components of social control and textual crafting.

Gee acknowledges that the current proliferation of digital media allows everyone (with access to digital media) the potential to be producers in society (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.3). This opportunity is presented by Gee as a third stage in a trajectory of textual production that has evolved with technological and social change. In the first stage, in pre-literate societies, oral language is recognised as a mode of ubiquitous production in what Gee describes as an oral social formation. In this type of society, interpretation is potentially dialogic and negotiable. In the literate second stage of textual production, literate cultures are regarded as supporting a form of top-down institutionally-driven elitist textual production, where meaning is relatively fixed and subject to the power-forces of the controlling institutions. In the third stage, the proliferation of access to digital media allows
participants to produce written language in a way that resembles the discursive production of oral language. In this stage, the affordances of digital media allow written language to become more negotiable and dialogic; the power-forces are changed and institutional forms of literacy are challenged (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.125). This phenomenon can be reconciled with the spectrum of textual mastery proposed in this study, and in particular the spectrum of social control component that text production in social networking sites allows. Gee is clear that these stages can overlap in temporality. In relation to this study, the overlapping of the latter two stages is reflected in the formal educational context for literacy in which the participants are situated as school children, and the opportunities for text production within social networking sites that the participants engage in. The participants can be constructed as positioned at once within an institutionally literate and post-literate digital social context; and able, to some extent, to navigate easily from one context to another, and to traverse both contexts simultaneously.

Gee argues that within the digital age, official institutionally defined literate behaviour, e.g. schooling is being challenged by amateur producers, who, using the affordances of digital media, can compete with official and professional producers of text (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.3). Gee describes the contexts that support this challenging amateur production as “passionate affinity spaces” (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.69): spaces where people with a shared interest, and ‘passion’ for their endeavour organise themselves to engage in passionate affinity-based learning (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.70). Passionate affinity spaces share seven common features:

- Membership depends on interest over ‘official’ credentials;
• Members share different degrees of interest: some will be more passionate than others;
• Everyone can produce – although production will need to meet negotiated standards
• Some members will lead; others will follow. Leadership and mentoring are flexible concepts;
• Knowledge is distributed and shared;
• The space is not closed and membership varies;
• Members share a common quest to learn more and develop in some way

(adapted from Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.70-71).

The thematic analysis that precedes this chapter has argued that based on these data, children can be constructed as text producers who are fulfilling a variety of roles and experiences: text production as a pleasurable activity; text production to enact the text producing role; text production to achieve social positioning; text production to achieve social control. These roles and experiences are reflected in the features of the social networking site, which accordingly can be invoked as a passionate affinity space. In these spaces, the case study data demonstrates that the participants’ textual productions variably circumscribe and are circumscribed by social and technological forces; they adopt various roles which can be mapped onto a model of text production as mastery. Within this model, they can be constructed in terms of their ability to control their social world or be positioned within it; and by their ability to craft or merely create texts that contribute to the overall achievement of their social networking. Despite the relevant balance, for each participant, successful text
production relies on the achievement of some degree of proficiency along the spectrums of social control and textual crafting in Bebo.

Gee locates producers in passionate affinity spaces as ‘amateurs’ who are now able to network and produce knowledge (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.102). In this study, these ‘amateurs’ are constructed as having the potential to become masterful composers of text. The implication of this is that these ‘amateur’ producers are able to compete with and challenge the professional, credentialed and even institutional systems that control literate society. While Gee acknowledges that (in 2011) it is too soon to make grand generalisations about the impact of the work of amateurs, he suggests that some children, with the cultivation of their families and friends, can use their participation in these passionate affinity spaces to significantly enhance their trajectory into the ‘dominant upper class in developed capitalist societies’ (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.105). Gee presents this as an equity crisis involving accessibility to digital tools and parental cultivation, where some children are cultivated into “shape-shifting portfolio people”; a term derived from his earlier work (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.105; Gee, 2000), and others are not.

Gee positions these people and practices within what he describes as ‘the new capitalism’ (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.108). Gee differentiates new from old forms of capitalism by describing how working patterns have shifted since industrialisation in response to advances in science and technology; how profit now is more likely to be derived from the production of design ideas and knowledge rather than the production of commodities; and how team work and collaboration are required for the pooling of intelligence for economic survival in a rapidly changing environment.
Notably, in developed countries, Gee argues that new capitalist societies are comprised of three sorts of workers:

- symbol analysts: people who create new knowledge, products and designs and are well rewarded;
- technical workers: those who master technical knowledge to undertake routine and less well-paid work;
- service workers and industrial/ manual workers: poorly paid workers who represent their companies to the ‘public’.

(adapted from Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.108)

The most successful workers, according to Gee, are ‘shape-shifting portfolio people’: those who see themselves in entrepreneurial terms in relation to the new capital age. They are agentive, and regard themselves as projects for promotion. Their combined skills and experiences constitute a portfolio, which, through a process of reflection, can be shifted and adapted to suit their circumstances (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.109). In Gee’s new capitalism, one’s portfolio, and ability to accrue experiences and manage them correlates with social success. The most proficient of these workers have the potential to become the portfolio shape-shifting people who will occupy the upper class in the global world and the new capital age (Gee and Hayes, 2011, p.110).

Based upon the data presented so far in this study, Gee’s framework can be used to argue that, to varying degrees, Jennifer, Chloe and Elley are operating within the context of new capitalism and the opportunities afforded by it to be ‘amateur’ producers, who through their text production within the social networking site Bebo,
are learning to compete with those involved in more professional, institutional and
credentialed forms of text production. In this context, and due to their age and stage
in the trajectory of formal education, they can be constructed as apprentice text
producers, whose practices are circumscribed by the (expert) site designers who
(along with a range of other influences, including their social network) afford them
opportunities to learn; to innovate; to master; to undertake routine communication;
and to merely act responsively. Thus the participants in this study can be described
as being engaged in a form of apprenticeship that will lead to their ability to act as
‘amateur’ producers, who depending upon their level of mastery, will be able to
challenge existing and recognised practices and act entrepreneurially to realise
success. These children can be constructed as apprentices for the new capitalist age,
whose mode of production is textual and dependent upon the affordances of the
digital media available to them, and their access to ‘passionate affinity spaces’.

However, based upon the data presented in this study, I would argue that while
participation in a ‘passionate affinity space’ such as Bebo might apprentice children
into the production practices of the new capital age, their development of the
mastery of social control is more overtly theorised and documented than the
opportunities to develop as a text crafter, and to achieve mastery along this
spectrum. The furore that has surrounded the explosion of social networking
amongst young children has focused on social issues to such an extent that the
opportunities to support children’s ability to craft texts in this medium have been
overlooked.
In order to participate entrepreneurially, as the most successful ‘amateurs’ are regarded by Gee as doing, children’s ability to craft text, and in so doing, attend to the cohesion and coherence of their text; to the issues of design and rhetoric; to the skills of orchestration and remix; all with an eye to the aesthetic of the text and the social control that it affords them, will maximally contribute to the process of realising social control through text production.

The key implication emerging from this study therefore, is that when viewed from this macro-level theoretical perspective, those responsible for supporting children’s ability to produce meaningful texts in the digital age should acknowledge not only the social dimension involved, that currently is realised in the protectionist discourse that surrounds children’s social networking, but also acknowledge the alternative perspective that understands that children’s text production in digital spaces involves the development of mastery in textual crafting.

Textual crafting, when summoned in these terms can be defined as the ability to develop a critical awareness that directs the text producer’s attention to the aesthetics of the textual artefact and the contingent social control that can be achieved through this dimension. This aesthetic awareness involves pleasure, but also the ability to exercise control over the modes of representation made available to them as crafters of texts. These modes include the impressionistic and improvisational elements of a text, that when orchestrated knowingly and critically, can combine and balance to form a finely rendered textual composition.
In recontextualising this study within the macro-level theoretical field, and thereby accommodating the analysis that was born from considerations of the meso- and micro-level theoretical statements, Gee’s concept of ‘amateur’ production in the new capital age (2011, p.112) provides the basis for one key recommendation that is made in the light of the grounded theory approach that has been taken in this study: *Educators and policy makers should stand back from the constructed protectionist discourse that surrounds children’s use of social networking, and while recognising the extent of the justifiable concerns for children’s safety in these contexts, attend to additionally promoting opportunities for children to develop skills of textual crafting and analysis that may ultimately contribute to their success not only as text producers, but as part of the growing number of amateur producers who will compete for position in the new capitalist digital age.*

In this way, apprentice text producers who use the affordances of social networking to learn to produce texts will be supported in the development of their ability to craft texts and achieve social control in such a way that they attain the status of highly masterful yet ‘amateur’ text producers who can challenge the professional, authoritative and institutional forms of literacy. Accordingly, children’s willingness to construct profile pages in *Bebo* can be viewed as an apprenticeship into ‘the capitalist mode of production’ which ultimately will shape social relationships in information society (Castells, 2000a, p.502).

By returning to the study’s data, it is possible, using a consideration of their mastery as text producers in *Bebo* to envisage each participant as an apprentice who occupies a different position within this context. Using Gee’s description of three types of
workers who occupy new capitalist contexts (symbol analysts, technical workers, service workers), Jennifer, Chloe and Elley can be constructed as producers with different characteristics. To exemplify this key implication and how the recommendation might be implemented, the three participants will be discussed in turn.

Elley can be constructed as the least entrepreneurial text producer of the three participants. While she is agentive and purposeful, her Bebo profile is constructed in response to her desire to position herself as one amongst others. She skims other people’s profiles as a source of inspiration. She reflects upon the impression that her texts create and makes changes to her profile based upon what other people in the social network are doing to their profiles. She is cautious about the impact of her texts and does not wish to stand out from her social network as being different. Through her text production, Elley regards herself as a project for promotion, but only in relation to her wider network. Of the three participants, Elley is constructed as the most responsive text producer. As such she serves her network. The texts that she produces work in relation to her network’s texts. They imitate them and as such work to strengthen the collective identity of the network. Elley contributes to this collective text producing endeavour by participating, but not by initiating ideas. In relation to Gee’s framework, Elley’s use of Bebo might be regarded as preparing her to occupy a service worker status. Her productive time is spent surveying what others have done, and reacting to it. This work serves her network. While her work in the social networking site is primarily for herself, it is only made meaningful within the structure of the wider group. The benefit derived from Elley’s text production is realised in social rather than personal terms. Through this preparation,
Elley does not develop the technical mastery that might be associated with the ability to craft texts, neither does she develop the ability to control the social network in which she operates through entrepreneurial and creative behaviour. Instead, Elley, through her text production simply achieves belonging to the social network; and the social networking site, through Elley’s text production is grown.

To support Elley’s potential to engage more agentively in the new capital age, educators and caregivers might find ways to make explicit the implications for text in relation to social control and textual crafting. Through the use of scaffolded and collaborative experiences with text production in social networking sites, Elley might build confidence in her ability to craft texts that will achieve the social control that she desires, but does not yet achieve. This in turn might propel Elley towards more technical and masterful text production that enhances her ability to succeed in a digital new capitalist society.

Alternatively Jennifer is constructed as a controlled, engaged, purposeful and reflective text producer. In addition to using Bebo to achieve social positioning, Jennifer articulates how she derives a sense of pleasure from text production, and can be constructed as a text producer who enacts the text producing role to achieve the status of text crafter. Jennifer is concerned about the aesthetic of her profile. Her concern with impression management extends to producing a text that not only serves to affiliate her with her friends, but also to pleasing herself. Jennifer does not therefore merely serve her network. Using Gee’s description, Jennifer’s role can be aligned with the achievement of a technical status, and Jennifer can be constructed as a being concerned with the mastery of the technical knowledge involved in the
crafting of a perfect profile page. In so doing she serves her network and contributes to the collective identity of her network, but beyond this, in her quest for mastery and personal satisfaction, Jennifer serves herself. As a text producer, Jennifer is driven to acquire a status that differs from Elley. The technical affordances of Bebo, contribute to Jennifer’s development as an agentive text producer, and through her apprenticeship she will learn to contribute to a system where social and personal benefit can be realised. Jennifer, through her text production is allowed to belong to the social network, and additionally derives pleasure from the act of text producing. Through her quest for technical mastery she contributes to the quality of the collective impression created by the social networking site. The social networking site, as a result is enhanced aesthetically by Jennifer’s apprenticeship into technical mastery that is realised by her ability to adopt the role of designer and rhetor; and craft aesthetically pleasing texts.

To support Jennifer’s ability to engage more agentively in the new capital age, educators and caregivers might find ways to ensure that Jennifer’s mastery as a crafter of text is fully realised by her. This recognition could be used to further develop her awareness of how texts, through their aesthetic appeal, have the potential to contribute to how she is positioned in the social world. Opportunities to explicitly analyse the potential effect of her own and others’ texts could support Jennifer’s chances to develop the market-awareness required by those who become successful at creating knowledge, products and designs in the digital age. While Jennifer is an accomplished text crafter, this support might further develop Jennifer’s analytical potential and ensure greater potential for success in a digital new capitalist society.
Chloe is constructed as an agentive and critical text producer in relation to achieving social control. She argues that she controls the process of social networking and claims that she is indifferent to it. At the same time she states that she is addicted to the act of social networking, visiting her page several times a day. Chloe’s profile pages reveal that, despite her claims for independence, she chooses to conform to the style of texts found within her social network. Chloe uses social networking to affiliate with others and she constructs texts that reflect her awareness of how other members of the network are behaving as text producers. Chloe enjoys producing texts and is aware of the opportunities for social engineering that are afforded by social networking. She categorises people within her social networking site based upon how they present themselves, and has used Bebo to reposition herself following a geographical move away from school friends. Chloe can be constructed as a ‘knowing’ and powerful producer of texts who chooses to conform but who is also aware that she can use her texts to position herself as a leader and innovator, as well as to affiliate herself to others. She pursues a quest to start a trend, and claims not to be led by the text-producing behaviour of others in her network. In short, due to her reflexivity and independence, Chloe can be constructed as having mastered the act of text production in social networking sites to achieve social control; she has developed a critical awareness of how control, indifference and originality can support her endeavours to position herself as an independent profile creator with the potential to influence others’ text production. Chloe, through her text production and reflexive behaviour, can be positioned as not only belonging to, but as attempting to drive and control the behaviour of the social network. Chloe derives pleasure from the act of text producing in Bebo, but this pleasure is derived from her sense of
control and superiority, which in turn is facilitated by Chloe’s ability to separate herself from the act of social networking and framing of it as a pastime that she can take or leave. Through her quest for status and her ability to subvert conventions (e.g. the hacking game), Chloe displays a playfulness that contributes to her construction as an apprentice analyst. While she does not display the skills of textual crafting that Jennifer does, in Gee’s terms, Chloe presents the most potential to be constructed as an entrepreneur. Her knowingness and reflexivity, combined with her playful approach towards text production supports the construction of Chloe as an analytical text producer, and who (at the time of writing), if she develops the skills of crafting required of knowledge creators and designers, is the most likely apprentice into the shape-shifting portfolio class who occupy the most successful position in Gee’s new capitalist class (Gee, 2011, p.110).

To support Chloe’s ability to engage more agentively in the new capital age, educators and caregivers might find ways to make the skills of text crafting more explicit, and provide opportunities to develop these skills in collaborative, scaffolded settings. These occasions might be used to focus Chloe’s attention on the ways in which aesthetic awareness can contribute to her ability to use texts as a vehicle for her to market herself, thus managing her proficiency as a producer of text to achieve social control.

This polarised and over-simplistic account merely aims to contextualise the recommendation made by this study. Clearly this account raises many shortcomings. The comparison of each participant alongside Gee’s framework raises the issue of temporality, reliability and researcher subjectivity. While data were collected over
three episodes, a consequence of constructing data using a constructivist grounded theory approach is that data become synthesised into key moments that form the basis of descriptions. In so doing, temporally-situated data become abstracted from the individual context of their construction. It must be acknowledged that the descriptions presented here are constructions that serve to raise the data to a conceptual level. In so doing, the potential for the participants to be reconstructed in a different way at a different time, and by a different researcher is acknowledged and has been fully discussed already (see Chapter 5: Methodology and methods).

In addition, this constructivist account is by default, to a degree, deterministic. While my role as researcher has been explicitly acknowledged throughout the process, it is nevertheless recognised that the cases of Elley, Jennifer and Chloe, are presented as case studies that render them in oversimplified terms in order to begin to exemplify how this framework might be extended beyond a conceptual framework and into a practical application. Accordingly, the examples given are somewhat dramatic, and highly crafted.

Further, the examples given raise a practical dilemma for consideration. While one key recommendation for educators and caregivers is made by this study, a shortcoming of this study is that it does not attempt to explore how educators and caregivers might act on the recommendation in practical terms. To reiterate:

_Educators and policy makers should stand back from the constructed protectionist discourse that surrounds children’s use of social networking, and while recognising the extent of the justifiable concerns for children’s safety in these contexts, attend to additionally promoting opportunities for children to develop skills of textual crafting._
and analysis that may ultimately contribute to their success not only as text producers, but as part of the growing number of amateur producers who will compete for position in the new capitalist digital age.

Conclusion

This study, through a somewhat lengthy process of analysis and iteration has moved from articulating codes, thematic headings and tentative categories to elaborating categories, refining them and using them as the basis for the construction of a model that can be used to consider how pre teenage children behave as text producers in social networking sites. This model has subsequently been recontextualised in the light of the theoretical framework outlined as part of the process of achieving researcher sensitivity (Chapter 4: Establishing a theoretical framework). However, the data constructed and the model proposed do not support a consideration of how the recommendation made might be applied. Clearly, for reasons of ethics, in the current educational context, the use of social networking sites that are subject to minimum age restrictions, but that are above the age of the children in question, cannot be recommended. Further, for these very children, in this protectionist climate, the prospect of making visible their activities as text producers in social networking sites to those responsible for safeguarding them, would serve to alter the act itself. It must be stated therefore that this recommendation stands outside the current discourse of protectionism that has pervaded perceptions of children’s activity in social networking sites and their contingent vulnerability from predatory adults and unsociable behaviour. However, equally, this recommendation is made at a time when children’s use of social networking sites shows absolutely no sign of abating. As described in the review of literature, at the time of writing, Ofcom’s most recent Media Literacy Survey, published in 2011 reported that 47% of 10-12
year old internet users have a profile on a social networking site, an increase from 35% in 2009 (Ofcom, 2011, p.44). Therefore, despite overt ethical constraints, it must be accepted that text production in social networking sites is a popular activity amongst children who are deemed underage. In relation to their text production, these very children are still constructed as novices, with much to learn about the crafting process, the role of the text, author and recipient (Kellogg, 2008). To this end, this study makes no apology for the fact that it raises this tension as a limitation.

This tension is predicated upon the sense that childhood is strongly contested in the digital age (Alexander, 2010). The production of textual artefacts in social networking sites varies from the production of more traditional school-based texts, whether on screen or in print-based activities (Dowdall, 2006). In these contexts, the audience is usually singular (the teacher; the class); the audience is usually a passive consumer of the text, or private commentator on the text (the reader; the marker), and the text itself is a finite, complete entity. Therefore, the habitus, or disposition to act as a text producer in an online social networking site differs from the disposition to act as a text-producer in a traditional school setting. This difference must be recognised and understood by the educators responsible for promoting children’s ability to construct texts that will support their future success and entry into a globalised economy, where understanding the implications of the production of textual artefacts that serve as assets in a capitalist information age is relevant to all who engage in the process. In particular, the role of the peer-group and the role of the producers of the social networking sites themselves as two separate forces must be made explicit to the child-producers of profile pages in online social networking
sites. By understanding and engaging with the processes involved in the production of texts in online social networking sites (and in the future, in newer evolving portals for the production of texts and the construction of identity), educators can seek to develop the critical awareness of child text producers in these contexts, and support their ability to operate as a producer of texts for profit not loss, that will act to position the child successfully in relation to their peers and the wider ‘market’ that they exist in.

Viewed from this perspective, the role of the educator enlarges to include accepting responsibility for the child’s development as a producer in the new digital age. In this age, the currency that holds value is the ability to draw from available technological structures and awareness and understanding of notions of audience and public, to construct and manage representations of self in textual form that will support positioning. Text production in this arena becomes more than a functional act, subject to curricular whims and assessment regimes. Text production becomes in part the mastery of composition: the ability to balance impressionistic and improvisational elements; and as a whole, an act of identity (Luke, 2005). The new technological age repositions children as apprentices in this process, and as a consequence, their caregivers are positioned as mentors and collaborators with responsibility for supporting this apprenticeship. Access to this opportunity for apprentices and collaborators is via the ‘passionate affinity space’ that houses the act. Driven by the motivation to accrue profit from the work involved, children learn to produce texts in the marketised society made possible by the affordances of the new technological age. In this market, children are the new marketeers. They learn ‘on the job’, and they profit or fail. To succeed in supporting these children,
educators and caregivers must step away from the protectionist discourse surrounding children’s social networking, and endeavour to reconsider children as text producers in these contexts from an asset perspective. In so doing new, hybrid passionate affinity spaces may be constructed; spaces where educators and children together can collaborate to learn to be masterful text producers who craft textual artefacts with regard for their reception and consequence.

For Chloe, Jennifer and Elley, text production in Bebo can be regarded as an unprecedented opportunity to learn to function as youth producers in a textual market. Furthermore, in this market, the participants are able to realise profit and experience the rewards of their labour by achieving social status, pleasure and affiliation with others. Text production in social networking sites provides young people with varying opportunities to experience everyday market forces. In so doing, social networking sites provide a compelling and alternative institution in which young people can learn, as a producing class, how markets work, and how to take position within the markets that they enter. This learning is a form of apprenticeship, where the social network and the social networking site, through a synthesis of technological and social forces act to circumscribe and support the individual text producer who is driven by issues relating to identity and positioning.

To support children’s ability to develop further as text producers in the digital new capitalist age, social networking must be recognised by educators and policy makers as a meaningful context through which children’s mastery of essential skills for future success in a post-literate society can be developed. For this to happen, the protectionist discourse that currently surrounds children’s activity must be challenged, and social networking must be reconceptualised as a medium where
children’s creative and analytical skills that equate to mastery of textual crafting and the use of text production to achieve social control can be supported by those with responsibility for children’s future success. This study (conducted as a part-time endeavour, and interrupted by the arrival of two small children) has extended across a period of seven years. During this time, the phenomenon of social networking has grown exponentially, and habits have changed. To conclude this study, I contacted Jennifer to arrange to feedback provisional findings and to update myself on the participants’ current use of social networking sites. Jennifer informed me that she had deleted ‘her Bebo’ three weeks ago... “it was too embarrassing to keep” Jennifer stated, now aged sixteen. On further questioning it transpired that Chloe and Elley had also deleted their Bebo accounts, prior to Jennifer. All three girls now use Facebook.

While this happening serves to illuminate the transience of the portals that house text production in the digital age, more significantly it serves to distil the notion that the textual artefacts produced by young people in these transient contexts, are incredibly important. The texts produced during social networking have the potential to continue to work and realise social capital over time. Further, they are perceived by their producers as having the potential to create an impression long after their production, despite their transient nature. Accordingly the need for young people to be supported to achieve the ability to undertake masterful textual composition in online spaces should be recognised. The presentation of the Model of text production as mastery (Figure 5, chapter 7), made in this thesis, represents my small attempt to contribute to this need.
Appendices

Appendix 1: The features of Bebo ................................................. 344
Appendix 2: Research information sheet ..................................... 346
Appendix 3: First-parent consent letter ....................................... 348
Appendix 4: First-participant consent letter ............................... 350
Appendix 5: Second and third-parents’ consent letter ................. 352
Appendix 6: Second and third-participants’ consent letter .......... 354
Appendix 7: Interview schedule 1 June 2008 ........................... 356
Appendix 8: Interview schedule 2 September 2008 ..................... 360
Appendix 9: Interview schedule 3 April 2009 ............................ 362
Appendix 10: The criteria for the evaluation of grounded theory studies ................................................................. 364
Appendix 11: Example interview transcript (Data set J1) June 2008 ............................................................... 366
Appendix 12: Example interview transcript coding (Data set J1) June 2008 ................................................................. 370
Appendix 13: Example screenshot summary with initial provisional coding in red (Data set J1) June 2008 .... 372
Appendix 14: List of initial codes from screenshot and screenshot summary (Data set J1) June 2008 ............ 374
Appendix 15: List of initial codes from interview transcript (Data set J1) June 2008 ......................................................... 376
Appendix 16: Jennifer screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets J1, J2, J3 .............................................. 380
Appendix 17: Jennifer key codes by data set J1, J2, J3 ............... 400
Appendix 18: Jennifer key codes assimilated across the data sets .... 404
Appendix 19: Chloe screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets C1, C2, C3 ........................................ 406
Appendix 20: Chloe key codes by data set C1, C2, C3 .............. 440
Appendix 21: Chloe key codes assimilated across the data sets .... 444
Appendix 22: Elley screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets E1, E2, E3 ........................................ 446
Appendix 23: Elley key codes by data set E1, E2, E3 ............... 464
Appendix 24: Elley key codes assimilated across the data sets .... 468
Appendix 1: The features of Bebo

In order to contextualize this discussion, an example of a social networking sites profile page is needed. I will refer here to a paper that I published in 2006 which describes the then recently launched and popular social networking site, Bebo. Bebo was launched in 2005, and saw phenomenal growth in the UK. By 2008 it was reported as being the most popular social networking site among young users (12-15 years) (Ofcom, 2008a:55). Since this time, Bebo has lost market share to other social networking sites, losing out to Facebook in particular. Having been purchased in 2010, it has been recently relaunched to compete with larger sites\(^26\). In this paper, Bebo is described as a textual space that affords specific social behaviours and is constrained by social and pedagogic-style influences.

Bebo claims to be a website that is designed to help friends stay in touch in a number of ways. When you register with ‘Bebo’, you become a member. As a member, you are invited to post a range of information about yourself onto your pages. Members can create a ‘profile’ that gives information about themselves; a ‘photo gallery’ with room for comments; and an online ‘journal’ to be used to record important events or questions for other members. In order to make this information visible to others, you invite friends in your email contact list to take a quiz about you and in so doing, invite them to register with ‘Bebo’ too. If they accept this request, the friend becomes a member of ‘Bebo’ with access to information that the original member has posted and vice versa. Therefore, a group of members with each others’ email addresses all have access to discrete sets of information that they choose to display on the ‘Bebo’ website. In this way, a social network of friends a ‘Bebo’ community even, is created.

Drawing upon Davies’ discussion of teenaged informal on-line learning (Davies, 2006), the ‘Bebo’ community can be described in terms of a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger 1998). The ‘Bebo’ community members share a specific repertoire of practices where mutual engagement is essential. The community is reliant upon far more than geographical proximity and social engagement for its construction (ibid:72) and depends on the complementary processes of participation and reification in order for meaning to be negotiated (ibid:52). However, it must be noted that these processes are subject to the constraints of the ‘Bebo’ discourse itself, where the register is imposed by the ‘Bebo’ designers and influenced by

intrertextual influences from teen magazines. In addition, despite Kress’ articulations that through their use of new digital technologies, children are positioned as authors with more authority than ever before (Kress, 2005), the opportunities for authorship offered by the ‘Bebo’ discourse can be viewed as substantially pedagogic, reductive even, and as constrained by the intentions of others as the objective driven lessons that currently characterise primary English teaching (OfSTED, 2005).

Accepting that ‘Bebo’ texts and the communities of practice around them are subject to these constraints, ‘Bebo’ texts can be observed to be significantly different from the texts that children produce at school. ‘Bebo’ texts are vehicles for creating and maintaining social identities and relationships across time and space: a practice that is both overt and reflexive in a world where experiences and representations are increasingly mediated for us and by us (De Zengotita, 2005). The potential for reflexivity offered by the ‘Bebo’ site in relation to the formation of social identities appears to mark a significant departure from the ‘community of practice’ created within the equally constrained context of school-directed text production, where children produce texts as end products to meet the demands of their teacher(s) and curriculum.

(Adapted from Dowdall, 2006:153-163)

This extract attempts to describe the features of a social networking sites as a textual space and elaborate some of the processes that a young user will experience as she constructs a profile, creates a network of connections and embarks upon social networking.
Appendix 2: Research information sheet

About me I am a lecturer and researcher at the University of Plymouth, Faculty of Education. In addition, I am a qualified primary school teacher. I am currently collecting data for my doctoral research.

Aim The aim of my research is to learn about three pre-teenage children’s text production in online social network sites. For example, if children use Bebo, or MySpace, I want to find out what they think about the texts that they and their friends create online as they post, comment and communicate with each other.

What would be involved I would like to interview your child, in your home, three times between now and the end of 2008. We would need to be near a computer, so that your child (if they are willing) can show me and let me copy some examples of their online texts – e.g. their Bebo profile page. I only want to see texts that your child chooses to show me, and will not have access to their online work at any other times. If the texts identify other children, I will ask your child to gain their permission to allow me to include the texts in my data collection. I will tape record each interview and partially transcribe the conversations. Data will be stored securely in line with University of Plymouth guidelines.

Publication of results and access to data When we have finished our interviews, I will write about what I have learnt for my PhD thesis. I also hope to publish this work in academic journals and textbooks read by teachers and educational researchers. When I do this, I will protect your child’s anonymity. However, sometimes names and images might appear in screenshots that I would like to use. If this happens, I will make sure that your child cannot be identified by anyone reading my research by removing identifying information. Only the children involved, my supervisors and the examiners will see original screenshots. My work will be stored safely on my research computer.
Privacy, confidentiality and safety Your child’s privacy will be respected at all times, and the information that they share with me will be treated as confidential. However, if your child shares information that indicates that they may be at risk (online bullying, predatory online behaviour etc.), I will tell the child that I need to tell their carers/parents. I would use the framework that teachers use to define risks. This is the Every Child Matters Common Assessment Framework for children and young people.

Debriefing As part of each interview, I will share my ongoing findings and ideas with your child and ask for their opinions. At the end of the research process, I will prepare a summary of my findings to share with your child and you.

Right to withdraw It is important that you know that you can withdraw your child from the interviews at any point in the research process if you do not want them to continue.

Thank you very much for thinking about whether you are willing for your child to be involved in this research.

Clare Dowdall, University of Plymouth
Appendix 3: First-parent consent letter

Clare Dowdall
Faculty of Education
University of Plymouth
Exmouth
EX8 2AT

April 2008

Dear Mr and Mrs XXXXX

Digital texts and social identities research project consent letter

Jennifer has expressed an interest in taking part in my research project. In this letter and information sheet I will explain what I am trying to find out and how, so that you can check whether you are happy for her to take part and provide consent.

The aim of my research is to learn about three pre-teenage children’s text production in online social network sites. For example, if children use Bebo, or Myspace, I want to find out what they think about the texts that they and their friends create online as they post, comment and communicate with each other.

I need to find three children who use the computer for communicating with their friends. If you consent to Jennifer’s involvement in this research, I will ask Jennifer to invite two of her friends who also use the computer in this way, to take part in this research project. If Jennifer does not want to invite two friends to take part, she will be under no obligation to do this.

I attach an information sheet that describes the research project. If you are happy for Jennifer to participate, please can you sign the attached consent form? It is important that you know that you can withdraw your child from the interviews at any point in the research if you do not want them to continue.

Thank you very much for thinking about whether you would like to be involved in this research.

Yours sincerely

Clare Dowdall
Appendix 3: First-parent consent letter (continued)

Digital texts and social identities research project
Parent/ Carer consent form

Child’s name:

Address:

Home telephone:

Please circle as appropriate

I have read the information sheet for this research project  yes/ no

I give consent for my child to take part in the research project  yes/ no

I understand that my child’s privacy will be fully protected  yes/no

Parent/Carer’s name:

Signed:  Date:

Please return using the stamped address envelope.

Thank you
Appendix 4: First-participant consent letter

Clare Dowdall
Faculty of Education
University of Plymouth
Exmouth
EX8 2AT

April 2008
Dear

Digital texts and social identities research project consent letter

Thank you for being interested in taking part in my research project. In this letter and information sheet I will explain what I am trying to find out and how, so that you can check whether you are happy to take part.

The attached information sheet describes my project. I need to find three children who use social network sites like Bebo and MySpace for communicating with their friends. I know that you do this, and wondered if you might be able to invite two of your friends who also use the computer in this way, to take part in this research project. If you do not want to invite two friends to take part, you do not have to do this.

If you are happy to take part, please can you sign the consent sheet that is attached?

It is important that you know that you can withdraw from the interviews at any point in the research if you do not want to continue.

Thank you very much for thinking about whether you would like to be involved in this research.

Clare Dowdall
Appendix 4: First-participant consent letter (continued)

Digital texts and social identities research project
First-participant consent form

Child’s name:

Address:

Home telephone:

Please circle as appropriate:

I have read the attached consent letter for this research project yes/ no

I am happy to take part in the research project as described yes/ no

I understand that my privacy will be fully protected yes/no

Signed: Date:
Appendix 5: Second and third-parents’ consent letter

Clare Dowdall
Faculty of Education
University of Plymouth
Exmouth
EX8 2AT

April 2008
Dear

Digital texts and social identities research introduction letter

I am a researcher at the University of Plymouth’s Faculty of Education and former primary school teacher. I am writing to you because I am hoping to conduct some research for my PhD with children who use the computer to communicate with their friends. I am an ex-colleague of Mrs XXXXX (Deputy Head Teacher XXXXX). With her permission, I have asked her daughter, Jennifer, to ask her friends who use social network sites such as Bebo or MySpace if they would be interested in taking part in my research. Your child has expressed an interest.

I attach an information sheet that describes exactly what would be involved if you were able to give your consent for your child to participate.

I really appreciate your time in reading this letter and the attached information.

Please can I stress that I do not want to place you under any pressure to agree if this would be inconvenient.

I attach my telephone number and contact details. If you are willing for your child to be involved in this research project, I would be really grateful if you could contact me. At that point, I can arrange to meet you to explain the project in more detail and answer any questions.

Thank you very much for your time

Clare Dowdall
University of Plymouth
Appendix 5: Second and third-parents’ consent letter

(continued)

Digital texts and social identities research project
Parent/ Carer consent form

Child’s name:

Address:

Home telephone:

Please circle as appropriate:

I have read the attached consent letter for this research project yes/ no

I give consent for my child to take part in the research project y yes/ no

I understand that my child’s privacy will be fully protected yes/no

Parent/ Carer’s name:

Signed: Date:

Please return in the stamped addressed envelope.

Thank you.
Appendix 6: Second and third-participants’ consent letter

Clare Dowdall
Faculty of Education
University of Plymouth
Exmouth
EX8 2AT

April 2008

Dear

Digital texts and social identities research project child’s consent letter

Thank you for being interested in taking part in my research project. In this letter and information sheet I will explain what I am trying to find out and how, so that you can check whether you are happy to take part.

The attached information sheet describes my project. I need to find three children who use social network sites like Bebo and MySpace for communicating with their friends. I have asked Jennifer Allen to help me find two other children and she has suggested you. If you are interested, I will provide a letter for your parents/carers to explain my work and to check that they are happy for you to take part.

If you are happy to take part, please can you sign the consent sheet that is attached?

It is important that you know that you can withdraw from the interviews at any point in the research if you do not want to continue.

Thank you very much for thinking about whether you would like to be involved in this research.

Clare Dowdall
Appendix 6: Second and third participants’ consent letter

(continued)

Digital texts and social identities research project consent form

Participant consent form

Name:

Address:

Home telephone:

Please circle as appropriate:

I have read the attached consent letter for this research project  yes/ no

I am happy to take part in the research project as described  yes/ no

I understand that my privacy will be fully protected  yes/no

Signed:  Date:

Please return using the stamped addressed envelope.

Thank you
Appendix 7: Interview schedule 1 (June 2008)

Introduction
Introduce myself
Thank participant
Review privacy, confidentiality and right to withdraw issues
Explain process and check consent still stands

Context
When you go on the computer, what do you do and what sites do you use?
How long have you been doing it?
How did you find out about...?
How did you learn to do it?
Why do you use it...?
Can you show me your site and give me a tour?

Social networking
Who sees your site? Who are your friends?
Do you know all the people in person?
How do you get your friends?
Who are the most important people to you?
Can people be powerful using the site?
What types of people use the sites?
Do the sites play a part in your friendships?
Have you ever made or broken friends/ fallen out using the site?
Do you talk about yours/others pages with friends at school?
Appendix 7: Interview schedule 1 (June 2008) (continued)

Text construction

When you make a page, what features do you use?

What effect do you try to create with your page?

Do you change your pages at all?

Do you play around with how you look?

Where do you get your ideas from?

Do you think about what other people might think when you upload information?

Do you save your pages?

Do you spend time looking at/ working on your pages?

Do you worry about what people think?

What makes you change your profile page?

Do you check and edit your posts

Do you put more thought into some posts than others?

Interaction

How do you interact using the site?

Do you make comments/ receive comments

Do you let people comment on your page?

Can you control what other people write on your pages?

Do you use…. with other friends?

Reflections

How does sn affect your life?

If you were a parent, what would you think about social networking?
Appendix 7: Interview schedule 1 (June 2008) (continued)

Reflections (continued)

If you were a teacher what would you think?

How does it impact on your social life?

How do you get to be powerful in a sn?

What happens to kids who don’t sn?

Limitations

What limits what you can do?

Screen shot capture

Take screen shots and save file

Thank participant and plan next interview
Appendix 8: Interview schedule 2 (September 2008)

Introduction

Thank participant

Review privacy, confidentiality and right to withdraw issues

Explain process and check consent still stands

Catching up

Look at last profile page (print out of screenshot)

Generally what social networking have you been doing since we last talked?

Prompt: what sites have you visited, used, commented on?

Text construction

What changes have you made to your profile page since we last chatted?

Prompt: skin, main photo, about me blurb, song lyrics, videos, photos, say something, the other half of me, surveys, quizzes, blogs?

What have you created yourself and what have you posted from elsewhere?

What have you used your profile page for?

Prompt: friendship, entertainment, creativity, image representation

What have you worked on and planned most carefully?

Where have you responded to others?

Have other people contributed to your page?

How have other people influenced your page?

What sort of comments have you had recently?

How have you responded to them?

What have you deleted?
Appendix 8: Interview schedule 2 (September 2008)

Text construction (continued)

What have you started that other people have copied?

What is the most important part of your page?

How has Bebo affected your life since we last talked?

   Prompt: over the holidays... and now you are back at school?

How has Bebo affected your friendship recently?

Is there anything else?

Take screen shots and save file

Thank participant and plan next interview
Appendix 9: Interview schedule 3 (April 2009)

**Introduction**

Thank participant

Review privacy, confidentiality and right to withdraw issues

Explain process and check consent still stands

**Catching up**

What have you been using and doing for social networking since last time?

What has changed on your site? Why have you changed this?

What has stayed the same? Why?

**A typical session**

Describe a typical SN session

   How do you begin?

   Do you have a routine?

   What else is going on while you are SNing?

   What decisions do you have to make?

   What activities do you do as part of SNing/ while SNing?

   What changes do you make to your pages?

   How do you finish the session?

   How do you communicate with friends while SNing?

**Text construction**

In personal terms, what does SN achieve for you?

   What do you like about doing it?

   Why do you do it?
Appendix 9: Interview schedule 3 (April 2009)

Text construction (continued)

Why don’t you stop doing it?

In social terms, what does SN achieve for you?

What does it do for your social life that couldn’t be achieved f2f

Why do your friends do it?

How does it affect your friendships?

What sort of things influence your social networking and page design?

What range of other texts do you compose at school and at home?

Can you describe the full range of ways that you communicate with your friends?

How do you stay on top of everything and keep up to date with everything? Is it a struggle?

Take screen shots and save file

Thank participant and plan to interview again if necessary
Appendix 10: Criteria for the evaluation of constructivist grounded theory studies (Adapted from Charmaz, 2006:183)

Credibility
Has your research achieved intimate familiarity?
Are the data sufficient to merit the claims (range, number, depth of observations)?
Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?
Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?
Are there strong links between the gathered data and your argument/analysis?
Is there enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment and agree with the claims?

Originality
Are your categories fresh? Do they offer new insights?
Does your analysis offer a new conceptual reading of the data?
What is the social and theoretical significance of this work?
How does your grounded theory challenge, extend or refine current ideas, concepts and practices?

Resonance
Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience?
Have you revealed both liminal and unstable taken-for-granted meanings?
Have you drawn links between larger collectivities or institutions and individual lives, when the data indicate?
Does your grounded theory make sense to your participants or people who share their circumstances? Does your analysis offer them deeper insights about their lives and worlds?

**Usefulness**

Does your analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds?

Do your analytic categories suggest any generic processes?

If so, have you examined these generic processes for tacit implications?

Can the analysis spark further research in substantive areas?

How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?
Appendix 11: Example interview transcript

(Data set J1) 29th July 2008

(Note: Jenni’s Bebo was deleted when computer broke down and she recreated it in June. Also we had problems accessing bebo until the end of this interview)

Introductory blurb

1. When you go on the computer, what do you do and what sites do you use?

2. Bebo and YouTube and I go on MSN as well

3. Right, so what do you use Bebo for?

4. Ermm Its just like a page about yourself and you can talk to your friends as well as MSN so that is it really

5. And what do you use YouTube for?

6. Listening to music and seeing videos yeah

7. And what do you use MSN for?

8. Just like talking to friends like talking to friends

9. So … with Bebo when you go on to talk to your friends is that different from when you use MSN?
10. Yeah because on Bebo you have to leave comments and on... I don’t know how to explain but on MSN it is live and they’re liket here... they have to be online but with Bebo you have to leave comments and they ,might not reply until the next day, so...it’s slower

11. So it’s a bit slower, it’s different

12. Yeah

13. Ok… ermm how long have you been… I am going to talk mainly about Bebo… so how long have you been using Bebo?

14. Well my other bebo I started in 2006 probably yeah,

15. What month, can you remember?

16. I think it was August because my friend helped me set it up and...

17. That was going to be my next question, how did you find out about it?

18. Yeah my friend set it up for me...

19. So did she or he…
20. She already had it yeah

21. And did you see it at her house?

22. Yeah because she like had it for a lot longer than me and she just said “do you want to start?” and I said “yeak okay” and she helped me set it up and told me what to do and how it worked

23. Okay brilliant, and how did you actually learn to do it then?

24. She like showed me how to use different things but erm it changes a lot, like they add new things and then you just like pick it up as you go along really

25. Just by trying things out?

26. Yeah or by asking your friends, like if they have seen it as well so yeah

27. And can you show me your site and give me a tour of it?

28. Yeah

(Discussion and silence while we get computer going)

29. Erm so I will just carry on asking questions and then we will go back and look at it… so who sees your site?
30. My friends and only my friends, like only the people that I have agreed can see it

31. How many friends have you got on there?

32. I have probably got 40 now but I used to have a lot more because... but like you just add them so it is ok

33. So how are you going through the process of adding them again? How are you refinding them?

34. Erm well if you go on friends and they have got them you just add them off of that normally

35. So that’s kind of a bit of a job that you have got to do!

....... End of Sample interview transcript....
Appendix 12: Example interview transcript coding

(Data set J1) 29th July 2008

This is a scanned representation of a manually coded interview transcript. Codes are recorded in different colours to reflect the ongoing and repeated initial coding process.
Appendix 13: Example screenshot summary (based on memo writing) with initial provisional coding in red (J1)

(Data set J1) 29th July 2008

Description and analysis of Jennifer’s screen shots 1-7

Jennifer’s Bebo page is composed on a light and summery skin, which she has found by browsing others’ pages and checking out the skin makers that she likes borrowing. She selected this skin from a skin maker SiianaaStyles selecting. The skin includes stylised sea and pool shots, featuring bright watery colours, and the word fun. A part of one of the photographs is used as a motif which appears at intervals throughout the profile.

Jennifer’s profile name is Jenii. Jennifer is subscribing to the popular convention of altering her name conforming to popular conventions. This involves adding vowels to change the look but not the pronunciation of her name and appears to mimic mimicking the skin maker’s choice of name spelling choosing how to present self. This signals that Jennifer is conforming conforming to a trend that is popular amongst her social network and peer group as a way of affiliating affiliating to others with others and presenting herself.

Jennifer’s profile photograph appears to have been selected to suit the style of the skin selection. Almost half of the shot is of a blue sky and clouds, which mirrors one of the shots in the skin template. It is a relatively unusual profile photo because it shows five people sitting a short distance away on a grassy bank, in the sun. More usually, profile photographs in Jennifer’s social network include posed close-up shots, as shown in the friends section. Jennifer’s is a carefully composed careful composition image, arranged and taken using a mobile phone. No one individual’s image is dominant or clear. However Jennifer is positioned in the middle of the shot and is smiling directly at the camera. This choice of profile photo signals Jennifer’s confidence to break with convention breaking with convention and make decisions decision making about her profile page based on artistic content as well as affiliation
and conformity. It also represents Jennifer at the heart of a group of friends, rather than as an individual positioning, group versus individual.

As a signature-strip, Jennifer includes her full name in capitals JENII/XXXXX which is contained by a heart emoticon at the beginning, and ;x at the end decision about artistic content and display. Underneath her name she has added some lyrics from an American Rock Band *Paramore*:

‘Because I’ll never let this go,
But I can’t find the words to tell you
I don’t want to be alone
But now I feel like I don’t know you display of knowledge about music’

These words say much about Jennifer. They display her musical taste display of musical taste, display of knowledge, display of personal style, awareness, and affiliations as well as having the potential to imply a message to someone display of cleverness, sophistication, wit, or a wider group of people within in her audience and social network. The use of lyrics on a profile page is an evolved use of music as a signifier of identity signifying identity. The inclusion of these lyrics can be viewed as the 21st century, more subtle, online equivalent to walking through a park carrying a ghetto blaster which is blaring out your chosen tracks as a means of identity performance, or covering a school book with a page from a teen magazine like Smash Hits, which includes lyrics from current popular songs. In all these examples, artefacts from popular/teen culture are being assimilated into the identity of the ‘performer’ assimilation of artefacts into identity. This allows a complex form of affiliation, where Jennifer is aligning herself with all other Paramore fans, as well as the micro-fan set which exists within her social network.
Appendix 14: List of initial codes derived from screenshots and screenshot summary

(Data set J1) 29th July 2008

Borrowing
Mimicry
Conforming
Affiliation
Selecting
Careful composition
Breaking with convention
Decision making
Choosing
Positioning amongst peers
Group member rather than an individual
Displaying taste
Displaying personal style
Displaying knowledge (music, pc)
Implying meaning through song inclusion
Signifying identity
Assimilation of popular cultural artefacts into identity
Aligning with macro fan set/Aligning with micro fan set
Positioning within the social world
Dynamic interaction
Ownership of text
Awareness of polyvocality
Interaction of text and image
Suggesting emotion
Reflection of language from popular culture
Reflective writing
Presentation of self
Skilful

374
Combination of self and popular culture – mixing
Using text to meld influences that are internal and external
Composing carefully
Complex artefact of self
Orchestrating text
Complimenting
Performing allegiance
Rebuilding
Controlling style and effect
Structured performance circumscribed
Open text composed freely
Purposeful texts
Achieving desired effect
Consistency of impression created and representation
Micro identity work
Macro identity work
Change over time
Awareness of impact of each micro section on the whole
Integration and realisation of self and external influences
Influences from popular culture
Subscription to desired lifestyle/image
Appendix 15: List of initial codes derived from interview transcript

(Data set J1) 29th July 2008

Interjection numbers follow each code

Representing self 4
Communication 4
Slower communication different to txt 10
Owning Bebo 14
Learning from others 16
Initiation and induction 18, 22
Learning from others and by trial 24
Role of collaboration when building network 34, 38
Bebo as work – building network 34
Influence of friends on network 38
Intersection between Bebo and school 47
Awareness of potential for social engineering 51
Awareness of potential audience 55
Awareness of need for vigilance 55
Awareness of potential for commercial exploitation 57
Not a big part of friendship – denial of importance 63
Adjunct to existing friendship 63
Not a significant part of friendship 65-71
Habitual and regular usage 73
Use it too much 73
376
Awareness of potential for misunderstanding 81
Strategies to repair friendship 83
Strategies to correct misunderstandings 85
Texts seeping from Bebo to school to Bebo 86-88
Bebo texts as topics for playground discussion 88
Bebo texts as artefacts of popular culture 88
Multidimensional texts- texts within texts 93
Continual changes to skin 106
Borrowing content from friends as acceptable practice 114
Showing affiliation by copying/ borrowing ideas 118
Awareness of impact 120
Dynamic texts subject to change 120
Organised and careful text creation 126
Planning and editing 126
Thoughtful text creation 126
Text having impact on others 128
Control of appearance 128
Demonstration of technical skill 128
Personification of Bebo 132
Bebo as an entity and power 132
Site for personal expression 140
Impression management 140
Regular change to profile 142
Complete restyling v slight changes 146
Change to borrowed and uploaded artefacts 156
Appendix 15: List of initial codes derived from interview transcript (continued)

(Data set J1) 29th July 2008

Acceptable levels of changing materials 162
Collaborative composition 160
Quest for originality 166
Quest for originality 168
Ownership of page, my page 170
How I want it to be 170
Spectrum of comments private to public 172
Everyday comments 182
Comments as routine gestures of friendship 182
Significant and insignificant text 184
Conventional commenting behaviour 188
Controlling comments 195
Private and public comments 195
Viewing others pages 204
Working on own page as a priority 204
Introspection as a text producer 204
Derivation of pleasure from working on a page 206
Pride and self-satisfaction 206
Creativity as a text producer 208
Sense of achievement 212
Aspiring for originality 212
378
Sharing material

Aspires to be the originator; to be copied

Ownership it’s mine for me

Others as commentator

Role of words v images and video

Discord between assertion that bebo is unimportant to friendship and extent of usage

Critical use of bebo

Bebo as a social activity and past time, done with friends

Cyber bullying

Conventional use of txt and formal language everyone knows

Stage for performance

Power through ability to control text

Bebo as a way of talking to friends

I liked the idea and I copied it

Reflection of likes from one page to another as a source of affiliation

Copied from others
Appendix 16: Jennifer screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets J1, J2, J3

J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:1)

Figure J1:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:2)

Figure J1:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:3)

Figure J1:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:4)

Figure J1:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:5)

Figure J1:5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:6)

Figure J1:6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
J1 screenshots 29.07.08

(J1:7)

Figure J1:7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Jennifer’s Bebo page is composed on a light and summery skin, which she has found by browsing others’ pages and checking out the skin makers that she likes. She selected this skin from a skin maker *SiianaaStyles*. The skin includes stylised sea and pool shots, featuring bright watery colours, and the word *fun*. A part of one of the photographs is used as a motif which appears at intervals throughout the profile.

Jennifer’s profile name is *Jenii*. Jennifer is subscribing to the popular convention of altering her name. This involves adding vowels to change the look but not the pronunciation of her name and appears to mimic the skin maker’s choice of name spelling.

Jennifer’s profile photograph appears to have been selected to suit the style of the skin. Almost half of the shot is of a blue sky and clouds, which mirrors one of the shots in the skin template. It is a relatively unusual profile photo because it shows five people sitting a short distance away on a grassy bank, in the sun. More usually, profile photographs in Jennifer’s social network include posed close-up shots, as shown in the *friends* section. Jennifer’s is a carefully composed image, arranged and taken using a mobile phone. No one individual’s image is dominant or clear. However Jennifer is positioned in the middle of the shot and is smiling directly at the camera.

As a signature-strip, Jennifer includes her full name in capitals JENII/XXXXX which is contained by a heart emoticon at the beginning, and ;x at the end. Underneath her name she has added some lyrics from an American Rock Band *Paramore*. These words display Jennifer’s musical taste, awareness, and affiliations as well as having the
potential to imply a message to someone, or a wider group of people within in her audience and social network.

Beneath the lyrics, Jennifer has written an *about me* statement. This statement is written in the first person, using a series of *if i* statements. This has the effect of conveying a powerful sense of who Jenii is and wishes to be. Jennifer presents herself first with a statement about herself, *i love everything about summer*, and then with a statement which positions her within her social world, *apparently i laugh at anything...*

The statement about friends and family meaning *a lot more than everything to me* works alongside and supports the profile photo to clearly inform the reader that Jenii is a popular, loving and sociable person.

---

*i love everything about summer, apparently i laugh at anything but i dont see how that can be a bad thing, i love my family and friends they mean alot more than everything to me, i love music, it can help alot sometimes, and i really like paramore + pendulum + fall out boy, im also actually in love with the song ultraviolet by the stiff dylans, i am pretty obsessed with Friends, i believe almost everything i get told, i dont really care what people think of me, i have alot of best mates that are boys, i make alot of mistakes, first year at teign was pretty good, i've watched people change, for the better and for the worse, but i've made so many amazing new mates (: , im pretty happy with my life atm; its not perfect, but i wouldn't change it for the world.*
Alongside Jennifer’s *about me* statement, she has included a *SomeoneSpecial* module. This module is a written tribute to her current best friend. In addition, Jennifer includes a photograph of *The other half of me*. This module provides another opportunity to perform allegiance, as it allows Jennifer to choose a friend from her network who she views as her best friend, or mirror image. The friend chosen is different to her * SomeoneSpecial* friend.

At the time of our first interview, Jennifer only had 46 friends within her network because her profile was in the process of being rebuilt. Within the *friends* module, 16 friends have been selected for inclusion.

Jennifer has uploaded only one photograph album, which she has entitled *Life:* The featured photograph reflects the theme of the profile, being a sunny sea and sky-scape. Jennifer includes music and TV videos, all of which she has alluded to earlier in her *about me* statement. She also permits her friends’ comments to be shown as a roll down score of one-sided seemingly light-hearted conversations that reflect the events of the day.

The final module that Jennifer includes is a lengthy *Best Profile Survey*. This is a template survey where Jennifer has answered a long set of questions about herself, her likes and dislikes, things she has done, what she looks for in a partner, and other random elements.

*J1 screenshot data and summary END*
Jennifer - J2 screenshots 16.09.08

(J2:1)

Figure J2:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
(J2:2)

Figure J2:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Jennifer - J2 screenshots 16.09.08

(J2:3)

Figure J2:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure J2:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Jennifer - J2 screenshot summary from screenshots 16.09.08

Jennifer has completely reworked and simplified her profile page since interview J1 and explains that she has changed her profile photograph several times since the previous interview (J2:24). Now, the skin, profile photograph and about me blurb are different. However, she retains a similar light, upbeat, friendly style, and states that her profile photo is similar to the previous one, featuring herself amongst friends on a day out at the weekend (J2:26). This profile photograph is composed purposefully with a group of friends. Jennifer describes how they crafted the photograph together, using their mobiles, but not for the purpose of the Bebo profile (J2:30-41). She has reduced her about me blurb to contain personal information and a short, three line description:

amazing friends; mean the world,  
love one tree hill & the O'C,  
and of course, Friends (:.

Jennifer has also reduced the number of videos, but still includes the lengthy Best Profile survey, with edited information. Her name Jenii and signature strip remain the same. Generally, while being much reduced in content, the overall impression is similar to the first set of data, with a light and cheerful tone. The background is white, and the profile is punctuated with little line-drawn hearts, that form part of the skin.

J2 screenshot data and summary END
Jennifer - J3 screenshots 21:04.09

(J3:1)

Figure J3:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Jennifer - J3 screenshots 21:04.09

(J3:2)

Figure J3:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure J3:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure J3:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Jennifer J3 screenshot summary from screenshots 21:04.09

Jennifer has redesigned the look of her profile page since interview J2. The skin, profile photograph and *about me* blurb is different again. Generally, the overall impression is moodier, as Jennifer has chosen to use a dark skin and to remove the conversational text. She has further reduced her *about me* blurb to just contain two lines of personal information, detailing her name and school location. She still includes videos and photograph modules, but has removed the *Best Profile* survey. Jennifer explains in the interview that she finds *Bebo* applications (apps) annoying, preferring to include just videos, pictures and comments from friends (J3:6-10). On her new profile, her name has been changed to *jeenii*. Her profile photograph is a shot of her and a friend taking a photo of themselves in a mirror with a mobile phone: a shot that can be found on other friends’ profile pages. Jennifer explains that she has changed her profile because she wanted it to be simple (J3:10). She also explains that her friends have simplified their pages too (J3:18). While Jennifer has made these changes, she claims that she still uses *Bebo* regularly, and that it is really important to her (J3:50-60). She takes pride in its appearance *It is your own little page and it is really cool* (J3:87).

J3 screenshot data and summary END
Appendix 17: Jennifer - Key codes by data set J1, J2, J3

Jennifer Data set J1:

The following key codes were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 1 (screenshot data, screenshot summary and interview transcript).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Imposing meaning through song inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aligning with macro fan set</td>
<td>Influences from popular culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning with micro fan set</td>
<td>Integration and realisation of self and external influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilation of popular cultural artefacts into identity</td>
<td>Interaction of text and image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of polyvocality</td>
<td>Macro identity work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>Micro identity work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking with convention</td>
<td>Awareness of impact of each micro section on the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careful composition</td>
<td>Mimicry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change over time</td>
<td>Open text composed freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing</td>
<td>Orchestrating text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining self and popular culture – mixing</td>
<td>Ownership of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex artefact of self</td>
<td>Performing allegiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complimenting</td>
<td>Positioning amongst peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composing carefully</td>
<td>Positioning within the social world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conforming</td>
<td>Presentation of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency of impression created and representation</td>
<td>Purposeful texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling style and effect</td>
<td>Rebuilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Reflection of language from popular culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying knowledge (music, pop culture)</td>
<td>Reflective writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying personal style</td>
<td>Selecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying taste</td>
<td>Signifying identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic interaction</td>
<td>Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving desired effect</td>
<td>Structured performance circumscribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggesting emotion</td>
<td>Subscription to desired lifestyle/image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group member rather than an individual</td>
<td>Using text to meld influences that are internal and external</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jennifer Data set J2:

The following key codes were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 2 (screenshot data, screenshot summary and interview transcript)

*Accepting others comments*  *Pride in being independent*
*Affiliation*  *Pride in using my own ideas*
*Audience awareness*  *Purposeful text production*
*Building up love- self-publicising*  *Quest to demonstrate popularity*
*Change*  *Reciprocated appreciation*
*Regular change*  *reflecting current taste and interest*
*Collaboration*  *Similar styles to before*
*Commenting as chit chat*  *Sharing*
*Copying*  *Simplification*
*Crafting*  *Text production as entertainment*
*Creativity*  *Trickery*
*Editing skill*  *Unpurposeful photo crafting*
*Making effort*  *Updating*
*Multi-tasking*  *Updating to stay current*
*No change*  *
*Pointless apps*  *
*Pride in being copied*  *
Jennifer - Data set J3:

The following key codes were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 3 (screenshot data, screenshot summary and interview transcript).

Agency as a designer
Aesthetic design decisions
Affiliation
Being aware of what's going on
Change
Making choices
Concern with appearance
Control over change
Control over display
Copying as a compliment
Display
Display of shared interests
Everyday behaviour
Use to build familiarity
Improvement
Inclusion of 'popular' culture
Normal behaviour
Ownership
Importance of ownership
Performance
Pride
Importance of profile
Purposeful use – to gain reaction
Selective use – fit for purpose
Selection of friends
Simplification
Vigilance – checking others for material to use
Importance of visibility
Appendix 18: Jennifer - Key codes assimilated across the three data sets

The key initial codes from data sets 1-3 were synthesised and grouped to complete the initial coding process. Each group of key codes was given a heading (in bold).

**Borrowing and sharing:** Borrowing, mimicry, showing affiliation by copying/borrowing ideas, borrowing content from friends as acceptable practice, sharing material, viewing others’ pages

**Collaboration:** *Bebo* as group work – building a network, collaboration to produce texts for inclusion, collaboration when building a network, learning from others, learning from self, dynamic interaction, awareness of polyvocality

**Celebrity as a text producer:** Aspiring to be the originator - to be copied, being copied as a sign of esteem, aspiring for originality, the quest for originality, demonstration of technical skill

**Personal satisfaction:** Creativity as a text producer, thoughtful text production, how I want it to be, reflective writing, suggesting emotion, introspection as a text producer, site as a space for personal expression, module production as a creative and thoughtful act

**Ownership:** Choosing, ownership of page, my page, decision making, ownership, it’s mine, it’s for me, selecting, ownership of text, working on own page as a priority, derivation of pleasure from working on a page, pride and self-satisfaction, sense of achievement

**Site as a vehicle for integration of popular culture and identity:** Assimilation of popular cultural artefacts into identity, integration and realisation of self and external influences, using text to meld influences that are internal and external, combination of self and popular culture – mixing, implying meaning through song inclusion, signifying identity, influences from popular culture, reflection of language from popular culture, multidimensional texts

**Movement across sites:** Texts seeping from *Bebo* to school to *Bebo*

**Personification of *Bebo***: Personification of *Bebo*, *Bebo* as an entity, *Bebo* texts as topics for playground discussion, *Bebo* texts as artefacts of popular culture
Performance and audience: Displaying taste, displaying personal style, stage for performance, complex artefact of self, impression management, presentation of self, representing self, awareness of potential audience, text having an impact on others

Role in friendships: Bebo as a social activity and pastime, done with friends, not a big part of friendship – denial of importance, adjunct to existing friendship, not a significant part of friendship, level of friendship restricted to friends at school, discord between assertion that Bebo is unimportant to friendship and extent of usage

Control and power: Careful composition, orchestrating text, controlling style and effect, composing carefully, controlling comments, consistency of impression created and representation, achieving desired effect, organised and careful text creation, planning and editing, control of appearance, power through ability to control text, awareness of impact of each micro section on whole, significant and insignificant text, interaction of text and image

Positioning: Subscription to desired lifestyle and image, group member rather than an individual, aligning with macro and micro fan set, positioning within the social world, awareness of potential for social engineering, performing allegiance, affiliation, potential for conflict

Change: Change to borrowed and uploaded artefacts, acceptable levels of changing materials, change over time, continual changes to skin, dynamic texts subject to change, regular changes to profile, complete restyling v slight changes

Conventions and Strategies: Conventional commenting behaviour, conventional use of text and formal language – everyone knows, agreed rules for damage limitation when fall outs occur, strategies to correct misunderstandings, conforming, breaking with conventions

Awareness of impact of different audience – private and public on text production: Structured performance circumscribed, open text composed freely, micro identity work, macro identity work, spectrum of comments private to public, private and public comments, comments as routine gestures of friendship, everyday comments,

Other: Slower communication, different to SMS texting, regular usage, use it too much, complex reading strategies required to access big picture, complimenting, skilful, awareness of potential for commercial exploitation, cyberbullying, critical use of Bebo
Appendix 19: Chloe – screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets C1, C2, C3 C1

C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:1)

Figure C1:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:2)

Figure C1:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure C1:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:4) Chloe

Figure C1:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:5)

Figure C1:5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:6)

Figure C1:6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:7)

Figure C1:7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C1 screen shots 30.06.08

(C1:8)

Figure C1:8 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Chloe C1 screenshot summary from screen shots 30.06.08

Chloe’s Bebo page is composed on a bright yellow skin with the logo *Smile if you’re gay!* printed under a rainbow. The skin is completely plain apart from this. Chloe’s profile name is MissChloe<lollylilliepop>. She has also included her name Chloe Jane alongside her profile photograph. Chloe’s profile photograph is a tilted self portrait taken using a phone or camera in her left hand. She is smiling directly at the camera and has tilted the camera to achieve a geometric effect.

As a signature strip, Chloe has included three kisses ‘xxx’ and nothing else. Underneath this is a list of personal information: gender – female; last active; relationship status - down for whatever; hometown; Member since... . Beneath this information, Chloe has included a Miss Chloe Says statement which reads *Me Party In June Gna Be The Bestest*, followed by a teeth-baring emoticon. On the right hand side of the profile, Chloe includes three personal statements:

```
Me N My Ponies Together Foever! x;
Shammy && Winston x Love You Boys x

---

remeber to keep yourself alive.... IT is the important thing😊

---

Wot if You Beried a chicken leg bone here..... do you think people will think that a chicken died here..... or will they no we had a BBQ?? -Jenii good tys
```

These statements demonstrate her awareness of audience. They allow Chloe the opportunity to reflect her interests; to offer a light-hearted piece of personal advice; and to allude to an event and conversation between herself and her friend, positioning herself and affirming a relationship.

The rest of the profile page is an amalgam of Bebo modules, chosen and uploaded by Chloe. She includes a friends module, showing 24 of 169 friends; and a Which
Footballer are you? Quiz, with her result published. The result includes a photograph and a description of her characteristics. Underneath the quiz result is a list of other quizzes that friends can ‘take’ and publish on their own profile. Chloe includes three more quiz modules that follow the same format: a *When are you going to die?* quiz; and a *What Common Stereotyope Do You Fit?* quiz. In each module, the result is published, along with the opportunity for readers to take the quiz. A list of alternative quizzes is also included.

Chloe has included a blog module on her page. She uses this to display her ‘crewage’. Crewage is a word made up by Chloe and her friends to mean gang members. Under this heading, Chloe has listed her friends. She has awarded each friend with a label and emoticon as a way of adorning them.

Chloe has a *photos* module, and underneath that a *Big Photo* module where she includes a photo of her and a friend, taken with a phone, in a mirror. Below this she includes a *Zodiac* module, describing her attributes; and a module called *bands*, which features a mixture of celebrities and images of her own creation. These images reflect her interests and include her horses and friends as well as an image from High School Musical.

At the bottom of her profile, twenty comments from friends are included. This profile page does not include any video modules.

**C1 screenshot data and summary END**
Chloe - C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:1)

Figure C2:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:2)

Figure C2:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:3)

Figure C2:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:4)

Figure C2:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:5)

Figure C2:5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:6)

Figure C2:6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:7)

Figure C2:7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C2 screen shots 22.09.08

(C2:8)

Figure C2:8 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Chloe C2 screenshot summary from screen shots 22.09.08

Between interview one and two, Chloe has evolved her profile. Some modules remain the same, such as the crewage list, and the use of a quiz. Some modules are new.

At the top of Chloe’s profile she includes her profile photo and her current user name: ChloeJane, which she has changed from Miss Chloe (screenshot C1:1). She has selected a plain turquoise skin, with a strapline: *Let’s Flip A Coin. Heads we’ll be together, tails, we’ll flip again.* At the end of the personal information, it changes to a white background. Chloe’s profile photograph shows Chloe taking her own photograph in a mirror. Her gaze is at the camera’s viewfinder. Further down the profile page, Chloe has chosen to include a module called *The Other Half Of Me.* This is a facility that shows the person in your network who you are closest friends with. For Chloe, it is her friend Georgie. In Georgie’s photo, she is also holding a camera and taking a photograph of herself in the mirror, literally reflecting the visual image that Chloe has presented at the top of the page.

Accompanying her user name and photo, Chloe has introduced some text of her own: first a motto “*ARM OUT OF SLING stuff wot the doctor says it didn’t hert lol !!X*”. She also has written an ‘*about me blurb*’. This blurb begins *(Y)*Family, *Friends, My Animals*... The sign preceding the text is taken from the conventions used in Instant Messaging and stands for a ‘thumbs-up’ sign, meaning ‘I like…’. Chloe lists her favourite possessions and pastimes using a combination of conventional script, emoticons, conventions from instant messaging, and interjections. These are designed to help her reader. She uses the term *(bludd)* alongside *London* to signal her awareness of
London street-talk. Chloe has selected 6 of her 178 friends for display on her profile page within her friends module.

Beneath the about me blurb, she has written a tribute to her friends and horses:

In addition to modules that Chloe authors herself, she has also included a new quiz module: Am I A Good Person? and removed the older quizzes. Her result is displayed for her friends to read. The wording reflects the text that could be found in a teen-magazine and appears to draw from this genre. It is an automated response generated by Bebo.

The remaining modules that Chloe has included on her profile include her blog, which now includes personal details; an extensive ‘favourites’ list, that is a template-based feature; a video box carrying a link to her favourite music video, and the crewage list that appeared in her previous profile. While these modules are template-based, they do allow Chloe further opportunities to compose text and craft her identity. In these spaces, she aims to amuse and entertain with her responses to the numerous template questions. When asked How do you want to die? Chloe responds: don’t mind Just Want it To Be MAGERLY TRAGIC:
Chloe’s profile remains a friendly and welcoming site. There are more references to popular culture through the inclusion of the video module, and the reduction in the number of quizzes has simplified the appearance.

**C2 screenshot data and summary END**
Chloe - C3 screen shots 23.04.09

(C3:1)

Figure C3:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure C3:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C3 screen shots 23.04.09

(C3:3)

Figure C3:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C3 screen shots 23.04.09

(C3:4)

Figure C3:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C3 screen shots 23.04.09

(C3:5)

Figure C3:5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C3 screen shots 23.04.09

(C3:6)

Figure C3:6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
C3 screen shots 23.04.09

(C3:7)

Figure C3:7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure C3:8 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Chloe C3 screenshot summary from screen shots 23.04.09

Chloe has redesigned the look of her profile since interview C2. However, her profile has not been simplified, and remains a lengthy text, containing a range of modules. The skin is a deep blue colour, with a patchwork love motif that appears throughout the page to punctuate the modules. This skin creates a moodier impression than the bright, light coloured skins used in her previous two profiles.

Chloe has changed her profile name again. She is now Chloee. Her profile photograph shows her sitting alone on the back of a park bench, looking thoughtful. She has tagged her photo Me on bench :/(:

Alongside she includes her full name and a list of likes, which includes clothing, shops, people and activities. She addresses the reader at the end of the list by stating as her final like ‘you’. Underneath this list Chloe has uploaded a Chloe ‘Jane’ Hodgkinson * says: Cor dey-ja-vous! comment which has been responded to by a friend and her again. This module invites interaction very early on in the profile page and allows co-authored text to be prominent. This differs from Chloe’s earlier profiles, where comments feature later in the profile page and do not form part of the initial impression. Beneath this, Chloe includes personal information, including a Chloee says statement and a photograph of The Other Half Of Me, which she has labelled with a message to the reader: Georgie – Wait till you see her other half :) The message implies a joke: Georgie’s other half is Chloe, and serves to affirm their friendship in public.
At the top of her profile, Chloe has written about her friends. These comments take different forms and combine to present a complex and multilayered representation of Chloe in relation to her network: the first is written directly and refers to a recent event, undecipherable to the uninitiated; the second is a statement about best friends; the third is a tribute and statement of feeling.

Chloe has uploaded a new module: *My Best Friend.* In this module, Chloe has added a photo of herself between two best friends, and written an *About Your Friend* statement. This statement echoes the tribute made earlier: She begins by declaring her affection for them and explaining her reasons *I love them so much, they have helped me through sooooo much. and even if i don’t show it they are the bestest friends in the universe and i don’t know where i would be without them.* She concludes by addressing them directly: *Love You Both always xx.*

Chloe has also uploaded a poll about her *best part,* which has received ten comments from readers. She has continued to include the *blog* module, but has changed the content to include tributes to her two best friends. These tributes include a combination of description, explanation and a direct address. They are embellished with emoticons.

Alongside these tributes, Chloe has added a new module: *What does your day of birth say about you,* and a *Things to do 2009* list, which includes completed items that have been scored through. Chloe has composed this lengthy list herself based on examples that she has seen elsewhere. Finally, her profile includes a *Big Photo,* which features her amongst a group of girls, posing for a shot; a bowling buddies
game, which her friends can play and display their score; and a comments section, showing the twenty most recent comments.

This is the most developed and extensive profile that Chloe has composed. She has written large amounts of text herself. While she includes template modules, she has personalised them and chosen not to rely on uploaded modules to convey an impression of herself.

**C3 screenshot data and summary END**
## Appendix 20: Chloe - Key codes by data set C1, C2, C3

### Data set C1:

The following **key codes** were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 1 (screenshot, screenshot summary and interview transcript).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adornment of friends</td>
<td>Hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Ideas from face to face world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing affirmation of friendship</td>
<td>Impact of friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience awareness</td>
<td>Influenced by friends’ pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bebo as an entity (it)</td>
<td>Integration of popular culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging (to the cool club), acceptance, being in the know</td>
<td>Joint composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories of user</td>
<td>Reflection of multiple identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change page to change impression</td>
<td>Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of code that friends understand</td>
<td>Personal satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative ownership</td>
<td>Playing with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to face to face</td>
<td>Site for positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control as a text producer</td>
<td>Power from originality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control over impression</td>
<td>Purposeful display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of comments left</td>
<td>Ranking friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying, getting from a friend</td>
<td>Reflection/ representation of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance that copying is ok</td>
<td>Use of rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride as a creator/ in not copying</td>
<td>Site for promoting image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conforming/ fitting in</td>
<td>Text as a portal for power play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of in-club</td>
<td>Transient texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of friendship</td>
<td>Removing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation by age</td>
<td>Responsibility as a text producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role as an entertainer</td>
<td>Responsibility to audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone does it</td>
<td>Scanning and skimming profiles for ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusivity</td>
<td>Subversion of conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving feedback</td>
<td>Surveillance, policing of own site, Text production as playful activity with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following crazes</td>
<td>What everyone does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulaic text production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chloe - Data set C2:

The following **key codes** were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 2 (screenshot, screenshot summary and interview transcript).

Giver of adulation
Affiliation
Authorship
Awareness of text functions
Boredom stimulating change
Borrowing as a strategy
Change
Exclusive code
Composer of text
Focus of discussion
Following convention
Crafter of text
TP to entertain self
Extensive display of self in words

Interest in own profile
Judgement provider
Minimal use of photos to represent self
Original text production
Personal reasons for change (I got bored)
Pleasure from own profile
Quest for originality
Removal of photos

, avoiding ‘being on show’
Selection of content for privacy
Self represented through interests/ animals
Signals of belonging as performance
Use of templates to produce ‘original’ text
**Chloe - Data set C3:**

The following **key codes** were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 3 (screenshot, screenshot summary and interview transcript).

- Addiction
- Addressing audience
- Affiliation
- Affirming friendship
- Awareness of impact
- Borrowing
- Categories of profiles/ categorising users
- Co-authoring by hacking
- Committed text producer
- Constant connection
- Constant engagement
- Contrived atmosphere
- Confident display of self
- Crafted profile/ crafting
- Deception
- Decisions about display
- Decisions about evaluation
- Deselection of content
- Display of belonging
- Display of self amongst friends/ friendship
- Display of taste
- Entertainment
- Extensive presentation of self
- Hacking as a game
- Invitation to interact
- Invitation to collaborate
- Lifeline/ essential
- Multilayered representation of self
- Personal evaluation
- Personal pleasure/ enjoyment
- Personal responsibility

**Pride**

- Responding and displaying
- Reflecting style
- Representation (profile as)
- Revelation
- Routine behaviour
- Seeking opinion
- Seeking reassurance/re cognition/validation
- Selection and choice
- Selective behaviour
- Site for giving tributes
- Subversion of rules
- Surveillance
- Text production for positioning
- Vigilance
Appendix 21: Chloe – Key codes assimilated across the three data sets

The key initial codes from data sets 1-3 were synthesised and grouped to complete the initial coding process. Each group of key codes was given a heading (in bold).

**Pleasure:** personal satisfaction, playful activity, crafter of tex, text production to entertain self, pleasure from own profile, personal pleasure/enjoyment  
**Pastime:** everyone does it, hobby, boredom stimulating change, entertainment, routine behaviour,  
**Addiction:** addiction to Bebo, constant connection, connection to face to face world, constant engagement, lifeline/essential,  
**Pride:** Pride as a creator/ in not copying, original text production, quest for originality, use of templates to create original text, pride,  
**Popularity:** being added, displaying popularity,  
**Power play:** Exclusivity, positioning, power from originality, ranking friends, text as a portal for power play, subversion of conventions, giver of adulation, exclusive code, addressing audience, hacking as a game, invitation to interact, invitation to collaborate, personal responsibility, power, revelation, use of rules,  
**Bebo as a force to be managed:** entity,  
**Social responsibility:** responsibility as a text producer, responsibility to audience, judgement provider, committed text producer, giving tributes, surveillance (of self and others), vigilance  
**Promoting a distinct image:** changing impressions, code, control over impression, control of comments left, reflection of multiple identities, purposeful display, reflection of interests, surveillance of own site, extensive display of self in words, interest in own profile, removal of photos, avoiding ‘being on show’, self represented through interests, awareness of impact, confident display of self, contrivance, deception, decisions about display, decisions about evaluation, de-selection of content, display of taste, multilayered representation of self, personal evaluation, reflecting style, profile as representation, integration of popular culture, removing information  
**Categorising profiles:** categories of user, differentiation by age, categorising users  
**Performing a role:** role as an entertainer  
**Collaboration:** collaborative ownership, joint composition, mentoring,
Strategies for text production: formulaic text production, transient texts, scanning and skimming for ideas, authorship, awareness of text functions, borrowing as a strategy, composer of text, crafter of text, borrowing,

Position-taking: adornment of friends, affiliation, affirmation, audience awareness, belonging, acceptance, copying from a friend, conforming/fitting in, creation of in-club, demonstration of friendship, giving feedback, following crazes, impact of friends, influenced by friends, playing with friends, following convention, signals of belonging as performance, display of belonging, responding and displaying, seeking opinion, seeking reassurance/recognition/validation, text production for positioning
Appendix 22: Elley – screenshots and screenshot summaries from data sets E1, E2, E3

E1 screenshots 12.06.08

(E1:1)

Figure E1:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
E1 screenshots 12.06.08

(E1:2)

Figure E1:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
E1 screenshots 12.06.08

(E1:3)

Figure E1:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
E1 screenshots 12.06.08

(E1:4)

Figure E1:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
E1 screenshots 12.06.08

(E1:5)

Figure E1:5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
E1 screenshots 12.06.08

(E1:6)

Figure E1:6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
E1 screenshot summary from screenshots 12.06.08

Elley’s Bebo page is composed on a moody turquoise skin with the strap line love you. The skin is dark and the black and white text is muted. Small hearts punctuate Elley’s written contributions to the page.

Elley’s profile name is heavily punctuated with symbols and emoticons #*..^elley(heart)** . Her profile photograph is a full-length shot that she has taken of herself in a mirror using a mobile phone. This style of image is frequently used by friends in her profile as shown in the friends’ section.

Underneath her name, Elley has included a number of accessories:

The lines ‘blondes never regret anything’ are punctuated by hearts. Beneath this, she writes ‘love you’ and beneath this, she includes lyrics from the Chris Brown song ‘Forever’:

<3...feels like were on another level, feels like our love is intertwined we can be two rebels,breaking the rules,me and you,you and i x all you got to do is watch me,look what i can do with my feet
baby, feel the beat inside...3>
♥Love youu Chris Brown♥

Elley also includes an I like line: I like bouncing off things, and a list of best mates. Elley includes three crossed out versions of her name, concluding with the definitive version ELLEYlol (abbreviation for laugh out loud). This convention implies the presence of the audience who Elley is writing for. Elley has also inserted a disconnected statement: My name is Earl is awesome, which also indicates that she is addressing an audience.

Elley has responded to the Bebo prompts Gender: female; Relationship status: it’s complicated; Hometown: Pakistan.

She has chosen not to disclose her age or actual location, indicating a critical awareness as a text producer.

Elley’s profile is lengthy. She includes: a friends box; videos taken from YouTube of Britain’s got Talent, Mariah Carey and a ‘funny’ YouTube clip. She has provided a white board for friends to draw and comment on; 5 photo albums; a playlist including two songs which can be played; a Groups module, showing group pages that Bebo members can join, e.g. The best Borat fan club; a bands section, containing 6 bands; a widgets section, containing a photo of a young male actor from Skins; a changes module, that records the changes to her page including comments and posts; and a lengthy blogs section. This section includes a request to friends to write to it. Elley’s blog section has been posted on her profile for 438 days, and her about me section, for 663 days.
Alongside Elley’s module runs a friends’ comments section. The comments are short and of apparently little significance. As with Jennifer’s profile, the comments appear to be ways of acknowledging a friend’s presence or making an arrangement, rather than significant conversation.

Elley’s profile is a repository for many references to artefacts of her popular culture: video, songs, lyrics, bands, groups, television programmes are referred to or directly included. In this profile, Elley appears to be constructing a representation of herself from these references. Her direct text production is minimal and restricted to occasional comments and outbursts, rather than a monologue written for the audience.

E1 screenshot data and summary END
Figure E2.1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Elley - E2 screen shots 4.11.08

(E2:2)

Figure E2:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure E2:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Elley - E2 screen shots 4.11.08

(E2:4)

Figure E2:4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Elley’s second profile is a much shorter and simplified text. She has replaced the skin with a lighter and plainer design. The strapline i think i might just love you, and heart emoticons still punctuate the page. Elley’s profile shot is a photograph of her taking a photograph with her best friend in a mirror. Elley is looking at the camera rather than the audience and it is hard to see her face. Elley now includes her full name, age and some personal information alongside her profile photograph taken; very blonde, and details of her best friend. She has included an Elley says: comment “I Did Not Slap You....I simply High Fived Your Face”. This had been uploaded 22 hours previously, and refers to an in-joke with her friends, perhaps taken from popular culture. This is the only text within the profile that Elley has originated. Everything else on the profile: friends, video and comments, has been uploaded by Elley or friends and taken from elsewhere. Consequently, the profile is dominated by images in the form of thumbnails that will lead the reader to photograph albums and video clips. This profile constructs Elley in relation to her popular culture, and the impression formed is heavily circumscribed by the social world and popular culture surrounding her.

E2 screenshot data and summary END
Figure E3:1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Elley - E2 screen shots 4.11.08

(E3:2)

Figure E3:2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Figure E3:3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions
Elley – E3 screenshot summary from screen shots 4.11.08

Elley’s third profile page has been simplified further. The skin has changed and now includes pink writing and three butterflies around the profile photograph. Her photograph is an unsmiling face shot taken in the mirror of Elley alone. She has followed the convention of photographing herself in a mirror using a mobile phone. She has changed her name to ‘Elle’ and her status to ‘single’. 273 ‘share the luvs’ have been registered.

Elley has further reduced the personal information included. There is no about me blurb. Instead she includes 5 snippets of information referring to her preferences:

LoveTheHills(L) (The Hills is an American popular television series)
Shoppinggggg
RiverIsland
Holiday(Y)
Zakinthos

She includes four music videos, and just one photograph album containing 40 photos. She has chosen to display 12 of 140 friends in the friends module. This is now a very minimal profile, much reduced from E1.

E3 screenshot data and summary END
Appendix 23: Elley - Key codes by data set E1, E2, E3

Data set E1:

The following key codes were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 1 (screenshots, screenshot summary, interview transcript).

Access
Affiliation
Audience Awareness
Authority
Being up to date
Belonging
Borrowing and copying
Carefully crafted, crafting self
Change over time, evolution
Choice
Consumerist text production
Communication
Competition
Control
Connection to face to face world
Creativity and display
Display of taste
Effort
Enquiry
Entertaining audience
Feedback, seeking response
Friendship, acknowledgement of friendship
Functions of text
Gratification
Induction, peer learning,

Interruption
Making choices as a text producer
Materiality and permanence of texts
Making choices about you
Methods of making
Multimodality
Natural activity
Non-reflection
Perfection
Play
Popular culture
Popularity
Positioning
Promotion of self, marketing,
Public and private texts
Recreational use
Refashioning and self-improvement
Representing
Responding and reacting
Sharing
Site for performance and display
Subject of discussion
Surveillance
Value
Ubiquity
Elley - Key codes by data set

Data set E2:

The following key codes were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 2 (screenshots, screenshot summary, interview transcript).

Affiliation, copying for affiliation
Audience awareness, pleasing audience
Following the trend
Frequent changes
Composition of popular culture
Concern with appearance (getting it right?)
Copying from other places, getting from friends, copy and paste
Display of taste
Display of status
Display of being on-trend
Display of friendship in action through public comments
Display of being involved – with the in-crowd
Entertainer, serving friends

Importance of first impressions
Being important enough
Being judged by appearance
In joke to signal belonging
Disclosure
Friendship displayed, confirmed
Learning how to behave?
Measuring impact through comments
Non-reflection on effect
Popular culture references
Responsive text production, influenced by comments
Simplification
Shared behaviour, in-jokes
Trend awareness
Uploaded rather than originated
Elley - Key codes by data set

Data set E3:

The following key codes were constructed by assimilating provisional initial codes from each element of data set 3 (screenshots, screenshot summary, interview transcript).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absence of original text</th>
<th>Less concern about impact of others’ comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Marketing of self, labelling self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Plain appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bebo less important now</td>
<td>Reduced frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the same</td>
<td>Reflection of current events/interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of categories of user</td>
<td>Response to trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of creating wrong impression, being wrong</td>
<td>Safe space for expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careful text production to avoid mis-impressions</td>
<td>Simplified, reduced profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing to manage impression (removing photos)</td>
<td>Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for change elsewhere</td>
<td>Good for seeing styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for new material</td>
<td>Surveillance of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking for impression made (spelling)</td>
<td>Testing new opportunities, try new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to maintain interest</td>
<td>Text production as a trend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to be an individual</td>
<td>Being part of trend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenced by others</td>
<td>Display of opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful image construction</td>
<td>Uninviting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display of preferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site for expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images dominate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of friends’ comments and feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of being current</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-relationship to other forms of communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for knowing more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 24: Elley – Key codes assimilated across the three data sets

The key initial codes from data sets 1-3 were synthesised and grouped to complete the initial coding process. Each group of key codes was given a heading (in bold).

**social positioning:** audience awareness, pleasing audience, crafting self, consumerist text production, display of taste, entertaining audience, promoting self, marketing self, public texts, being subject of discussion, concern with appearance, being judged, categories of user, being up to date, refashioning, self-improvement, following the trend, display of being on-trend, trend awareness

**allegiance and affiliation:** affiliation, positioning, belonging, induction, learning to behave, display of popularity, display of friendship, display of being involved, being important enough, use of in-jokes to signal belonging, shared behaviour, being the same, awareness of being wrong, serving friends

**performance and feedback:** responding, reacting, responsive text production, responding to trends, evaluation through comments, seeking feedback

**social control:** control through text production, importance of first impressions, surveillance, careful text production, impression management, checking for changes elsewhere, purposeful image construction, site for expression,

**Bebo in online and face to face contexts:** connection to face-to-face world,

**copying, searching, editing:** borrowing, copying, creativity, methods of making, sharing, copying from friends, copying and pasting, uploading, absence of original text, making choices, image dominant
composing using popular culture: composition of popular culture, popular culture references

other: natural activity, non reflection, recreation, competition, effort, perfection, functions of text
References


Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2008b) Talk for Writing, London: DCSF

477


Great Britain, Ofsted (2009) English at the crossroads, [online] available at


accessed 8.6.2011


http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt_research/2364_literacy_state_of_the_nation
accessed 14.06.2011

James, A. and Prout, A. (2005) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood:


accessed 2nd June 2009


Kress, G. (1997). *Before writing: Rethinking the paths to literacy*. London:

Routledge.


Livingstone, S. (2008a) ‘Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression’ in New Media & Society, 10 (3). [online] available at


http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Shortsocialnetworking sites.pdf accessed 5.5.2011


Pearson, Erika. ‘All the World Wide Web’s a stage: The performance of identity in online social networks’ in *First Monday* [Online], Volume 14 Number 3 (25 February 2009) [online] available at


