

Journeys and Politics in and Around Digital Media:  
An Ethnographic Study of How Teenagers with Physical  
Disabilities Use the Internet

by

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## Abstract

This thesis is based on a two-year ethnography, conducted in a special school, on how young people with physical disabilities use the internet. The thesis focuses on four key areas identified during the research. Firstly, the thesis highlights the embodied 'rhythms' or pace and journeys or wayfaring that characterise how young people move in and between digital media and that are not captured by studies focusing on typologies of internet use. Secondly, the thesis discusses how young people with physical disabilities struggle to overcome stigma and exclusion in their online relationships, as rather than facilitate disembodied communication(s), digital media is increasingly saturated with normative visuality. Thirdly, the thesis discusses how young people with physical disabilities use of digital media is regulated by their teachers and parents, often limiting their use of this medium. Finally, the thesis explores how the young people 'enact' disability in different contexts including the special school, mainstream colleges and the home, and what this tells us about these institutional contexts. In addition to participant observation the fieldwork also involved in-depth interviews with a small cohort of young people with physical disabilities and video diaries produced by participants that showcased how they use the internet in the home. Interviews were also carried out with some school staff from the special school as well as parents of participants. Home visits enabled observation of how participants use the internet in domestic settings, and some participants were followed to their mainstream colleges as they progressed into further education, or attended placements during the two-year period.

A concern addressed in the thesis is how inequalities are reproduced and embedded in young people with physical disabilities habitual use of the internet. At the same time, the study found that these young people used the internet much in the same way as their able-bodied peers, for example, to play games, socialise and post images to garner approval. Video diaries revealed significant differences in the rhythms and journeys underpinning the way in which the young people used digital media, articulating contextual and habitual factors and the level of their disability.

Furthermore, these young people used the internet to find, build and maintain social relationships online, to explore their sexuality and to engage in self-promotion on social networking sites. However, when online they also encountered various obstacles and struggled

to overcome bodily stigma and exclusion within the visual and narrowly normative presentation of the self-online.

School teachers and parents were found to adhere to regulatory policies and advice on how to mediate young people's access and use to digital media. This study found the regulatory practices (monitoring, blocking, filtering content) restricted how young people with physical disabilities could access and use digital media in the home and at school. For some participants their gender and ethnicity was found to intersect with their disability making them subject to substantial regulatory practices in the home. Moreover, the students who were more able-bodied found ways to evade the regulatory practices encountered in the school and at home.

Finally, the study also found that the special school created a protective environment that fosters an inclusive space, where students with different abilities can prosper. In contrast however, their transition to mainstream colleges reveal that when they are expected to practice and adjust their disability to the normative practices in place for able-bodied students, they become hindered in their ability to feel included and perform academically.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

During my undergraduate degree, I volunteered as a classroom assistant in a special school.

As a voluntary classroom assistant, I was placed for four months with primary students with a range of abilities, aged from six years. Before long, I started to offer one-to-one assistance to a young boy named Matt, a funny, hardworking, and assertive character. Matt enjoyed logging onto his assigned desktop computer for gaming during his free time, giving him little time to interact with other students in his class. He would quickly finish his school tasks and seek his teacher's approval to play games online during lessons. A favourite was a platform game that allowed him to run and fly. He would smile and declare to his peers in the class that he was flying, jumping, and being chased in the game. Often, this would attract students in his class to huddle around him, watching him play difficult levels online and outperform his previous online score. Unlike his peers, who would play outside and with toys, he would spend his lunch and break times playing games online. His use of the internet and desire to play games online was unlike other students in his class. Being online was a meaningful experience for this young boy, it was related to him being immobile offline and experiencing a life restricted to his wheelchair. He knew that, due to his muscle-wasting condition, he would at some point be unable to click and move the mouse, or tap on the keyboard, and thus be unable to run and fly online, or generally use the internet as his condition progressed. This story stayed with me, leading me to want to explore the ways young people with physical disabilities use the internet for activities, which they consider meaningful.

Initially, existing literature and my time in the special school guided my research questions.

During the course of reviewing existing literature, I found there were a number of studies that discussed the difficulties people experience across a spectrum of different disabilities when



accessing and using the internet (Adam and Kreps, 2009; Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006; Goggin & Newell, 2003; Vicente & López, 2010). Alongside this, there has been the promise of the benefits people with disabilities can reap if they are provided with internet access and are able to use the internet (Baker et al., 2013; Caton & Chapman, 2016; Chadwick et al., 2016; Grace et al., 2014; Ritchie & Blanck, 2003; Tsaliki & Kontogianni, 2014). One benefit discussed in the literature is the increased independence offered by the internet (Grimaldi & Goette, 1999; Kaye, 2000; Keller, Owens & Parker, 2000; Ritchie & Blanck, 2003; Seymour, 1998). These discussions guided me to formulate the following research question:

*How does the internet act as a means to provide young people with physical disabilities with meaningful activities?*

*Adolescence is marked by the longing for independence; it is argued the internet assists young people to feel autonomous (Bradley, 2005). This research aims to find out how young people with physical disabilities feel the internet provides them with opportunities to participate in society, become independent and autonomous.*

A research proposal highlighting the above research question was sent to the same special school where I had first volunteered, requesting to carry out research with secondary students (the research journey is described in detail in chapter two). By now I was an outsider to the school; even if I could still recall names of students and some members of staff that I had worked alongside whilst volunteering in the school, I was not known to most. Many members of staff I had interacted with at the time had now left the school, and the young students I had offered assistance to had moved into the secondary department.

As my research was focused on young people in their teens, I was placed with students with physical disabilities in the secondary department. I found many students in the secondary department were using the internet in the school with the assistance of teachers, classroom volunteers, and teaching assistants. The way students with similar physical disabilities were accessing and using the internet in the school was often rather different. I started to realise internet use was much more complex than I had initially anticipated, and my research questions were based on many assumptions formed by working alongside primary students, my close encounter with the young boy, as well as previous literature. The research questions initially formed required further reflection and revision, and needed to take account of what I was discovering.

I had thought internet use by young people with physical disabilities would be meaningful. By this, I expected young people with physical disabilities to be using the internet in ways which would allow them to perform activities that would be unfeasible offline, by the means of using online services to shop for goods and services, seek answers to health related queries, maintain alliances with their friends, or to find new friendships (Kaye, 2000). Such use of the internet was assumed to be empowering, as it would make them less dependent on others (Ritchie & Blanck, 2003). This research question was problematic, as it assumed young people with physical disabilities would be using the internet for disability related activities, and therefore their use of the internet would be different from their able-bodied peers. Raghavendra et al. (2012) have shown that young people with physical disabilities typically use the internet for e-mails, instant messaging, social networking, and online gaming, just like able-bodied young people. The findings of this study show that young people's use of the internet is not that different from the ways young able-bodied people use the internet. Given that few studies have been conducted in this area, there is little research

available (Blackburn & Read, 2005) on what young people with physical disabilities do online. Rather than assuming young people with physical disabilities will be using the internet for disability related activities, an important area to investigate was what young people with physical disabilities do online once they have internet access.

Another issue with the research questions is that I assumed the internet would be used in ways to help young people with physical disabilities to become autonomous and to be less dependent on others. I had identified young people with physical disabilities by their impairment, i.e. with a condition that restricts their level of physical mobility. I assumed disability would be considered by the young people with physical impairments either through a medical perspective or through the social model. If disability was considered a condition that requires treatment and cure, as proposed by the medical model of disability (Oliver & Sapey, 2006), I expected young people with physical disabilities to report using the internet for disability related activities that would help them to find medical assistance, i.e. disability support groups online as found by Obst and Stafurik (2010). I had expected that if they look for medical assistance online, young people with physical disabilities would report being less dependent on their parents and carers for medical advice and support.

Alternatively, I also assumed internet use could be used in ways to become autonomous and independent, by engaging with the internet in ways which would help young people with physical disabilities to overcome exclusionary disabling barriers, environments, and cultures found offline (Oliver, 1990; 2009). Murray's study in 2002 revealed that young people with disabilities are either prohibited or discouraged from participating in mainstream endeavours either because of physical, cultural, or economic barriers. Murray (2002) found young people

with physical disabilities who experience these barriers offline have reduced possibilities to engage in mainstream activities, public spaces, public transport, and buildings. Murray (2002) also showed they are unable to leave their home and take advantage of places their able-bodied peers take for granted. Thus, it was assumed young people with mobility impairments will, as found by Anderberg and Jönsson (2005), take control over important areas in their lives through their use of the internet, as tasks that are considered to be unachievable and strenuous in the real physical world can be easily carried out in the online environment.

By subscribing to either of the two models separately, I was taking a reductionist approach. As the medical model is based on the assumption that disabled people want to be able-bodied, this places the young people with physical disabilities as being responsible for their medical recovery to a conceivable normal state (Oliver & Sapey, 2006; Swain & French, 2000). My time in the school did not match this perspective of the model. However, considering disability solely from the social model perspective was found to be inadequate too, as it failed to incorporate the personal experience of pain, which is frequently a part of impairment (Crow, 1996). By ascribing either to the medical or social model, I also risked masking the positive dimension of being disabled for young people with physical disabilities. For example, this thesis would have failed to appreciate an affirmative stance as proposed by Swain and French (2000), whereby viewing disability and impairment as unfortunate does not acknowledge the way in which disabled people experience and enjoy their disabled life, their identity, and their self-awareness as disabled people. If disability is seen from the perspective of the affirmative model, then the internet can be seen to be a beneficial medium, when it is used by people with disabilities in ways that empower them; for example, the internet may be utilised to challenge, advertise, and promote disability. Furthermore, Thomas

(1999) notes for many people with disabilities, their encounter with able-bodied people is also positive, as they have able-bodied relatives, friends, and carers who provide support in their daily lives. Therefore, I needed to reconsider my approach to understanding disability.

By siding with an interactional model, I was able to appreciate that “people are disabled by society *and* by their bodies” (Shakespeare, 2014:75), but disability is a result of the interplay of many other factors too, which include the individual’s attitude, personality, the environment, policies, and culture that forms the experience of being a disabled individual with an impairment. Therefore, I needed to understand how young people with physical impairments experience with disability and how this disability is enacted in the settings in which they use the internet, e.g. in the special school.

Furthermore, this study needed to acknowledge internet access in settings such as the school and home, entailing young people with physical disabilities depending on others, i.e. teachers, carers, and parents who can set them up with technological devices for them to access and use the internet. Therefore, the role they play was also an important area to research, as it has been found, while their role maybe a facilitating one, their presence may also impede the use of the internet for young people with physical disabilities (Raghavendra et al., 2012). I therefore needed to consider how young people with physical disabilities use of the internet was mediated by adults, i.e. teachers and teaching assistants in the school, parents, relatives, and carers in the home. This thesis therefore revised the research question to a much more general and exploratory one:

***How do young people with physical disabilities use the internet?***

To answer the research question, focus was placed on investigating:

What do young people with physical disabilities do online?

How digital media access and use mediated by adults (parents, teachers, teaching assistants etc.)?

How is disability enacted in the contexts in which young people with physical disabilities use the internet?

To research how young people with physical disabilities use the internet, three research methods were chosen to gather data: participant observation, interviews, and video diaries. The research design was not entirely pre-planned, as disability academics have argued that for research to fully reflect the experiences of people with disabilities, research must involve participants in developing the methodology (Farmer & Macleod, 2011), so the research design was therefore open to negotiation with participants. Researching use of the internet by young people with physical disabilities in its entirety in one setting is unfeasible, as it has been found that internet use takes place differently in the school in comparison to the home (boyd, 2014; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016; Raghavendra et al., 2013). It was therefore important to research internet use in school and at home, while participant observation enabled the researcher to observe how the internet is accessed and used by young people with physical disabilities in the special school. Handheld video cameras provided to participants to record video diaries on their use of the internet as and when it took place in the home, enabled them to create material on their personal use of the internet. Most studies on young people with disabilities tend to rely on parental and professional views, thereby silencing young people's voices (Goyal, 2005). A key aim of this study was to give a voice to young

people with physical disabilities; this was achieved by asking them to produce the diaries and by interviewing them on their use of the internet in the special school and during home visits. As data was being collected through these research methods, I started to conceptualise four themes that started to emerge as different forms of access to digital media (Ellcessor, 2016) that required further attention and investigation. Data collection was tailored around gathering in-depth data on these four emergent themes, which generated four key analytical chapters on different forms of digital media access in the following areas:

### **Inequalities Revealed by the Diverse ‘Rhythms’ of Internet Use**

The internet is a prominent feature in young people’s everyday lives (Bannon et al., 2015; Livingstone & Bober, 2004). Despite this, internet access and use levels remain low for people with disabilities (Livingstone et al., 2005). This unequal access and use of the internet by people with disabilities is discussed in relation to the digital disability divide that is aggravated by low income and few opportunities to educate people with disabilities to use digital media (Chadwick & Weeson, 2016; Newman et al., 2016; Vicente & López, 2010). While young people are frequently presented as the generation that use the internet across multiple devices (boyd, 2014; Gardner & Davis, 2013), access to the internet by people with disabilities are still discussed primarily in relation to a computer.

Tsaliki and Kontogianni (2014:146) argue people with disabilities face a ‘disability divide’. Adam and Kreps (2009) explain this in relation to inaccessibility that results from the stage when new technologies become available. Internet technologies are firstly designed for the able-bodied population. Technical fixes that can be applied to these technologies become available to the disabled population on a later date. Hence, when the computer arrived, it was

not instantaneously accessible to people with impairments; special assistive technologies were devised later. During this postponement of assistive technologies becoming available to individuals with disabilities, most online resources were also designed for the able-bodied population. These assistive technologies, Moser (2006) points out, are strongly concerned with what is taken to be 'normal', as when assistive technologies originate they do so against a norm of the non-disabled. Assistive technologies bring with them a set of problems for people with disabilities. They are expensive, hence disabled people from low income backgrounds find it difficult to purchase information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Vicente & López, 2010). Furthermore, ICTs have been developing at a considerable rate, and this increasing pace has made it difficult for adaptive technologies to keep up (Vicente & López, 2010). The type of assistive technology that is required by an individual with a disability is dependent on their needs – assistive technologies include mini or king sized keyboards, head-operated pointing devices, etc. In addition, software products may also be required, such as screen magnification software for the visually impaired, or screen reading software. This suggests there are varied barriers that can prevent individuals from going online (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006). Söderström (2009a) finds access to ICT and an assistive device does not necessarily provide usable technologies, as the World Wide Web is extensively inaccessible or difficult to access by people across a range of disabilities (Adam & Kreps, 2009).

The above discussion presents people with disabilities access the internet differently from able-bodied internet users. Further, people with disabilities tend to be recent users of the internet in comparison to their able-bodied peers (Cook et al., 2005). Therefore, people with disabilities are often not skilful users of technology. Using the internet entails navigating through a number of complex sequences; a skilful internet user must be able to perform



specific actions that are required to meet desired responses. Often, this may mean the user must be able to navigate across different web pages and recall and perform long sequences of commands online, which has proven difficult for people with intellectual disabilities (Chadwick et al., 2013). Raghavendra et al. (2012) have found a physical disability can slow down the typing speed, which can limit or frustrate young people with physical disabilities engaging in games and instant conversational interactions that require immediate responses. Studies often draw on discourses on digital literacy to highlight that many young people do not possess the necessary skills or natural fluency to use the internet (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011).

However, drawing on the mobilities literature, the third chapter of this thesis takes a different perspective on how inequalities are reproduced by differences in the habitual 'rhythms' of internet use. By developing a novel conceptual and methodological framework, this thesis illustrates that young people with physical disabilities use the internet by wayfaring in, around, and out of, online and offline environments. This wayfaring along takes place with different rhythmic measures of internet use that are disrupted, meet with frictions, and slow down when the internet users face obstacles, disruptions, or take mindful pauses during their online journeys. The chapter concludes by noting internet use for young people with physical disabilities comprises of differential rhythms that oscillate between a fast, steady and slow pace, and how their paths of moving around online follow a mundane, repetitive pattern that reproduces inequalities in the way in which they habitually journey within and between digital media.

## **Online Social Relationships**

A second theme to emerge from the data was how young people with physical disabilities maintain and build social relationships online. Several studies have that found developing and maintaining social relationships online enhances social capital (broadly speaking, a concept used to describe the benefits of being in a social relationship with others, e.g. emotional benefits, increasing self-esteem, etc.) (Ahn, 2012; Steinfield et al., 2008; Vitak & Ellison, 2012). It is argued that affording people with disabilities internet access can benefit them from social capital online (Chadwick & Wesson, 2016). Several studies have found that online communication enhances people with disabilities' social interaction with people with similar disabilities (Braithwaite et al., 1999; Finn, 1999; Guo et al., 2005; Soutter et al., 2004). Although the internet allows for people with disabilities to connect with similar people to themselves, it also provides them opportunities to interact with able-bodied peers (Holmes & O'Loughlin, 2012).

Given that young people with physical disabilities are found to experience exclusion when forming relationships offline, as, for example, wheelchair users are disregarded and treated disrespectfully in public places (Cahill & Eggleston, 1995), as a consequence, they are held back from fully participating in society, and therefore providing young people with physical disabilities with internet access is argued to enhance their social inclusion (Guo et al., 2005; Lathouwers et al., 2009).

It is sometimes argued the internet can especially benefit people with disabilities, since the internet does not require, for example, oral or auditory forms of communication (Seymour & Lupton, 2004). In such cases, the internet is seen to provide an opportunity for individuals to

interact and convey their interests and stories with others online in a way that is not hampered by their disability. Also, it is claimed that online communication is freer from preconceptions, prejudice, and the pressure of time (Raghavendra et al., 2012). People with disabilities who are easily identified as being disabled by their impairments, are said to benefit from going online, as online spaces that offer visual anonymity can reduce the stigma of being visually different, as experienced offline (Chadwick & Wesson, 2016). However, others have argued that masking a disability online may do little to reduce stigma (Bower & Tuffin, 2002).

By drawing on literature on social relationships and computer-mediated communication in online spaces, chapter four argues that research on disabled people's online relationships has often focused on how virtual interaction enables them to establish relationships without being constrained or stigmatised by their body. However, data collected through ethnography has revealed that young people with physical disabilities struggle to overcome bodily stigma and exclusion online. Online interaction can provide young people with disabilities with the confidence to form new relations. However, they often experience rejection in pursuing romantic relations or friendships online, because the contemporary visual and narrowly normative presentation of the self online reinforces the exclusionary logic young people with disabilities face in their offline lives. By drawing three illustrative case studies: (i) a gay teenager with physical disabilities seeking identity and romantic relations online; (ii) a teenage girl with physical disabilities, excluded by her friends for not being able to live up to a 'girlie' image, which develops into an online drama; and (iii) a young athlete with physical disabilities, who, via the creation of a sports-based identity, is able to find acceptance online, the chapter teases out the complex ways in which teenage 'lookism', normative behaviour, exclusion, and rejection are mediated by disability and digital media.

## **Regulating Digital Media Accessibility**

A third theme to emerge from the study is how digital media access is regulated for young people with physical disabilities in the context of their homes and the special school. By drawing on discourses of the digital disability divide, digital media accessibility is found to be traditionally discussed with reference to making technological fixes to existing technologies, or proposing for assistive technologies to be inbuilt when developing technologies (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006; Jaeger, 2015). However, Ellcessor (2016) argues for us to rethink digital media accessibility through a broader notion of access. Ellcessor (2016) provides an interrogatory framework based on five categories: use, content, form, experience, and regulation, to analyse how digital media access becomes limited for people with disabilities. Under the category of regulation, Ellcessor (2016) is interested in a range of policies, and their enforcement, or lack of it, limits access to digital media by people with disabilities. Providing many examples, she shows how many social media and blogging sites have features that make the process of accessing sites difficult for people with disabilities, e.g. through pop-ups or not being provided with audio-visual captions for the hard of hearing. Ellcessor (2016) argues the presence or absence of these features are not by chance; rather, there are regulatory sites and stakeholders that are involved in providing digital media accessibility for people with a range of disabilities. By looking at various macro level regulatory sites, such as governmental policies, business standards, industry norms, and forms of enforcement, Ellcessor (2016) questions in each case how access is defined and by whom, the structures that limit or expand access, and the sources of power that exert authority in providing access. By focusing on these areas, Ellcessor (2016) finds different stakeholders and accessibility advocates share different understandings of access. While legal policies take a narrow definition of access as technological fixes, people with disabilities understand access to mean how useable a technology is.

Ellcessor (2016) notes regulatory sites are also local and community based. While she does not interrogate those sites, this study draws upon her interrogatory framework to analyse two important sites from where young people with physical disabilities are accessing the internet – namely the home and the special school. By using Ellcessor’s (2016) framework, this study finds the responsibility to regulate digital media access is filtered down to parents, educational authorities, and to young people themselves. In these contexts, parents and teachers are found to be using normative frameworks to understand young people with disabilities as digital media users. This tends to take place by viewing them as vulnerable young people with disabilities, and requiring regulatory interventions to protect them against online risks.

There are several reasons as to why young people with disabilities are particularly regarded as vulnerable to the internet. Whittle et al. (2013) argue that they may readily trust unfamiliar adults online because they develop trusting relationships with the many adults providing care in offline settings. Furthermore, they may not be as competent as their able-bodied peers in recognising their exposure to online grooming, or be able to manage such an encounter in an online or an offline context. Livingstone et al. (2011) find parents of children with disabilities perceive their children as being less able to cope with online environments. Similarly, Lathouwers et al. (2009) find parents of children with physical disabilities are overly protective, warning their children more about online risks and placing more restrictions on their use of the internet than parents with non-disabled children.

Educational settings are a significant environment for learning about internet use.

Raghavendra et al. (2012) find that due to school rules, what young people with physical

disabilities can learn about the internet remains limited to educational sites and emails. Social networking sites and recreational activities, which were reported to be common sites used among young people, were restricted on school grounds (Raghavendra et al., 2012). Friends and siblings therefore played a significant role in helping to set up the young people with physical disabilities on these sites. Barnfather et al. (2011) also find that through an online peer support intervention, peer mentors that shared the same disabilities – cerebral palsy and spina bifida – as their young mentees, helped to successfully provide them with information and emotional support. This allowed them to develop their online skills and make friendships. Newman et al. (2016) also find many young people with disabilities require personalised support to be able to use the internet. Tailored one-to-one support provided to young people with disabilities to use social networking sites has proved to be effective (Grace et al., 2014). These studies highlight the role of gatekeepers in providing internet access, and supporting internet use is vital for people with disabilities. Chadwick and Wesson (2016) note that as people with disabilities are more likely to be viewed as being vulnerable online by gatekeepers such as parents, teachers, and carers, it is likely they will be further excluded from internet access and use through fewer opportunities to access the internet, and reduced support and guidance.

Livingstone et al. (2013) report that not only parents, but young people themselves, worry about being exposed to risks and inappropriate material online, such as pornographic and violent content. This gives the impression that young people require assistance to avoid being exposed to inappropriate material online. In order to make sure that children can benefit from using the internet as safely as possible, parental supervision is viewed as compulsory (Wang, Bianchi & Raley, 2005). Hence, studies aim to find out the ways in which parents actively mediate their children's use of the internet. From a policy orientated perspective, researchers

seek to propose future initiatives to improve this mediation and ensure the safe use of the internet by young people (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). A number of initiatives have been promoted to ensure young people safely use the internet, for instance, through government legislation, through encouraging awareness, through enhancing the knowledge and skills of internet users, by encouraging parental supervision strategies, organising awareness campaigns, and with schools being targeted to play a significant role in the promotion of safe internet use by young people (Valcke et al., 2011). The analysis suggests that many of the actors who participate in policy making discussions tend to promote the internet as being an important and advantageous medium when it is used in ways which are regarded to be safe for young people. Through parental mediation that involves parents setting rules and restrictions for their child, and through filtering and restricting access to websites, such means come to be regarded as the most effective way forward for young people to use the internet, and it also becomes difficult to foresee an alternative view to promote safe internet use.

By drawing on literature on digital media accessibility and disability, the fifth chapter discusses the various measures parents and teachers take to regulate digital media access of young people with physical disabilities in the home and the school i.e. by blocking and filtering content or monitoring their online activities. Each of these regulatory practices is discussed with reference to an illustrative case study, which shows how young people with physical disabilities try to evade regulations that they find limits their access to digital media. The first illustrative case study is of a teenage girl with physical disabilities that highlight that as her disability intersects with her gender and ethnicity, this aggravates the regulatory practices she finds herself under in the home. The second illustrative case study is of a teenage boy with a visual impairment who is provided with a school laptop and is regulated

by them as well as the Local Educational Authority that tracks his online activities. Unable to evade his online activities on the laptop, he eventually limits his own access to the device and resorts to finding ways to get online through his personal internet-enabled devices. Both illustrative case studies show that despite the struggle young people with physical disabilities undergo to find their ways around regulatory practices in the school and at home to use the internet privately and for personal activities, what they are able to use the internet for remains limited. Davis and Eynon (2013) argue that regulations can prevent young people from developing the necessary skills needed for a full and successful engagement in an online environment.

## **Disability**

Disability is an umbrella term that covers a spectrum of different conditions. While a definition of disability that fits all contexts is desired, it is in reality, as argued by Altman (2001), unfeasible, since different organisations and nations define disability in different ways. In Britain, the concept itself has been denoted with many meanings that have produced several models of disability. Disability has been considered a medical condition, a stigma, a form of deviance, a societal restriction, an experience, and an expected social role for people with impairments (Oliver 1990, 2009; Susman, 1994). Rather than siding with one model over another, scholars tend to apply an interactionist model of disability that considers how a medical impairment can, together with societal barriers, disable a person (Chadwick & Wesson, 2016; Shakespeare, 2014).

Chapter six draws on the literature in disability studies to address how disability is understood in terms of various disability models. However, rather than attempting to define



what disability is, the chapter draws on the work of Mol (2002) to analyse how disability is enacted by young people with physical disabilities across different educational sites, i.e. in the special school and in a mainstream school. For the young people with physical disabilities in this study, an important transition was moving into mainstream education for further education; while for some participants this was a long term transition, for other participants they were provided with the opportunities to spend one day per week in a mainstream college for training them for educational life beyond the special school. Little is known about young people with disabilities' experiences and perspectives when going through periods of transitions (Kirk, 2008). This chapter finds the special school provides an environment in which young people with physical disabilities are protected, supported, and cocooned, as also found by Kirk (2008). However, once they move into settings where they are deprived of the protective environment of the special school, they struggle to settle in with their disabilities. The chapter highlights the struggle of two teenage boys with physical disabilities settling into mainstream education. Their stories reveal that they are expected to practise and adjust their disability to the normative practices in place for able-bodied students, which hinders their ability to feel included and perform academically.

The final chapter in this thesis is a conclusive chapter that brings together the findings of this thesis, and details the main contribution made to the study of internet use by young people with physical disabilities.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

During the spring term of 2008, I volunteered in a special school for four months as a voluntary classroom assistant. I returned to the same school to carry out research for this thesis at the start of the academic autumn term in 2012. Initially, I carried out voluntary work as a classroom assistant for seven months to access and identify potential participants for my study. I was able to recruit teenage participants with physical disabilities for this study once ethical approval was granted, after which ethnography was undertaken in the school. The study later expanded and became ‘multi-sited’ as I started to ‘follow’ the participants to their homes and to mainstream colleges as and when some participants entered further education, and, across these settings, I was invited to witness their online interactions (Marcus, 1998). Students, teachers, and parents were interviewed on issues relating to disability and participants’ use of the internet in the school and home. A selection of students kept video diaries on their private use of the internet, and were also interviewed to discuss their recordings and personal use of the internet. This chapter is chronologically organised to reflect this research journey. It begins by discussing the stages in gaining access to the participants, followed by the methodological approach and research methods utilised to collect data, and the steps undertaken to ensure ethical research and to analyse findings. The chapter brings the research journey to an end by discussing the ways in which the researcher marked an exit from the research field.

### **Researching Young People with Disabilities**

Young people with disabilities are often marginalised in research (Watson et al., 2012). Research is gradually emerging involving children and young people with communication needs (Nind, 2011), with cerebral palsy, and with physical disabilities (Raghavendra et al.,

2013). Rabiee et al. (2005) suggest that the exclusion of young people with disabilities in research may be related to the lack of appropriate data collection methods to facilitate their inclusion. Hence, at the onset of proposing to carry out research with young people with physical disabilities, this study identified ethnography, interviews, and video diaries as preliminary research methods to collect data and study internet use by teenagers with physical disabilities. However, these methods were to be discussed with teachers and potential participants as to whether they would be suitable for carrying out data collection with participants as anticipated, and how far they could be made flexible to the needs of potential participants.

### **Gaining Access to Participants**

To study internet access and use by young people with physical disabilities, the first research stage entailed identifying and gaining access to a setting where young people with disabilities could be studied. As I was already familiar with the special school that I had volunteered at in 2008, it was natural for me to return to the same school to seek permission to carry out research with the students there. The special school is known for accommodating pupils with primarily physical as well as multiple or complex needs from primary and secondary age. During the week, the school also provides residential accommodation to the students studying there.

At the early stage of writing the research proposal, I identified and contacted the school principal who had provided me with the opportunity to be a voluntary classroom assistant during my first placement. The purpose and nature of the research, and planned methods to be employed (participant observation, interviews and video diaries), were fully explained to

the school principal via email, with a request to allow this research to be conducted at the school. A series of face-to-face meetings followed our email conversations to discuss the research at greater length, and for a relation of trust and understanding to develop between us.

These meetings were also an opportunity to negotiate access and gain entry to the school. Making offers of inducements to gatekeepers is not uncommon (Foster, 1996); however, it was the school principal who raised the issue of how the school would benefit from my presence in the school as I carry out research. So, the principal suggested for me to undertake voluntary work in the school, whereby I would fulfil the role of a classroom assistant and provide educational support to the students. This role continued during my time at the school, and became less frequent as I officially started to carry out research.

There were six different class groups in the secondary department, comprising of roughly eight students with different abilities. During the first three months, the principal considered it to be appropriate for me to be placed as a volunteer with the six different class groups during lessons when they would be using the internet or computer. This was to allow me to identify potential participants across different student ages and abilities. Before access to the students was provided, I underwent a DBS<sup>1</sup> check and safeguard training. A one-to-one tour of the school was also provided by the school principal, where I was introduced to many members of staff and students.

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<sup>1</sup> Disclosure and Barring Service check to verify a person's criminal record

## **Identifying Participants**

During the first three months of being present at the school, I spent a day, and sometimes a few lessons, with each of the six class groups, observing how students accessed and used the internet. However, as I did not want to disrupt the students' learning during lessons, I had little opportunity to ask students questions on their use of the internet, and struggled to develop a rapport. To form an understanding on students' use of the internet, i.e. how they use and access the internet outside school, to learn about which activities they engage with online, permission was therefore sought and granted by the school principal to carry out a questionnaire (see appendix 1) with all secondary students. The questionnaire was carried out at a time that would not disrupt students' study time, i.e. during break and lunch times, before the teacher officially started the lesson, or when they had completed their work in lessons. The questionnaire was double-checked by the school principal before it was carried out with the pupils, and the findings were used to aid the researcher to identify potential participants.

Carrying out a questionnaire provided two advantages. Firstly, it provided the opportunity to interact with all secondary students. During the interaction, it allowed the students to be introduced to me as a volunteer intending to take on the role of a researcher in the near future. This gave rise to many questions that were asked both by students and staff in relation to the design and purpose of the future study. While some students were carefree about my role, others were intrigued. A discussion took place with some students on the possibility for them being approached to be a part of the future research project. It was explained that their participation in the questionnaire was not compulsory and that the exercise was to provide some initial insights on their use of the internet in the home and at school. In this way, the facilitation process started long before the actual recruitment of participants.

A second advantage provided by carrying out questionnaires was the experience it generated. By interacting with all secondary students, as a volunteer the limitations and lack of communication skills became apparent when interacting with students with complex and severe cognitive and communication impairments. Davis et al. (2000) report having to spend more time than initially anticipated in a special school carrying out ethnography and interviews with young people with disabilities, due to lacking the experience of working with young people with disabilities. This lack of experience meant encountering issues of being unable to effectively communicate with young people with a range of disabilities. Similarly, I also found lacking experience of communicating with young people with complex disabilities made the process of carrying out a questionnaire time-consuming and difficult.

Furthermore, most students who were approached were unable to fill out the questionnaire independently, and had to be asked questions face-to-face with the assistance of teachers. Those students with severe disabilities had a small attention span to engage in lengthy conversations about their use of the internet before being distracted or distracting themselves. This study therefore needed to consider how the presented condition of the participant may influence the way in which data is collected (Ison, 2009). It is not unusual for young people with severe communication, learning or cognitive disabilities to be excluded from research, despite researchers using less rigid methods for gathering data (Morris, 2003; O’Kane, 1999). However, in recent years, researchers have seen that young people with learning difficulties can participate directly in research rather than having carers and professionals respond on their behalf (Nind, 2011). Hence, when identifying participants, this study did consider young people with cognitive and communication needs, and the ways in which the qualitative methods (interviews and video diaries) could be adjusted to cater to their needs and ensure their participation.

The findings of the questionnaire revealed not all secondary students in the school were using the internet in the home or independently in school. Those with severe cognitive or complex disabilities were accessing the internet with a member of staff, and were engaging in activities chosen by a staff member in and out of lessons. The findings from the questionnaire, observations made of students using the internet in school, listening to conversations taking place in school among students on what they do online at home, and probing them and staff through informal chats during break times on students' use of the internet, helped to form an inclusion criterion. In this way, a number of criterion (purposive) sampling strategies (Patton, 2002) were adopted in the study to identify potential participants who met some predetermined criterion, including:

- Students that use the internet at home and/or at school with little to no assistance offered by adults (parents, teachers and carers)
- Students with visible physical disabilities/impairments whereby their condition restricts their level of mobility
- Students that share a past life experience, i.e. disabled from birth

Nineteen students were identified as potential participants for the study. This list was then negotiated with the school principal in a meeting. During the meeting, this list was narrowed down to sixteen names as the principal suggested that some students would struggle to take part due to their disability, and also advised not to include certain students who were experiencing challenging circumstances in their lives at that moment.

### **Description of Final Sample**

A list of sixteen students aged 14 to 19 years was finalised after negotiation with the school principal, and these sixteen students were then approached to be a part of the study. The

sample of participants had medical conditions such as cerebral palsy, muscle wasting conditions, e.g. muscular dystrophy, and conditions that impacted their physical growth, daily health and diet, and communication skills. Four of the sixteen students had mild learning and cognitive skills, and difficulties with muscle coordination, and three students were reported to have behavioural issues. All but one participant used a wheelchair. Of the sixteen students, four students were female and twelve were male, as the school had an overwhelming majority of male students. One participant was from an ethnic minority background, while the remaining were from white backgrounds. Most participants had other members in their family (siblings, parents, or distant relatives) with disabling conditions. While the majority of the students in the sample had been schooled in the special school since primary years, others had moved from a mainstream school, either due to being bullied or because their educational and care needs were no longer being met.

One student whose participation in the study had been rejected by the school, expressed willingness to be a part of the study once she left the special school and moved on to further education. Of the sixteen students, eleven decided to take part in the study (four female and seven males). These eleven participants were observed using the internet in educational settings (special school and/or mainstream colleges and school trips). They participated in interviews and produced internet diaries (ten video diaries and one written diary). Seven participants of the eleven consented to home visits.

The five students who opted out of the study consented to being interviewed on their use of the internet in school, and a further two students who had not been mentioned in the list of names negotiated with the principal, were later interviewed in school on their use of the



internet. The study also draws on semi and unstructured interviews with seven parents and sixteen members of staff.

In each chapter, this thesis draws on a number of illustrative case studies on select participants. The descriptive accounts help to tease out and explain how the lives of the participants illustrate the points being made against the relevant literature discussed in each chapter. An illustrative case study of one participant named Scott has been used in three analytical chapters; this has been done as it was found that Scott was considered to be the most able student in the special school, and who was discussed frequently by participants, parents, and teachers across many interviews in the study.

### **Methodological Orientation**

For this study, I adopted approaches drawn from an interpretive understanding, which under hermeneutic inquiry takes “something *as* something” (Gadamer, 1970; Schwandt, 2000:194), and therefore, understanding rests on interpretation. Under this approach, sense is made of texts and social action, i.e. the use of the internet by teenagers with physical disabilities in a number of different settings, which considers the interpretation to be specific to the occasion in which the text or action arises and comes into being. Understanding is reached through dialogue, which takes into account the engagement of prejudgments, biases and tradition. Rather than taking a view that biases and tradition can be set aside, are external, and something the researcher can become distant from, the hermeneutical approach appreciates biases which condition interpretations. To interpret and form an understanding of how disability and internet use comes into being in the lives of young people in the special school and in other contexts, it is necessary to understand what the author, i.e. participants, attempt

to communicate. To do this, the conditions under which the text or social action takes place need to be appreciated. Meanings derived from the social action or text by the researcher are negotiated with the participants, and understanding becomes one that is participative (Schwandt, 2000). To form an understanding on the lives of teenagers with physical disabilities requires data collection to produce “thick descriptions” of their lived experiences (Geertz, 1973). The hermeneutic methodology complements research methods such as ethnography, which can yield this kind of data (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Geertz, 1973).

This study adopted and recognised that ethnographic research requires reflexivity, whereby my role and social position in the process of carrying out the research was shaped by my experience in the field and the data that is produced by it (Lumsden, 2013). Ethnography was the first method utilised by this study, which further led me to utilise complementary methods of interviews, video, and written diaries.

### **Ethnography**

This study entailed a two-year ethnographic study in a special school to learn how physically disabled teenagers used the internet. The main method used was overt participant observation. During the two years, I occasionally continued to help out at the school, particularly with those students who were a part of the study and were being observed during lessons. Ethnography:

...involves direct and sustained contact with human beings, in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time; draws on a family of methods, usually including participant observation and conversation;

respects the complexity of the social world; and therefore tells rich, sensitive, and credible stories.

(O'Reilly, 2012 p.4)

Over time, as an ethnographer I was able to immerse myself within the setting of the special school. This was done by learning the initially unfamiliar routine of the school and participating in it. Every morning would begin with me walking into the school grounds with a positive attitude and smile, greeting the bus drivers, escorts, teaching assistants, and parents with a friendly *good morning*, who would be busy unloading the students in their wheelchairs from the vehicles and guiding them into the school building. I would wait to walk alongside or escort some students into the school building; this allowed me to be seen as a 'trusted outsider'. Furthermore, by making conversation with students as they made their way into the school building, offering assistance, greeting the receptionists, and pulling out chairs ready for the morning assembly, I was soon considered a part of the school. The morning assembly would be followed by me walking one or more students to their classrooms; usually, I would walk alongside participants to their lessons; at other times when there would be a shortage of staff, I would push young people in their wheelchairs to their classrooms before joining a classroom where my research participants would be located.

Time was an important dimension whilst carrying out ethnography in the school. With negotiation with the school principal, I was permitted to dedicate an equal number of days during the week to class groups where research participants would be located, and in particular, I was permitted access to lessons where the use of the internet would take place. A request was made to classroom teachers to allow me to sit next to, or work alongside students who were participants in the study. Over time, a relation of trust developed between the

teaching staff and with participants. Rather than abiding by a strict timetable of being present in one classroom on a given day, I started to 'follow' (Marcus, 1998:90) my participants from one class to another, particularly to lessons where the use of the internet would take place, or to presentations that students would deliver to trainee teachers on what it means to be disabled. Some teachers also invited me to join them in particular lessons, even when I would not be timetabled to be present. This following of participants enabled me to spend time in the school observing places where the students spent their free time using the internet on school computers in a computer lab, and on personal devices in corridors and quiet areas during break and lunch times. This also led me to school trips, allowing me to observe how my participants and other students used the internet during travel and in out-of-school settings. Every Monday, a class would travel to a mainstream college, and I was able to join a group of participants by travelling with them to the college campus on the school bus, observing their use of the internet by sitting next to them on the bus, and following them in and out of lessons. By following my participants, ethnography became 'multi-sited' (Marcus, 1998:83) which allowed me to benefit from informal chats and opportunistic questioning with participants and school staff in and out of lessons. Furthermore, it permitted me to become familiar and sensitive to the context in which the young people use the internet.

As some of the students in the special school progressed to further education, I would dedicate a couple of hours during the week to observing their use of the internet in their mainstream college. By spending time with them, sitting next to them in and out of lessons, and conversing with them as they went online in the library, or on their personal devices as they waited for transport to travel back home, I was able to observe how they use the internet differently from the time they were in the special school. Often, participants would show me their personal devices as they used the internet, and would talk me through their online activities. I was added to private conversations taking place on digital media applications, and

invited to engage in the conversations. Some participants sent me emails of their unfolding conversations with other peers and friends online. Furthermore, participants sometimes chose to show their developing online conversations with friends, acquaintances, and romantic partners in person. Others would send screenshots of conversations taking place on social media sites.

Ethnography is conventionally considered as utilising participant observation as a central method; however, the field setting of a special school did not allow the researcher to be a participant observer at all times. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) map out the various roles ethnographers may take that vary between being a complete participant (where the researcher becomes native to the setting) to a complete observer (has no contact with those being observed), and in the middle of these, the researcher's involvement in the field may vary between these two spectrums – to a participant as observer, or an observer as participant. Occasionally, in the special school, as a researcher I switched between these roles. For example, on occasions when I was invited to take part in sport or a music event organised by the school, I would take on the role of a complete participant, providing assistance to the students in carrying out sport or music related activities. At other times, when the students were undergoing exam conditions whilst using the internet in lessons, as a researcher I would have to sit back and observe the use of the internet by students in the classroom from a distance. Therefore, the degree of being a participant observer varied on a daily basis over the two years of carrying out ethnography in the school. In mainstream colleges, my role as a researcher became one of being an observer in lessons and a friend who would sit next to and have a conversation with the participants. My role would not be to provide educational support in mainstream colleges but to offer assistance, e.g. to reach into their bags and take out money for their lunch.

Another key aspect of carrying out ethnography was note-taking. To produce 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973:6) of the unfolding events required me to keep a record of social action and conversations taking place in the school that would be of importance to the study. While keeping a notebook during research is advisable (O'Reilly, 2012), this was unfeasible, as it made me appear to the classroom teachers as making notes on them during lessons. Both teachers and participants wanted to see what I noted down and this became a distraction during class sessions. To be able to jot down quick and short notes, a paper and pen was carried in a pocket to lessons that allowed me to quickly note key words that would serve as a reminder when writing up notes at the end of the day. Often, I would make lengthy notes on my mobile phone in the school toilets, away from the school staff and students; at other times, mental notes of events and conversations would be made.

While ethnography carried out in the special school provided an insight into how teenagers use the internet in and around educational settings, and how this differs and changes when moving to mainstream educational settings, a method was required to provide an insight into how the participants were using the internet in the home, as it was identified as another popular setting where the internet was used. As it would be difficult for the researcher to be physically present to carry out ethnography in the home, home visits were made to seven participants' homes; however, not all parents consented to this. A further method was required that would permit the researcher to observe not only how participants access the internet in the home, but also how they use the internet at times when they would choose to use the internet. For this reason, video cameras were handed out to participants to film themselves using the internet in the home as and when internet use took place.

## Visual Ethnography

This study implemented the use of recorded video diaries produced by the participants that showcased their use of the internet in the home. The visual recordings also provided sensory ethnographic data as a way of telling and showing how the internet is used in the home.

Visual ethnography is a vague term, as it describes both the study and use of visual materials (O'Reilly, 2009; Pink, 2004). Visual ethnographic studies tend to place an emphasis on *collaborative* or *participatory* research, i.e. where participants make a contribution of some degree in creating visual representations for the researcher (Buckingham, 2009). Many studies within the field of creative media production have used video diaries with school children, which involves them in video making (Buckingham, 2005; Myers & Thornham, 2012; Winnie, 2010). Bagnoli (2009) has found as young children often find it difficult to communicate verbally, the use of creative methods enables the young people to express themselves in novel ways. Similarly, Pink's ethnographic study in 2007 was complemented with her video recording of participants, which revealed that by using video as a research method, data moves beyond the limitations of text and provides a sensory experience and perception.

Following Pink (2013:47), video diaries in this study were used as visual ethnography as “a route to comprehending those aspects of experience that are very often sensory, unspoken, tacit and invisible”. Participants were provided with a handheld video camera and instructions on the safe and ethical use of video recording as advised by the school, i.e. not to post recordings on YouTube or social networking sites, not to record people in public places or without their permission, and to keep the video camera at home (see appendix 4).

The study was tailored to the needs of the participants by, for example, agreeing the participants could film their use of the internet sporadically over a period of a year. I had identified two participants during the recruitment phase who would require assistance in recording their video diaries whilst simultaneously using the internet in the home. Before I could intervene and offer assistance, I informed the two participants that they could seek parental assistance with recording the video diaries. They were also provided with tripods so that they could, as far as possible, attempt to record their own video diaries. However, after making several attempts, the two participants preferred my help in recording their video diaries at home during pre-planned home visits.

The remaining participants were able to independently carry out video diaries, defined by Buchwald et al. (2009:13) as “a digitalised diary used for research with purposes similar to those of studies using written diaries, that is, the collection of data on informants’ lives over an extended period”. Unlike a written diary that is recorded on a regular basis (Alaszewski, 2006), nine out of ten participants in this study made video diary recordings sporadically over a period of a year, producing at least five recordings. The duration of each video diary would vary from a few minutes to over an hour. As young people with disabilities have daily busy schedules, consisting of long journeys travelling to and from school via shared transport, staying overnight in the residential place away from home (at school or overnight at a hospital), meeting medical appointments and performing leisure activities, e.g. sports or music classes, it was difficult for many participants to find the time to use the internet at home during the week, whilst also being able to record their use at the same time. Participants were therefore reminded to record video diaries during school holidays or weekends. Participants were often apologetic in their recordings or in interviews for not being able to



provide more footage because they had been too busy, or for not being *exciting* in their internet use as they repeated what they would show themselves doing online in their diaries.

While participants were provided with training on how to safely use the camera, they were not provided with guidance on *what* to show in relation to internet use when filming their video diaries at home. They were instructed to record their use of the internet in the home in a way in which they liked. This was deliberately done to foster their creative potential, as well as to assure them that there is no right or wrong way of keeping a video diary.

By asking the participants in this study to keep a video diary, they were invited to take up an ethnographic position, and experiment with how to present internet observation and themselves using the internet. All participants brought with them their skills of making a video diary. Two participants in interviews recalled making video diaries and then deleting the footage as they were not satisfied with the way they filmed themselves showing their use of the internet. The recordings revealed participants made choices about what to film in their video diaries and how to present themselves. A study by Livari et al. (2014) with ten-to-eleven-year-olds using video diaries to film their everyday use of technologies in the home, revealed participants took different positions in their diaries. This ranged from being a diarist, to talking to the camera as a news anchor; from a stage performer to a news broadcaster. Other studies have also found participants represent themselves in similar ways (Chan, 2006; Potter, 2005; Winnie, 2010). This study too finds similar findings.

Participants would present themselves using the internet late at night in a dark bedroom, often with music or the television playing in the background, whilst using the internet on a phone

and laptop. Others filmed themselves using the family computer in the living room, having conversations with their parents, and showing their prowess in playing games simultaneously. The videos were made up of a mixture of explanation that would lead to a narration of what they were doing online, as well as some quick intimate and personal reflections. Action shots of using the internet would lead to them showing their quick and spontaneous reactions to what pops up on their screen, often as they exposed themselves to new online content on their Facebook Newsfeed, on news sites, private messages, or emails. The video diaries thus conveyed an authentic recording, one that is not rehearsed or edited. Furthermore, they allowed participants to express their experiences and feelings in the moment (Cashmore et al., 2010).

Gibson's (2005) video diary study with young men with muscular dystrophy presented that, not only do the young men present a particular kind of self in the recordings, but they also construct video diaries with a physically absent, yet 'always' present, researcher. This showed that participants kept in mind the audience they were catering to when producing their video diaries. Similarly, Noer (2014) found the way the participants in the study addressed the researcher when making their video diaries – that despite there being a physical separation, there was a sense of the researcher's presence. In this study, the presence of the researcher could be felt throughout the recordings and across the video diaries produced by the research participants. Rather than addressing a *Dear Diary*, participants spoke directly to the researcher. Participants started the diaries directly informing the researcher about what they were doing or about to do online, and some participants updated the researcher on their day, or new haircut, or provided an introduction and lengthy description on other beings in the room, such as a pet dog, cat, or sibling. The camera can thus be said to have taken the

place of the researcher, as the participants gave it a role of a conversation partner (Buchwald et al., 2009).

## **Interviews**

Asking questions, listening to conversations, and engaging in them, takes place simultaneously with ethnography (O'Reilly, 2005), and I was engaged in these methods for data collection with school staff and participants in and out of lessons, at break and lunch times, and by hanging around after school in the residential area. I also decided to focus more in depth on the experiences of select participants and students. This was achieved by carrying out audio recorded interviews with participants, with seven of their parents, fourteen members of staff at the special school, and two college teachers. These interviews were 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984:102). For those participants who recorded their use of the internet via a video or a written diary, interviews were a time to reflect on their recording and probe further their use of the internet taking place in the home, as shown in the recordings. As most studies tend to rely on parental and professional views, thereby silencing teenagers' voices (Goyal, 2005), a key contribution of this study lies in providing young people who have physical disabilities with a voice. This was made possible through carrying out a combination of individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, followed by a series of unstructured interviews with participants in the school, and, with some, in the home.

Semi-structured interviews were initially carried out with all participants, whereby an interview guide covering prepared questions was referred to. These questions were open-ended and posed in relation to knowing more about their thoughts and attitudes on disability

and internet use in the home and the school. Although the interview guide (see appendix 2) provided the same starting point for each semi-structured interview, given that it assumes a common set of discussable topics, each interview varied according to what was said by individual interviewees, and how the answers were followed up with further questions to elicit further descriptions. Not all student participants responded with lengthy answers, particularly younger participants, and those with a short attention span and mild cognitive disabilities found it difficult to engage in and provide lengthy discussions, often giving one or two words as an answer, or just a few sentences.

The interviews that followed the initial interview were unstructured; here, interviews proceeded with no formal interview guide, and each participant discussed different issues in relation to their lives living with a disability, how they used and accessed the internet in various settings, and what developments had taken place in their online and offline lives since the previous interview. In this sense, the unstructured interviews had a research topic which steered the conversation. The talk generated from unstructured interviews resembled conversations that were taking place in ethnographic interviewing. Even those participants who were hesitant in providing lengthy answers in semi-structured interviews started to converse in this freer form of interviewing, having developed a rapport with the researcher. They would divulge personal details often unrelated to topics of interest to the study, such as relationship with siblings and teachers, as well as financial and emotional difficulties taking place in the home. The interviewing process provided the young participants the opportunity to talk about the issues most important to them and about their use of the internet.

Unstructured interviews also provided an occasion to follow up and cover a sequence of themes emerging from each participant's diaries. Most participants preferred that I came prepared, viewing the video diary prior to the interview. A list of topics would be memorised, as having notes which I referred to would disrupt the natural flow of the conversation. Some participants would enjoy me presenting clippings from the video diaries to refresh their memory on their use of the internet in the home when asking them questions in relation to it. In this way, video diaries became a visual aid during interviews, that steered deeper insights into participants' use of the internet.

An important issue when conducting individual interviews with young people is where the interview will take place. Most interviews were located and carried out in the special school. A glass-walled room was allocated for the interviews, and this room was booked prior to carrying out interviews with students in the school. It was provided for safeguarding issues, enabling teaching staff to keep a watch on both the interviewer and interviewee as they passed by the room. The glass wall allowed interviewees to monitor who would be standing outside the room, and a few students would become quiet or whisper when providing answers to questions when they noticed a teacher passing by.

One participant who had moved into further education was repeatedly interviewed in a glass-walled room allocated for interviews, which was located inside the college library. Another participant in further education was interviewed in an empty college canteen with cleaners lurking around. In another college, a private room was provided to carry out interviews, and the door to the room was closed during the interviews with a male interviewee, at his request.

When carrying out individual interviews, a member of staff at the school and college would be made aware of the whereabouts of the participant.

Seven of the participants had secured consent from parents, allowing the researcher to make home visits. Four of these participants preferred the researcher to interview them at home rather than in an educational setting. Valentine (1999) has found that being provided with a private space to carry out interviews with children can prove difficult, as the home space is often shared with other household members. While the bedroom of the participant is an obvious choice to carry out an interview, parents often find ways to be present when this takes place. This was the case with carrying out research with four participants, whereby parents or siblings drifted in and out of the interview space (in the living room or the bedroom), or they continued to remain present in the same room during the entire interview, on occasions contributing to the interview itself. Likewise, when parents would be interviewed in the living room, some participants drifted in and out of the interview space, and occasionally stood outside the room to overhear what their parents would be discussing. As this research further necessitated visiting the participants in their bedroom space to see how they accessed and used the internet there, to ensure this took place wisely, the bedroom door was, on all occasions, left wide open. This allowed parents to walk in on the conversation taking place between me and the participant. One interview took place in the bedroom space with a male participant, as his parents showed no objection for the bedroom door to be partly closed whilst they were busy preparing lunch in the kitchen downstairs. During the interview, the parents would walk past the bedroom. This, however, was not an issue for the participant who was sharing personal stories about his online relationships at the time.

Successful interviews with seven parents were achieved, after making at least two separate home visits and spending time with the parents in their home, where they showed me the domestic settings where their child would use the internet. These home visits and interactions with parents were eased by the presence of participants. Multiple home visits allowed trust and rapport to develop; after which I was able to approach them for an interview. A typical interview with parents lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. Interviews carried out with members of staff during my time at the special school were also lengthy, often being between one and two hours in duration.

One female participant was hesitant to take part in individual face-to-face interviews, and together we agreed on online interviews. Computer-mediated communication is typified as either asynchronous or synchronous communication (Jacobson, 1999). Initially, asynchronous computer-mediated communication was carried out; this describes communication between the researcher and the respondents that takes place when they do not need to be online simultaneously to be able to communicate through email. This enables repeated exchanges of emails to take place, making such communication a thoughtful and personal experience (Mann & Stewart, 2000). However, after several attempts at carrying out this form of an interview, in-depth answers and a rapport between the interviewer and interviewee failed to emerge. Synchronous computer-mediated communication, which entailed sending messages in real time, when two or more users are logged on at the same time on different computers to interchange messages (Mann & Stewart, 2000), was carried out on three separate occasions.

## **Ethics**

Prior to recruiting participants and carrying out research with them, it was necessary to gain full ethical clearance from the school and the university. This project underwent full ethical review, was approved by Loughborough University's ethics committee (see appendix 3), and has also ensured explicit compliance with the code of practice set out by the special school and the British Sociological Association. There were several ethical issues that surrounded this study, and this section discusses these in relation to gaining informed consent from participants, anonymising the participant's identity, the dilemma in promising confidentiality, power relations between the participants and researcher, and measures taken to ensure theirs and the researcher's safety.

### ***Informed Consent***

Informed consent is threefold. It entails potential participants to be presented with information regarding the project in a way in which they understand (Crow et al., 2006). Secondly, potential participants should be competent in taking an informed decision when giving their consent, and thirdly, they should understand that giving consent is voluntary (Beresford, 1997).

Participants approached for this study were recognised by the school principals as being competent in reaching an informed decision about their participation. To recruit participants, this study needed to devise and present information to the participants of different ages and abilities, which would help them to make an informed decision about their participation (Davis, 1998). This was done by holding private face-to-face meetings with the sixteen



potential participants in the school. During these meetings, which typically lasted between ten and fifteen minutes, the researcher provided the potential participants with a research pack (a brown opaque envelope that contained a booklet (see appendix 4), a leaflet, and a consent letter addressed to their parents to be returned in a brown opaque envelope provided in the pack). The booklet was designed to provide a step-by-step guide to making an informed decision; it informed the potential participant about the researcher, the study, methods to be used, the number of hours they would dedicate to the study, and the role that they would play in the research process. They were also shown and provided with the opportunity to hold a handheld video camera. They were informed they would be provided with one after a training session on how to safely use the device for recording their use of the internet in the home. Each potential participant was talked through the booklet at a pace and manner appropriate to their age and ability. They were also informed that their decision to take part was voluntary, and that they should discuss their participation with their parents by handing over the pack to them. They were also informed that only if their parents agreed to their participation (by signing the parental consent form), would the participants then be asked for their consent.

To fully reflect the experiences of people with disabilities, the researcher must involve participants in developing the way research data is collected (Farmer & Macleod, 2011). In the meeting, a discussion also took place, which highlighted that participants can change or tailor the proposed methods, i.e. interviews can be made flexible according to their needs, and that they should not hesitate to make suggestions at any point in the research process.

Participants were instructed to return the parental form directly to the researcher in school or at the school reception desk, where it would be safely kept and handed to the researcher.

Four male students explained during the recruitment that they were not willing to take part in keeping video diaries or to be visited in the home. They were, however, willing to be interviewed in school to discuss their use of the internet. These students were not provided with parental consent forms; however, they did take home with them a leaflet outlining that they would be taking part in an interview in school about their use of the internet. Before the interview, they were asked to provide their informed consent.

Leaflets (see appendix 5) were drawn up and distributed to the school staff and sent out to parents of children in the secondary department prior to the start of the research. These leaflets presented a photographic image of the researcher. It also highlighted the study aims and objectives, the duration of the study being carried out through participant observation, and interviews to take place with staff and students. They were provided with contact details should they wish their child to not be a part of the research. This study made clear that school staff and students were under no obligation to participate, and that their participation was completely voluntary.

Gaining initial consent from the children was only a part of a continuing process. Many times when I met participants for data collection, i.e. during home visits, interviews, or when they would pass over recorded material in the school, participants were reminded that they could end their participation at any time.

### *Confidentiality & Anonymity*

Research confidentiality entails providing utmost privacy to information shared with the researcher by the participant. This means the researcher should not pass on any information that can lead to others identifying the participant, nor pass on information that the participant shares with the researcher to others (Masson, 2004). However, confidentiality is not always respected when researching young people (Alderson & Morrow, 2011), especially for those children who are construed as being vulnerable or incompetent (Kirk, 2007).

According to the ethical guidelines set by the university, promising confidentiality is essential to participants. Parents and school staff who took part in interviews were assured of confidentiality in the leaflets that were handed out, and when met in person. However, setting the boundaries for confidentiality with teenage participants proved difficult, as the school principal outlined that any information shared by students with adults in the school that hints towards them or other students being at risk, should be reported back to the school. At the onset of recruiting participants, it was made clear to the participants that the researcher will ensure confidentiality. However, if the researcher feels that they have come across something which needs to be reported to the school, for example, a student is being harmed by another student or is at risk of harm, then this will be discussed with the participant who has brought the researcher's attention to this matter before making a formal report to the school.

During the research phase, one incident took place where a male student disclosed receiving partly nude images from a female peer online. The male student, who had now moved onto further education, revealed being upset after viewing the image, which he then realised was also being circulated among other male peers. Being concerned for the female student who

was circulating these images, the participant preferred me to report the matter to the school principal without compromising his identity. The school principal was informed about the incident, and respected my position as a researcher and the ethical practice of research by not placing me in a position where I would have to compromise participant confidentiality.

There was also another separate incident. Once I had completed gathering data in the special school, a female participant, Lucy, moved onto further education, and became involved in an online dispute with participants still in the special school. As the participants in the special school knew she was a part of the study, they suspected that she must have revealed details about her online activities to me. I started to receive messages and requests from the participants at the special school to disclose information that was shared by Lucy with the school. I discussed with the participants that I was not in a position to disclose any information shared by Lucy with them or the school. I informed the school about the requests that were being made by the students. The school principal assured me I would not receive any demands from the participants in the future and that the matter would be dealt with. After making the report to the school, I did not receive any messages in relation to the online dispute, either from the participants involved or the school itself.

The special school where the research was conducted is considered easily identifiable, and as the school accommodates just over one hundred students, the participants in the study were aware of peers who were involved in the study. Most members of staff were also aware of the students who took part in this study, and while every effort had been made to anonymise the identities of the participants, the participants were aware they would be, to some members, identifiable in the chapters. The participants assigned themselves a pseudonym, and the

material was anonymised to ensure confidentiality (i.e. the names, physical conditions, and other compromising information such as details of the participants' disabilities have been removed or changed), and to ensure the cases of individual students are not easily identifiable to their peers.

### ***Member Check***

As an additional precautionary measure, and to gain valuable member feedback from participants, the illustrative case studies were shared with the participants, and altered if they felt they had been misunderstood or misrepresented (Denzin, 1978; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:216), "the researcher needs to find a way to allow for the participants to review the material one way or another". Therefore, this study conducted the member check by emailing illustrative case studies to respective participants. Once the participants had an opportunity to read and comment on the illustrative case study written up about them, a series of emails were exchanged, followed by face-to-face meetings taking place in coffee shops, their home, or college. In this study, the member check process was conducted several times with some participants, which entailed several meetings. The first meetings were for ensuring the accuracy of the illustrative case studies; the respondents checked and re-read the case studies, and expanded their previous perceptions with more details. I would revise and update the illustrative case studies and later provide them with a full chapter, for them to see how their case study was illustrating points being made in the chapter in which their case study was placed. I asked the participants whether the analysis indicated that the researcher's comprehension and interpretation for the collected data was consistent, and whether they agreed with the way their illustrative case studies were being used. Most participants made minor changes and revisions to the illustrative case studies, and were pleased with the way I had come to understand and write about them.

However, the member check process was particularly valuable when I misrepresented one participant, Lucy, as “it is the researcher’s goal to contest multiple verisimilitudes, multiple versions of reality, and the perceived truths that structure these realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:580). When carrying out a member check on Lucy, she objected to and criticised the way in which her illustrative case study was written in an email, and provided lengthy comments. A request was made for a face-to-face meeting. During the meeting, she objected to certain words that were used in the first draft that constructed her with negative connotations. This process of carrying out a member check proved particularly useful, as it provided Lucy with the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with me and revisit and explain in further detail previous discussions that we had shared. By returning to previous topics of discussion and interviews, Lucy was able to provide additional detail, which helped me to understand more clearly her position and interpretation of herself and others. The following accounts that were written on her were more comprehensive, clearly thought-through in collaboration with her, and after a few revisions she approved of her illustrative case study.

Chapters with illustrative case studies on participants were shared with the school principal only after they had been approved and consented to by the participants. However, I experienced difficulty in receiving feedback from the school principal, despite making several attempts of contact and sending reminders. Two participants, who were still students at the school, refused permission for their illustrative case studies to be shown to the school principal, and for this reason, which was explained to the school principal, their illustrative case studies were omitted from the chapters sent to the school. Furthermore, during the process of carrying out this study, many participants and students voiced their opinion on the school. A request was placed by the school principal to share findings gathered about the

school and on internet use made by students. A document highlighting brief research findings was sent to the school, and again, I did not receive any feedback in relation to the document.

### **Leaving the Research Field**

The pace at which data was being collected via interviews, video diaries, and home visits varied from one participant to another. Data collection reached an end at different times with different participants. Once data saturation was achieved from each participant in areas being researched (Grady, 1998), I informed each participant personally, that no further data collection would take place from that moment. Rather than abruptly leaving the research field, I continued to volunteer in the school until the end of the academic year, and I continued my visits to mainstream colleges, lessening the time spent with participants with each visit until the end of their academic year.

To mark an official end to the research collection phase, I engaged in similar acts of leaving the school as the participants, i.e. creating a leavers' book which I carried around with me during my final weeks in the school. I would also distribute the book among staff and students for them to leave a message. One participant wrote in the book how they hoped the researcher would not abandon them after leaving the school and would continue to remain in contact. On the last day of the academic term, the school principal announced during a school assembly that I would be leaving the school but would stay in touch, making visits when possible.

To officially mark the end of the data collection, and to thank the students and staff for their involvement in the research, a two-hour private session was held in a room allocated in the

special school for all research participants and selected members of staff. A quiz game related to questions about the internet and my time at the school was carried out, followed by food and drinks, which were also made available to participant students and teachers. This offered an opportunity to thank all students and staff for their unique contribution to the research project, as well as to inform them how they could keep in touch via university email. Students who were 18 years or over and had left the special school, saw me as a friend as well as a researcher and added me on Facebook. I continued to receive online messages from many participants on a frequent basis for many months after leaving the research setting. With each online chat I would lessen my interaction, and over a lengthy period of time, contact with the participants became less frequent. This was a difficult phase, as many participants were persistent in sending several messages and asking their friends to do the same, as they wanted to discuss personal issues with me and feared being abandoned. I continued to receive requests to meet in person, and some wanted me to return to the school again. I reassured them I would visit them in person when carrying out member checks, and that I needed time to be able to continue with the writing-up stage of research. After several months of little to no contact that followed this phase, some participants still occasionally send a message online, providing updates on their life plans as they move out of the special school.

## **Analysis**

Data analysis was not a distinct phase of data collection. They were interlinked and, through the process of data collection, key topics that required further attention were identified, i.e. social relationships online, disability, and regulating access to digital media. There is no set procedure for analysing ethnographic data, but the various kinds of data produced from field notes, interview transcripts, observations, and informal conversations with participants across research sites, required the analysis for broad categories, which were future analysed against



literature. For example, chapter four analyses ethnographic data and interviews against literature on teenage social relationships, online relationships, disability, exclusion, and stigma. Chapter five analyses ethnographic data and interviews with participants and teachers, against literature on digital media accessibility, regulations on internet safety, and online risks. Chapter six analyses ethnographic data and interviews, and draws on policy statements of the special school published on their website against literature on special schools and models of disability. These categories helped to make sense of the vast ethnographic data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In comparison, in chapter three, research data collected via video diaries is analysed and interwoven with the discussion of a novel methodological framework that ties together concepts of rhythms, wayfaring, and friction.

### **Emerging Themes**

Whilst carrying out ethnography, and producing interview transcripts with members of staff in the special school, participants and their parents, this study started to identify four broad areas that required attention. These included the rhythms of using the internet at home evident in video diaries, the developing online social relationships of participants, the ways in which internet use was being regulated in and out of school by parents and teachers, and how disability was enacted by young people with physical disabilities in the special school and in mainstream educational settings. These areas were future-focused upon and analysed against literature that has helped me to form the four analytical chapters that follow.

## **Chapter 3: Unravelling Wayfaring and the Rhythms of Moving In and Out of the Internet**

### **Introduction**

The internet is typically viewed as driving a fast paced life (Tomlinson, 2007; Wajcman, 2008). Teenagers, in particular, are perceived to be whizzing online from one activity to another (Livingstone, 2009) through the immediacy of applications (apps) (Gardner & Davis, 2013). Despite this, adolescents' media use is frequently studied through typologies, e.g. time spent gaming or information seeking, which does not capture the dynamics of young people's movement within and beyond digital media.

This chapter advances the scholarly debates regarding young people's online activities, by exploring their differing 'rhythms' or pace, and wayfaring or journeys, within and between online and offline places. The importance and intricacy of these different paces and trajectories emerged in the study of how teenagers with physical disabilities use the internet at home, recorded through video diaries. As a framework for making sense of these everyday movements or trajectories online, this article draws on the concepts of 'rhythm' (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]) and 'wayfaring' (Ingold, 2007), which help to unravel the moving about online from one site and activity to another in a 'rhythmic' or repetitive and habitual manner, that may happen in a fast and slow pace.

This chapter begins by reviewing literature that examines internet use by young people through typologies, followed by a discussion of the study of the internet in the mobilities literature. By placing the analysis of internet use in mobility studies, I shift the focus from what young people consume online to the embodied media practices of using the internet. What follows is a discussion on digital rhythms and wayfaring, which forms a framework for

analysing the video diaries of three teenagers with physical disabilities, chosen for illustrative cases. The framework suggests methodological ideas of how to study internet use as a dynamic, mobile activity, and it also offers insights on how inequalities are embedded in these habitual rhythms.

### **Studying Internet Use and Mobilities**

Differences in young people's internet use have often been examined in terms of users' age, gender, socioeconomic status, digital skills and digital diversity (the different ways people access and use the internet), with scholars arguing that internet use is not a homogeneous experience for all adolescents (de Almeida et al., 2011; Peter and Valkenburg, 2006).

Typologies of internet use have sought to identify these differences. Scholars have measured who is going online, the types of content people view online, and the frequency, duration, and speed (dial-up, wireless) of internet use. Research has also captured the frequency of internet use, or the number of times a user engages in different activities online, such as information seeking and gaming (Brandzæg et al., 2011; Eynon & Malmberg, 2011; Holmes, 2011; Howard et al., 2001; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006).

Studies also draw on variables, such as the amount of time people spend online and the number of activities they engage with, to construct different user profiles. For example, Livingstone and Helsper (2007) have observed that most middle-class adolescents in the United Kingdom use the internet daily, access the internet at home, engage with at least seven activities, and that the time they spend online is increasing. Blank and Groszlj (2011) note that, on average, British internet users aged 14 and over engage in 25 different online activities. It has also been observed that when inequalities persist in the way young people use the internet, this use varies according to young people's digital skills, their motivation to use the

internet, and the level of support they receive from family members and teachers (OECD 2016).

These studies usefully highlight the broad trends of internet use by young people. However, they say little about how young people *move about* online. Storm-Mathiesen (2016) suggests that the aforementioned studies offer insights on linguistic data from parents and children on young people's practices of the internet; however, they do not provide insights on the embodied practices of media use from non-discursive accounts, and how these are situated in the routine lives of young people. To study these routines requires researching media practices as and when they happen in everyday contexts.

Mobility studies offer a fruitful approach for understanding the routine and mundane digital media practices by young people. The 'mobility turn' in social sciences (see Urry, 2004; Sheller and Urry, 2006) has inspired an interdisciplinary conceptual paradigm exploring mobilities and *immobilities*, including the study of various forms of travel and transport such as automobility (see Dant, 2004; Laurier et al., 2008; Lumsden, 2015). Sheller and Urry (2006:2) argue that the emergent practices of physical, informational, and communicational mobility are continually "reconfiguring patterns of movement, co-presences, social exclusion and security". This is also coupled with an increasing focus on 'hyper-mobility' and forms of 'instantaneous' communication (Freund & Martin, 2007; Hannam et al., 2006). However, others such as Bissell (2007:280) highlight the need to study those moments during which individuals are *immobile*, 'stuck', 'suspended', or 'waiting'.

Social scientists have also explored the application of these principles to the study of the internet and communication practices. As Hannam et al. (2006:4) note: "There is increasing

convergence between transport and communication, ‘mobilizing’ the requirements and characteristics of co-presence into a new kind of mobility nexus.” Aouragh (2011) focuses on ‘virtual mobility’ amongst Palestinians, while others such as Voilmy et al. (2008) have studied commuters’ mobile internet use. Moiz and Paris (2015) also show how, for the ‘flashpacker’ (the modern ‘backpacker’ and global traveller), the ‘statusphere’ epitomised via “publishing, reading, responding to, and sharing micro-sized updates” (Solis, cited in Moiz and Paris, 2015) provides them with a form of ‘virtual mooring’ (Hannam et al., 2006), connecting them to others while they are ‘on the move’.

Therefore, mobility studies have helped shift the focus from media consumption or content to everyday embodied media practices (Moore, 2014; 2015; Pink & Mackley, 2013). Moore (2014:204) claims that virtual travel takes place alongside manual bodily movements. He calls this being ‘doubly digital’, as fingers tapping and mouse clicking translate to a person traversing through, in, and out of online and offline environments. These forms of movement are referred to by Ingold (2007) as ‘wayfaring’ - a particular form of improvisational movement through which beings inhabit the world by journeying along lines of travel without a destination in mind.

To explore the differences in the embodied practice of using the internet, such as the pace and trajectories of moving online, I draw on the concepts of ‘rhythm’ and ‘wayfaring’. I seek to develop and employ a novel conceptual and methodological framework for making sense of how users, in this case young people with physical disabilities, traverse the internet.

### **Digital Rhythms and Wayfaring**

The concept of rhythm was originally introduced by Lefebvre (2004 [1992]) alongside ‘rhythmanalysis’ - an analytical lens or tool to analyse practices and performances of rhythms

in everyday life. Lefebvre (2004 [1992]:15) defines rhythm in many ways. Broadly, it is considered as the “repeated instances of movements, gestures, actions, situations that are open to a measure of difference” (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]:15). Rhythms are comprised of reprises and returns with a variation, where each move is not identical to the one that preceded it. Everyday life is organised according to various rhythms, and the coming together of many rhythms (polyrhythmia) at the same time produces a state of motion.

Lefebvre (2004 [1992]) describes different ways rhythms can overlap, coexist and relate to one another. In doing this, he firstly identifies different modes of repetition that include biological (sleep, hunger), cyclic (seasonal and cosmic, cycles that produce new beginnings), and linear rhythms (produced from human social action, such as walking at a certain pace with little difference in intervals). Secondly, he identifies these intertwined rhythms in the study of everyday city life, whereby each specific rhythm, e.g. pedestrian walking down the street (fast or slow), is shaped by interactions made with other rhythms, e.g. time of day, where the rhythm of an automobile is shaped by the rhythm and flow of traffic. Each rhythm has its own time and space of where and when the rhythm unfolds and with its own measure of ‘speed, frequency, consistency’, and intervals (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]:10). Although all these rhythms are repetitive, they vary according to pace; some are slow and long while others are quick and short. When different rhythms taking place at different paces come together, Lefebvre (2004 [1992]) calls this juxtaposition of multiple rhythms taking place at the same time ‘polyrhythmia’ (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]:89).

Rhythms also have a political or evaluative dimension. For instance, being slow or immobile has been likened to the inability to match a fast-paced life (Tomlinson, 2007). Cresswell (2010) notes that different social groups and individuals are positioned differently in regard

to their movements. The politics of mobility places people with disabilities in a slower lane of life that relies on the use of assistive technologies to enable them to move about online and offline, which marks them as different from mainstream internet practitioners (Söderström, 2013).

However, movements for slow eating and slow living provide a different meaning to the term slow. Rather than considering being slow as a disadvantage, being slow is a response for “time for meaningful things” (Parkins, 2004:364). Being slow is considered as giving mindful attention to a practice, savouring its pleasure or becoming involved in the task to which we give our time (Parkins, 2004). For instance, we may slow down or pause to give our mindful attention to something we view online, just as people pause on different sections of a newspaper to read an article (Moore, 2015). Internet users may also intentionally ‘pause’ online, to, for example, rest or to make observations (Ingold, 2007). Slowing down or ‘pausing’ can also, therefore, be a choice.

Lefebvre (2004 [1992]) notes a disruption in heterogeneous or harmonious rhythms (eurhythmia) produces a condition of arrhythmia. A rhythm can also be disrupted by ‘friction’, which slows down the motion or brings it to a halt (Cresswell, 2014). Friction is understood by Cresswell (2014) in terms of physics, or the arrangement of power relations. In this chapter, I draw on the latter to understand how teenagers can encounter friction or immobility while using the internet (for instance, via internal factors such as an interfering parent or slow internet connection). Bissell (2007) notes there are rhythms of waiting that take place in transport, e.g. at airports. When the mobility of people travelling is brought to a slower pace, e.g. delayed flight timings, rather than waiting being ‘empty time’, people

become conscious of their bodies and endure the wait by engaging in activities such as eating, reading or, nowadays, browsing the internet.

One becomes conscious of their own rhythms when they are met with disruptions or irregularities (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]). As rhythms are performed in environments that are ever changing (Ingold, 2011), those people that come to successfully attune their rhythms to changing environments that bring with them disruptions or interferences become skilled practitioners. For example, rhythms, such as walking, which are repeatedly performed by individuals, do not take place automatically. This is further exemplified by Edensor (2010), who analyses when walking down a street in a city the body adapts to the eventualities, flows, and interruptions that shape the experience of the walker.

Ingold (2007:91-92) uses the concept 'wayfaring' to define the 'ways of knowing' as one moves 'along a line of travel'. Here, Ingold does not refer to moving along online, but refers to how people come to know and learn their way around physical landscapes as they move along them. The path of a wayfarer is negotiated and improvised along the way by the individual, who is constantly seeking a way through, while being on the move. The wayfarer pauses for rest and returns repeatedly to places already visited (Ingold, 2010). Therefore, in addition to 'rhythm', the concept of wayfaring helps to understand and explore how people move in and out of various digital media such as apps, social networking sites, and bedrooms, constructing rhythmic and often repetitive, even improvised journeys. The concept of wayfaring allows this chapter to unpack the humdrum of dwelling and moving in and out of places in digital media in everyday contexts (at home and on the go), in a way that research that draws on typologies to understand internet use does not effectively capture.



In the following section I present excerpts from three video diaries that unravel the routine use of the internet by the participants. I selected the three cases to reflect the spectrum of rhythms, pace, and digital journeys that were evident across the video diaries. By journeys, I refer to the beginning of the footage filmed in the video diaries that draws attention to interaction and actions with the internet. The first case focuses on Scott, who is more physically able than most of his peers in the school, and how he performs fast, repetitive journeys in and out of digital media. The second case presents Noah’s journeys, focusing on repetitive replaying of a platform game. Lastly, Mick’s video diary shows a slower rhythm, intermittently using a gaming site and being interrupted by, and having conversations with, his parents, who are also engaged with their own digital devices and conversations.

### **Zigzagging In and Out of the Internet**

Scott films his own diary, which shows that he is proficient in finding his way around the internet, reflected in the number of online activities he performs, as well as the pace, rhythms, and pauses that define his five-minute journey within and beyond the internet.

	Running Time <sup>2</sup>
1 Scott is sitting with his black laptop on his bed, recording with his left hand. Rap music plays in background. Black bedroom walls and drawn black curtains envelope the room in darkness. <i>Err twenty ninth of January. It is ten to eight in the evening.</i> Sound notification from Facebook Messenger alerts Scott to a new	00:00:00

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<sup>2</sup> In hours, minutes and seconds.

<p>message. Camera shuffles in his left hand. Bright light radiates from the laptop screen. The Facebook newsfeed partly comes in to clear view.</p>	00:00:23
<p>2</p> <p>The camera pans across his laptop screen. Quickly, a chat window on Facebook comes to view. <i>Just on Facebook, just sort of browsing through the newsfeed.</i> Scott scrolls down his newsfeed with his finger tapping at a steady pace on the laptop keyboard. <i>There's nothing really happening...nothing really to look at. I'm really not even paying much attention to it because I'm really busy having a conversation with someone [his girlfriend].</i> The camera pans from the newsfeed to the private chat window. Heart emoticons and smiley faces appear. <i>That's the only reason I am on here.</i></p>	00:00:46
<p>3</p> <p>The camera focuses back on the newsfeed. Sound notification from Facebook Messenger. The camera returns to the private conversation. Girlfriend sends hugs and kisses. <i>That's the only thing I'm doing.</i> Scott clicks on a different tab to show, <i>I brought some, [clears throat] some lyrics up so I can sing along to a song.</i> Focuses the camera on the webpage, shows lyrics to a pop-rock love song. <i>Haven't done much else throughout the day.</i></p>	00:01:05
<p>4</p> <p>Scott clicks the mouse to bring up a list of visited websites. He talks through the list as he scrolls down. <i>Just browsing on Facebook.</i> Camera pans and focuses on the list of Facebook history. <i>This is the tabs that come out of it.</i> Continues to scroll down the list. <i>The things that come out of it, the things like jokes and stuff.</i> Zooms out the list, focuses the camera on his laptop keyboard.</p>	00:01:30
<p>5</p>	

<p>Pans the camera back to the history list. <i>Checking emails, train tickets, stuff like that because I'm going away to Derby so it's good for looking at times...Er online banking, [zooms in] I use online banking very cautiously.</i> Continues to scroll down the list. [Zooms out]. <i>That's all I've done today, and anything before that is all Facebook for the whole day.</i></p>	<p>00:02:08</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Clicks on a tab, screen flicks to the Facebook newsfeed. <i>At the minute I'm also using my iPod touch.</i> Scott holds up his iPod in his right hand in front of the camera and swipes across the springboard, goes past many applications before tapping on the Instagram icon with his thumb. <i>And I'm using Instagram.</i></p>	<p>00:02:18</p>
<p>7</p> <p><i>To edit and publish some photos for my own personal use, so that's another use of the internet that I've done today.</i> [Sound notification from Facebook Messenger]. The Instagram app uploads a list of selfies that failed to upload online the previous time he was using the app. [Another chat notification]. Scott brings his thumb down on the iPod to the camera icon, taps turning it on. At the bottom right hand corner of the iPod screen is a small image of previously snapped photographs on the device. The last one shows a close up shot of his eyes. Scott taps on the image three times before the device responds and brings Scott's photos up in a list of albums.</p>	<p>00:02:36</p>
<p>8</p> <p><i>Erm what else have I done?</i> Pauses. <i>That's about it generally.</i> Scott taps and selects an album on his camera roll with his thumb. A gallery of his pictures including selfies, images with school friends, girlfriend, and two pictures of his eyes spring up on his screen. He taps on the image of his eyes and it fills</p>	

<p>the screen. App now allows him to scale and crop the image. <i>Not done much else.</i></p>	<p>00:02:50</p>
<p>9</p> <p><i>Just doing this photo right now.</i> Scott zooms in and out into the eyes with his finger and thumb to crop the image.</p>	<p>00:03:02</p>
<p>10</p> <p>Instagram takes Scott to a screen to enhance the image. A row of filter options are displayed along the bottom of the screen. He selects the second one from the row with his thumb. The image becomes dark around the edges and bright from the centre. Sound notification from Facebook Messenger.</p> <p>Scott taps along the filter icons eighteen times, from left to right, before returning to the same ones again. <i>Trying to find one that brings out the colour in my eyes best because that's why I'm doing it. Gonna go with this one.</i> He uses his thumb and finger to place a focus on the two eyes, this makes the eyes light up deep blue. <i>Adding a focus.</i> Takes his thumb and finger off the screen, <i>I think that'll do!</i> Pauses. He appears to be looking at the edited image.</p>	<p>00:04:06</p>
<p>11</p> <p>Taps on the next icon twice at the top of the screen and shares the image online.</p>	<p>00:04:14</p>
<p>12</p> <p>He moves his thumb down the iPod, presses on the home button, moves his right hand holding the device away from the camera and places it down on his bed. Scott focuses his attention back to the laptop.</p>	<p>00:04:18</p>
<p>13</p>	

<p><i>Now I'm just on Facebook chatting, got some new messages. The camera pans to the chat window and back to the news feed. A close up image of a teenage boy appears. I don't know who the hell that is. Scott starts to scroll down the news page. Yeah I guess I'll just do this for the next couple of days, yeah byeeeee.</i></p>	<p>00:05:05</p>
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There are different rhythms at work in Scott's diary. The first is the rhythm of him moving or flicking, in a fast paced succession, back and forth between different online platforms. In the first minute of the diary (sequences 1, 2 and 3), his attention shifts from a Facebook message to Facebook feed to Facebook chat, back to Facebook feed and again to Facebook message, until he ends up searching for lyrics to a love song he was listening to. Throughout this quick rhythmic action, his voice-over explains he has been 'just on Facebook,' doing this 'all day' or 'not much.' This fast paced flicking through platforms repeats in all his ten diaries, so clearly constitutes a habitual rhythm, revealing the fairly frenetic, repetitive activity that constitutes his seeming inactivity or not doing 'much' on Facebook.

The second rhythm is constituted by Scott's movements between devices, i.e. his iPod Touch and laptop. In all his diaries, Scott uses the two devices simultaneously. During the two-minute sequence of using his iPod Touch (sequences 6-12) Scott, further, moves between different apps, from Instagram to Camera, to Albums to Photo Edit and back to Instagram. All the while, Facebook rumbles in the background, sending messages to the laptop screen. This movement between devices and platforms is illustrative of how the so-called 'convergence' culture operates at the micro-level (Jenkins, 2006).

The third rhythm is driven by Scott's hands, which swiftly tap on the keyboard, swipe, and touch the iPod screen. Rhythms of the hand are revealed when he shows himself picking up the iPod touch from his bed, positioning it in his right hand, and comfortably placing his thumb in front of the screen to repeatedly tap, scroll, and flick through online content. This rhythm illustrates the facility and dexterity of Scott's movements, how the repeated actions by his thumbs have become 'attuned' with the use of the devices (Ingold, 2011).

The fourth and final rhythm is created by the broader context of Scott's use of digital media. He remains seated on his bed, yet is constantly in motion in his media-rich bedroom (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001), with comfortable access to two internet-enabled devices (laptop and an iPod Touch), with rap music booming out of the sound system connected to his iPod and becoming part of the atmosphere of his room marked by the type of music and the darkness, which all create his own personal and private social space in the family home (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). By using Lincoln's (2012:150) concept of 'zoning' to understand how bedroom space has different zones, which integrate and merge through media objects, we find the bedroom is a 'portal of communication', a space Scott uses in the evenings to get online and socialise from home; the same bed he sleeps on becomes a site where he can dip in and out of a variety of activities by using the laptop and iPod Touch to socialise, scroll for updates, seek information, create content, and publish online. The room provides a porous, sensory environment, creating a polyrhythmia of Scott's rapid movements in and out of digital media, music, and the dark, closed solitude of his room.

Furthermore, Scott's journey can be described as a form of 'wayfaring' (Ingold, 2007), as it does not entail a destination. Instead, he is continually making his way along as he uses the internet. His movements are embedded in online conversations, the visual content he uploads,

and websites he logs onto, which are traceable from a history list. Scott chooses to slow down at times, for example when he is engaged in editing (18 times) and deciding whether he is satisfied with the edited image of his own eyes that he uploads to Instagram. He also pauses to reflect on his journey online when he scrolls down the history list and thinks about what else he has done online whilst filming himself in conversation with the absent researcher. The list of websites previously visited illustrate some habitual and perhaps unique places he traverses online besides those filmed in the diary, such as buying train tickets, online banking, and ‘jokes and stuff’. However, even if Scott’s journeys are wayfaring, spontaneously meandering in and out of digital media, they are also highly rhythmic, i.e. repetitive and patterned; in all his diaries he repeats the same quick flicking back and forth between the same platforms, sites, and devices with intermittent pauses. I suspect that those rhythms are not necessarily unique to him but apply to many other young people, both disabled and able bodied.

### **Replay!**

When using the internet, Noah prefers to game online. His mother has encouraged him to use social networking sites to interact with his friends and broaden his use of the internet; however, his video diaries, filmed by the researcher, show his continued interest in gaming. Often seen gaming online in school during lessons and at break times, and at home too, he was found to be engaged in the same activity, whereby he enjoys outperforming his previous score online.

	Running Time
<p>1</p> <p>In a bright airy living room, Noah is sat on a swivel chair in front of his desktop computer being filmed by the researcher. Noah smiles at the camera as the computer continues to load. The researcher positions the camera on the desk. Noah enters his login details and opens and closes a few folders on the computer.</p> <p>Researcher: <i>What are you doing?</i></p> <p>Noah: <i>Showing you which games I play.</i></p>	<p>00:00:00</p> <p>00:02:06</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Noah drags and clicks the mouse with his right hand over the Internet Explorer icon. He waits for the screen to upload. The Google homepage uploads, Noah types 'extreme' in the search bar, and the site offers him suggestions for his search. He scrolls down and clicks on the second suggestion, 'Extreme Pamplona'.</p>	<p>00:02:20</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Gaming site loads. Noah clicks to start the game. As the site loads the first level, Noah moves his right hand across the computer screen to turn the speaker volume on. Pumping music starts to play. Screen loads the first level to the game.</p>	<p>00:02:38</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Countdown to the level appears on the screen. Sound of a hooter and energetic Spanish music plays. A bull is unleashed behind a male figure.</p>	



<p>Noah controls the movement of the male figure by tapping on the arrow keys on the keyboard.</p>	<p>00:02:39</p>
<p>5</p> <p>The male figure starts to run as Noah starts tapping on the keyboard.</p> <p>Researcher: <i>You still play this!</i></p> <p>The male figure runs in the game, jumping over a number of obstacles, giving off grunts as it jumps, rolls and falls.</p> <p>Noah: <i>Remember it?</i></p> <p>Researcher: <i>Yeah, I do now yeah!</i></p> <p>Noah: <i>Know which one I like?</i></p> <p>Researcher: <i>Which one?</i></p> <p>Noah: <i>I like the policing one.</i> Noah successfully completes the game and saves the man from being hit by the bull. Sound of cheers.</p>	<p>00:03:27</p>
<p>6</p> <p>New screen shows level completed in 48 seconds. The male figure appears panting on the side of the screen. Noah's mouse is placed on the screen where two flags emerge. He is presented with a choice to click one flag.</p>	<p>00:03:34</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Noah: <i>So, which one would you go for? That one</i> [points to a German flag] <i>or that one?</i> [points to a French flag with his mouse].</p> <p>Researcher: <i>Errrr, let's go for Germany.</i></p> <p>Noah: <i>That one.</i> Noah moves the mouse back over the German flag and clicks to select the next level. Game begins. Noah jumps over many higher obstacles than before, one after the other.</p>	<p>00:03:51</p>
<p>8</p>	

<p>Noah successfully completes the level. Screen shows level is complete in 31 seconds. Noah has now unlocked two further flags.</p> <p>Noah: <i>Now, here, no, that one</i> [Union Jack] <i>or that one</i> [Swiss flag. Points with the mouse].</p> <p>Researcher: <i>Because we are British let's go for the Union Jack!</i> [Giggles]</p> <p>Noah: <i>Now here's one you'll like.</i> He moves the mouse to click on the Union Jack.</p>	00:04:33
<p>9</p> <p>Game begins. Male figure jumps out of a window chased by a police officer.</p> <p>Noah: <i>Here's one bit I really like. Swinggg! Yeah!</i> Noah swings the animated character in mid-air and lands him safely before continuing him on with his run. <i>Missed meeee!</i> The character jumps over obstacles backwards and forwards.</p>	00:04:59
<p>10</p> <p>Researcher: <i>Oh no he didn't!</i> The cop grabs the male figure. The level comes to an end. Noah and the researcher laugh. Level over in 68 seconds. The game presents options to repeat the same level or restart the game from the beginning.</p> <p>Noah: <i>I'll play it again.</i> He moves the mouse and clicks to replay the same level.</p>	00:05:01
<p>11</p> <p>Noah replays and loses the same level in 43 seconds. He replays the level again and loses in 94 seconds. Noah replays and completes the level in 31 seconds.</p>	00:05:44

<p>12</p> <p>Noah clicks on a new unlocked flag. Noah successfully plays and completes the new level in 3 minutes. Noah moves the mouse to click on the final level.</p>	<p>00:10:26</p>
<p>13</p> <p>Level begins. The level is a repeat of the level played in sequence 4. The male figure is chased and caught up by a bull in 1 minute 33 seconds. Level over.</p> <p>Researcher and Noah: <i>Oooo!</i> Screen shows option to replay the level again.</p> <p>Noah moves the mouse to click on the replay option.</p>	<p>00:11:19</p>
<p>14</p> <p>Level restarts.</p> <p>Noah: <i>Come on, come on, come on. Here we go. Look stuck!</i> Refers to the bull that is stuck by an obstacle, preventing it from reaching the male figure as he crosses the finishing line and wins the level. Sound of cheers.</p> <p>The animated man has his arms raised up with a smile on his face and fists clenched, celebrating his win.</p>	<p>00:13:20</p>
<p>15</p> <p>Noah closes the game and flicks to the Google homepage.</p> <p>Researcher: <i>What else do you do?</i></p> <p>Noah: <i>I've got Facebook!</i> Noah searches the site on Google and clicks on the first listed site. It now takes him to the Facebook page where he enters his login details.</p>	<p>00:14:14</p>
<p>16</p>	

Noah: <i>Here we go</i> . Screen shows Noah's newsfeed page and friends list, which he scrolls down for 1 minute 32 seconds. Noah moves to Facebook games and uploads a karaoke game, Lyroke, which he plays for 4 minutes 41 seconds.	00:22:42
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The first rhythm that emerges from Noah's diary is that of repetitious playing of different levels that make up a platform game, *Extreme Pamplona*. Noah moves from one level to another in a cyclical rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]) as each new level entails a new beginning. To reach a new level involves a series of steps that he follows, i.e. he clicks to start the level that leads to a countdown, followed by the sound of a hooter, which gives him the cue to start running (by tapping on a key on the keyboard) to escape a character such as a bull, chasing him, and making it over a finishing line. When he successfully completes the level, he is awarded with unlocked flags; he taps on a new flag that emerges after completing a level to move onto a new level. Each time he plays a new level to the game, the same sequence of game play is repeated, creating a cyclic rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004 [1992]). This takes place, in succession, eight times. Beginning at a fast pace, in sequences 4 to 6, Noah completes the first two levels in forty-eight seconds, illustrating a rapid gaming rhythm that is typical of platform games (Compton & Mateas, 2006). This is followed by him playing the third level in quick succession, with sequences 7 to 8 taking him thirty-one seconds. In total, from sequences 4 to 8 he spends one minute and nineteen seconds playing 3 levels.

Completing quick chases allows Noah to build a momentum of completing quick levels; however, when he plays the fourth level in sequence 9 he becomes *stuck*. The game introduces difficult jumps and chases and these translate into longer gaming episodes. The second rhythm is one of slowing down, caused by kinetic friction (Creswell, 2014) brought

about by a static and a moving body, i.e. the animated character controlled by Noah is unable to jump over an object and causes a disruption, preventing him from moving at a fast pace in the game. Unable to jump over obstacles translates to longer sequences. In sequences 9 to 11, it takes Noah three minutes and twenty-nine seconds to replay the same level three times, before he is able to successfully move on to the next level at his fourth attempt.

This repetition of longer sequences of levels, being chased, losing the level and clicking to replay the same level, gives rise to the second rhythm, jarred by friction. This friction stands in contrast to the first rhythm of rapid gaming, illustrating a state of *flow* achieved by Noah's level of skill (ability to complete the task presented by the game) matching the level of difficulty presented by the game (Shin, 2006). However, there is also some variation in the rhythm. So, on his fourth attempt at the harder level, Noah manages to complete the level in sequence 11 in thirty-one seconds. On sequences 13 and 14 however, Noah is presented with playing the first level again, which he completed quickly in sequence 4; however, here it takes him two attempts at replaying the level before he is able to successfully complete the game.

The third rhythm is constituted by the way Noah moves from one site to the next. He spends a total of thirteen minutes twenty seconds on the gaming site *Extreme Pamplona*, before moving to Facebook for one minute thirty-two seconds, and then onto playing another game called Lyroke for four minutes forty-one seconds. Thus, whilst Noah moves fast, completing levels in quick succession, he stays on one gaming site. This rhythm stands in contrast with Scott, who swiftly moves from one site to another and back again and also swaps between two devices. The way in which Noah stays on a few gaming sites and repeats the same game may be due to him having a mild cognitive disability. The repetitive game, which he is able



<p>Mick moves the mouse, and clicks on an icon that brings up a list of player names.</p> <p>Father: <i>I think you might have your list on a hold up...</i></p> <p>Mick mumbles, burps, and clicks on the list his father is referring to. The screen flicks to load the stats of the game. Mick clicks on an icon that takes him to another screen that informs him of his avatar's health. He then clicks on another icon titled <i>engage</i> and another screen loads up.</p> <p>Father: <i>That's better... Yeah?</i></p> <p>Mick: <i>Yeah!</i></p>	<p>00:00:29</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Mick's mother mumbles in the background.</p> <p>Mick turns towards his mother.</p> <p>Mother: <i>Not going to start the next chapter, because if I do I won't be able to put it down again.</i></p> <p>Text continues to change at the bottom of the screen; it updates Mick on the damage caused to the health of his avatar. Mick turns his head towards the screen.</p>	<p>00:01:02</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Mick's Mother: <i>I don't think [name unclear] has gone to Japan.</i></p>	<p>00:01:18</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Mick moves his head away from the screen and back again, he then moves his mouse and clicks on an icon. A list of names pops up, he moves his mouse on the screen and pauses.</p>	

<p>Mick: <i>I'll just have to explain to the researcher that I've not got the whole picture</i> [refers to the camera not being able to record the whole computer screen].</p> <p>Mick uses his mouse to check the health of the avatar and clicks to engage in a raid.</p> <p>Father: <i>Yeah but you've got the best that you can.</i></p> <p>Mick turns his head down, then moves his mouse across the screen and makes a purchase for the avatar's health. Mick pats his arm repeatedly and turns his head away from the screen.</p>	<p>00:02:32</p>
<p>6</p> <p>Mick's father mentions something [unclear], Mick and his father both giggle.</p> <p>Song changes.</p> <p>Mick: <i>I just thought</i> [nudges the camera, camera wobbles up and down]</p> <p>Father: <i>What you trying to do mate?</i></p> <p>Mick: <i>I was trying to see.</i></p> <p>Mother: <i>That's how low my sugars have got.</i></p> <p>Father: <i>2 point 1.</i></p> <p>Mick: <i>Dad.</i></p> <p>Father: <i>Yeah.</i></p> <p>Mick: <i>I was just gonna say I've recorded mother singing, I'm gonna put it on YouTube, this is how rubbish my mum sings you'll get booed off.</i></p> <p>Giggles, stretches his arms and leans back in his wheelchair.</p>	<p>00:04:08</p>
<p>7</p>	



<p>Mick moves the mouse and clicks on an icon to engage his avatar in a raid.</p> <p>Mick: <i>I won't be able to record much anyway.</i></p> <p>Father: <i>Katy Perry is this, isn't it?</i> [refers to the song]</p> <p>Mick: Moves the mouse over the screen and places it on top of an icon he clicks on next. <i>And we're gonna let it burn, burn, burn</i> [sings along to the song]. Clicks on the icon. Keeps the mouse on top of the same icon. <i>I don't want you singing and recording, Dad.</i></p> <p>Mick turns his head away from the screen. Updates from the game flash on the screen. Clicks repeatedly on an icon five times.</p> <p>Mick: <i>What?</i></p> <p>Mother: <i>I said I wonder where Cinnamon Tree is, takeaway in [the area] it's Indian!</i></p> <p>Mick continues to click repeatedly nine times on the icon, he pauses.</p> <p>Mick: <i>Really I could! Dad?</i> Moves the mouse around the screen. Clicks back to check damage to the avatar's health.</p> <p>Song comes to an end.</p>	<p>00:06:29</p>
<p>8</p> <p>New song plays.</p> <p>Moves the mouse around the screen. Clicks on his avatar. Checks the stamina.</p> <p><i>Bing!</i> Sound of Facebook chat notification.</p> <p>Father: <i>Have you opened chat?</i></p> <p>Mother: <i>No, I am trying to sort out some food.</i></p> <p>Father: <i>We planned chicken haven't we?</i></p>	

<p>Mother: <i>I don't feel like.</i></p> <p>Father: <i>If we go now..., I've just got a personal best, want to know what it was?</i></p> <p>Mick: <i>What?</i></p> <p>Father: <i>Five billion nine hundred and thirty-two.</i></p> <p>Mother: <i>That's not your personal best, you had that seven billion one?</i></p> <p>Father: <i>No I didn't have the seven!</i></p> <p>Mother: <i>Excuse me! The other week? You did!</i></p>	00:08:00
<p>9</p> <p>Mick clicks to check statistics on the health, stamina, and damage to his avatar. This activity leads him to switch between three different screens. He returns to the main page, places the mouse over an icon and clicks three times to engage in a raid.</p> <p>Father: <i>Oh yeah I did seven point four six.</i></p> <p>Mother: <i>Right, so shut up!</i></p> <p>Mick pauses, looks away from the screen.</p> <p>Mother: <i>Come on then.</i></p> <p>Father: <i>Alright won't be long, what do you want the...</i></p> <p>Mick: [stretches his arms] <i>Errr...can I get... Errrrmmm</i></p> <p>Father takes out his wallet from his trouser pocket. <i>I'm having spam fritters you want spam fritters too?</i></p> <p>Mick agrees, then leans back in his chair and looks outside as his parents leave the house.</p>	00:09:12

Mick's diary is marked by a slow rhythm, underpinning his intermittent interaction with the online game. The rhythm is characterised by slow 'dead time' (Watts & Urry, 2008) broken up by sporadic, brief and quick online activities taking place on one gaming site. Mick's online activity begins with him observing textual updates to a raid he is engaged in online. The screen shows a still image of a ghostly character, and underneath the image continuous updates to the game are flashed. To make moves in the game, Mick monitors the damage caused in the raid to his avatar. To do this, he flicks back and forth between three different screens (web pages) on the website; these different screens include game statistics, his avatar's health, and the settings of the game. In sequence 2, Mick clicks between these three different activities, and returns to the main game page. Two minutes and three seconds later, Mick clicks to check the health of the avatar before returning to the main gaming page in sequence 5. Four and a half minutes later, in sequences 7 and 8, he repeats this again.

Mick then battles in a raid by tapping on an icon repeatedly fifteen times in sequence 7 to defeat the character. Three minutes later in sequence 9, he repeatedly taps three times on the same icon again. In between, Mick clicks back and forth between the gaming page and health statistics of his avatar in sequences 8 and 9. However, whilst there are fast paced periods of active engagement with the game, these periods are interspersed with Mick not engaging in the online game, which accounts for the fact that the few checks and one raid take a total of nine minutes and twelve seconds.

The second rhythm, therefore, is constituted by the way in which Mick's gaming is frequently interrupted by his parents, so that he gets distracted by his parents talking about other things; at times this brings friction to his game play, as Mick physically turns his head away from the computer screen and towards his mother. In contrast, Mick's father plays a more supportive

and assistive role; he watches over and assists Mick's online activities. Many of the parental interruptions are verbal interjections made particularly by his mother; conversations also take place between, and with, the parents. For example, in sequences 1 and 2, Mick's father assists Mick in setting up the camera and directs his online activities after being online for twenty-nine seconds. In sequences 3 and 4, Mick's mother mumbles in the background, which draws Mick's attention and activities away from the computer screen and towards her. He returns to the game forty-nine seconds later, before pausing again in sequence 5 to discuss the recording of the diary with his father. While his parents continue to talk, Mick briefly intervenes in the conversation, still being away from his online activities for two minutes twenty-eight seconds after clicking on an icon in sequence 5. In sequence 7, Mick once again returns to the game, while his parents engage in a conversation about a local restaurant, sugar levels, and a disagreement over the father's best score in an online game. In sequence 9, Mick is distracted from his online activities by his mother raising her voice. This is followed by the family engaging in a discussion about getting a takeaway, where Mick remains diverted from his online activities.

Like Noah, Mick also engages in one online activity or game at a time, not moving about back and forth between sites like Scott did. Noah also interacts with the researcher in between his gaming; however, Mick spends significantly more time interacting with his parents offline than playing the online game. So, Mick's wayfaring takes place between the game and listening to his parents' interjections and conversations, sporadically taking part in them or becoming the target of their interventions (of helping him with either the game or the recording, or being asked about a takeaway meal). This type of wayfaring or wandering back and forth online and offline is typical of teenager's (and people in general) use of the internet, whereby young people move seamlessly from interacting with family members to doing their

homework online, or using social media when with others, e.g. at the dinner table with their parents (Haddon & Livingstone, 2014). However, Mick's rhythm is also partly influenced by his disability. Rather than 'plunging' or escaping into his online world in the middle of a family mealtime, Mick is fairly thinly engaged with the online environment, being more oriented towards listening to his parents and relying on them for help. His disability also comes to the fore as he nudges the camera, stretches and shuffles about in his chair, and struggles to place the camera back to its position.

Further, the slow rhythm of engaging with the online game is also guided by the type of game Mick is playing. The game requires Mick to wait and observe other opponents' moves and make decisions to purchase an item for the avatar. This kind of waiting around is also illustrated in Scott's diary, as he waits for a response to chat notifications and newsfeed updates on Facebook. However, whilst waiting, Scott endures the time by engaging in fast switches between other online activities, just as Bissell (2007) notes people waiting around in airports fill the empty time by engaging in activities such as reading. In contrast, Mick fills his waiting time with parental interaction.

## **Discussion & Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed three video diaries of teenagers with physical disabilities using the internet by forming a conceptual framework that draws on rhythms (Ingold, 2011; Lefebvre (2004 [1992]) and wayfaring (Ingold, 2011; Moores, 2014; 2015), to understand the pace and trajectories of moving about online. This study has found the pace of moving about online varies across different internet users. For example, Scott's rhythm of using the internet is fast paced, he quickly moves back and forth between numerous online sites (chatting, browsing social media, searching information, and uploading content). Secondly, these online activities

take place simultaneously across multiple devices, allowing Scott to engage with many activities in a journey that takes place in a short time. Noah's use of the internet also takes place at a fast pace; he manages to complete eight levels of one game before moving on to playing another game online. However, unlike Scott, Noah's movements take place on one gaming site and on one device, his desktop computer. Constantly replaying several levels to the game, which he initially finds difficult, creates longer sequences of game play, and this translates into a journey that does not take him to many places online. In contrast, Mick's moving about online is limited to one gaming site on one device. He remains fixated on a few screens on the site. He quickly engages in making attacks, purchasing items and checking the overall status of his avatar in the game, but all of this takes place at a slower pace overall, with several intervals for his offline activities, making his journey of being online prolonged. Simultaneously, Mick is frequently distracted from his online activities by his parents.

The study found that slowing down and being immobile is an integral part of the experience of using the internet. For example, while Scott can choose to pause and give his mindful attention (Parkins, 2004) to the image he wants to upload online, Noah, in contrast, is slowed down by the game becoming increasingly more difficult. In contrast, Mick is unable to make moves in the game at a fast pace, due to the format of the game and his disability; so, he engages with the site at a slow pace. Slowness is sometimes the result of a disruption caused by a slow internet connection as experienced by Scott, kinetic friction produced by the game (Cresswell, 2014) as experienced by Noah, and power relations, e.g. interfering parents, who make conversational interjections diverting Mick's attention away from the online game. The journeys of moving about online also give rise to moments of waiting. While Scott waits around online for an online message, he continues to engage in wayfaring to other activities,

but in contrast, Mick waits around by listening or taking part in the conversation taking place between his parents, and fidgeting around with the camera.

Further, Scott moves about within and between digital media with dexterity, using his hands and fingers to hold the camera, slide the touch screen, message, etc. Noah is engaged in simpler rapid movements of tapping his keyboard with his fingers to play the platform game. Mick's movements are slower both on the keyboard and in his chair, making him unable to perform the kinds of complex rapid movements that Scott performs, and what digital media users may take for granted.

I find the broader context within which internet use takes place also shapes the rhythms of using the internet. For Scott, as he is in the privacy of his bedroom, he creates his personal dark space, which is uninterrupted by other household members, allowing him to continue with his online journeys at a fast pace. In contrast, Noah's and Mick's use of the internet takes place in a shared living space, so unlike Scott, their online activities could be, and are, disrupted and viewed by household members.

Overall, the video diaries showcase how use of the internet is largely shaped by habitual rhythms of moving about within and between digital media, which are repeated over and over again. These habitual rhythms, and the way in which they become engrained in everyday practices, are not captured by typologies of internet use, drawing attention to another dimension that shapes the way in which young people use digital media.

Furthermore, the rhythms and journeys emerging from the material open up another angle on how inequalities come to be reproduced through digital media. Research on inequality has

often focused on access; the most recent OECD (2016) highlights that, despite young people in high and low income countries being provided with internet access, inequalities persist in learning how to navigate oneself online and in the use of digital devices. Thornham and Cruz (2016:9) find underprivileged young people are avid users of the internet on their mobile phones; however, routinely using the phone ‘did not...get them anywhere new’ as they were unable to, for example, transfer their digital skills to the use of computers for job seeking. These are important observations. However, my analysis highlights how inequality is reproduced by the way in which young people habitually move about within and between digital media. The distinctive feature of Scott’s journey and its rhythm is that throughout, he largely remains in charge, i.e. he directs his habitual wandering about from social media feed to chatting with his girlfriend and uploading his picture on Instagram. His movements are driven by habit (repeating in a similar way day in, day out), and his movements are stalled by friction, such as time taken for programmes to upload or time his girlfriend takes to respond. However, he is also able to direct his journey and move fluidly and quickly from one site and device to the next in privacy and darkness behind his closed bedroom door, without being too stuck or interrupted by exterior forces. This stands in contrast with Noah, whose game playing, however fulfilling, is driven by the pace of the game, which dictates his rapid rhythm and eventually slows it down and drives him to stop when continuing becomes too difficult. Similarly, Mick’s wayfaring in and out of the role-playing game is frequently interrupted or deviated by his parents, who occasionally help him, occasionally distract him, and occasionally have a conversation with him. Mick being in the public space of his living room and unable to manoeuvre the camera or aspects of the computer, is unable to protect his private space or fully direct his online journeys, creating a slow and continuously interrupted rhythm.



Lefebvre's (2004 [1992]) work was distinctly political, seeking to pinpoint everyday 'tactics' created by the subaltern that disrupted the 'strategies' of the powerful. In a similar way, his work on rhythms drew attention to the everyday and habitual paces and movements, which created political and power effects. In the spirit of Lefebvre's (2004 [1992]) work, I have sought to explore how the rhythms of digital media use are interlaced, perpetuate, and disrupt inequalities. Mobility studies have had a tendency to equate fast pace and movement with privilege and power. In this case, Scott is clearly the most privileged of the three participants discussed, and he moves rapidly between multiple sites and devices. However, Noah's gaming is also characterised by rapid movements, but he remains stuck in one gaming site, continuously repeating the same cycle of the game. I do not contend that gaming as such is necessarily the sign of lack of privilege or power, but it is the way in which the gaming is habitually performed in Noah's case, which illustrates him being driven or hooked by the repetition of the game, rather than introducing any deviations to the software's script. Further, the three cases also illustrate how diverse elements coalesce in adolescent experience to produce rhythms and inequalities, including digital devices, different platforms (games, social media sites), structures of indoor space, other family members, furniture, dexterity of hands and fingers, online friends, and status.

## **Chapter 4: Online Relationships: A Struggle to Overcome Bodily Stigma and Exclusion**

### **Introduction**

The importance of developing peer and romantic relationships during adolescent years has been recognised by researchers, as have the difficulties adolescents with disabilities encounter offline when attempting to develop these (Helsper, 2014; Salmon, 2013).

Warrington and Younger (2011) documented how adolescents were excluded from peer networks at school on the basis of being ‘uncool’. They noted that adolescents, who were unable to conform to a desired appearance, personality or behavioural traits, were marked as different from the crowd. In order to attain peer acceptance and belonging, adolescents constantly reassessed themselves against desired characteristics, and adopted a number of strategies. For instance, girls embodied a specific femininity focused on appearance, while boys embodied a strong, frequently homophobic masculinity. Scholars have identified similar gendered behaviours in online environments, where individuals create desirable impressions of themselves in order to be accepted (Uski & Lampinen, 2014). However, the strategies and experiences of disabled teenagers, when attempting to form and maintain relationships online, remain largely understudied.

Stigma, as defined by Goffman (1963), is an attribute that is possessed by an individual, which marks him/her as not ‘normal’ in social interactions. The concept of stigma has informed studies focusing on the difficulties people with disabilities encounter in forming relations with non-disabled people in offline contexts (Cahill & Eggleston, 1995; Salmon, 2013). In contrast, anonymous online environments have been claimed to be non-stigmatising, allowing people with disabilities to establish relationships not hampered by ‘looking’ different, and also to form new identities by, for instance, taking on an avatar (a

graphical representation customized by the online user) (Malacrida, 2010; Saltes, 2013). Hence, there is a presumption that ‘people with disabilities are special beneficiaries of the internet’ (Goggin & Newell, 2003, p.110). For example, Söderström (2009b) found that disabled adolescents felt empowered and better included by developing friendships with non-disabled adolescents online. It has also been suggested that being able to strategically conceal bodily stigma online can assist people with physical disabilities to interact with groups of people, who may not otherwise be forthcoming offline (Saltes, 2013).

In this chapter I explore how, rather than enabling a disembodied communication, the contemporary, often rigidly normative and distinctly visual online culture – characterised by selfies, Instagram, Snapchat, sexting, etc. – makes it difficult to transcend the disabled body. In this situation, disability continues to mark an individual as a misfit online, as can other ‘uncool’ characteristics, which go against the grain of typical teenage norms and values (e.g. hegemonic femininity and masculinity, and popularity), avidly displayed on social media (e.g. Zhao et al., 2008).

The chapter illustrates the challenges that young people with physical disabilities face in the online world, via three case studies, emerging from ethnographic research in a special school in the UK. Before moving onto the empirical analysis, I will briefly review research on how teenagers form and maintain relationships online and, then, on how disabled teenagers manage online relationships.

### **Teenage Relationships Online: Inclusion and Exclusion**

Teenagers engage in social selectivity when contacting people they wish to connect with online and via mobile technologies (Gardner and Davis, 2014; Matsuda, 2005). The benefits

of interacting online include increased social capital, psychological well-being, creating and strengthening relationships, and a sense of belonging (Chang & Zhu, 2012; Ellison et al., 2007). Establishing a sense of belonging is vital for an adolescent's identity development (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). By viewing others' online profile pages, teenagers learn about various interests, connections and values, which allow them to evaluate and align themselves to others, learn unspoken group norms, and consider what sets them apart from out-groups (Barker, 2012).

Social networking sites can support relationships, but can also complicate and disrupt them. Friendships can be challenged when teenagers strategically highlight their connections with some peers over others. This can be done by creating friendship hierarchies and posting photographs of occasions or creating group conversations that exclude some friends (boyd, 2010). These online activities can create jealousy and make teenagers anxious about their friendships. This is particularly the case with girls, as they place importance on establishing social relationships (Simmons, 2002). Displaying connections with 'popular' contacts, even if one has only occasional contact, is a crucial strategy for presenting oneself as a member of a desirable social circle (Wang et al., 2010).

Teenagers may also experience 'performative, interpersonal conflict... in front of an active, engaged audience' (Marwick & boyd, 2014: 5). Scholars use the concept 'relational aggression' to describe subtle behaviours undertaken, particularly by females, to exclude others from friendship groups (Simmons, 2002). Marwick and boyd (2014) use the teenagers' own concept of 'drama' to highlight that teenagers are not necessarily simply victims or bullies in these conflicts. The ways in which exclusion takes place in friendships is gendered (Marwick & boyd, 2014). Boys tend to engage in physical forms of aggression and compete

against one another in offline contexts, whereas girls frequently gossip, ignore, insult, blame, create rumours, and use name calling in tightly-knit networks of friends (boyd, 2010; Simmons, 2002; Svahn & Ewaldsson, 2011). Engaging in ‘drama’ online is therefore conceptualised as a ‘girly’ thing to do, with boys regarding it as an un-masculine activity. In contrast, boys engage in alternatives like pranking, which involve making jokes of each other, ranging from the insignificant to the seriously offending (Marwick & boyd, 2014). If teenagers are unable to reaffirm their friendships, spiteful deletions may follow an online argument or break-up, extending to offline spaces (boyd, 2010). Furthermore, if one is not ‘unfriended’, their profile page may come under surveillance by an ex-friend or partner, often causing more distress to the stalker than the stalked (Lukacs & Quan-Haase, 2015).

Many implicit norms guide online behaviour (Tokunaga, 2014). One must learn these unwritten rules to successfully participate on social networking sites. These norms include not doing the following: publicly conducting private conversations, excessively sharing online content, displaying public posts on fights, posting emotional or attention-seeking statuses, or frequently updating them (McLaughlin & Vitak, 2011; Uski & Lampinen, 2014). Failure to conform to online norms, such as displaying negative emotions on social media, can strain relationships (Tokunaga, 2014). These social interactional norms are intertwined with the requirement to present an ‘authentic’ self, i.e. a self that corresponds to the identity of the individual offline (Uski & Lampinen, 2014).

### **Creating ‘Desirable’ Impressions Online**

Key to establishing and developing peer relationships is the successful presentation of the self online. Goffman’s 1959 work on this presentation has been used by scholars studying impression management on social networking sites (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Uski &

Lampinen, 2014). Users of these sites strategically present desirable versions of themselves; an increasing amount of communication takes place through images as users engage in photo sharing through various means, including publishing selfies (Sorokowska et al., 2016). Growing scholarship on sharing visuals reveals that they are particularly important for teenagers, who often carefully select and upload images to project a desired identity or performance to their friends (Zhao et al., 2008). Strano (2008) and Siibak (2009) found that women and men post images of idealised, beautiful or muscular bodies, or images of being engaged in activities with others, to portray a social self.

In a study of dating sites, Whitty (2008: 1714) discovered that ‘participants believed that the need to present a good physical image...was more important than any other characteristic’. Users admitted to exaggerating or enhancing their qualities. However, there was also a consensus that daters who deliberately misrepresent themselves lose the chance to successfully take the relationships offline. When seeking partners on online dating sites, users thus need to walk a tightrope between being honest and exaggerating their positive attributes to attract interest (Hancock & Toma, 2009).

The presentation of self on gay websites follows norms that are both similar and different. This is evident in Mowlabocus’ (2010a) study of Gaydar, a social networking site where male users go online to meet other men, chat to friends and strangers, and arrange sexual encounters. Mowlabocus (2010a) uses the concept of ‘cyber carnality’ to describe a form of online gay male culture, where text and images that are used to construct online identities borrows heavily from the codes of pornography. These presentations many include posting nude poses, close-ups images of specific body parts, and bodies in sexual action (Mowlabocus, 2010b). Cassidy (2015) found that this ‘cyber carnality’ culture, which

consists of casual sex, has made gay men in Brisbane, Australia reluctant to participate on Gaydar. Cassidy (2015) argues that although the site allows many young users to explore their sexuality, they are unable to form genuine relationships since they perceive themselves to be different from the gay masculinity found on the site.

### **Digital Media, Disability and Stigma**

The internet is viewed as providing those with disabilities with access to communication not hampered by physical barriers, and access to support from others with disabilities (Braithwaite et al., 1999).

The online interactions of people with disabilities is often discussed in the context of specialised networking sites for people with disabilities, such as Disabled Friends, Disabled Date, and Disabled United (Ellis & Kent, 2011). This depicts people with disabilities as being afforded the opportunity to embrace their disabled identities online by finding online friendships with people like themselves. Such special platforms can provide people with disabilities with a sense of belonging and support, and a place to discuss and reinforce their own identity. Alternatively, online spaces can provide disabled people with the opportunity to conceal, downplay, or temporarily shed their disabled identities when interacting with non-disabled people (Saltes, 2013).

People with disabilities also face the dilemma of how to present themselves on social networking sites. Goffman's notion of stigma (Goffman, 1963) has been used to analyse how disabled bodies are managed online via the adoption of avatars on gaming sites (Bloustien & Wood, 2015), and also by concealing or downplaying disabled bodies in anonymous online settings (Saltes, 2013). Different online and offline settings have different interactional norms

for exclusion and inclusion. Literature on inclusion in specialised disability networks shows how physical deformities or deficits in character can be embraced in these settings (Salmon, 2013; Stewart et al., 2011), while the same criteria becomes a basis for exclusion on mainstream dating sites (Saltes, 2013).

Saltes (2013) discovered that the boundaries between embodiment and disembodiment can become blurred on dating websites, as people with disabilities face the dilemma of when to disclose their impairment. In these cases, the argument that one is able to transcend the stigmatised body online often does not apply, as bodies can often be invisible only temporarily. Therefore, one way in which online spaces can assist individuals with disabilities is affording them a 'choice to disclose' their impairments (Bowker & Tuffin, 2002: 334). Seymour and Lupton (2004: 301) showed how initiating a relationship online enabled disabled individuals to 'hold off the body'. This, in turn, extended the time that was spent online developing relationships that were in their early stages. It empowered participants to take charge of interactions and to reveal information at a time and in a manner that they considered appropriate. These strategies protected participants from the impact of conventional prescriptions of bodily attractiveness. As presenting an "authentic" self becomes a normative practice for users of social networking and dating sites (Ellison et al., 2006; Uski & Lampinen, 2014), managing the visibility of physical disability becomes increasingly challenging.

As demonstrated by the above literature, the extent to which disabled individuals experience stigma when they reveal a physical disability in online spaces (and to non-disabled users) is still understudied. For example, a person in a wheelchair can be discredited offline (Cahill and Eggleston, 1995), but may be able to pass as normal in situations online by strategically presenting visuals that conceal the disability. In addition, stigma may lead to the 'spoiling' of



the individual's identity that is seen to be publicly associated online with the stigmatised individual. The extent to which this plays out may relate to how far the visible disability of the stigmatised individual deviates from the norms of interaction displayed by others in the particular context one interacts in (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, Goffman's (1963) work on stigma helps to unpack the experiences of exclusion and inclusion in the new online contexts.

In order to stay close to the experience of the participants, I chose to present the issues via three individual case studies. Whilst the cases illuminate unique individual stories, they also highlight one of the themes – 'exclusion', and the challenges in conforming to teenage norms (especially in relation to the body) that are repeated in more participants' lives. The case studies focus on a gay teenager with visible physical disabilities, (Gary), a girl with a physical disability, (Lucy), rejected by her female friends, and Scott, an aspiring athlete with a disability.

### **Gary: Being Disabled and Gay Online**

Gary has a jovial personality but is a cautious individual, who avoids posting certain information about himself online to keep his personal affairs private. During his early teenage years he became aware of his sexuality and kept this hidden from friends, parents, and family members, until he decided to come out in his late teens. Gary became aware of his sexuality when he found himself being attracted to a male soap star, which made him question his romantic relationship with a female in school. To become certain of his sexuality he turned to the internet. He used the shared family computer to search naked women and remembers '*having no reaction at all, and being rather bored*'. When he searched for naked men, however, he '*found the reaction was OOOOOOOOO!*'. When Gary was provided with his

personal laptop, he was able to further explore his sexuality online by watching online porn and interacting on gay dating sites.

Gary subscribed to many dating sites, which expanded his association with gay men and his experience, and his interactional behaviour with others online developed over time. This is exemplified by his first online interaction with a potential companion, where he avoided uploading a profile image. This was done as a precaution, to not become identifiable to anyone using the app who may know him or his family offline. On the dating site, Gary spoke to a male student residing in Cyprus. They decided to exchange photographs, and within minutes Gary received an image of the student's genitalia and was asked to send one in exchange. Initially uncomfortable with the idea, Gary eventually sent an image of his private parts and enhanced the image to avoid being identifiable. The enhanced image was evaluated by the other male as being '*too dark*' and he blocked Gary online. Gary felt disappointed, as he was experiencing online rejection for the first time.

While the internet allowed Gary to explore his sexuality through interactions with other males on gay dating sites, they failed to materialise beyond casual online conversations and sexual banter. After taking a break from dating sites, Gary encountered another potential relationship online, which over time developed into an offline friendship. Gary started a conversation with a male named David in his early 30s, who he thought looked '*rather handsome*' in his profile picture. David chatted to Gary on a weekly basis and maintained contact despite travelling overseas to his home country. During this period Gary felt anxious, as he expected to lose the friendship he had developed with David. Gary was pleasantly surprised when David returned from his visit and continued to interact with him online and did not ask Gary to engage in sexting.

Gary anticipated revealing his appearance and disability to David, by sending him a picture of himself, and, as usual, David placed a request for an image in the early stages of online interaction. Looking at the image, David was quick to pick up on an aspect of Gary's clothing, which made him stand out as different. In the online conversation that followed, Gary disclosed details about his disability to David. The disclosure helped the friendship and trust between the two to develop. Online conversations moved beyond the dating app, to video calls and offline meetings. Whilst Gary started to develop romantic feelings for David, David's search for a potential partner continued online, as he saw Gary as nothing more than a friend. This left Gary feeling jealous of the other men David would interact with online. Feeling isolated when David would appear online to message other men and not interact with Gary, Gary soon started to keep a track of the time David would appear to be online and go offline.

Subsequently, Gary started to include a profile image on the dating website to avoid being rejected after investing his time and feelings interacting with potential partners. He sums up his experience online as a place where he does not believe he will find a long-term relationship. He considers online dating to be like fast food, *'where...they eat with their eyes first. People scroll and like a picture. Talk to them, hook up for alliance, and then the next day, repeat.'*

### **Lucy: Girl Culture and Online Exclusion**

From her primary years, Lucy had formed strong friendships with a small group of students, most of whom were also part of this study. When entering her teenage years, she found herself drifting apart from two of her friends. One was a girl without a physical disability

named Vicky. The two of them had hung around, had sleepovers, gossiped, and were seen to be engaged in activities as ‘best friends’. According to Lucy, their friendship was very strong. However, this suddenly changed, as Vicky started to form stronger bonds with other girls in her class.

It remained unclear to Lucy as to why she was left without her friend. Vicky started to dress up and look ‘pretty’ for her age with her peers. However, while Lucy, *‘wouldn’t say I was girly, but more able to notice these “girly” features’*, she remained uninterested and incapable of participating in the same activities as Vicky. Despite continually making efforts to engage in girly activities, such as applying make-up and dressing up, Lucy found herself being pushed out of friendships with Vicky and her new close friend Sarah, who was also, at one point, close to Lucy. Vicky and Sarah were stereotypically ‘pretty’ for their age. They associated themselves with boys in the school and took selfies in the school toilets, later uploading them to Instagram or Facebook. Lucy attempted to do the same, and her friends noticed she began posting pouting selfies on Facebook and Instagram. Later, she sent private messages to her close friends, requesting them to like her uploaded images, when not getting any ‘likes.’ Vicky was unresponsive to Lucy’s online requests, and Lucy continued to crave friendship with her.

Lucy eventually initiated contact with both Vicky and Sarah on Facebook through private messages. While Lucy maintained she used private chats to express her desire to become friends with them, Sarah asserted that public online conversations with Lucy were leading her and Vicky to believe Lucy might engage in self-harm if they did not accept her friendship. Lucy’s status updates on Facebook were open to being interpreted as ‘seeking attention’ and suggesting she may be thinking of self-harm. This left both girls worried for Lucy’s welfare,

and to ensure her wellbeing, both girls reported the matter to the head teacher with the messages exchanged online. Lucy insisted, *'I never said that I would self-harm if someone didn't accept me as a friend, but I did post on social media a few times that I felt like self-harming, and these were general posts, not directed'*.

Lucy continued to pursue contact with both girls on Facebook, and often the interactions unfolded publicly online, in front of mutual friends. Eventually, Lucy became involved in exchanging spiteful messages with both girls. This escalated when parents from both sides intervened and advised Lucy to deactivate her account after Vicky blocked her.

The girls' mutual friends online started to notice the estranged friendships between Lucy and the two other girls. After a while, Lucy created a replica of Sarah's account to watch Vicky's online activities. However, Sarah realised she was a victim of online identity theft. A second attempt was made by Lucy on a different site, but here too she was unsuccessful in monitoring Vicky's online activities. Unable to contact Vicky, Lucy sporadically sent messages to Sarah, trying to make friends with her but also asking questions about Vicky. Sarah complained to the mutual friends she shared with Lucy about the constant attempts Lucy was making to restart a friendship, which she and Vicky no longer wanted with her. The girls' shared friends spoke of how they both felt Lucy and Sarah enjoyed the drama they created online by involving them in their private conversations. Both girls complained and gossiped about one another, sending screenshots of conversations to the mutual friends. However, neither of them was willing to end the contact as Vicky had done by blocking Lucy.

### **Scott: Online Acceptance Through a ‘Sporty Persona’**

Scott spent his early years in a mainstream school, where he was unable to carry out many daily chores independently. This made him appear different from other boys. Soon after, he was diagnosed with a progressive disability that would affect his strength and mobility. The absence of a social circle in school and his developing disability instigated his parents to place him in the special needs school. There he was more able, with a slightly milder form of disability in comparison to the other students. When he moved to the school, he *‘changed into a completely different person, well my parents say I just went from being the bottom of the class to being at the top of the class, so my confidence just went through the roof and I changed into a completely different child, which is who I am today’*. He formed strong friendships with the school staff, but was unable to develop friendships with the peers who were less able than him.

One evening in his early teenage years, he plucked up the courage to go on an online chat room and begin interaction with people online. Over time, he became more aware of the various social messaging platforms beyond online chat rooms, and started to utilise some of them. He avoided profile-building sites like MySpace, and went to instant messaging services such as MSN. A trap he later considers to have fallen into was that online you can present yourself as anyone you like, and this is exactly what he did. He went from being honest to building a portfolio of lies, spawned by his own self-loathing and anxieties regarding people’s opinions. He often over-dramatised things to make it seem like he had been through more than he had, and to make himself seem a better person than he really was. Scott would speak to people he had things in common with or could share thoughts with, or if there was a physical attraction. Even if someone had never responded to his message, he would still make the effort to chat, which he never had done before.

Scott's conversations would range from talking about personal emotions and self-discovery, to common interests, future plans, and common teenager talk. When Scott left the school for a mainstream college, he formed many friendships, which he now maintains online.

However, unable to adjust to the teaching practices of a mainstream college that failed to consider his needs, he eventually dropped out and pursued a full time disability sport. After becoming sponsored and achieving many accolades for his contribution to the team, Scott started to express his affiliation with the sport and team by posting profile pictures of him huddled around his team, promoting the team kit, him scoring a point for his team, or receiving recognition for the sport. He explains his reasons for presenting himself this way online as, *'It's me, but a lot of people know that, anyway, it's a lot like I got pride in the team I play for, I was there, I was a part of it'*. His online persona as an athlete grabs him much attention, 'likes', and an increasing friends list.

As a result of being active online, Scott was approached by an online friend to be a part of a joint YouTube project with five other people he barely knew. Scott's role was to produce videos for a YouTube channel to discuss social issues, whilst collaborating with other online users discussing predetermined subjects. While it was a short-lived experience, it provided him with the chance to post videos of himself discussing a new topic on a weekly basis.

Despite there not being a big audience, and with little opportunity to interact with others in the group posting similar videos, Scott was able to form new contacts with members and the audience.

Scott considers these relationships and experiences to be meaningful in his younger years, as they provided him with his first experience of having a social circle and outlets to express

himself. Much of his early social life was derived from online interactions; offline he would go to school, put on a face, come home, go to his bedroom and escape with friends, or play multi-player online role-playing games (MMOs) where he could get away from everything else and experience some happiness. Now, in his late teens and a part of the local disability sports club, as an aspiring athlete he attracts much online attention via his sports profile, which is enhanced by his appealing physical appearance. Now social media for him acts as a means to check in with people, share and observe each other's lives, and to share deeper conversation when required, as a method of expressing himself more easily to people who are not easily accessible face-to-face.

## **Discussion**

The case studies demonstrate that the distinctly visual culture on gay dating sites and social networking sites makes it difficult for physically disabled teenagers to surpass bodily stigma in order to develop social relationships. Gary was originally able to validate his gay identity on dating sites, when he was unwilling to reveal this sexual identity in his offline surroundings for fear that he would be stigmatised. To ensure his offline contacts did not learn about his sexuality, he avoided uploading his picture on dating sites. Mowlabocus (2010a) notes that on gay dating sites, uploading a face picture demonstrates the person is openly gay online, and it also insures against deception. Gary recognised the importance of adhering to the online norms of 'presentation of self' with those he interacted with, in order to build successful relationships. He was able to temporarily avoid displaying his authentic body online; however, by not doing so in the longer term, he would jeopardise the relationships he had worked to build online. Hence, compelled to reveal his real body online, he experienced immediate rejection from potential partners when he shared an image of his disabled body. While he was able to find some support and friendship from David, who



questioned Gary further about his disability, he was unable to provide a romantic interest. The case study of Gary indicates that the ‘cyber carnality’ (Cassidy, 2015; Mowlabocus, 2010a) often expressed on gay dating sites, consists of physically attractive gay men who enjoy hooking up online. This culture can exclude gay men who do not conform to this stereotype, and who seek to develop longer-term relationships with the potential to develop in the offline world.

Physical attractiveness is also important for establishing connections on social networking sites (Wang et al., 2010). School girls who do not perform in ways that are stereotypically associated with being heterosexual (e.g. being softly spoken and ‘dressing-up’) can become subject to name-calling by female peers (Waldron, 2011). Lucy’s inability to perform the ‘cool’ and ‘girly’ heterosexual behaviour of being pretty, able, fashionable, and desirable to boys in school, excludes her from friendships with girls who display these behaviours. Despite her efforts to engage in ‘dressing-up’ and posting ‘selfies’, her inability to overcome bodily stigma and other ‘uncool’ characteristics set her apart from the girls. Unable to gain entry to the close-knit friendship circle shared by two girls in her class, her exclusion plays out in public on a social networking site. Lucy fails to present positive wellbeing online, and her longing for friendship with the two girls soon transpires into online ‘drama’ (boyd, 2010; Simmons, 2002; Svahn & Ewaldsson, 2011). This consists of ‘messy’ interactions between the girls, filled with disputes and accusations that are displayed in a public online space, and which ultimately come to the attention of mutual friends (Marwick and boyd, 2014).

However, Scott’s case emerges as an anomaly. In contrast to the others, he diffuses the stigma of a physical disability with his identity as an athlete, and is able to successfully display characteristics associated with heterosexual masculinity, such as competitiveness,

physical strength, and activity. Sport provides disabled men with an opportunity to align themselves with 'able-bodied' concepts of masculinity, such as endurance, which counters stereotypes of men with disabilities as weak, inactive, and dependent (Huang and Brittain, 2006). Scott visually displays his 'sporty persona' by posting images in sporty attire and playing sport. He gains acceptance from club members online, who 'like' and comment on his success stories and images of sponsorship by sports companies. This supports Farquhar's findings in 2012 that Facebook users seek social acceptance by aligning themselves with specific social groups. Sporty images are perceived as conveying a healthy and motivated personality (Farquhar, 2012). The images posted by Scott present qualities of independence and are career-focused, as he explicitly writes about his wins in tournaments, thereby presenting himself as a successful disabled teenager. Scott demonstrates his ability to align himself with normative online behaviours. He displays characteristics that he perceives his online social circle consider as 'attributes of maleness', and in this way he is able to diffuse stigma and guarantee inclusion by displaying his physical disability with pride.

## **Conclusion**

Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma helps this study to identify the difficulties participants experienced when attempting to present their self and/or body in online spaces. Gary experiences online exclusion and rejection due to his bodily stigma, when he is expected by other users to reveal his physical body in images on a gay dating site. Similarly, Lucy's disability, coupled with the other 'uncool' characteristics (including an inability to conform and showcase socially desirable behaviours online) leads to her exclusion from her female peers. However, as Scott's physical disability is manageable in accordance with desirable attributes related to the display of heterosexual masculinity linked to 'sporting prowess' found on social networking sites, he is accepted online. Hence, to become accepted online,

physically disabled teenagers were required to negotiate their identities along visual stereotypes of physical appearance, sexuality, and gender by performing ‘emphasised femininity’ or ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1987). Furthermore, finding acceptance in online relations is possible for those who are able to display their physical disability in alignment with desirable attributes. However, how feasible this is will be dependent on how visually disruptive and manageable the bodily stigma is, in comparison to the normative visual standard showcased by others in an online setting.

This study has shown that the internet’s potential to provide physically disabled teenagers with an online space where they are not constrained by their body, is not always fully realised. Online challenges for physically disabled teenagers stem from the visible bodily stigma they are unable to conceal due to the ‘basic visibility rule’ (Zhao et al., 2008) found on networking and dating sites, where desirable social images are posted of sexualised bodies that conform to bodily perfection and stereotypes. Stigmatisation experienced by people with disabilities in offline contexts can also be reinforced in new ways online, as interactions are guided by similar social norms linked to appearance, sexuality, gender, and sociability.

## **Chapter 5: Regulating Internet Access in the Special School and the Home**

### **Introduction**

Access to digital media has been discussed largely in relation to the affordability of technology, as well as one's ability to easily reach it (Jaeger, 2015). This has been followed by discourses on web accessibility that look at websites and their content being difficult to read, view, or navigate by people with a range of disabilities (Adam & Kreps, 2009). These discourses have highlighted that for people with disabilities, digital media technologies need to be affordable and user-friendly, with assistive technologies being inbuilt rather than being an afterthought, and to be usable by all, regardless of their abilities (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006; Jaeger, 2015).

Elcessor (2016) has argued for the concept of access to be broadened, in order to appreciate the diverse ways in which digital media remains inaccessible for people with disabilities. She provides a framework, also called an 'interrogatory toolkit', that can be applied to study digital media access under five broad categories: use, form, content, experience, and regulation. Under the category of regulation, the framework interrogates access to digital media by uncovering three aspects: first, how a medium, and access to it, is defined; second, the structures that limit or expand access in each case; and finally, the sources of power that produce and enforce our understanding of access to a medium.

Elcessor (2016, p.31) uses this framework to analyse 'myriad regulatory forces' consisting of legal structures, policies, media regulators, international agreements, industry standards, and professional norms involved in the processes of ensuring digital media is accessible for all.

While her work analyses access to digital media through regulations at a macro level, Ellcessor acknowledges there are also informal, private, and community-based forms of regulation. This chapter takes a lead from Ellcessor's (2016) interrogating toolkit to study two regulatory contexts – a special school and the homes where young people with physical disabilities were accessing digital media – and where their access, and use of it, was regulated by parents and teachers. Drawing on two illustrative case studies, this chapter elicits the everyday regulatory practices where access to digital media is defined, limited, extended, and authorised by parents and teachers. Importantly, the chapter provides insights to the response to these regulations of young people with physical disabilities, who choose to evade those regulations that they find limit their access to digital media.

This chapter begins by reviewing existing literature on discourses on regulating access to digital media in relation to people with disabilities. Moving on, this chapter reflects on how digital media access by young people is regulated in local contexts such as schools and the home. Drawing on school policy documents, ethnography, and interviews with teachers, parents, and young people with physical disabilities, this chapter provides two illustrative case studies that highlight the multiple sources of authority (school policies, teachers, parents) that standardise different notions of access and place young people with physical disabilities under different measures of digital media regulations that are found to limit their access to digital media. The illustrative case studies provide insight to the ways young people with physical disabilities respond to these regulations.

### **Disability, Digital Media and Regulation of Access**

Jaeger (2015) argues that for technologies to be accessible, they should be designed to be inclusive so that end users, whether with or without a disability, can participate with them

equally. However, Jaeger (2015) notes for most digital media technologies accessibility is not part of the design process, and despite there being many legal and industry standards to ensure accessibility is incorporated as a core component, many industries comply with minimum standards. When accessibility regulations are not met, or are kept to a minimum, inaccessibility becomes built into technologies for many people with disabilities (Goggin & Newell, 2003).

Ellcessor (2016) argues that outside legal frameworks there are advocates of accessibility; an example includes the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) – a non-profit governing body for the World Wide Web. W3C understands accessibility as a variable, whereby they acknowledge it is impossible to guarantee access to digital media for all, but try to cater to as many people as possible with different needs. The guidelines developed by W3C are for web developers, who are identified as being key to improving accessibility for a range of people. As the guidelines provided by the organisation are not legally binding, Ellcessor (2016) finds many developers end up taking accessibility in web development as optional.

Ellcessor (2016) finds there are also other stakeholders involved in the process of providing accessible digital media. These are stakeholders that build a ‘business case’ for clients, line managers, and key decision makers beside developers of technologies, to share their commitment in providing accessibility. These advocates connect the good of providing accessibility alongside business values, e.g. by advocating how creating accessibility in technology can save or make money for an organisation.

In contrast to these official regulators, everyday regulators are seen in the context of activists and people with disabilities. Ellcessor (2016) argues these groups of people see accessibility tied to the user experience, with no mention of technical standards and legal policies. They define accessibility in terms of the extent to which someone can access or use something while meeting the diverse needs of people. Providing an example of D/deaf users who are unable to access live streaming video, as they come without audio visual captions, Ellcessor (2016) finds users turn to social media to protest for change. These protests are targeted at media producers to regulate equal access by demanding increased captioning of live streaming videos. She finds that end users experiencing inaccessibility view it as a denial of their equal rights.

So far, accessibility has been regarded in a narrow sense. In legal policies and legislation, access is considered to be facilitated through technological fixes. However, the lack of enforcement of existing legal policies, with many industries complying with minimum standards and some viewing it as optional, means accessible digital media is limited for many people with disabilities. Furthermore, considering access in this way prohibits the use of more broad notions in legal policies that can improve accessibility, i.e. by taking account of how content appears on digital media, the interface used across digital media devices, its intended use, and the actual experience that people with disabilities encounter. Both Jaeger (2015) and Ellcessor (2016) argue there is a need for the perception of many groups who regulate digital media access to change to achieve equality. This not only is a matter of improving enforcement of existing legal structures, but also it is key to finding the language to connect concerns of online equality to groups beyond people with disabilities, as they are the ones that provide accessibility. To really change the situation, Jaeger (2015) argues new

approaches to the arguments for accessibility need to take place by advocating accessibility as a human rights and social justice issue.

Looking at digital rights, Alper and Goggin (2017) argue young people with disabilities have found it difficult to realise them. A key reason for this is the way we understand young people with disabilities as users of digital media, and their rights stemming from normative frameworks on childhood, disability, and digital media. As young people with disabilities, they are seen as vulnerable, in need of protection, and as being disempowered by their disability, interactions with inaccessible technologies, and hostile attitudes experienced offline. Interacting with digital media, they are considered as needing protection from online risks, in contrast to able-bodied young people using digital media who are often considered as competent digital media users. These frameworks have become an obstacle in an attempt to broaden policies when considering young people with disabilities' digital inclusion. There is a need for policies to rethink taken-for-granted concepts of disability and digital media, as this contributes to the way young people's access to digital media becomes regulated in alignment with discourses of online risks and opportunities.

Alper and Goggin (2017) identify young people with disabilities' rights online are structured around protection, provision, and participation. Their protection becomes facilitated around sexual health, i.e. access becomes regulated in preventing online sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as the prevention and management of cyberbullying, pornography, and personal data misuse. Provision becomes facilitated around education and technology to promote creativity and digital skills in an equitable way. Finally, their participation is regarded as being key in research when making digital rights decisions for young people with



disabilities, of which there is little of. They argue young people with disabilities need to become part of the consultation process that decides how their use and access of digital media becomes regulated and is shaped by their digital rights.

Alper and Goggin (2017) argue the experiences of young people as digital media users need to be considered when reconceptualising their digital rights. Goggin (2017) argues this can be done if discourses on digital inclusion of people with disabilities move forward by incorporating better theory of disability, and by drawing on qualitative research on digital media users' barriers to inclusion compounded by intersections of gender, sexuality, race, caste, income, culture, etc. This will allow discussions of access and inclusion to move forward from narrow definitions that currently dominate policy frameworks on digital media, inclusion, young people, and their rights.

### **From Global to Local Regulations to Access**

The home and school are two important sites where young people are provided with digital media technologies. In these contexts, their access and use of them becomes regulated by their providers. However, following the rapid adoption of the internet by young people, governmental policies and institutions that protect young people's welfare, particularly in the field of education, have placed emphasis for digital media to be regulated in alignment with discourses taking place around keeping their exposure to online risks to a minimum while enhancing their online opportunities. Governmental policies on e-safety and safeguarding inform school regulations to block, filter, and restrict content when young people access school computers on site (UKCCIS, 2015).

Hashish et al. (2014) find filtering and blocking software, and tools such as Net Nanny or pre-configured adult filters on many digital media devices allow adults to limit the exposure of inappropriate material online, and that all have a common feature in that they are designed to adhere to restricting access to online material considered inappropriate by industries and not young people themselves. Rosenberg (2001) notes such tools work with identifying and blocking a compilation of keywords, which characterise material online judged as being inappropriate. The oversimplification of the system often excludes material that users may want to view and is considered appropriate; at times users may not even be aware of what they are restricted from, and in this way their access to digital content may be limited.

Pascoe (2012) finds schools impose restrictions on students' use of digital media technologies as a way to ensure its use does not hinder educational learning. These fears are often aggravated by not knowing what it is young people may engage with online if left unsupervised. Bulfin et al. (2016) find young people predominately use personal internet-enabled devices in the school context for information seeking purposes, and tend to put off engaging with checking or accessing social media sites for out of school activity.

Hope (2005) notes that in school, students come under direct physical monitoring practices when they are engaging with the internet on computers. A single staff member watches over approximately 30 students, often unable to provide constant monitoring. This provides a window of opportunity for students in a classroom to hide their personal digital devices and engage with unsuitable websites. Furthermore, students identify locations around mainstream schools where there is little supervision by members of staff, and this provides them with spaces to engage with their devices and move online.

Bulfin et al. (2016) find students become frustrated when they are placed under many internet restrictions. Furthermore, restrictions such as not being able to use the internet when students want to, and being faced with sites that are blocked or filtered, further takes away opportunities for students to develop their online skills. When they are seen using their devices by teachers, students voice being made to feel as though they are doing something wrong online. If caught using personal devices, teachers may respond by confiscating them.

Filtering, blocking, and monitoring are explicit practices of regulating digital media access to technologies and their content. These studies have highlighted that young people respond by going on their own devices in school to access material that may be blocked or filtered on school computers, as well as identifying spaces on school grounds where they are not monitored to go online.

The responsibility of regulating young people's access to digital media has also filtered down to parents and young people themselves in the home (Livingstone & Bober, 2006).

Regulation of digital media in the home has been researched by scholars, mainly using large-scale surveys to look at different parental strategies and practices they adopt to mediate their children's activities online, providing little account of how children respond to them.

Livingstone et al. (2015) identify that these strategies include active mediation, whereby parents talk to their children about online experiences, or sit next to their child as they use the internet to discuss online content with them. Another strategy includes restrictive mediation, whereby parents set rules and limitations to their child's use of the internet. This can be done by limiting the time spent online, placing restrictions on location of the computer, and restricting access of certain websites and activities. Some parents may also put in place filters

to block or restrict access to some websites; they may also look through the history of online activities their children engage with. These findings are contested when it comes to settling on which parental strategy dominates the mediation of digital media in the home. Some scholars note parents adopt a relaxed measure, while others are found to be authoritative (Aunola et al., 2000; Ayas & Horzum, 2013; Eastin et al., 2006; Özgür, 2016). Recently, Livingstone et al. (2017) found that parents choose both strategies in varying measures. Parents who consider themselves to possess digital skills use their skills to support their children's online activities, while using active mediation of technical controls and monitoring to lower their risks. In contrast, parents who are less confident in theirs and their child's digital skills implement restrictive measures that limit their child's digital inclusion.

While research looking at practices of regulation in the home, carried out via large surveys, provides important trends adopted by parents to mediate their children in the home, these studies do not provide accounts for the ways young people respond to the regulation practices. Furthermore, parents may not be the only people providing digital media technologies to young people in the home, as Hijazi-Omari and Ribak's (2008) study shows young Muslim girls in Palestine receiving mobile phones from their boyfriends and hiding them from their families and school teachers. These girls hid the phones in the home and found protected spaces, such as under a pillow, to access their mobile phones to communicate with their boyfriends at night. While the girls had been provided with mobile phones by their boyfriends, their boyfriends regulated their access by not putting any credit on the phone and avoiding informing the girls of their mobile number. This study provides important insights to young girls engaging in covert forms of accessing mobile phones in the home, where regulation extends to members outside of the family.

As demonstrated by the above literature, discourses and research around regulating access to digital media in relation to people with disabilities has typically taken place at a macro level, looking at how legal and industry definitions of access limits or expands accessibility for people with disabilities. When looking at regulations in local contexts, discussions over how to manage young people accessing digital media show that the responsibility becomes filtered down to parents, teachers, and young people themselves. However, little is revealed in these studies about how these regulations limit or expand accessibility for young people with disabilities as digital media users. By using the interrogatory toolkit developed by Ellcessor (2016), this study analyses the way access is defined, limited, expanded, and enforced in the special school and the homes of two young people with physical disabilities. The first illustrative case study, of a young girl called Bruna, highlights that the intersection of gender and ethnicity with disability structures the regulatory practices in the home that limits her access to digital media. In the following illustrative case study, a young physically disabled male student demonstrates his struggles to evade regulatory practices in the school that extend to the way he accesses digital media in the home.

### **Bruna: Seeking Permission for Access**

Bruna comes from a traditionally conservative family with strong religious and cultural values stemming from a South Asian ethnic background. She lives in a nuclear family with frequent contact and strong ties with the extended family and friendships with her cousin sisters. This often means she becomes subjected to her uncle's and aunt's scrutiny, who often take a key interest in her life. Having close ties with a large family circle has meant she has been heavily guarded by adults in her home life.

At the age of 15, when Bruna was first interviewed, she expressed her concerns for not being given the freedom to be independent at home. Being surrounded by family members meant she had little opportunity to experience independent travel and to develop simple life skills she considered important for her age, such as how to make monetary exchanges at retail shops. In the gathering of her extended family, Bruna was a compliant young girl. She recalls the time her aunt confiscated her iPod Touch for a week when she visited her, because her aunt does not like family members being distracted on their devices when they can be talking to each other in the room. During this week, Bruna was unable to communicate with her close cousins online using a free application for online private chats. Being a shy girl, she was hesitant to ask for her device, and her absence online was noticed by her cousins. They resorted to sending a message to Bruna's elder sister, and it was through her that her cousins came to know why Bruna had not been replying to her online messages. For Bruna to get her device back, a cousin sister made a request to Bruna's father. Bruna explains: "*She came around to my house, and then she goes to my dad why don't you allow her, you know, like she's not going to do anything wrong.*"

Bruna expressed being subjected to many restrictions in the family home. These restrictions came particularly from her father's brother. She explained: "*Because of him I'm not allowed to go to the cinemas, I'm not allowed to like go to town; see my parents don't allow stuff like that.... There are so many things my family don't allow me to do...I know they do it for my own good and for my safety but other people wouldn't think of it that way they would be like oh my god her parents are so mean and stuff like that I don't want to give a bad impression of my parents. You know my dad he doesn't really like it if I hang around with boys and stuff like that like.*" After being invited by a male friend to socialise in public places outside of school, rather than explaining her situation to her male friend, Bruna, many times, made

excuses of not being able to attend on the days and times he requested. In this way, Bruna was both able to avoid asking her parents for permission to see him out of school and uphold a positive impression of her family, as she believed that, coming from a white background, he would not understand her family loyalties or expectations, but would instead view her home life with negative connotations.

To maintain contact with her close male friend who moved to a mainstream college for further education, Bruna tried to persuade her parents to allow her to use social networking sites so she could maintain her friendships online. After seeking parental permission for several months to join social networking sites, Bruna eventually stopped pestering her parents. She did not want them to have the impression that she wanted to do something *wrong* online. Without parental approval, Bruna then created an anonymous Twitter account. She continued to use the account to update herself with celebrity news, as well as to engage in sporadic private online conversations with her friends. She kept her presence on Twitter hidden from her family by using the Twitter application on her iPod Touch and deleting the application after using it when no one would be overlooking her. However, Bruna's Twitter use was discovered after many months, when her sister blurted out to her father that Bruna used Twitter. While her father did not say anything, she explained her worries: *"If my uncle found out I would be, I would be dead, he would actually take my iPod away from me and my dad wouldn't even do anything."*

At home, Bruna had little power over her iPod Touch as her family members actively scrolled through her online history, conversations, and applications. Sometimes, they watched over

her to see what she did online. While Bruna struggled to use the internet for activities of her choosing at home, she was faced with comparable struggles in the special school.

In the special school, Bruna was often placed in a classroom where she was being educated alongside students who were either above or below her age. Due to the school catering to a range of students with differing abilities and ages in the same class, Bruna found herself struggling to form bonds with students that she could consider as real friends. She intentionally avoided the company of some students because *“all they talk about is dudes, boys and babies, marriage and stuff like that. That’s not my kind of thing, you know what I mean? That’s a bit. I wouldn’t talk all about that, maybe I would talk about it, maybe when I’m a bit older, it’s not my thing right now, you know it’s not, not something I want to talk about or something I want to do so that’s why I don’t really talk with them because that’s all they talk about. Bit boring.”* Being placed in a class amongst peers she considered classmates and not real friends, Bruna focused more of her time in lessons on her academic work and thereby spent less time socialising with peers in lessons. Being in a class where most students were male, she would limit her association with them. Occasionally, she was seen to engage in their banter, when one of the boys would disrupt her learning because she would be progressing well ahead of him. He would tease her, often shouting out that she was on her iPod Touch, and by doing this he would draw unwanted adult attention towards her.

One of the school rules was not to use personal devices that could be a distraction in learning during school time. However, the teaching staff were aware students carried and used a range of personal devices such as iPods, mobile phones, and iPads to listen to music during their travel when commuting to and from the school, to play games during break times, and to



carry with them a device to contact parents out of school if necessary. While an objection was not made for students to bring devices to the school, students were aware being seen using them could land them in trouble. There were many such rules in the school. One rule that annoyed Bruna was that students were not allowed to independently exit the main building to travel to outbuildings on school grounds. Instead, they would have to actively find or request for a member of staff to watch them travel from one part of the school grounds to the other. This rule, in place for health and safety reasons, made Bruna feel as though she was incompetent in moving from area to another. As she was more mature and able than the students in her class, she still required the constant watch of adults to carry out simple tasks such as moving around. She explained: *“You know in this school you can’t do anything without staff. It’s like you don’t have your personal, not even personal, you don’t have a time where you’re not with a staff.”*

When in the rare situation of a member of staff not being around, she felt *“a bit more free, not like under control.”* Being in a classroom where the ratio of staff to students was roughly equal, and at break and lunch times where the students were surrounded by staff members at all times, made it difficult for students to find a moment where they could be without the presence of adult staff. In such an environment, Bruna constantly felt the presence of adult staff and *“hates”* attending school, as the entire day was spent indoors and in classrooms. She claimed *“breaks and lunches are meant to be for when you get a time away from your classroom but like all day being in a classroom in the environment of a classroom, it’s awful.”* For students like Bruna, going outside to play was unfeasible, and interacting with her peers was undesirable. She spent most of her time conversing with teaching assistants in lessons, so was unwilling to spend her break time doing the same. In such an environment,

for students with disabilities there is little liberty to do much else. One means of escape is the internet.

Accessing the internet on school computers means students are restricted to search engines and educational sites, with teachers and assistants “*hovering*” around them. This provides the students with little opportunity to access non-educational sites. When students are required to watch and download videos for their assignment, each student calls a member of staff to log them on to websites such as YouTube. The boys in Bruna’s class would often try to look at the password the members of staff tap into the keyboard, and a joke was sometimes made on how they were unable to use sites they could at home without having to be logged on. While the boys tried to find amusement by watching mundane work-related videos and cracking a joke about the low level of entertainment that educational videos provide, Bruna was seen to sometimes slip her black iPod Touch beside or behind her computer keyboard, with the screen facing down. Occasionally, when provided with the opportunity of being without the watchful gaze of staff, she would peep at the screen or press the home button to light up the screen to see if there were any new notifications or chats from social networking sites.

When Bruna received a message on her iPod Touch, she explained “*in class...I know I have a message. It’s really like urgh I really need to check it, I really want to know what it is, I really like need to check it like something happens in my fingers like I really need to check it like - I can’t.*” In such a situation, Bruna developed a skill to check her iPod as the teaching staff “*hover over...like they just walk around*” and Bruna “*hates that*” and explained how she wanted them to “*just not look*” at her. As she was hardly ever caught doing more than just peeking at her iPod Touch in lessons, she avoided being subject to trouble. Furthermore,

Bruna acknowledged, “*they don’t really watch me anyway*”. This was because she was one of the few students in the school who the teachers did not pay close attention to for mischievous behaviour or for providing support for her special needs. This placed her in a unique position, as she was one of the few students in her class who was able to access the internet independently.

Once the lesson was over, Bruna moved quickly to use the toilets where privately, calmly, and without worrying about watching for staff, she could, for a longer period of time, use her iPod Touch to get online. This gave her the opportunity to hold a conversation online with her friends from the local temple, her cousins, and the close male friend who had moved on to college.

As Bruna was not able to spend all her time in the school toilets during breaks, she continued to seek ways to get online. She did this by avoiding the attention of numerous staff members on duty by turning towards a corner or positioning herself away from adults; finding a wall to position herself next to in order to avoid a member of staff standing behind her who would glare down at the screen of her iPod; looking for reasons to move from one area to another in the school so she could check her device while on the move; or, if lucky, being in a room without an adult. She would also actively rush to the toilets again before members of staff did when the break was coming to an end. She explained: “*Not that I do anything wrong I just don’t want them to see it because they already, they already look at... all of my life in school and know everything about me plus on my iPod it’s like there should be a privacy point they’ve already passed it but I can’t let them go through this...not that I’ve got anything in there, ... you know everything about me, you are always next to me, always got your eyes on*

*me what more do you want? It's like they're looking inside your body or inside your brain, trust me I hate it, it's like I hate the fact that there's staff everywhere."*

Once Bruna left the special school and moved to a mainstream college, she was finally provided with a much-awaited mobile phone by her family. Here also, she was provided with one-to-one support offered by a teaching assistant. After seeking permission from the school principal to stop the provision of one-to-one support as she felt able to work on her own without adult supervision, she integrated with her class peers and started to use the internet on her mobile phone without hesitation. She can be seen posting images of her class, peers and teachers on Snapchat during lessons. She has developed a relaxed and constant online presence throughout the day in college, openly using her applications and not hiding her phone to socialise with her friends during break and lunch times. Although she continues to hide her phone under the table during lessons, she now looks out for one teacher who is usually standing in front of the class. Furthermore, not being the only student in her class using the internet on her personal device makes her less wary of her fellow students reporting her to the teacher. She feels there are less heightened implications for getting into trouble, as students are seen to be engaging in such behaviour most of the time. At home, her situation has changed little, with her uncle still taking advantage of scrolling through her personal device and questioning her on why she has male followers on Instagram.

## **Discussion**

Bruna's case study demonstrates that the medium she strives to access in the home and at the special school is her iPod Touch. This personal device is useful to her when she has a wireless internet connection, as it enables her to access free chat applications to communicate

with her close circle of female friends and cousins. Bruna's main reason for using the device is to remain connected to others. Green and Singleton's (2007) study with young Pakistani women also finds mobile phones were particularly seen as key devices for women to enable communication with close friends and family. However, in the domestic sphere, Bruna's access to digital media is defined by many authoritative family members. Rather than her parents setting and implementing strict rules, it is members of her extended family – her uncle and aunt – who confiscate her iPod Touch for weeks, or directly watch over her and scroll through her device to monitor her online activities.

Bruna, like many young British girls from a South Asian background, as discussed by Hennink et al. (1999), abides by her cultural traditions, religious obligations, family loyalties, and community expectations, and even develops a disinterest in relationships with boys. Her cultural background, gender, and disability structure the way she can access digital media sites on her device in the home. As a young female with a disability from a South Asian religious background, she is prohibited from socialising with male peers but is approved of socialising with cousins and female friends from her local temple, presumably all known to her family. Providing mobile phones to young women is often considered as making them susceptible to male courting (Hijazi-Omari & Ribak, 2008). To protect Bruna from this, her family delays her access to a mobile phone until she starts college, and monitor her online activities, particularly in relation to male relations, when scrolling through her iPod Touch and phone. It is also for this reason she is not granted access to social networking sites. However, Bruna is able to evade these regulatory measures by creating a false account through an application on her iPod Touch, which she then deletes after using it in private.

The practice of watching over her in the home emerges in harmony with the practices found in the special school by official staff regulators. Here, members of staff directly stand over or beside Bruna and other students when they engage with the internet. The special school complies with the regulations set out by governmental policies, and blocks and restricts unauthorised access to websites such as YouTube and Facebook. Unlike many of her peers, Bruna can identify spaces in the school where she can, for a few brief moments, access her iPod Touch without being monitored, e.g. in the school toilets. In the school, like in her home, she is under supervision by adults. She becomes frustrated with not being able to find private spaces to go online, particularly as she maintains she does nothing *wrong* online.

Unlike most peers in her class, she is more physically able and can access the internet on her personal device, and expands her access to websites that are restricted for those using school computers outside of lessons. Despite her physical disability, Bruna is also able to assert to staff members in her mainstream college that she can work independently and without the support offered to her. Here, without being constantly supervised by several adults, her access to digital media becomes expanded as she, like other able-bodied peers, engages in using her mobile phone to chat, socialise, and post images online.

Bruna's case study illustrates that her access to digital media is limited in many instances by the complex intersection of her gender, ethnicity, and disability. As a young girl with a disability, she is in a special school where she is watched over by several staff members. Here, she is subjected to strong measures of e-safety, where internet content is blocked, filtered, restricted, and requires the approval of staff members on school computers. Here, the use of personal digital technologies is prohibited, and she tries to find ways to access her iPod

Touch without being seen from private spaces such as the toilet. At home, her position as a young South Asian girl with a disability means her access to digital media is a fraught experience, where she watches out for family members overlooking her online activities, requiring her to delete applications that are prohibited for social networking use in the event of her device being taken away, confiscated, or looked through. In the mainstream college, her access to digital media is eventually expanded after she is able to assert her position as an able young girl with a disability, by reassuring the principal she can work without support. She then engages in accessing her mobile phone much like the able bodied young people in her class, while at home her situation remains to stay the same.

### **John: Struggling to Evade Regulations**

John is a sarcastic, well-behaved, and hard-working student. However, for John, restricted mobility, difficulty with coordination and movement, as well as a visual impairment makes the experience of working with a computer difficult and time consuming. He is a keen music enthusiast, often displaying his musical passion in the school band or in singalongs held for *the* school and parents. At home, John's musical taste is reflected in the décor of his bedroom as well as the choice of websites he uses to create, download, or listen to music. John also loves to learn and develop his ICT skills. Over the years, he has picked up on a number of keyboard shortcuts that allow him to perform commands on the computer with minimum effort, and enable him to focus less on the computer screen. This also helps him to speed up his pace of work when utilising the technology, given that his visual impairment makes working on a computer screen difficult.

John is provided with a laptop by the school and Local Education Authority (LEA) to work on in lessons and to take home. It comes with visual software to magnify what is displayed on the screen when needed, as well as software that tracks his online activities when using the laptop remotely from school. Sometimes it takes much longer for John to read and view all of the contents of the webpage, and many features go unnoticed as he only focuses on the features on screen that are of interest to him. This has led John to encounter some difficulties with the school. His mother recalls an incident when the school called home, as the electronic software installed on his laptop by the LEA picked up that John had viewed pornographic material. His mother was well aware that he must have done this by accident, if he was even aware at all of such material appearing on his screen. In his defence, John explained that he was visiting a gaming website and a box popped up on his screen with such material from the site he was using. He had no intention of viewing the material, nor did he. John realised that even when viewing safe internet sites, he could land himself in trouble. In order to avoid such a situation, John started to restrict his online activities on the school laptop until he received a personal computer from his family at home. The computer, placed next to his bed with the screen facing towards the door of his room, allows his parents, from a distance, to see what he does online when they walk into or pass by his room.

At home, John has access to the internet on his own computer in his bedroom, his iPad, iPod Touch, smart phone, and the school laptop. Like Bruna, John's use and access of the internet has increased over time. At the start of the research, John was a casual user of the internet, mainly accessing it from his school laptop as he did not have his own computer at home. He had many friends in the special school with whom he would interact during lunch and break times, spending little time online in school. However, as his friends were senior to him in age, they all moved on to college. In such a situation, like Bruna, John too found himself cut off



from the company of his peers who were in his new class and who were younger than him in age and with different interests. Like Bruna, John too had access to an iPod Touch. However, unlike her he would use the device openly to listen to music or for gaming. He did this for a long period before he was provided with the school internet password by his friends, which enabled him to access Facebook on his personal device at school. Hence, little did anyone think he was using his iPod Touch for socialising on Facebook. When asked about his use of the internet on his iPod Touch, his mother was taken by surprise. She had not thought about him accessing the internet on there as she has *“only seen him play games or play music on it.”*

John would not be seen to be using the internet for personal use during lesson time. The main reason for this is his disciplined nature and the fear of being caught using the internet for non-academic use. He explains the only time he would consider using his device for the internet in lessons is *“only if my laptop crashed up and there wasn’t any computer spare, that’s the only time that I would ask for the teacher if I could use the internet on my iPod.”* All members of staff in the class are aware John prefers not to have any support until he asks for it. For this reason, one will not see a member of staff being seated next to him. On occasions where there is an additional member of staff, such as a volunteer or teaching assistant with little support to provide other students, they will be directed to sit next to John to make sure he can work out the contents of a webpage if using the internet. However, this irritates John; knowing that someone is ‘watching’ him closely puts him off his task and he moves the laptop screen towards him to hinder the view of the person seated next to him. In this way, John firmly conveys the message to the members of staff in his class that he can work independently and does not want anyone watching him. As a result, one will often find him happily getting on with his work quietly, without someone constantly watching over him. While a situation like this would provide someone like Bruna with the opportunity to easily

use her iPod Touch, for John this is impractical, as he cannot conceal his device in order to use it in lessons, even when not being closely watched by members of staff.

John, like all the other students that participated in this study, never really knew what the implications would be if he was caught using his device to access and use sites that are not permitted on school computers. Like other participants, he too had the notion that he would be called into the principal's office, and it is the one place they all would not like to visit. As a result, John explained he would "*just go online when bored...in school time, apart from lesson time. At break and lunch*". When using the internet on his iPod Touch at break and lunch times, John will not hide in the toilets or turn his back to a wall, as he cannot engage with the internet on his iPod Touch for a brief time. As he relies on a walker in school, he needs to be seated, to be able to hold up his device close to his eyes as it takes longer than just taking a glance at the screen to be able to read the contents of a webpage or to write a message. He brings the device towards his face, making it difficult for the people around him to notice what he is looking at, unless one gets very close to him. Furthermore, as he has his earphones plugged in, he gives the impression he is sifting through his music to play a song of his choice. Unlike Bruna, who interacts with many people online who would reply instantaneously, John's online social network is sporadically spaced throughout the day; hence, he is not always looking to be online for a long period of time on his iPod Touch. Instead, as he mentions, he goes online "*about, twice or three times a day*". As a result, his online presence would be even less than that of Bruna's in the special school, but this plays in his favour, as his use of the internet in school goes undetected at break and lunch times, allowing him to use it for a few minutes as desired.

At home John's parents do not monitor his school laptop, as they feel it is being monitored sufficiently by the school. They rely on the school authorities to notify them when and if his online activities are inappropriate on the device. Instead, his parents monitor his use of Facebook by befriending him. However, on Facebook, John is able to evade his parents looking at his online posts by changing his privacy settings. Furthermore, his mother reveals: *"Oh I don't monitor that [iPod] ...I don't monitor that, that's a point ain't it, because his school one got a restriction on from the school so he's only allowed to go on certain things and they had this security protection where people monitor him there and at home. So I've never thought about that."*

John had little understanding of how this electronic software installed on his laptop picked up his online activities, until he found himself once again being called into the principal's office. When using the laptop at home, John realised he was able to access the websites that would be otherwise blocked in school. He continued to his favourite site, Facebook, until his private messages, which he was exchanging with a friend online, were flagged up and sent to his school principal. She had brought up his entire conversation with his friend, and John tried hard to explain that reading the conversation back it could be construed as engaging in an inappropriate conversation, when really the conversation was nothing more than teenage banter. After this experience, John realised that even when he thought his online activities were private, he really had no privacy at all. This experience left him feeling cautious, wary, and annoyed with the school. John limited his activities on the laptop to being strictly educational and stopped using it outside of school.

Once John received his iPad, it replaced his iPod Touch, and now that the screen is much larger, he does not bring up the device close to his face. However, as he uses the device at school in the same way he did when operating the iPod Touch, he receives little attention from the staff nearby. Furthermore, as he positions the device close to his lap when using the iPad, he has a greater view of the people around him, and can rapidly switch between his Facebook application and the music library as he notices someone is approaching him. Like Bruna, John too was taking advantage of the school Wi-Fi password that was circulated among the students. However, since Bruna has left the school, the school internet connection password has been changed, leaving John and his friends to find alternative means to get online. John is now able to do this by carrying his mobile phone for a connection in his bag, which he leaves hidden in his walker and connects this to his iPad wirelessly. As he sits in the student common room, the staff do not supervise John, as they believe he does not have an internet connection on his device. This now provides him with the opportunity to interact, not only on Facebook, but on other applications such as Instagram throughout his break time, without being subjected to the direct physical monitoring of staff. This has enabled him to remain sociable with his online friends and to engage more in online socialising networks than he did previously.

## **Discussion**

John's case study illustrates that his access to the internet across multiple devices (iPad, iPod Touch, smart phone, computer, and laptop) is varied. To make the experience of accessing content on the laptop/computer easier, he learns several shortcuts performed by using the keyboard, which thereby places less stress on navigating his way by focusing on the screen. In contrast, when using smaller devices like an iPod Touch, access is made possible by bringing the device close to his eyes for him to be able to see the contents on the screen.

Having magnifying software installed on his school laptop makes the process of accessing contents on his screen easier; therefore, he prefers to use the laptop over his iPod Touch when at home.

In John's case, by providing him with a school laptop inbuilt with magnifying software, the school and Local Educational Authority expands his reach to get online. However, by having tracking software installed on the laptop, the school and the LEA comply with regulatory policies. This, however, means that when John opens material classed as being inappropriate, even by accident, it compromises his access to online material on the device by coming under scrutiny of the school and his parents. The school principal is alerted to online material appearing on his screen that is considered as inappropriate, e.g. pornographic content when accessing a gaming site. Not knowing that this information would be passed onto his school as well as to his parents, John is surprised that his online activities are being regulated when using the laptop from home.

When John realises he can access sites on his laptop provided by the school that would be otherwise blocked when in school, such as Facebook, he thinks his online activities would once again not be monitored from home. He therefore engages in a private conversation with a friend on Facebook, and is surprised to be called back to the principal's office, who has a copy of the entire conversation, as certain words exchanged with his friend are flagged up by the software on his laptop and are considered inappropriate by the regulators. Although John finds it easier to access online content on the laptop, he resorts to limiting his use of it.

Alper (2017) also found that when teachers distributed school iPads to young people with disabilities to take home, their use was regulated by district officials, teachers, and parents. In the case of Alper's (2017) study, she found teachers and parents used Apple's software system, Guided Access, that allowed the home button to be temporarily disabled, preventing young people with disabilities using the device for communication software Proloquo2Go from closing or switching to other applications. This feature would also be used to prevent them from getting online. While the authorities provided young people with disabilities with access to digital media technologies, they simultaneously limited how they used the device and the content they engaged with. Furthermore, students could be locked out of using the device at home and at school, when the school would turn the passcode feature on. For the device to be woken up or turned on, users would be required to feed in the passcode that would be known by parents and teachers. Some young people with disabilities, however, found ways around this by watching parents or teachers enter the passcode into the device.

John also engages in measures to expand his access to digital media. As he eventually stops using the school laptop at home for personal use, in school he sporadically uses the internet on his personal devices, which members of staff mistake as him engaging in changing his songs or playing games on his iPod Touch. When the school changes the wi-fi password, distributed among the students, this restricts John and other peers from accessing the internet on their personal devices. However, John can access the internet by carrying his mobile phone in his walker, connecting his iPad to the wi-fi connection provided by his phone to get online.

At home, John's parents relied on his school to inform them if John was breaching the school's code of conduct by using the internet on his laptop. In the home, John's parents were employing less restrictive measures by occasionally looking at his computer screen as they walked past his room or by engaging interpersonal electronic surveillance of his Facebook activities (Tokunaga, 2011). Here too, John was found to engage in evading parental monitoring by changing his Facebook settings, which allowed his parents to see only the online activities he wanted them to see. John was therefore able to expand his access to engaging with social networking sites.

## **Conclusion**

Ellcessor's (2016) interrogatory framework has helped this study to identify how the regulatory forces in two local settings – a special school and in the domestic sphere – expand and limit access to digital media for young people with physical disabilities. This study has found access to digital media is multifaceted; it is not something that takes place by simply providing technology to young people with physical disabilities. John's case study illustrates that the special school and LEA assist his access to digital media by providing him with a laptop installed with magnifying software to ease his usability. However, as the technology comes with software that tracks and flags up his online activities that are considered 'inappropriate' by official authorities, after two separate occasions of being reported to the school principal, John becomes wary of using the technology, and restricts his own use of the device.

As anticipated by Goggin (2017), when considering the intersectionality of other aspects of young people with disabilities' lives with their disability and digital media use, we can

further our understanding of how they access and use the internet. Through Bruna's illustrative case study, this study finds that issues of gender and ethnicity, together with her disability, complicate and limit her access to digital media in the home. In the domestic sphere, Bruna is placed under several family regulations that constrain her from accessing digital media technologies. For example, she is not provided with a mobile phone until she moves to college; at home she uses a shared laptop, and while she is provided with an iPod Touch, the technology is often taken away from her to be confiscated and looked through by many members of her family. Family restrictions extend to limiting her engagement with online content. She is prohibited from using social networking sites in the fear this may expose her to male courting. She evades these regulatory measures in the home by creating an account on Twitter that she tries to keep secret by downloading the application for use, which she later deletes from her device.

Like Alper and Goggin (2017), this study also finds the normative frameworks to make sense of disability, and young people with disabilities as digital users, frames official regulators' understandings of them – as being vulnerable and in need of protection from online risks. The special school therefore has strict e-safety regulations implemented through several measures, such as monitoring students by watching them, blocking and filtering online content, and placing restrictions to where young people can access school computers. In this context, Bruna and John both come under these measures; however, both are, to some extent, able to evade these regulations by using their own personal devices to connect to sites that are otherwise restricted on school computers. Here, Bruna's access to digital media is limited by the time she is able to engage briefly online, sending quick messages to her female friends from the school toilets.



This study has shown young people with physical disabilities who are able to use their own personal media technologies to get online, and who respond to regulatory measures that limit their access to digital media technologies and content by finding ways to evade measures in the home and the school. However, young people with physical disabilities who were less able, or relied on assistance to use digital media, were unable to engage in measures to evade regulatory practices that they too found limited where, how, and when they could access digital media technologies and content.

## Chapter 6: Dis-ability

### Introduction

Mainstream schools are often considered suitable institutions for educating children who are identified with special needs and difficulties, and this is particularly advocated by theorists who support the ‘social model of disability’ (Holt, 2003). This is because educating children in special schools creates a *dilemma of difference*, whereby children are identified through ‘a medical model of disability’ (Tezi, 2005, 2007) as being different. This risks labelling and segregating children in special schools, away from children educated in mainstream schools and colleges (Terzi, 2005). However, providing inclusive education to young people with special needs risks them not being provided with the provisions that they need to prosper academically and socially (Tezi, 2005, 2007, 2014). The merits of inclusive education over segregated special schools for children with special needs continue to be debated (Hornby, 2015; Norwich, 2014).

Few studies have highlighted how diverse practices found in special and mainstream classrooms reproduce disability. Holt (2003) finds that in an inclusive primary school children with learning disabilities were made aware of their disability through everyday practices in the classroom. For example, children with learning disabilities had come to internalise that they are less able, by being placed in classrooms that did not match their age expected levels of academic ability. Furthermore, by being provided with teaching assistants in lessons to help them, they were visibly marked as being different from students who did not require the help of teaching assistants.

Like Holt's (2003) study, this chapter gives priority to young people with physical disabilities' experiences of enacting disability within and across special and mainstream schools. This chapter, firstly, explores the various models of disability that inform educational provisions available to children with special needs, and teases out a challenge that remains, for educators to understand how disability should be conceptualised in order to help provide an ideal learning environment for young people with special needs. The discussion also draws attention to the capabilities approach that is said to provide an alternative understanding of disability to help take the discussion forward (Reindal, 2008). The chapter then presents empirical evidence drawn from several studies, to highlight the experiences of young people being educated in special and mainstream schools. This is followed by a discussion on Mol's (2002) ontological perspective on enactment, which is utilised in this study to identify how disability is performed by two participants in a special and mainstream college. Finally, a discussion and conclusion follow.

### **Models of Disability Shaping School Experiences**

The medical model of disability is advocated by a number of scholars. A suitable starting point is to follow the roots of the model to the functionalist work presented by Parsons in *The Social System* (1951). In his account, Parsons (1951) fostered a medical view of sickness that has been applied to the study of disability. Under this view, biological reality was encouraged to be the base for all forms of impairments (Williams, 2001), and disability was equated as a *sick role* coupled with "a pathological condition", leading the disabled person to be "often humiliated by his incapacity to function normally" (Parsons, 1951:443). Hence, under this model, disability came to be viewed as incapacitating individuals from fulfilling effective social roles, and disability was rendered a negative, as well as a deviant, condition. For the individual with a disability to effectively perform their social roles and contribute towards the

social system, the model places emphasis on an individual's health to be managed, for their illness to be limited, and health to be reinstated, by medical institutions. The current educational framework premised on special educational needs (SEN) provision, has come under scrutiny for the way in which it identifies and describes learning differences among children from the medical perspective (Reindal, 2010; Winch, 2010).

Inclusive education has promoted the idea that children with special educational needs should be included within mainstream schools rather than being taught in separate, segregated special schools (Hornby, 2014, 2015). This argument has come to the fore after the medical model was criticised by the disability movement. Since the medical model emphasised a clear divide between those who are considered as abled and disabled, Hunt (1966:146) recognised this separation as posing a “challenge in their relations with ordinary society”, where the disabled are commonly believed to be “unfortunate, useless, different, oppressed and sick”. It was, on the whole, left to disabled people, particularly those associated with the disability rights movement, to critically assess existing approaches of disability and to develop them further (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). The social model moved the attention to the ways in which society restricted disabled people and limited their opportunities to fully involve themselves in mainstream economic and social activities (Oliver & Barnes, 2010). As an example, society was seen as disabling people with impairments by creating disabling environments that denied access to people with disabilities from entering buildings and public spaces (Quarmby, 2011). With the social model, Oliver (2009) shifted the focus away from the functional restrictions placed on individuals caused by impairments, by highlighting the disadvantages experienced by impaired individuals that are caused by disabling barriers, environments, and cultures.

Since the development of the social model of disability voicing, special schools have maintained an understanding of disability from the medical model. Reindal (2008) argues the special schools have been under much criticism, and debates have promoted the need for inclusive schools.

Hornby (2014) highlights that there are, however, several misunderstandings when it comes to understanding inclusion and inclusive education. These results primarily form the way scholars use these definitions. Some scholars advocate inclusive education, which entails children with special needs being educated in mainstream school, with separate schools for those who really need them. Others use the term to argue children should be educated in mainstream classes with permission to leave for individual therapy. There is also confusion over whether children should be fully integrated into mainstream schools, or whether moderate integration should take place through placements (Cigman, 2007). There are, therefore, a variety of ways in which children with special educational needs come to experience integration and education. Children with special needs may be educated in residential schools, separate classrooms or schools, or in mainstream education with teaching assistants providing special support (Minou, 2011).

There are now advocates who propose a new framework that claims to resolve the *dilemmas of difference* produced by special schools and inclusive education. Norwich (2014) and Tezi (2014) endorse the so-called ‘capability approach’. This approach advocates substituting the language of needs with that of capabilities; it aims for equality, and avoids undesirable labels. The premise of the approach is to see capabilities as opportunities and freedoms, and that individuals have to achieve particular states of being or undertake particular activities that they give value to, e.g. walking (Burchardt, 2004; Mitra, 2006; Terzi, 2007, 2008, 2014).

What the capability approach can offer to the field of special educational needs is being considered by many scholars (Norwich, 2014; Reindal 2010; Ridley & Watts, 2014). The purpose of presenting the above brief discussion is to highlight the importance and difficulty that defining and understanding the concept of disability presents. Even more so, it shows that the framework under which disability comes to be understood in education has implications, not only for policies, but for children's experiences of education.

### **Experiencing Special and Mainstream Schools**

There are contrasting accounts of how children with special educational needs fare in mainstream schools. While Farrell (2000) finds students with special needs benefit from being educated in mainstream schools, Shah (2007) argues mainstream schools continue to disempower students with disabilities through exclusionary procedures and practices. Young people who were educated in special schools were found to form friendships with their peers more easily than they could in mainstream schools; furthermore, special school provided them with support and facilities that they benefitted from. Curtin and Clarke (2005) found young people with physical disabilities, who could also have been educated in mainstream schools, spoke positively about their experiences of being educated in a special school. They reported that in the special school they were supported by staff, encouraged to be independent, and were able to form close friendships with other peers with physical disabilities. While in the mainstream school, they also formed positive friendships with able-bodied peers; however, they also experienced exclusion and loneliness.

Díez (2010) finds special schools foster a sense of self-respect, and teachers promote a sense that students have something to offer. Special schools provide safe havens and, unlike

mainstream school, lack bias and hostile attitudes. Similarly, Pitt and Curtin (2004) found participants in their study moved from mainstream schools to special schools after experiencing many negative experiences. In contrast, Davis and Watson (2001) found children with disabilities encounter discrimination in both special and mainstream schools, and these result not only from structural forces in schools, but also from everyday practices that adults and children engage in. Teachers, for example, compel children with disabilities to conform to specified ways of walking and talking; they remind students that they are different from their able-bodied peers and are forced to fit into existing educational practices for able-bodied peers. They argue young people should be facilitated to challenge structural and cultural conditions which create disability.

Mitchell (1999) finds young people with disabilities are now moving from special schools to further education in colleges. Often, this transition is eased through placements in colleges while they are still in special schools. Attending mainstream colleges is a valued experience as it offers students from special schools the opportunity to socialise with non-disabled peers. However, Mitchell (1999) finds that during placements, students from special schools remain in a separate group from the students in the mainstream college. These studies show that despite mainstream colleges and schools accompanying students with special needs, special schools continue to provide an environment which they find to be positive, accommodating, and where they are able to socialise easily with their peers with disabilities similar to themselves.

## Enacting Disability

At the onset of this study, it was acknowledged disability is a complex concept and one, as suggested by Corker and Shakespeare (2002), that cannot be defined nor completely understood by using a single definition. Disability is not only something one is, as suggested by the medical model of disability, nor merely something one becomes through environmental barriers, as suggested by the social model; so, this study understands disability as a dialectic between the two, through an interactionist model (Shakespeare, 2014). Furthermore, the argument above suggests the level of disability one can experience is something that can be changed, hence disability cannot be considered to be a fixed entity. By evoking Corker and Shakespeare's (2002) assertion, it can be said that what is required by a study of this nature is to venture towards analysing how disability is *done* and how the various models of disability shape this *doing* in different contexts. This can be achieved by taking the position outlined by Mol (2002), who argues reality is continuously enacted through practice. Hence, the focus is on a series of different practices where disability is observed as being *done* in different contexts; this includes practices in which disability and young people with disabilities is talked about, handled, educated, cared for, and supervised across different settings. What emerges is a slightly different teenager with disabilities in different contexts.

Disability and being a young person with a disability is not merely given but is instead *done*, and *done* differently in different places and by different actors. As a result, what emerges is that there is no singular way of being a young person with a disability, but instead, as this chapter shows, there are multiple realities. Given that this study has primarily looked at people with a physical disability in a special school, it leads this study to question how these



young people become and are made disabled through different educational practices. By working through excerpts from interviews, ethnographic notes, and the special school prospectus, this chapter discusses the normative way in which the special school creates an inclusive environment for young people with a range of abilities. As this study researched the lives of eleven participants and their experiences of disability, it is unfeasible to present how disability is enacted in the various life contexts of all eleven participants. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to provide an overview on how disability varies across the spectrum of disabilities presented by the participants in different social contexts. The argument I develop is that young people with physical disabilities come to practice disability, and this is shaped by the context and the key social actors that set limits and possibilities on how they should enact disability. The normative way in which disability is enacted in daily life is related to the way participants make a distinction between disability and ability, but also how this distinction is made for them.

As this study was located primarily in a special school, the chapter provides an overview on the environment the school provides for its students. In particular, the chapter will focus on describing the ways in which the school promotes its outlook on disability and maintains an environment of positivity, inclusion, and one of promoting ability. This chapter then moves towards examining the ways in which the students enact disability in this setting and in contrast to other contexts, i.e. when they move to mainstream educational settings.

### **The Special ‘School Bubble’**

The special school fosters a haven that is described as the ‘school bubble’ by a member of staff in the school, to denote the artificial environment built around the students, which does

not replicate the real world. This environment works by staff promoting positivity, ability, and providing students with constant support for their needs. It is in relation to this bubble where disability can be understood as being performed, enacted, and perceived.

### ***Positive Values***

The school sets out a positive ethos plan on its school website. These include positive values, which are claimed to be demonstrated through all aspects of school life. While these values are described on paper and online, they do not explicitly come to students' knowledge in this way. Instead, they are role modelled by adults, school staff, and visitors. Students learn and enact these positive values through a range of customs. These positive values not only guide good and desirable behaviour, but they are also a way of being good students with disabilities.

This behaviour includes being courteous, sensitive, and careful, with only using words and behaviour which are considered appropriate. Furthermore, the values include maintaining and promoting positive attitudes towards diversity and difference, be it cultural, physical, or social, and promoting the outlook of removing barriers to equal opportunities, is a key feature, and one noticeable in most activities in the school.

Promoting positive values leads to all students maintaining good behaviour at all times. One will not hear a student shouting, being rude, or being inappropriate in the school corridors unless they have behavioural issues. If a student is heard speaking or behaving in a manner which is deemed as 'inappropriate', fellow students are the first to correct them by saying 'behave'. Speeding wheelchairs, the correct way to sit and not slouch or to not take feet off the chair foot plate, is commonly and immediately corrected by members of staff as students

make their way from one part of the school to another. Day-to-day life in the school is governed by values of respect, and poor behaviour, such as being unnecessarily noisy, is immediately noticed and disapproved of. Students who display the ideal behaviour of being a good disabled pupil are praised and even applauded in school assemblies, thereby encouraging the ideal student behaviour. This takes place by verbally disapproving of poor behaviour and encouraging good behaviour, by ignoring the undesired behaviour as far as considered appropriate, by offering the student supervised time out, and by negotiating or discussing the reasons for their behaviour with an adult member of staff in private. The positive values help create an inclusive learning environment, which enables students with diverse backgrounds and needs to work alongside one another (Smith, 2008).

*“I think that the, the, positive ethos at [this school] permeates through everything that we do. It's not specifically about a policy; it's about a culture and the ethos at the school – our very strongest point, and it's the thing that when people visit the school that they always comment on. I think it's the thing that children most thrive under because of the way that they are treated with respect and dignity, and the ethos which supports fun.” (School Principal)*

The quote above taken from an interview conducted with the school principal reveals the positivity that resonates throughout every classroom. It not only helps to maintain a safe and inclusive working environment, but it instils the ‘right’ attitude considered by the educational institution to thrive under and to reach their true potential.

## *Ability*

A key role the positive ethos policy is able to bring out, is the positive attitude students develop towards viewing their disability. Teaching assistants and teachers encourage and promote students to excel in their abilities and engage in activities they are able to do as far as possible. They are also encouraged to find ways around their disabilities so that they are able to carry out activities rather than accepting that their disability is about inability. Staff at the school continually look for ways to plan lessons that cater to students with differing levels of ability. Students who are able to work independently are permitted to work on their own, handwriting their work or typing their work themselves. Others are permitted to work alongside teaching assistants who scribe their work or set them up with a laptop and assistive technologies so they can work independently.

The school also provides a technology centre that is continually trying out new assistive technologies to aid students in carrying out work independently. A teaching assistant working in this school for over fifteen years and now specialising in introducing new technologies to the school, recalls how over the years, and because of developments in computer technology, many students are now able to overcome their disability by using assistive technologies to work independently. For this teaching assistant, disability is nothing more than “*a hindrance*” where “*a lot of the time it’s not an insurmountable problem*”.

Teaching assistants strive for students to see beyond their disability by finding novel ways in which they can accomplish a task. Take the following example explained by another teaching assistant:

*“Well I try to get them to gain their confidence and say if you can’t do, for example Dave...he can’t hold the ruler straight or*

*he can't hold it and draw a line at the same time, so I will... but the way I try to get him to see past it, I'm sure he sees past it, is well by...I try to find coping methods of how to deal, so I'd suggest tape. Tape the ruler and then do the line. It may take longer but at least you did it yourself."*

The role the teaching assistant plays is to encourage the student to see beyond what he is unable to do, and to think in unconventional ways to draw or to hold a ruler straight for example, without asking someone for help.

Another way in which the school emphasis is on students seeing their disability is to provide them with role models. Occasionally, a Paralympian, or adults with physically disabilities from different professions, attend assemblies to give motivational speeches on their struggles and how they have successfully overcome obstacles that prevented them from being dependent.

### ***Providing Support***

Little was known about each student's disabling condition, as no prior knowledge was provided by the school. School principals stressed how knowing about a student's disabling condition is most often not even necessary in order to work with them. What is important is knowing what their needs are and how best to cater towards them. Teaching assistants and teachers most often did not know the name or type of condition the pupils in their class were diagnosed with. The focus was more towards understanding their physical, medical, emotional, and educational needs, and the level of support each student requires. This then, makes it a difficult task to talk about such a sensitive topic to the students. Most students

rarely know about the medical condition their fellow classmates are diagnosed with. Peers also come to see their classmates' disabilities in terms of their needs and the level of support they are seen to receive from teaching assistants and teachers. Peers learn by observing how they too can help their classmates when they see them struggle to complete a task on their own.

All students, despite having some form of physical disability, have different needs. Each student is therefore treated on a unique basis – the phrase 'no one is the same' is commonly heard and echoed by staff as well as pupils. Needs include anything from supervising a student in a lesson to escorting them to another room; scribing their work, reiterating instructions, setting up equipment for the student, and performing their work for them as they provide instructions. Care duties are strictly left to trained TAs; these include offering medication to students on time, helping them in the toileting duties, feeding them at lunch time, tube feeding students during lessons, readjusting students in their chairs when uncomfortable or unable to move themselves independently, taking students out of their chair for a stroll to exercise their muscles, placing them in another chair, and providing emotional support. As each student in the school has unique needs, it requires the school to put into place practices and routines in and out of lessons that not only encourage students to see what they are able to do independently, but allow teaching staff to intervene to cater to students' needs when they know they will struggle.

As well as providing corrective support, the level and type of support each student receives in the school is differentiated. Students have someone to do something for them, even when it is not always required. Some students develop *learned helplessness* as described by staff, where they are aware students use their disability as an excuse to not carry out or complete a task.

This can be exemplified by an example provided by a teaching assistant who faces a daily struggle with a student in her class. Abbey walks in with splints and a bag every morning to the classroom. While she is capable of taking her coat off and placing it out of the way, she chooses to wait for a member of staff to do this for her.

*“I’ve said to her Abbey...first you need to put your stuff away now I’m not going to do it for you, and now she’s very clever. What she did was...she stood there until somebody else came to her – another staff! Now she played us, she played us that day.”*

The quote reveals the way the student enacts innocence by waiting around for another member of staff to support her. The quote also shows how members of staff can unintentionally encourage students to become dependent on them for tasks that they are capable of performing for themselves. This creates a dilemma for teaching staff for the way in which disability is experienced in the school.

### **Dave: Regulating Appropriate Behaviour**

Dave’s physical disability is easily identifiable from his appearance, but also from his behaviour, which leads him to talk excessively and to be generally hyperactive. His physical appearance and behaviour attracts much unwanted attention, particularly when he is in new public settings. The main issues Dave and the people surrounding him in the school and home are faced with, include keeping him under discipline. His condition poses a challenge of excessive talking, and his repeating of particular phrases, which include ‘Shut up!’ ‘You’re

fired!’ ‘Potato!’ ‘Banana!’ ‘Thong!’ ‘You’re pregnant!’. These phrases, along with his boisterous behaviour and appearance, come into question, and are subject to different reactions under different contexts.

Like most students in the school, Dave arrives in the morning on a council bus. He is often cautioned by his bus driver to remain quiet as he seats himself towards the front of the bus and behind the bus driver who is able to hear most of Dave’s chatter. Dave, therefore, finds himself being scolded by the driver when he addresses his female friend seated next to him as “You’re pregnant”. This leaves Dave feeling frustrated, as the driver fails to understand his humour. To avoid interaction and to block out something the driver may say to him that can easily upset him, Dave often plugs in his earphones during the travel to and from the school. Simultaneously, he will take out his mobile phone to play gaming applications he has preloaded on to it. This not only keeps him entertained during the travels, but also distracts his attention away from the bus driver.

Once Dave arrives at the school, his presence is immediately felt by everyone. One instantly becomes aware of his lively and jovial personality as he greets the school staff waiting outside to bring the students safely into the building. Once inside the school building, one can always hear his voice from a distance, especially when he is having a chat with someone in the corridor. He is often busy interacting with a member of staff, a pupil, or one of the school bus escorts, or sometimes can even be found talking or singing out loud to himself. His loud, chatty, childlike side springs alive in the school. He enjoys being in this school, unlike the time he spent in his previous mainstream school where his needs were not accommodated to, or his behaviour tolerated.



Students and staff members over the years have become accustomed to his way of speaking, especially after he underwent surgery, which left him fixated on certain words. After every couple of seconds, he will speak to himself or speak out loud. Occasionally, he points out or informs someone they are ‘pregnant’ followed by ‘guess how many months?’. Those engaged in the conversation in the school play along with Dave. They would occasionally provide an estimate of, for example, ‘four million months’, or they will wait until they eventually give up or guess the answer. Often, Dave gives them a fictional estimation. It is, however, occasionally seen that Dave will receive a warning. He is, from time to time, requested to be quiet or to focus on the task at hand. He also becomes subjected to looks by members of staff when he poses the same question to his class teacher, who is unable to have her own children. Unaware of his teacher’s sentiments when he mentions the word ‘pregnant’, Dave continues to remain naïve to the awkwardness his humoured questions can create in the classroom. However, no one in the classroom informs Dave why he should not mention the word ‘pregnant’ to his form tutor. Teaching assistants often remain silent or tell him not to have that ‘joke’ with the teacher. Dave is often found complaining about why his classroom staff will not allow him to involve his teacher in his banter; however, this does not put an end to his wit, as he continues to pose the question.

In school, Dave independently makes his way around the building. He considers himself to be reliable as the school bestows the responsibility on him to be a part of the morning ‘wake-up, shake-up’. This involves him standing in front of the school students during morning assemblies, encouraging them to actively dance to an energising song. Dave is also made responsible for changing presentation slides for the morning assemblies being delivered by teachers. His morning duties are enjoyed by him, as he rushes to the laptop when arriving late. He is found to be seated next to the laptop that is set up for assembly presentations.

While Dave is a personality who is easily bored and distracted, and one can easily tell he is uninterested in a task when he is seen to stare into space or bite his nails, morning activities help him to remain on task. Being responsible for changing presentation slides keeps him focused on hearing what the teacher is saying when the presentation is being delivered. By assigning these tasks, which the teachers are aware will appeal to Dave, the school is able to correct and control his behaviour for the given situation.

Once the assembly comes to an end, Dave takes his bright multi-coloured coat and bag to his classroom, which he then places in a trolley. He then interacts with staff before being told what to do next. Often, this involves him bringing or taking the class register to or from the reception. He walks quietly and slowly so he is able to spot one of the receptionists to shout 'You're fired!' The receptionist also tries hard every morning to spot him early, to 'fire' him before he does her. However, since the school reception has been restructured, Dave has moaned about how he is now unable to 'fire' the receptionist, as she is now hidden away at the back of the office. If he sees the receptionist in the foyer or around the school, Dave will start shouting to her regardless of visitors, students, or teachers in the area. When interacting with the receptionist, his behaviour is not questioned or deemed strange. The receptionist instead smiles back and says '*You're fired, Dave*'.

In lessons, Dave remains active, chatty, and loud. Once the lesson starts, some class teachers assign a teaching assistant to sit beside him. This is done to keep him focused and on task. Due to the nature of his disability and visual impairment, teaching assistants would position themselves on his right side, as this enables Dave to avoid turning his whole body around to clearly see the face of his assistant. However, someone seated next to him can have a number of implications, as this provides him with someone to talk to. Often, the students in the

classroom avoid interacting with him as they are focused and quietly undertaking their work. Dave is usually the only student who has little inhibitions, and can be found chatting to the assistant next to him or talking to himself. Furthermore, Dave is often the only student in the class who requires a one-to-one assistant to point out to him the need to remain on task. This occasionally leaves Dave feeling different from the rest of his class group, who are able to work, to a large extent, independently and without repeatedly being told how to carry out their work. As Dave has one arm that is more active than the other, the way in which he carries out his work also differs from the rest of the class. This leads Dave to view disability as being '*something wrong*' with him.

Once he has access to a desktop computer, Dave frequently opens a blank document and types phrases that he speaks aloud on a regular basis, such as '*thong*' or '*you're fired*'. He often calls out names of students to show them his screen displaying the words, thereby distracting by humouring his classmates. Such behaviour leads Dave into the spotlight; however, he gets away with a light word of warning from the class teacher, who laughs at his smart ways of finding ways to convey his renowned phrases without verbally speaking them.

Depending on the task, and if being taught by a friendly teacher, Dave will seek permission and log onto the internet to open sites that are not blocked by the school, to listen to his favourite songs during lessons. If he finishes his work early, he will play games. It is usually at break and lunch times where he is seen logging on to the school computer to make sure the virtual farm that he has been labouring for many years is taken care of. He completes challenges and feeds his farm animals to make virtual money, and send challenges and presents to himself through the various accounts he has made, to be able to expand his farm online. He relies on his mother to make sure his farm is being catered to while he is in school,

as being on duty to make tea and provide his class students with refreshments during break time means he is sometimes unable to offer his time to his farm.

Every Monday, Dave travels on the school bus to his local college, with his four fellow classmates. He is the first to make his way on to the bus, to buckle his seatbelt and plug in his earphones to his red music player. Once the school bus arrives outside the college, Dave is the first person to place his phone in his bag, leave the bus, and walk independently to the college entrance from the car park. Occasionally losing or forgetting his college pass in the morning, he often finds himself signing in at the reception desk before making his way to the classroom. Unlike the other students who have to wait to be unclamped from the bus as they are seated in their wheelchairs, Dave quickly makes his way to the classroom. Once in the classroom, Dave is the first to inform his class teacher of the number of students present for the lesson.

In the mainstream college, Dave excels in showing his independence levels, by breaking away from the support staff from the second he arrives outside the building. As he arrives in the classroom, Dave walks towards his allocated desktop computer and signs in to his email to check if the class teacher has sent him instructions for the day's lesson. While waiting for the other students to arrive, Dave occasionally sings or talks to himself as a way of entertaining himself. However, being in a different location means Dave becomes more hyper, and his inappropriate behaviour becomes worse. This, combined with his disinterest in doing work, which he considers boring, means Dave is less focused in lessons. The class teacher makes little effort to sit beside him and explain the work to him in a fashion which he can understand. Instead, the class teacher uses the same technique to teach all the students in the class, and being unable to remain focused throughout the part where the teacher gives

instructions, means Dave frequently struggles to understand the work. This results in his slow work production, giving the teacher a reason to tell him off in front of the class for being distracted and not paying attention. As a result, Dave's self-esteem is eroded each week, and he often sits in front of a desktop computer moaning about being '*thick*' and engaging in his '*inappropriate talk*'.

This further lands Dave into trouble. The college teacher names the dialogue she exchanges with Dave, where she warns him about using his renowned phrases such as 'pregnant' to his classmates, as the '*inappropriate talk*'. This talk highlights what is considered as being acceptable and normal, where using his commonly spoken phrases are considered inappropriate during the lesson and also around the college campus, she reminds him the use of such phrases can land him in trouble. Despite travelling with a teaching assistant and friends and remaining with them during lessons, no one participates in Dave's banter on 'being pregnant'. The school vice principal also warns the researcher to not encourage his banter when out of school or to help him in his work in college, as this will prepare him for leaving school and make him aware of what is appropriate talk when outside of the special school. As a researcher, I become aware the special school is a place that permits Dave to be himself and allows exceptions for his talk and behaviour. Dave however, struggles to understand why there are different levels of tolerance to his natural behaviour, when he is in different settings.

Dave is unable to adjust to the sudden change that is expected from him when switching between different social settings. He continues to engage with using words such as 'you're pregnant' when interacting with his school friends in college, although they discourage him and limit their interaction with him. While his peers are aware they are in a different social

setting and model the positive, good behaviour, Dave struggles to fit into this mould. He also struggles to understand why he should be behaving differently, and even after being provided with an explanation that he is no longer on school grounds but in a college, he struggles to appreciate why he is allowed to behave in one way in one setting and not the same when in a new setting, when still surrounded by his friends and teaching assistants from the special school.

During lunch breaks, Dave breaks away from his class group. He independently buys his lunch at the college canteen. Only reliant on his right hand, he picks up a tray, looks at the food on offer and places his tray down to unzip his bag with his right hand, talking to himself often while he looks for his wallet in his bag. College students around him do not wait for him to find his money, but rather pass by him to pay for their lunch. He takes the wallet out, sometimes using his mouth to hold or grip the wallet, or placing it under his right arm or on the tray, before moving along the queue. Once he selects '*cheesy chips*' and pays for his dinner, he stands at the counter carefully placing the loose change in the wallet, while people in the queue continue to stare as he delays their lunch time. He then finds a free table where he can sit by himself and enjoy his dinner. The support staff however, continue to keep an occasional watch from a distant table, as they sit beside other students who require the assistance of the staff during lunch. While having his lunch, Dave remains focused on his food. He does not talk to himself, but rather, becomes a little intimidated by other students sitting in groups around the tables positioned next to him. Once Dave finishes his meal, he then moves to find a quiet corner where he can sit on his own and play games on his mobile phone. Occasionally, he returns early and waits outside his classroom for the lesson after lunch. If he spots a free desktop computer, he will log onto the internet to check on his virtual

farm, and often this attracts the attention of college students as they look over to his screen. Most of the time, he is oblivious to the way people look at him and his online activities.

## **Discussion**

Key features that helped Dave to successfully feel included in the special school are easy to identify. Firstly, the positive attitude amongst staff allowed Dave to be himself. His behaviour on the school bus and in the mainstream college was met with adult attitudes based on difference and normality. Dave “has his identity imposed on him in a way that not only tells him very clearly and in an authoritative manner what he is, but also what he must be” (Davis & Watson, 2001:673). Dave is expected to not be loud, or engage with others with his ‘inappropriate talk’. Unable to conform to this imposition, Dave finds himself sitting with his earphones on the school bus, listening to music to occupy himself, which will keep him out of trouble in relation to, for example, the bus driver. At college, he is seen to fall behind in his work, as the teacher fails to understand how to deal with his behavioural issues in a way that can include him and keep him focused in lessons.

Cole et al. (1999) find that schools can successfully include pupils with behavioural difficulties in the following ways – by teachers having empathic understanding, providing differentiated support to pupils, and holding positive attitudes. In the mainstream college however, Dave has to conform to college rules, and here he is not provided with the assistance of teaching staff as in the special school, who can sit next to him and keep him on task, reminding him constantly what he needs to do in the lesson. While other students in his college class would be praised for the completion of their work, Dave would be scolded in front of his peers for not being able to meet the expectations of class or college rules.

Furthermore, in the special school, teaching assistants allow students to work with their disability, and by performing simple tasks differently, the students are encouraged to think how they can, as far as possible, independently carry out their own work. For example, by taping a ruler to the page, Dave is able to draw a straight line without asking for someone to hold down the ruler. However, all students are taught in the same way in the mainstream college by the teacher who expects them all to perform their work with little help, and as they are no longer provided with differentiated help, Dave struggles to understand how to perform class tasks for himself. Pupils in special schools present a complexity of needs, and while the special school provides an environment where Dave's needs are catered for, he is suddenly made to feel disabled when the school staff sit with him in the mainstream college classroom, but refuse to provide him with assistance. Similarly, his class peers, who would talk to him in the special school, also start to avoid him in the mainstream college. Feeling excluded from friendships, Dave continued to occupy himself in his free time by playing virtual games online.

### **Scott: Top of the Class**

As a child, Scott was placed in a mainstream junior school. He was the only student in the school with a disability, and the environment was one that was not designed to accommodate his needs. While Scott successfully managed to make friends and settle in well in a mainstream school, he was continually made to feel different by the built environment, which played a role in lowering his self-confidence. The difference stemmed from being made to feel dependent on others for activities that he would be able to perform independently in the home. He now required assistance for carrying out simple tasks when in school. For example, Scott was unable to move the heavy toilet doors. His inability to open the door meant the class teacher would ask Scott before the start of the lesson and in front of all the class pupils,



if he required a toileting break. Furthermore, not being able to change his clothes without the assistance of an adult staff member before physical education further lowered his confidence in his ability to do things for himself. Such experiences changed Scott at a very early age. Being in a mainstream school did little to boost his self-confidence, and his parents started to consider alternative educational institutions, as this also started to affect his academic grades.

Still in his primary years, Scott was soon placed in the special educational needs school. Being educated in a special educational needs school provided Scott with a different experience. He became as independent as possible, and no longer required someone to assist him in any tasks. This was not only made possible by the environment being highly accessible and designed for students with physical disabilities, but also Scott's physical strength developed, as he was growing up. He was able to rely on a manual wheelchair and not on an electric one, as he developed the strength to push himself. This shows disability is not a fixed state, but rather, what a person with a physical disability is able to do can change over time as their physical health does, too. Furthermore, unlike most students who are restricted to the use of their wheelchair, or generally prefer to stay in their chairs throughout the day, Scott was able to walk around the school without the assistance of his wheelchair, much like he still does at home.

Scott was soon standing out from the peers in his class, not only because he was physically more able to perform activities in school without the assistance of staff, but also because he was academically more able. Scott quickly realised the

*‘major issue here [in the special school] really is that there is always people around...to do anything for you at any point and there’s so many people and that it’s almost as if whilst they’re trying to encourage independence and stuff, it’s never going to be enough...nobody leaving from here...would be able to go and live on their own straight after, it’s all very, it’s all very inclusive like it’s, it’s we’re our own little place and the rest of the world is somewhere else that’s my personal opinion.’*

Therefore, Scott explicitly refused unnecessary support staff. He made efforts to *‘have a decent social life, independent always, out all the time and stuff but that’s not, that’s not through school, that’s because of my own doing’*. Scott’s positive attitude to working independently and to only ask for help when required appealed to staff and students, setting him apart, and being seen as a role model for classmates to follow.

His attitude to excel in his ability, and the school’s efforts to provide him with an environment in which he would be able to see beyond his disability, made him the ideal student to enact the ideal disabled student role. The school offered him a part-time course in a mainstream school to attend music lessons. Here, Scott explains, *‘I become friends with everyone in the class. I rose to popular fame in just like two weeks.’*

As Scott was academically more able than the peers in the special school, he, unlike his peers, was able to far out-perform the students in the school. This meant he was continually switching to higher ability groups and was placed with class students much older than him.

He was also able to form strong relations with such students, and has been able to maintain friendships formed with his friends once they left the school, through the use of social networking sites. His ability to excel in different subject areas and achieve high standards made him stand out from the other students in the school, further boosting his self-confidence, and to recognise and excel in his abilities. Despite being placed in classes where he was clearly ahead in educational ability, he often sat by himself doing separate work from the rest of the class in the special school. This was not unusual, as most students in a class would be on a different task, studying for different entry levels and examination boards. Despite being different from the students in the class in this way, the school's inclusive nature meant Scott continued to feel included and similar to the students in the school. Like other students in the school who would engage in little conversation with peers during break and lunch times, Scott too, was to be found occupying himself with his technology and accessing social networking sites from his iPod, rather than using the school computers, or would be seen chatting to his teachers.

Once Scott moved to a mainstream college for further education, he instantly became popular among his college friends, often allowing them to have a spin in his wheelchair and make jokes about disabilities; he soon was at ease with his able-bodied peers. Scott studied music in college, and was the leading performer for many gigs performed for his course in front of an audience. However, this popularity and excelling academically did not last long. Over time, the pressure of meeting academic deadlines whilst attending training for out of college sports started to take its toll on Scott's physical health, academic performance, and his performance in sports. Often, Scott would have to work in groups with other students in his college. He would find his peers would not take the work as seriously as he did, and he disliked the attitude with which they worked. Scott felt he received little understanding and

praise from the staff in school, and that they often did not provide him with the reassurance in his ability to do well that he had received in the special school. Scott was also no longer the most academically able student in the mainstream class, and found little fulfilment in college. As he continued to do well in sports and managed to secure himself a sports scholarship, Scott decided to leave mainstream education after a year and concentrate on his sporting career.

## **Discussion**

Scott was able to prosper academically in the special school, as it provided him with an accessible environment in comparison to the mainstream school. Here, he was now able to undertake simple tasks such as going to the toilet, opening doors, and walking around the school building independently again. This helped to raise his self-confidence and to focus on his academic work, which he continued to excel in during his time in the special school. As he continued to resist the support of teaching assistants and endorsed working on his own, he was praised by teachers and became a role model for other students in his school.

Furthermore, he would be segregated from his peers by working on a different, and a more challenging, school task. This made him stand out in a positive manner; as he continued to be shifted to higher ability groups, he was continually making new friendships with peers much older than him. This helped him to develop his skills in forming friendships when leaving the special school, and in making his transition to mainstream education.

However, after some time, Scott started to feel the void of the positive environment provided by the special school that catered to his needs by praising his ability. In the mainstream college, Scott realised he was now competing academically with peers who were as able as

him. In order to keep his academic ability, he required assistance from college staff to understand his progressive condition, which made keeping up with school tasks whilst also being engaged in out-of-school sport activities, physically tiring. Unable to keep up with the pressure as well as the physical strain, Scott dropped out of college, as his sports club provided him with a positive environment where he was praised for his potential.

## **Conclusion**

The two illustrative case studies have revealed that Dave, in comparison to Scott, is constantly reminded to act 'normally' by adjusting his behaviour in accordance with the norms of speaking when outside the special school. Both Scott and Dave were segregated on the basis of their academic ability. While Dave is provided with a teaching assistant in the special school, this makes him feel as though there is something 'wrong' with him, as he requires more assistance than his peers. In comparison, Scott is positively segregated by his ability to outperform his peers in the special school. In this way, Dave is made to feel disabled, in comparison to Scott who revels in his ability.

Like Davis and Watson (2001), this study finds both Dave and Scott experience struggles in adjusting to the adults' beliefs, structural forces, and normative ways of practising disability in the mainstream college. For example, teachers that considered Scott to be more able considered him to be closer to the notion of normality. In mainstream education, teachers' attitudes limited opportunities for Dave and Scott to achieve their academic ability, as they were expected, like able-bodied peers, to perform their academic tasks with little help and support from teachers. The school structures encouraged Scott to recognise the idea of rank, and his disability in both the special and mainstream schools. Scott was able to negotiate his place in education by opting out and focusing on his sporting career. In comparison, Dave

continues to struggle with the different practices found in special and mainstream school that disable him.

Like Díez (2010), this study also finds special schools provide students with safe havens where teachers lack bias and negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. Despite school placements to mainstream colleges, this study also finds that students from special schools continue to remain segregated as a special group, where they are provided with little opportunity to interact with able-bodied peers (Mitchell, 1999). This study has also identified that mainstream schools continue to disempower students with disabilities through exclusionary procedures and practices (Shah, 2007).

This study finds both mainstream and special schools identify students with physical disabilities through the medical model, i.e. with a medical condition that requires treatment and care. Both institutions also ascribe to the social model, as they offer accessible environments to students with physical disabilities. However, in the mainstream school the social model is implemented to remove physical barriers that prevent or create obstacles for young people with physical disabilities to move around the school. In comparison, the special school not only continually tries to offer a physically accessible environment, but also identifies how young people with a range of physical disabilities can be provided with an environment that is inclusive. This is done by the staff in the school identifying what the students are capable of doing. They are able to provide individualised care and support to cater to their needs, that can enhance their capabilities both academically, and in the way they enact their disability. However, as the special school provides a protective environment, with many members of staff readily available to support students with their needs, some students take advantage of this by expecting staff to carry out tasks for them, while others like Dave

and Scott are unable to adjust to an environment when the support is not available to them. This raises a dilemma, as the level of support offered by schools to young people with physical disabilities shapes how they are disabled.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Young people's access to digital media has been examined in relation to parents being able to afford digital technologies and an internet connection, as well as how technology and connections are available across different social settings (Ellcessor, 2016). Ellcessor (2016) argues for defining access more broadly, taking into consideration regulation, hardware, software, and online content, which can be either more or less meaningful for people with disabilities. From a disability perspective, Ellcessor (2016) discusses how the design and content of the internet culturally favours an active and able-bodied user, and argues that we should reconceptualise access to digital media in terms of design, structure, content, and regulation in ways that cater to the needs of disabled people. Furthermore, she argues the ability to participate culturally and civically also depends on one's ability to use digital media.

While this study was researching how young people with physical disabilities use the internet, the findings emerging from research mirrored Ellcessor's (2016) discussions on access to digital media as encompassing use, regulations, content, and user experience. From the findings, I have conceptualised how each theme (rhythms of moving online, online relations, regulating internet access, and dis-ability) shows a different form of access, where site of access is found to reveal varied journeys and politics surrounding young people with physical disabilities' use of digital media.

This study finds the 'wayfaring' and 'rhythms' of moving in and between digital media revealed a different form of access. By drawing on mobilities literature, the journeys and



rhythms of moving in and around digital media uncovered how young people with physical disabilities were accessing digital media in the home on a habitual basis. For some participants, access to digital media was quick and took them to several places online, while others were accessing the same sites, with slow rhythms. Following Ellcessor's (2016) observations about key dimensions of access, this study has contributed to showing that moving about in the digital world involves hardware (iPods, laptops, PCs), software (apps, games, chats) and content (games, news, messages). However, the diaries illustrate that it is the embodied, habitual journeys – and the frictions, obstacles, pausing, and repeating marking these journeys – between the devices, sites, and content that is also important in terms of access. The case studies illustrate that broader elements beyond the digital come into place in shaping the digital rhythms and inequalities, including structures of indoor space (closed bedrooms, open living areas), furniture (beds, desks, closed curtains), family members, relationships, and communications online (or lack of). This study has suggested that the concepts of 'rhythm' and 'wayfaring' help to analyse these often unnoticed, embodied, and habitual aspects of digital media use and its inequalities.

Mobility studies have tended to equate a fast pace and movement with privilege and power. In this study, the concepts of 'rhythm' and 'wayfaring' helped to unravel how young people with disabilities may have more privileged journeys through the digital, traversing diverse sites and activities, or less privileged ones, entailing limited movements within one site, or slow movement with intermittent engagement with the digital. The concepts of 'wayfaring' and 'rhythms' clearly have future methodological potential for enabling in-depth studies on the everyday, habitual movements of individuals – both disabled and able-bodied – in the contemporary digitally saturated landscape.

Moving discussions on from technological access, Ellcessor (2016) also considers cultural accessibility, which refers to the ways in which people with disabilities can access content that is meaningful for them and defines their experience in their own terms. She proposes a vision for ‘cultural accessibility’ – a change in individuals’ attitudes towards people with disabilities and differences, who pass through online environments, so that all can have equal access, a valued voice, produce content, and have an enjoyable experience.

Taking the lead from Ellcessor (2016), this study has found the journeys of finding, developing, and maintaining relationships on social networking sites entails struggles of social access, whereby young people with physical disabilities were found to struggle to be socially accepted and to be able to form and maintain relationships in digital media, particularly social media. Social access is pertinent for young people with disabilities, who use social media to gain acceptance and to find and manage friendships and romantic relations. However, social access is challenging for young people with physical disabilities in the contemporary digital media environment, fixated on visual and continuous public and private social evaluation and judgement through likes and swipes, which mediate social exclusion and inclusion inside and outside the digital environment. Young people with physical disabilities can also align themselves with ideal notions of self in social media to gain social access; however, this is not easy for all. This study finds the inability to conform to normative notions of self on social media may lead to both online and offline social exclusion from friendship groups and romantic relations.

The internet enabled young people with physical disabilities the opportunity to explore and validate their sexuality, to build and remain in relationships, and to engage in self-promotion.

However, young people with physical disabilities also encountered exclusion online, by being blocked or rejected when they failed to conform to the norms of visual attractiveness.

Drawing on Goffman's (1963) work has enabled this study to tease out the politics involved in concealing and disclosing disability online, which is found to be a complex endeavour.

While digital environments offer people with disabilities the possibilities to create new identities and form new relationships, and even political alliances, with other disabled people, much of the time disclosing disability online may still lead to exclusion.

Another form of access discussed by Ellcessor (2016) is under the category of regulation. By analysing policy developments of digital media accessibility, Ellcessor (2016) examines how access to digital media is regulated by laws, as well as other structures and stakeholders, including industries and business norms. While Ellcessor (2016) looks at how these various policies and their enforcement expands or limits digital media access for people with disabilities, this study draws on her analytical toolkit to study how regulations filtered down to micro settings of a special school and the home expand or limit access to digital media for young people with physical disabilities. While on the one hand there are regulations that try to ensure digital media is designed and developed with accessibility being inbuilt through interfaces, hardware, and software, on the other hand there are policies in place to filter, block, and restrict the content that is made accessible for young people with physical disabilities in the home and the school. This study finds the school and the home are two political sites where access to digital media is negotiated. It finds that young people with physical disabilities resort to evading regulatory measures in place in schools and the home to expand their use of digital media when they feel their use is being limited.

The special school was also an important place in which young people with physical disabilities were accessing the internet. Here, the students who were more physically able were observed as using their personal mobile internet devices (iPod Touch, iPads, smart phones) to get online and access sites that were blocked on school computers. It was anticipated that the special school considers the young people with physical disabilities as vulnerable, and existing literature has also found that parents with children with disabilities place more restrictions on their use of the internet (Raghavendra et al., 2012). This study found that some participants were considered ‘doubly vulnerable’. For example, Bruna was found to be under many regulatory practices in the home, whereby her parents would check her iPod Touch, confiscate her device, restrict her access to social networking sites, and would stand over her as she used the internet. These practices were in place, not only because she was a teenager with a disability, but also because she was a young girl, from a South Asian background. The intersection of her gender along with her ethnicity means that she was doubly restricted in her use of the internet by the school and her family. In contrast to participants in this study who were under many regulations, there were also participants who did not struggle to use the internet in private, as, being more able, they experienced fewer restrictions from parents and were able to use the internet in more varied ways, e.g. for social relationships.

When carrying out ethnography in the special school and following students into mainstream colleges, an important theme that also emerged was the way in which they ‘enacted’ disability across these settings. I therefore felt it was important to address the ways in which young people with physical disabilities are made to *do* disability. This study found that the special school fostered a positive and inclusive environment that provided students with access to a space in which they could reach their potential and identify their disability as

overcoming an obstacle that does not allow them to perform a task in a conventional way. The inclusive setting is, however, artificial, with members of staff constantly keeping the children safe and catering to their needs. When the young people with physical disabilities move into mainstream education, they struggle to access ways of enacting disability as they do in the special school when in the rigid environments that require young people with physical disabilities to fit into the normative practices in place for their able-bodied peers.

### **Final Thoughts**

During my two years in the field, and even before I started conducting research, I developed a rapport and trusting relationships with my participants. My association with my participants deepened over time, especially when they started to share their video diaries, invite me for home visits, and share their personal details in interviews. The closeness that developed with my participants forced me to confront many ethical dilemmas during my time in the special school. I became involved in disputes amongst friends, often attempting to offer my version of events to teachers without compromising the ethical practice of the research. By spending two years in the field with participants, and by following them as they made the important transition into mainstream education, I could partly live their experiences with them. I also became an important person who they would share their unfolding online relationships with. I had the opportunity to witness their online conversations as they took place and when online content was shared and circulated amongst friends. This experience of studying internet use by young people with physical disabilities allowed me to overcome the usual thoughts of how they access and use the internet with which I had first started the research project.

As I neared the end of the fieldwork, I now viewed the young people with physical disabilities as teenagers whose lives are different; not only made different by their disability when accessing the internet, but also how their disability transcends and shapes their experience of being young people who struggle to form friendships, achieve agency, and face online as well as offline exclusion and barriers. Their disability often intersected with their ethnicity, sexuality, and/or gender. For example, Gary was faced with different challenges to Bruna, whose disability intersected with her being a young female from a South Asian background. Furthermore, Scott was presented as the most able participant, yet with his own struggles. While other participants were not like Scott, each participant revealed varied patterns of being a young person with physical disabilities, and this was reflected in the issues that highlighted their use of the internet in the illustrative case studies. I had come to see the participants as teenagers first, being physically disabled second, and using the internet third. I found these three issues intersected both differently and in a patterned way in the illustrative case studies.

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## Appendix 1: Internet Questionnaire

### Internet Questionnaire

Age:

**1. Do you use the internet?**

	Yes
	No

**2. What do you use to get on the internet?**

	Computer/Laptop
	Mobile Phone
	iPad/Tablet
	Games console
	Interactive TV

**3. Have you engaged in any of these activities on the internet:**

	Sent/received email
	Visited a social networking profile yours or someone else's for example Facebook/Twitter/MySpace by social network I mean a site where you have a profile and can meet other people or post message on you and their profile
	Visited a chat room i.e. a place on the internet where you can chat with people you may not know
	Used instant messaging i.e. exchanged messages on the internet with online friends or contacts on MSN, Google Talk, Yahoo messenger, Facebook messenger
	Played games with other people on the internet
	Created a character pet or avatar
	Put photos videos or music to share with others
	Post a message on a website
	Written a blog or online diary
	Spent time in a virtual world
	Information seeking i.e. using search engines Google, Yahoo, Bing etc.
	Made telephone calls through the internet i.e. Skype
	For homework
	For shopping
	Accessing porn
	Hobbies

Other: .....

**4. What do you spend MOST of your time doing on the internet?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Sending/receiving email
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visiting a social networking profile yours or someone else's for example Facebook/Twitter/MySpace by social network I mean a site where you have a profile and can meet other people or post message on you and their profile
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visiting a chat room i.e. a place on the internet where you can chat with people you may not know
<input type="checkbox"/>	Using instant messaging i.e. exchanged messages on the internet with online friends or contacts on MSN, Google Talk, Yahoo messenger, Facebook messenger
<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing games with other people on the internet
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creating a character pet or avatar
<input type="checkbox"/>	Putting photos videos or music to share with others
<input type="checkbox"/>	Posting a message on a website
<input type="checkbox"/>	Writing a blog or online diary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spending time in a virtual world
<input type="checkbox"/>	Information seeking i.e. using search engines Google, Yahoo, Bing etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Making telephone calls through the internet i.e. Skype
<input type="checkbox"/>	Homework
<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessing porn
<input type="checkbox"/>	Shopping
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hobbies

Other: .....

**5. Name three websites you regularly go on when you use the internet:**

- 1) .....
- 2) .....
- 3) .....

**6. Have you talked about the websites you go on with your:**

- Friends
- Parents
- Brother(s)/Sister(s)
- Teachers

**7. Name three things you enjoy doing when you use the internet:**



- 1) .....
- 2) .....
- 3) .....

**8. Name three things you don't like doing on the internet:**

- 1) .....
- 2) .....
- 3) .....

**9. How long do you think you spend using the internet on a normal college day?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	A few minutes
<input type="checkbox"/>	30 minutes
<input type="checkbox"/>	An hour
<input type="checkbox"/>	An hour and half
<input type="checkbox"/>	Two hours
<input type="checkbox"/>	More than two hours

**10. How long do you think you spend using the internet on a non-college day?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	A few minutes
<input type="checkbox"/>	30 minutes
<input type="checkbox"/>	An hour
<input type="checkbox"/>	An hour and half
<input type="checkbox"/>	Two hours
<input type="checkbox"/>	More than two hours

**11. Would you like to use the internet more than you do at present?**

Yes *What would you like to use the internet more for?*

.....  
.....

No *Why don't you want to use the internet more?*

.....  
.....

**12. Has your parent(s) explained why some websites are good or bad?**

Yes  
 No

**13. Has your parent(s) talked to you about what you should use the internet for?**

Yes  
 No

**14. Have you used websites to find new friendships online?**

Yes  
 No

If Yes, which of the following websites have you used:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Facebook
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twitter
<input type="checkbox"/>	MeetMe
<input type="checkbox"/>	MySpace
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bebo
<input type="checkbox"/>	LinkedIn
<input type="checkbox"/>	Orkut
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grindr
<input type="checkbox"/>	GuySpy

	QZone
--	-------

Other:

-----

*Thank you for taking part in the questionnaire.*

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

### Interview Guide for Young People with a Physical Disability

#### Questions related to their disability:

Describe yourself to me

You are a student in a special needs school that caters to students with physical disabilities. Do you see yourself as physical disabled?

#### Questions related to their use of the internet:

How did you get interested in using Facebook/Twitter/Whatsapp/Kik etc

What is it that you like/dislike about using Facebook/Twitter/Whatsapp/Kik etc

What's your experience been like of using Facebook/Twitter/Whatsapp/Kik etc

How much social networking would you say you do in a day?

Would you like to do more social networking online? Why/why not?

Thinking about how other people your age that use the internet, how would you say they are using it?

Do you think there are any differences in how they use the internet and how you are using it? Like are there things you do more than your friends, or the other way round. Tell me how this affects you.

What sort of thing is ok to tweet/post on Facebook?

What sort of picture or photo is ok to post on Facebook, or have as your profile picture? Why do you think this?

Can you think of a memorable moment of using the internet?

Can you think of a time when you have had trouble with trying to get something done on the internet?

## **Interview Guide for School Staff**

How are students using the internet in the school?

Do you think there is a difference in the way in which the students in this school use the internet from one another?

Do you think the student's physical disability affects their use of the internet?

Follow Up With: What does the school have in place to ensure all students can use the internet?

How does the school encourage students to use the internet?

What role do you as teachers play in student's use of the internet?

Have you had issues with the internet at school e.g. breaching regulations or causing other problems?

What do you think are the positives of using the Internet for your students? What are the negatives?

What role do you think the internet plays in the lives of the students in the school?

What role do you think the internet plays in the lives of the students outside of school?

What role do you think parents play in their child's use of the internet?

How do you as teachers define disability? How is this different from impairments?

Do you view your students as different from students in mainstream education? How do you view them to be different?

How do you think the students view their disability?

What are the positives and negatives about it?

In which manner does the school encourage the students to view their disability?

## Appendix 3: Ethical Approval

RE: Ethics

Jacqueline Green

Mon 04/04/2016 14:04

**To:** Herminder Kaur <H.Kaur@lboro.ac.uk>;  
The Meaningful Uses of the Internet by Teenagers with a Physical Disability  
R13-P89

Dear Herminder

I have a record of the study above which was approved on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013.

I hope that this is the one you are referring to.

Kind regards


Jacqueline Green  
Secretary, Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee  
Hazlerigg Building, Research Office  
Loughborough University  
01509 222423  
[J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk)  
Website: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/committees/ethics-approvals-human-participants/>

## Appendix 4: Information Booklet and Informed Consent

# Being A Research Participant

An information booklet to help you decide if you would like to be a participant for a PhD research project

## WHO AM I?

- ▶ My name is Herminder Kaur
- ▶ I am a first year PhD student from  Loughborough University
- ▶ I come from the social sciences department



- ▶ In the UK, a PhD stands for **Doctor of Philosophy** sometimes called a 'doctorate'.
- ▶ A PhD involves the researcher carrying out research on a topic
- ▶ And writing up about the research called a **dissertation** that is made up of around 80,000 words based on research carried out over the course of the study
- ▶ I am telling you because I am doing my research for my PhD at Ash Field Academy

## I am doing my research on internet use by physically disabled teenagers:

*I am interested in finding out:*

- ▶ How and what you use the Internet for
- ▶ What it **means** for you to have access to the Internet
- ▶ The **significance** of the internet in your daily life
- ▶ I am telling you because I would like you to be a research participant for my PhD.

## Research Participant

- ▶ Is a human being that a researcher works with to get its data from
- ▶ The research participant can be anyone like a:
  - Child
  - Teenager
  - Adult
  - Old person

Yes, this means you can be a research participant and be involved in my PhD research!



## I have chosen you to be a research participant because:

- ▶ You are a teenager
- ▶ You use the Internet
- ▶ You have some form of a physical impairment/disability
- ▶ I think you have something **new and interesting** to offer to my research

If you agree to be a research participant, you will be required to give me your **informed consent**. Before I tell you more about this lets have a look at the different ways I will gather data with reference to you using the internet, and what will be required from you as a research participant.

## What do you have to do as a research participant?

- ▶ To find out about your use of the internet at school I will observe you using the internet during lessons, break and lunch time. If you stay after school at residential I may also interact and observe you in residential.
- ▶ To find out about your use of the internet at home I would like you to keep a video diary. You will be required to record yourself using the internet!
- ▶ When you have done some recording I would like you to handover the recording/camera to me in school.
- ▶ In school we will agree on a time when we can watch your recording together and talk about it in an informal interview.
- ▶ We will do this in a private space like a classroom that no one is using to ensure privacy.

## Research Methods:

- ▶ I would like you to keep a **video diary** when you use the Internet
- ▶ And talk to me in our **face-to-face interviews** about the recordings you do
- ▶ So data will be collected using **three methods observation, video diaries and interviews**



- ▶ You may have an account on a social networking site. Your profile and account page provides immense details about your online activities. By viewing your social networking page I can get to know you a bit better too. Allowing me to follow you on your social networking page is completely optional.

## Why consider being a participant?

- ▶ It will be a new experience for you
- ▶ You are given a voice, a chance to have your say
- ▶ You can make a difference
- ▶ The experience will give you something to write about in your CV
- ▶ You will learn new skills
- ▶ You will learn more about yourself as you reflect back on the experience
- ▶ This will be a lifelong experience

## Time

- ▶ The amount of time you spend recording yourself using the Internet is dependent on you.
- ▶ The amount of time we spend together in interviews depends on how long you would like to talk for, I will arrange to meet up with you at a time that suits you and the school
- ▶ You carry on using the Internet as you ALWAYS do, you don't have to use the Internet more or less than you usually do!



## You Need To Decide!

- ▶ I would like you to think and consider whether you would like to be a part of my research
- ▶ If you decide **not** to be a part of my research **DON'T WORRY** this does not affect your studies or your qualifications in any way, all you have to do is tell me or any staff member in the school you are comfortable talking to.
- ▶ If you decide you would like to be a part of the study but have some concerns or questions don't be afraid to raise them with me or any staff member in the school



## What's Next?

- ▶ If you decide you would like to be a part of the research I would like you to discuss this with your parents at home.
- ▶ I would like you to make sure your parents sign the informed consent form, if they do this means they are happy for you to be a research participant
- ▶ Once I receive their informed consent I will ask you for your informed consent

## Any Concerns?

- ▶ If you feel you would not like to use a video camera or to be a part of interviews before or during the research then I am happy to discuss with you other ways to carry out the research that will suit you best

## Find Out More

- ▶ You can find out more about me by checking out my webpage when you are on the Internet. Just type in:
- ▶ <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/herminder-kaur.html>
- ▶ You can ask me any questions at any time when you see me in school so feel free to ask me whatever you like!

# What Do I Record in My Video Diary???




**"Don't worry this guide can give you some ideas!!"**

**YOUR VIDEO CAN CONTAIN CONTENT THAT IS**




Remember I want to know what YOU do on the internet when recording:

**HELP ME SEE WHAT YOU ARE DOING ON THE INTERNET**



- Position your camera before using the internet
- You can point your camera to your screen
- You might find it easier recording your use of the internet first and then later recording yourself talking about it



**Where are you recording yourself?**

- Talk through what you are doing online
- Do you have a time limit?
- Why are you online? ○ Who knows you are online?
- Have you visited this website before? When? Where?
- How do you decide you want to go online?
- What do you like/dislike about the website you are on?



# THOUGHT

You can start your recording by telling me what day and time it is & where you are using the internet.

You choose when you want to record what you are doing online, if you are in a public place using the internet be careful of how you use your camera

Sometimes you might find there are other people in the same room as you when you are using the internet, in times like this you might find its better to just record your screen and not say anything!

You might come across a problem when keeping your video diary that I haven't thought of. If this happens talk to Herminder in person or send her an email on [h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk)



## YOU ARE THE

# KING OF YOUR VIDEO DIARY

There is no right or wrong way of keeping a video diary! You decide what you would like to record! It's your diary! Don't worry if you miss a day of recording or if you don't record everything you do online! We can talk about it in your interviews.

## Using the camera safely and appropriately

1. The camera is to be used for keeping a video diary based on your use of the internet, do not use the camera for other personal use
2. Keep the camera in a safe place, do not leave it unattended when in a public place
3. Keep the camera safe at home
4. Tell your parents you have received a video camera for keeping a video diary
5. Ask your parents or family members to help you record or position your camera when recording your use of the internet

## Using the camera safely and appropriately

6. Do not show off your camera in public
7. Make sure you do not record other people in your video diary without their permission
8. You need to be careful when you use your camera in public places make sure you only point the camera to your screen or yourself
9. Be careful about what you say in the video diary, make sure you do not reveal private information about your use of the internet when recording in a public place as other people may hear something you don't want them to know



## Using the camera safely and appropriately

**10. DO NOT** upload your video recordings on the internet like YouTube or Facebook

**11. If your camera stops working DO NOT** try repairing it yourself, email or tell Herminder in person and you will be given a replacement camera

Ph.D. Research at [school name here]

## Information Sheet for Parents



*"My name is Herminder Kaur and I am a first year Ph.D. student at Loughborough University from the department of social sciences."*

### **What Am I Doing at [school name here]?**

I am carrying out research for my PhD at [school name here]. In addition to volunteering at [school name here] during school hours I will also be observing secondary class students use of the Internet during break and lesson time.

### **Why I am informing you?**

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide you as the parent (of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision to allow your child to participate in my research study. Please read the information overleaf and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not you would like to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to allow your child to be involved in this study, **the consent form attached with this information sheet will be used to record your permission.**

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this study is to provide a novel insight to internet use by physically disabled teenagers as there is a scarcity of research in this area. The study centres on understanding the significance for physically disabled adolescents to have access to the internet and how the internet acts as a means to provide the disabled youngsters with meaningful activities.

### **What is my child going to be asked to do?**

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to:

- **Keep a video diary and take part in informal interviews with the researcher.**
- Your child will be provided with a video camera to record their use of the internet at home and to discuss in the recordings why they are using the internet and what they are doing online. Your child **will not be encouraged** to use the internet more than they currently do, they will just be expected to record themselves whenever they use the internet. This will be followed up by interviews.
- The interviews will offer a time and space for your child to discuss their use of the internet further with the researcher. I propose to audio record the interviews as this will help me to listen back to what was said during the interview by your child and to properly interpret research findings. In the interview your child will not be encouraged to answer any question they would not like to.
- I will aim to conduct all interviews in the school at a time that will not disrupt your child's study. Interviews will not last more than an hour and will be conducted in a private classroom and at an agreed time with your child.

### **Can the researcher make a visit to your home?**

I would like to visit your child at home to observe your child using the internet. I propose to make a visit on at least two separate occasions. Visits will be arranged with your approval on a chosen date and time that will be most convenient to you and your child.

### ***How long will the study take?***

The researcher will be observing students during school days up until July 2014, and would like your child to keep a video diary up until then. During this time your child may make a transition to college or another school. If this is the case the researcher will seek consent to follow your child to their chosen college/school.

### ***Once my child takes part, can my child later change their mind?***

**Yes!** Your child's participation in this study is **voluntary**. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate in the research will not affect your relationship with **[school name here]** or the researcher. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty. If at any time, before, during or after the research you wish to withdraw from the study please contact the researcher. You will not be asked by the researcher to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

### ***Ensuring confidentiality and privacy of data:***

All personal information relating to your child will be kept confidential and will be made anonymous. The research study will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### ***Whom to contact with questions about the study?***

Prior, during or after your child's participation you can contact the researcher Herminder Kaur on email [h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk). Please send an email if you would like to: ask for further information, raise any concerns or to ask any questions.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/herminder-kaur.html>

### ***What if I am not happy with how the research is conducted?***

If you are unhappy with the way the research is being conducted you can contact an independent authority: Zoe Stockdale by email on [Z.C.Stockdale@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:Z.C.Stockdale@lboro.ac.uk)

This study has been approved by the Ethical Committee at Loughborough University. The University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at

[http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing\(2\).htm](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm).

## PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

- I confirm that I have read and understand the research information sheet for the study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that my child's involvement will involve being interviewed and keeping a video diary. I understand my child will be interviewed at a time and a private place to suit their needs. I understand the interview will not take place at a time that will disrupt my child's studies.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- I understand that the researcher below from Loughborough University is working on the project will have access to my child's personal details.
- I understand that any data or information used in any publications which arise from this study will be anonymous. I understand that all data will be stored securely and is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998.

**NOTE: The following is optional please tick as appropriate:**

- I give my permission for my child to be audio recorded for interviews.
- I give my permission to the researcher to visit my home to interview my child at a time that suits me and my child.
- I give my permission to the researcher to visit my home to view my child using the internet at a time that suits me and my child.

*You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, please discontinue his or her participation by informing the researcher. You will be given a copy of this document.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Informed Consent Form for Participants**  
**Please complete if you are happy to take part in the study**

**Title of Study:** The Meaningful Uses of the Internet by Teenagers with a Physical Disability

**Please tick the box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the research information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
  
2. I have spoken to the researcher below and understand that my involvement will involve being interviewed at a time and place to suit me and keeping a video diary.
  
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
  
4. I understand that the above researcher from the University of Loughborough who is working on the project will have access to my personal details.
  
5. I understand that any data or information used in any publications which arise from this study will be anonymous
  
6. I understand that all data will be stored securely and is covered by the Data Protection Act.
  
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

## Appendix 5: Leaflets for School Staff

Ph.D. Research at [school name here]

Information for School Teachers and Staff



*“My name is Herminder Kaur and I am a first year Ph.D. student at Loughborough University from the department of social sciences.”*

### What Am I Doing at [school name here]?

I am carrying out research for my PhD at [school name here]. In addition to volunteering at [school name here] during school hours I will also be observing their use of the Internet during break, lesson and residential time.

### Why I am informing you?

I will be interacting with students to find out more about their use of the internet and will continue to attend [school name here] as a researcher up until late 2014. All information gathered through observations and general interactions with students, teachers and support staff will form part of my Ph.D.

### What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to provide a novel insight to internet use by physically disabled teenagers as there is a scarcity of research in this area. My Ph.D. centres on understanding the significance for physically disabled adolescents to have access to the internet. The project aims to identify how the internet acts as a means to provide the disabled youngsters with meaningful activities. I am also interested in finding out how physically disabled adolescents feel the internet provides them with the opportunities to participate in society, become independent and autonomous.

**Ensuring confidentiality and privacy of data:** All information gathered through observations will be kept confidential. To ensure your anonymity your name will not appear on any written records, any information that could jeopardize your anonymity will not be used. This study will be confidential and anonymous. This study has been approved by the Ethical Committee at Loughborough University. The University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing\(2\).htm](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm).

**You're Approval:** If you would not like to be observed or asked any questions in relation to student's use of the internet please contact me on [h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk). Please feel free to contact me on the above email address if you require further information, or if you would like to withdraw any data obtained from you at any stage during or after the research process.

**For more information please visit:**

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/herminder-kaur.html> or

send an email to [h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:h.kaur@lboro.ac.uk) to allow me to answer any questions or concerns you may have.